**Tower Hamlets Welfare Rights Advisors Information Exchange April 2017**

**Welfare Rights Advisors Forum Meeting   18th May 2 – 4.30pm, Massingham Street  (address attached – don’t need to email if you’re attending, just turn up)**

**Agenda**

ATOS presentation on medical assessments

Universal Credit – discussion. Current problems identified: difficulty with telephone enquiries, clients not realising that their benefit has been refused, if a claim has been refused UC account/portal cannot be accessed and not being able to do or know they can do Mandatory Reviews, client with more than 2 children being told they can continue to claim CTC as in UC full service area (which is wrong), national office referring claimants to advice centre for help (Stifford Centre)

**DWP Meeting 20th April ~ Stephen Hanshaw Minutes**

As per previous emails, many of the Tower Hamlets advice agencies/advisors have introduced a policy / procedure to NOT assisting clients to make on line claims for Universal Credit on line.  The application process takes at least 2 hours and requires clients to have an email account.  We are using a ‘referral letter’ (attached) for clients to take personally to the JC+ to request that they get assistance to make the claim.  Stephen Hanshaw stated that clients have been turning up with these.  He states that they have been getting assistance to make the claims but asked for an amendment to be made (removing his name).  Where you do send a client to DWP please try and follow up the referral/contact the client to see what has happened.  We’ve spoken to one referred client only and although the DWP were initially reluctant they did assist with the claim.  Other clients that we have sent have not returned so we are assuming that they are getting assistance.  Stifford Centre have had a client who wasn’t helped (Tenter Street office).

General information/advice: use the client/claimant journal to make enquiries, we can get clients to log on and do enquiries with them, the claimant journal is key to the claim and needs to be accessed regularly to check what actions need taking, check how much and when payments are going to be made and also under ‘add note’ tab you can email an enquiry directly to the work coach, if it is something that they can’t deal with they refer the enquiry to the case manager at the service centre.

Telephone enquiries:  0345 600 4272     Postal:  FREEPOST DWP, Universal Credit Full Service

**Problems we raised with Stephen (said he’d take up with relevant department, we’re awaiting feedback)**

Claimants moving from legacy benefits to UC, why are they being asked to carry out ‘right to reside’ ‘work capability’ assessments?

UC refusals – decision is on their journal, they don’t get written confirmation that benefit has been refused, clients are not always aware, should be sent written decision, can this be done?

Can advisors be given a different number to ring when helping clients?

Can we do a mandatory review on the UC portal/journal?

**Welfare Rights Free Training Sessions**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Universal Credit** 2 hour workshop | •       General information about this new benefit including: claims, conditionality, sanctions**Suitable for** basic session but suitable for anyone including benefit advisors who haven’t already carried out any UC training | Island HouseRoserton StreetE14 3PG | **NOTE DATE CHANGE**25th May 20172-4pmFatima Begum |
| **ESA (UC’s Limited Capability for Work requirements)** 2 hours workshop | •       introduction and eligibility•       understanding the points test•       Mandatory reviews/appeals**Suitable for** basic session but suitable for anyone including benefit advisors who haven’t already carried out or want to review WCA knowledge | Island HouseRoserton StreetE14 3PG | 13th June 20172-4pm Jo Ellis |
| **Personal Independence Payment** | •       introduction and eligibility•       understanding the points test**Suitable for** basic session but suitable for anyone including benefit advisors who haven’t already carried out or want to review PIP knowledge training | Island HouseRoserton StreetE14 3PG | 11th July 20172-4pm Jo Ellis |

**Email address for Tribunal Services**

Send appeals to the postal address on the SSCS1 form (Bradford) and/or fax 08707394108 but if the deadline is very close you can email the Tribunal Service;

sscsa-sutton@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk

sscsa-epsom@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk

**CPAG Universal Credit Email Advice**

CPAG has launched a new Universal Credit email advice service for advisers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The service is designed to supplement our Handbooks, telephone advice service and online information provided on our website through [**Ask CPAG**](http://cpag-mail.org.uk/5MG-4T7G6-3FVCF0-2J78RV-1/c.aspx). It will also provide us with case examples of problem areas which we can use in our policy and campaigns work.    <http://www.cpag.org.uk/content/welcome-ask-cpag-online?utm_source=Child%20Poverty%20Action%20Group&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=8081142_LONDON%20-%20Universal%20Credit%20email%20-%20OURS&utm_content=Ask%20CPAG&dm_i=5MG,4T7G6,3FVCF0,I4V58,1>

You can use the service by sending your Universal Credit queries to **advice@cpag.org.uk**. Please ensure you include all relevant details. Your enquiry will be acknowledged and you will receive a substantive response as soon as possible. Please note that the service is limited to providing email advice and that we are unable to take on cases or provide advice and advocacy directly to clients.

**Benefits and Work Campaign April Information**

**PIP MOBILITY APPEALS MOTABILITY VEHICLES**

The government have announced a new scheme to allow DLA to PIP claimants to keep their Motability vehicle for 26 weeks, instead of just 8, if they are challenging the decision not to award enhanced rate mobility component. Claimants who joined the Motability scheme before 2013 get £2,000 if they return their vehicle within 8 weeks of their final DLA payment. This plunges to just £500 if you keep your vehicle for 26 weeks. Which might not be so bad if you could be sure that your appeal would be heard within six months, especially given that the PIP appeal success rate is around the 65% mark. Appeals themselves were taking an average of 16 weeks to complete, once begun, at the end of last year. Unfortunately, you first have to go through the mandatory reconsideration process. The DWP can take as long as they wish to make a decision on your mandatory reconsideration request, before you even get into the queue for an appeal. We don’t have any statistics on how long reconsiderations take on average. But there is a lot of anecdotal evidence of claimants having to chase the DWP up repeatedly and still having to wait months for a decision. And there is a growing backlog of social security appeals – up 43% in a year and climbing. So, your chances of getting your appeal heard before you have to return your vehicle, even if you opt for the 26 weeks, may be slim.

**ZERO POINT PIP ASSESSMENTS**
The number of claimants getting zero points for both components of PIP has almost doubled, with no explanation for the increase.  In the 12 months to April 2016, 93,000 claimants got zero points for both components. But in just six months after that, to October 2016, a further 83,000 claimants got zero points for both components.  The DWP have offered no explanation for the dramatic rise, but have denied that there is any sort of crackdown on PIP awards.

* **EXTRA MILLIONS PAID TO PIP ASSESSMENT COMPANIES**
Atos and Capita, who carry out PIP assessments on behalf of the DWP, are in line to make much more than the expected £512 million from their contracts, the DWP has revealed.  In spite of the fact that 65% of PIP appeals are currently successful and despite the growing unease even amongst MPs about the quality of PIP assessments, the two companies are making far more than expected from their contracts.  In total, Atos and Capita were set to be paid £512 million for their first five years’ work from 2013.Yet they have already been paid £578 million and had their contracts, which should have run out this year, extended to 2019. Clearly, PIP isn’t bad news for everyone involved.

 **Information attached**

DWP April Newsletter

Triggers for changing to UC (please check information – Fatima thinks there’s an error on it)

UC assistance referral letter

Long term food supply (alternatives to foodbank where clients have had their maximum 3)

Useful information on claiming Universal Credit (information booklet for clients)

Regulations removing work related activity component of ESA (includes transitional criteria)

Changes to PIP mobility for mental health

3.    **Referrals to Tower Hamlets Specialist Welfare Rights Caseworkers**

**Legal Advice Centre**: Only take referrals for appeals when got the appeal bundle, not Mandatory Reconsideration.  Otherwise can be ‘signposted’ (i.e. send client to drop in advice session) for assistance. Referrals can be emailed to admin@legaladvicecentre.org they will email back to confirm that clients have been booked – full guidance available on [www.thcan.org.uk/advice-agencies-information/](http://www.thcan.org.uk/advice-agencies-information/#_blank)

**Law Centre**: Chris Parsons very limited capacity but to email or phone him, has no particular criteriac.parsons@thlc.org.uk

**Island Advice**: Tower Hamlets clients only, limited casework and usually all appointments are taken up through our drop in advice session clients but can try by email  steph@island-advice.org.uk  or phone direct line 020 7538 0094 (phone number is for advisors only) Clients can ring 0207 987 9379

**CAB** advisor Eukay email eukandu@eastendcab.org.uk    Also their full drop in services sessions are available on:  [www.thcan.org.uk/advice-agencies-information/](http://www.thcan.org.uk/advice-agencies-information/#_blank)