**Tower Hamlets Welfare Rights Advisors Information Exchange - September 2017**

**1.**    **Welfare Rights Advisors Forum**– minutes

Martin Williams CPAG went through the attached Universal Credit workshop and additional information:

      Concerns that DWP / advice workers / support workers are telling clients to claim Universal Credit when they can actually remain on legacy benefits – this could result in them losing out thousands of pounds (eg if they lost the Severe Disability Premium they would be over £3,000 worse off a year on UC).  If someone is appealing against ESA Limited Capability for Work decision they CAN stay on ESA and if they have not had a previous LCW refusal they can be paid at the personal allowance rate until the appeal is heard (once appeal has been submitted ESA can be reinstated).  If they win the appeal they will stay on ESA and get the WRAG or LCWRA component reinstated (and backdated).  Always check whether it is possible to remain on legacy benefits and advise clients of this option rather than tell them to claim UC.

      Discussion about not spending too much time on doing a Mandatory Review for ESA WRAG refusals.  Most MR’s don’t change the decision, doing a comprehensive MR can delay the process of passing it on to appeal by giving DWP additional information to dispute the MR.  Unless there is compelling medical evidence and you think the case might be chanced on MR just state ‘I feel that I should have been awarded 15 points’.

       Don’t post mandatory reviews, email them JCP HACKNEY BDC Customer Services HACKNEY.BDCCUSTOMERSERVICES1@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK or if there is a delay, complain to correspondence@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

       ‘Closing claims’, is not a real concept in benefit law but DWP are stating (doing) it if someone doesn’t attend or book an appointment or they can’t verify identity or partner doesn’t do on line claim.  Clients are often told their claim is closed and told to make a new claim.  Some have made multiple claims and missing out on benefits.  They can’t make a note on journal, the first claim can no longer be accessed so they should write or ring UC and show how they meet conditions to get claim awarded rather than do a new claim.  If they have done or do a new claim they should ask for this claim to be paid from the date of the previous claim once it has been awarded.  Not a backdate (which isn’t allowed) but a request to do a MR of the date of claim of the new claim.

       A claimant commitment is required before UC can be awarded. It can be problematic when claimant has health problems, there is no assessment period in UC regs.  DWP don’t even have to do a LCW assessment, sometimes personal advisors state job seeking requirements that the claimants feel are not possible. If someone’s doctor has given them a certificate they should clearly exercise their discretionary powers to reduce work seeking requirements reasonably and we should write and ask them to exercise Regulation 99, disapply them from work seeking where supplying medical certificates and it is reasonable to do so.

**2.**    **Universal Credit Update**

   Local office has agreed to set up a **Formal System for advice centres to refer VULNERABLE claimants who are unable to make the applications/manage their journals**

The sessions are for customers that can use the computer or bring someone who can type for them, DWP will guide and support them through the process.

You should refer your client to either Dod St or City offices next available session date and email the appropriate DWP office the clients name, address, mobile phone number, national insurance number and the date of the session they are going to attend

**If the customer is not able to do this at all or cannot get someone to type for them, they can call  03456000723  Mon –Fri 08:00 – 18:00 and complete the application over the phone.**

**Poplar Jobcentre Session:**
Escalation process : AKTAR.KHAN1@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

Referral process: JUHEL.ULLAH@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

Referral day and times: Tuesday 10.00 – 12.00, Thursday 10.00 – 12.00

**City Tower Jobcentre Session:**
Escalation and Referral process: Ibrahim.Butt@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Referral day and times: Monday 10.00- 12.00, Wednesday 10.00 – 12.00

       **Complaints not being responded to**.  This issue has been taken up by central complaints in DWP.  I have been advised not to put complaints in the post to do them by email.  Major problems with post in DWP and letter often never get to correct department.  I am just getting details on the new factsheet on how / where to make complaints in Tower Hamlets, this includes all the relevant emails.  All complaints should be dealt with/responded to if they are not please let me know and I can give you the complaints checked, this will be available on the THCAN website too. <http://thcan.org.uk/factsheets/>

**3.    New template letters – template letters, all WR forum attachments and factsheets are available on the THCAN website**

<http://thcan.org.uk/advice-agencies-information/>

 <http://thcan.org.uk/factsheets/>

A)    letter to give to a client to take to doctor / to request medical evidence to be put in the support group

B)   Benefit Cap (updated not new)

**4.**    **Welfare Rights Benefit changes**

A)   DWP newsletters

B)   Citizens Advice Benefit Updates  <http://mailchi.mp/citizensadvice/benefits-update-2017?e=a16c9778a7>

5.    **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 criteria c.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)

**6.**    **Other information/services**

Deaf plus lip reading course