**Welfare Rights Advisors Universal Credit Meeting**

**Minutes -  18th November**

Stephen Hanshaw DWP information on Universal Credit roll out for Tower Hamlets.

* 2069 active Universal Credit claims in Tower Hamlets at present.
* Full UC service will start 3rd week February in Poplar and 3rd week March in City.  E2 not included at present as it comes under Hackney and this is going to be June 2018. Until then single gateway services will continue.
* The aim is that it will take 3 months to migrate claimants from old to new system (but it’s actually taking more like 5 months)
* Drop in claims over past couple of months
* Will be arranging a meeting in January prior to the full service being introduced.

Issues discussed:

* Can local offices take clients original documents and stamp so that they don’t have to send them off for DWP evidence – No, can’t do the original has to be supplied
* If someone claims UC social landlords are supposed to be automatically contacted to inform the claim has been made - Shofu, Swan Housing said this isn’t always happening and that it is taking at least 4-5 weeks for Alternative Payment Arrangements to be considered.  Stephen said landlords will automatically be a given an APA if requested as there is a 7 days waiting period before UC is awarded AND its paid in arrears so claimant will be in arears
* Vulnerable groups should get additional support through their personal advisor i.e. referrals to disability employment advisor, employment support, work coaches, referrals to external services where alcohol, drug, DV issues
* Advisors said that clients failing ESA WCA and are appealing are sometimes being advised to claim UC – this is wrong they should go on JSA or stay on ESA at lower rate
* Advisors felt that all failed ESA, WCA clients that have lost appeal and then claim JSA/UC are having work search requirements/claimant commitments that say look for 35 hours pw work and travel 90 minutes.  DWP advisors are not taking into account ‘limitations’.  Stephen said any such requirements can be challenged, and he will check to see that there are variations in claimant commitments, they should be relevant and reasonable to the individual. If advisors have any examples he would like to see them.
* Clients may be reluctant to ‘self disclose’ problems like addictions/health as they are concerned about being sanctioned, they say that they can do everything due to fear of being refused benefit.  Steve would hope that they do provide information but unless they do they can’t really take into account limitations.  Martin (CPAG) recommends DWP do a leaflet stating to clients that it’s in their benefit to discuss/disclose problems.
* Dis-applying work search UC claimants can have 2 X 14 day periods where the work search requirements can be stopped due to health or other issues.  Maximum this can be done for is 13 weeks
* Advisors state that telephone helpline recorded message is unhelpful and standard of advice in call centres is inconsistent.  It says if you have made a claim less than one month ago ‘hang up’.  Actually these claimants may be eligible for hardship payment and should be referred to information on this.
* Can advisors have their own number? Steve request that we do a formal request for this **ACTION JO** – will write to request this
* IT/literacy problems, Local Authority support is available, also in Job Centre Plus – would be useful to have details of where/when ACTION Stephen/Jo get details and send out list
* YouTube video to watch – shows / advises on process: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fy06rAVZuss>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwTeW0yqbQ>

* Stephen is aware that there are going to be problems with the introduction of Universal Credit as its new but encourages advisors to provide details and evidence of examples of poor service as they want to improve.
* There will be provision under the full service for people who can’t use computers
* 7th November introduction fo reduced benefit cap in Tower Hamlets and Local Authority are in process of identifying and notifying these people now
* Other issues regarding Universal Credit eligibility / process are covered in the factsheet on THCAN website:  <http://thcan.org.uk/factsheets/>  will be updated with new info **ACTION JO**

**Other Updates**

* New bedroom tax re extra bedroom for disabled child - CPAG test case wins  <http://cpag-mail.org.uk/5MH-4M7MY-84HLYU0C5/cr.aspx>

## ****Council tax reduction scheme Consultation: LBTH options**** are being considered for: CT savings, reducing the amount of financial help provided through the council tax reduction scheme. Find out about the proposed options. <http://towerhamlets.us13.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=0a206cf89c3b7d0289c383305&id=2280479c0c&e=086bd75dd3>

**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’  (ie 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/)

**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/)

**Advisor Languages**

Last meeting we agreed to list and share details of advisors with language skills (not Bengali) – please can you email me the language provision you have – purpose of signposting clients who need advice in specific languages, send me their name, language spoken (including dialect if appropriate), telephone and email contact (advisors should agree to share this information with other advisors only and to NOT to pass this information to clients unless the advisors agrees)

**Housing Advisor Forum Meeting**

Contact email:  V.Ciorraga-Cruz V.Ciorraga-Cruz@thlc.co.uk

HOUSING FORUM MEETING - 8TH DECEMBER 2016 AT 3PM to 5PM AT TOWER HAMLETS LAW CENTRE

**Employment Services**

Please see attached flyer and circulate to your networks and clients.  Ali Ahmed

**Hackney Welfare Reform Information**

Attachment

**Trust for London Research Document**

Information on poverty and UC clients are worse off:

<http://us5.campaign-archive1.com/?u=f4025488484eca307f0f3eb9a&id=5a8b81b21f&e=2025577a43>