Annette Small

**Judicial Support**

London Tribunals Cluster

HMCTS

Sutton SSCSA

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SM1 1DA

Dear Ms Small

Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network is a partnership of advice centres from the borough of Tower Hamlets. Welfare Benefits workers meet quarterly to discuss changes in benefits and policy issues. I have been asked to write on behalf of the Tower Hamlets Welfare Rights Advisors forum to raise issues of concern that we have identified with the current administration of the appeals

1. Increase in number of adjournments. Of course we accept that there will always be a need for adjournments due to requirements for medical evidence or other valid reasons. However, even when caseworkers have provided submissions and medical evidence, where, the caseworker gone through bundle/submission with the client we have had clients’ hearings adjourned unreasonably.  For example two of clients (in Anchorage House) were asked if they had received their ‘bundle’, they didn’t know what appeal bundle was – one of them had it in his bag but didn’t know what they were on about. Both had prepared submissions that referred to the bundle contents.
2. Clients being sent decisions and representatives not being copied in, when clients have stated they have a representative they are not always getting copies of the decision notices
3. Delays in and inconsistency in the time that clients are having to wait for hearings. The issue has been documented on Rights Net apparently 6-12 months waits are not unusual. This is causing considerable hardship and stress to clients. We have also some clients who are getting hearings within a couple of months. The delays are unreasonable
4. Appeal bundles messed up – bits missing (even had wrong clients info in some of them).

At present I am just raising the concerns as a general matter for your consideration. Of course caseworkers can take up individual cases on behalf of clients but I would be grateful if could consider the issues generally as all of these issues are causing further delays and hardship to clients.

Our Welfare Rights Supervisor Fatima Begum will be attending your next meeting and representing THCAN

Yours sincerely

Jo Ellis

Training coordinator

**On behalf of the Tower Hamlets Welfare Rights Advisors Forum**