**Merry Christmas from Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network**

**Welfare rights advisors monthly information exchange, is sent to around 200 individuals and organisations with an interest in welfare rights in Tower Hamlets and is available to see on the** [**www.thcan.org.uk**](http://www.thcan.org.uk)

**Up-to-date information on advice providers services and opening times are available on the website also factsheets on issues relevant to Tower Hamlets and welfare benefits**

**Tower Hamlets Welfare Rights Advisors Information Exchange –  December  2018**

1. **Welfare Rights Advisors Forum Meeting Minutes**
2. Residents Support Scheme (replacement for Crisis Support Grants) – new policy and procedure Details

Details of the new scheme, contacts where to apply, form for applying to become a ‘trusted’ partner attached and will be available on [www.thcan.org.uk](http://www.thcan.org.uk) (factsheets)

1. Council Tax Reduction – Minimum Income Floor recommendation

Council Tax Reduction scheme as from April 2017 summarised, recommendations for changes discussed and agreed to support – Jo to write on behalf of THCAN

1. Universal Credit Support Project

Details of LBTH support sessions and contacts attached.  The aim of the Outreach Team is to help those residents in Tower Hamlets who need support with the transition onto Universal Credit, they will assist with: making new claims, setting up emails and giving support through the claims process. They will offer low level support on claims, not filling in ESA50’s or advising on benefits, can deal with lost log-ins, updating journals, but not checking awards.  They would eventually expect clients to take up IT and language support, not intended to be indefinite support. Should they identify any other needs; will make appropriate referrals to other organisations

1. Steph Dickinson – Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network, priorities for LBTH advice services funding next year

Didn’t do this LBTH have confirmed that there will be a further 12 month extension on current advice MSG so this item to be delayed to 2019

1. Training Sessions for 2019

Island Advice runs 10 training sessions on benefits issues that LBTH staff/volunteers/residents can attend for free.  Proposed sessions below (dates and venues to be sent with Januarys information exchange. We would also welcome comments about your experience of 2018 courses and suggestions for new/additional courses/workshops for 2019.  We would also like any agencies that have a training room that can accommodate around 20 participants, with power point let us know if they have a room available to deliver the course/s.  Proposed courses:

* Universal Credit – 1 day basic and a 2 ½  hour workshop casework
* Universal Credit, Employment Support Allowance and the Work capability Assessment - 1 day basic
* Appeals 1 day
* Disability Benefits: Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance  1 day
* Welfare Rights overview – 1 day
* EEA Nationals and benefits (not immigration course) 2 ½  hour workshop
* Housing costs; Universal Credit and Housing Benefit
* Advice Skills – key principals and policies in advice: communication skills, equal opportunities, data protection, case recording and action plans – 2 ½ hour workshop
* Overpayments and recovery – 2 ½ hour workshop

# **Benefit  changes/items to report this month**

* 1. DWP newsletter attached – changes to be implemented to UC (next year)
	2. We have started to see clients attend with ESA3 forms, reviewing their ESA payments for past years where they may have missed out – not being assessed for Income Related ESA and only receiving single person contribution based benefit.  Back dated payments are being considered and awarded

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| 1. **Welfare Rights Services Signposting and Referrals for Tower Hamlets Residents**
* Details of organisations that provide welfare rights assistance in the borough, such as; completing forms, mandatory reconsiderations and casework   <http://thcan.org.uk/advice-centres/>  Check agencies area of help, client group and opening time
* New service offering free one-off legal advice sessions every second Monday of the month at Link Centre, Delivered by Morgan & Wiseman - specialists in immigration law - appointments to be made in advance. See attached leaflet.
* Also see <http://thcan.org.uk/legal-advice/>  for free legal advice sessions (mostly volunteer solicitors) in Tower Hamlets

**Specialist help for welfare rights cases (appeals) can be accessed through:*** 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/#_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 specialist cases have to go on a waiting list but 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)

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