**This is Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network’s welfare rights advisors monthly information exchange, it 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, factsheets and opening times are also available on the website – please feel free to send me information / updates on advice service that you would like included on this**

**Welfare Rights Advisors Forum (this meeting was combined Welfare Rights Advisors and Debt Advisors forum)**

**Next meeting will be in Jan date/venue to be confirmed**

Minutes of October meeting attached action points are below – discussions were around clarification and explanation of processes (detailed in minutes)

**Housing Benefits**

* CTR should automatically be awarded through the process of applying for HB, some situations (administrative issues) whether this doesn’t always happen, as there’s entitlement to a 12 month backdate for CTR should be OK to just let HB know if they haven’t linked the HB claim to CTR and it will be paid (may have to show good cause), also they are looking into a simplified CTR form that doesn’t require all the housing details that are really not relevant for CTR.  For UC claimants the CTR is pretty much automatic, HB are notified of income details needed (including change of circumstances)
* HB will consider possibility of advisors being given a phone number for advice sector staff (contact center hard to contact)
* DWP guidance on the severe disability premium and the gateway to UC
* DHP strategy/guidance attached

**Council Tax Issues**

* Details of the procedure for applying to the LA discretionary power to reduce council tax bills under section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 detailing eligibility criteria and any right of appeal – Alan will send template and has sent info below (our debt advisor has produced a ‘template’ for advisors/clients to use and this should be available for next mail out)
* Digital Access for LBTH  Web Site 1st & the MY Account, not to be confused with the My Tower Hamlet Account for other services. This is for Account Access to Council Tax Accounts or Rates Accounts, client will need an email address and web access, also acts as contact on the billing records. Council Tax are auto signing up residents when they register for a move online and they give an email address.  They then email them the log on and send the account. Most people should be able to sign up, but if there were issues, residents could attend one of the One Stop Shops and ask for assistance if they have an email address already.  <https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/council_and_democracy/council_tax/Your_Council_Tax.aspx>   then access via Manage My Account.
* LBTH digital access and digital by default, asked what support is available via Ideas Stores and Stop Shops for residents to help them. There is info on the LBTH web link about the changes and support but we are still waiting for further clarification/information <https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/News_events/2019/June_2019/Council_announces_changes_to_the_way_people_access_services.aspx>

NOTE:  I think the ‘digital by default’ action point should be an issue for training/discussion at our next meeting? Especially with regards to web based benefit applications

**Free Training Sessions**

LBTH organisations places on benefits courses have now been filled (but if you’re still interested let me know and I’ll put you on the waiting list). Places on Housing and Debt units are still available

Email:   [jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk](mailto:jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk) to request a place

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Welfare Rights Unit** |
| 12-Nov | Employment Support Allowance and Universal Credit for claimants with Limited Capability for Work |
| 19-Nov | Housing Benefit/Housing Costs (UC) Bedroom Tax/Benefit cap |
| 26-Nov | Fuel Debt 10 - 1.30 - European Union Settlement Scheme awareness 2-4pm |
| 03-Dec | Universal Credit |
| 10-Dec | turn2us benefit calculations am – Benefits and Immigration status pm |
| 17-Dec | Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living and Attendance Allowance |
|  | **Debt Unit** |
| 07-Jan | Placement and training review, supervision meetings |
| 14-Jan | Debt day 1 - priority and non-priority debts |
| 21-Jan | Debt day 2 - financial statements priority/non priority debts |
| 29-Jan | Money Management Skills / Energy Best Deal |
| 04-Feb | Tailoring Advice for Debt |
| 11-Feb | Council Tax |
|  | **Housing Unit** |
| 25-Feb | Housing foundation day 1 |
| 03-Mar | Housing foundation day 2 |
| 10-Mar | Advising on possession proceedings |
| 17-Mar | Social housing next steps |
| 22-Mar | Housing and lettings |

**Benefit Up-dates**

1. From October 2019, the maximum rate at which deductions can be made from Universal Credit to repay an advance payment, will be reduced from 40% to 30% of the standard allowance
2. The Public Law Project (PLP) has launched a claimant commitment website to help make sure that individual claimant commitments are appropriately tailored and do not impose unrealistic requirements <https://claimantcommitments.org.uk/>
3. Further info on claimant commitments <https://claimantcommitments.org.uk/universal-credit-claimant-commitments/>

**Other Information**

* Praxis information update – Praxis provide advice and support to people from migrant backgrounds. A number of clients are currently being signposted to drop-in services that they no longer provide. See updated list of services (attached). Clients who require support with making a European Settlement Scheme application (and are in any way ‘at risk’) – they can offer fast appointments, referral form attached– or you can access our online form here: <http://www.praxis.org.uk/online-forms-and-advice-page-42.html>
* Bromley By Bow Centre.  project to promote the rights of private renters.  attached flyer
* Worse off: The impact of universal credit on families in Tower Hamlets CPAG/LBTH report launch and report <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/report/worse-impact-universal-credit-families-tower-hamlets>
* Legal Advice Centre have capacity to take on more first-tier tribunal hearings for all disability-related benefit appeals (PIP, DLA, ESA, UC - work capability).   Referrals by Tel: 02089804205 [susan@legaladvicecentre london](mailto:susan@legaladvicecentre%20london) [mathew@legaladvicecentre.london](mailto:mathew@legaladvicecentre.london)
* DWP Newsletter September and October 2019 attached
* Tower Hamlets Debt & Money Advice Forum here at Toynbee Hall on Wednesday 25th September at 2.30pm. An agenda will be circulated nearer the time but please let  [sam.crosby@toynbeehall.org.uk](mailto:sam.crosby@toynbeehall.org.uk) know if you want to attend

**Vacancies**

* Limehouse Project Fundraising Officer, Part time 17 hours, £30,000 pro rata, per annum, Closing date for applications: 9am, 4th November 2019. Interviews: 14th November 2019

<https://limehouseproject.org.uk/get-involved/#EmploymentOpportunities>

* Social Prescribers (entry level) x 5 posts  <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/xi/vacancy/?vac_ref=915817957>
* Bromley-by-Bow centre are currently recruiting an Advice Centre Manager.  To apply for the role please send an application form and equal opportunity form at [hr@bbbc.org.uk](mailto:hr@bbbc.org.uk) Closing Date 5pm on 14th November 2019. Interviews 20th November 2019.

**Specialist Welfare Rights Advisors Referrals for Tower Hamlets Residents**

**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](mailto: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](mailto: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 email  [steph@island-advice.org.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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)