**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.  It is available to view (including past information exchanges) 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 –feel free to send me information / updates on advice services to include on this**

**Welfare Rights Advisors Forum (combined Welfare Rights Advisors and Debt Advisors forum)**

**Next meeting will be Thursday 30th January 2020 (anyone got a venue we can use 20 people plus wifi and power point??? let me know)**

**Agenda Items**

* Digital Access for LBTH forms and account.  Demonstration and feedback
* Please advise if any other issues / training or information requirements

**Free Training Sessions**    LBTH organisations / volunteers  or paid workers Email:   [jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk](mailto:jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk) to request a place

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| **Housing Costs**  22nd January 2020  2-4pm | * Renting and Homeowners entitlement to help with housing costs (HB/legacy benefits and Housing Element of UC) * Non-dependent deductions * Bedroom tax   **Suitable for** Basic course no knowledge assumed | Island Advice  Island House  Roserton Street  E14 3PG | Jo Ellis  Trainer |
| **Benefit overpayments and Recovery**  13th February 2020  10-12 | * General information about benefit overpayments * Which/when can overpayments be challenged   **Suitable for** experienced advisors and debt workers dealing with clients with overpayments of benefit | Island Advice  Island House  Roserton Street  E14 3PG | Fatima Begum  Benefits specialist |
| **Benefit Overpayment DEBTS**  13th February 2020  1-3pm | * How are overpayments recovered * What debt remedies and options are available for clients who have incurred RECOVERABLE benefit overpayment debts   **Suitable for** advisors who come across clients with overpayment related debts | Island Advice  Island House  Roserton Street  E14 3PG | Sarah Sauvat  Debt specialist |

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|  | **Debt Unit – Learning to Advise** | | |
| 07-Jan | | money management half day |  |
| 14-Jan | | Debt day 1 - priority and non-priority debts |  |
| 21-Jan | | Debt day 2 - financial statements priority/non priority debts |  |
| 28-Jan | | Fuel Debt Advice in the Community 6281-01 L2 |  |
| 04-Feb | | Tailoring Advice for Debt |  |
| 11-Feb | | Council Tax |  |
|  | **Housing Unit– Learning to Advise** | | |
| 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 | | |
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**Benefit /Advice Issues Up-dates**

* Applications to write off/reduce council tax liability and/or debt information and application form attached (will be available on <http://thcan.org.uk/factsheets/>)  Anyone who is responsible for a council tax bill either in the current year or for arrears from previous years can apply if they can show that they are experiencing financial hardship.
* Z2K can confirm that it was right to demand that the Government is held to account for its [nine week ad campaign](https://z2k.us1.list-manage.com/track/click?u=3b0eff0a29af2c710133f7daa&id=fa28a0fe0a&e=3a657838db) in The Metro earlier this year, in which it repeatedly misled the public on Universal Credit.  The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has confirmed that there is simply no evidence to back the Department for Work & Pensions’ (DWP’s) claims about people being better off on Universal Credit.  We have launched a public campaign, urging all political parties to commit to an independent investigation, should they form the next Government, into how and why these misleading adverts were approved within DWP.  We are also asking the Work & Pensions Select Committee to undertake a wider inquiry into whether this represents a more fundamentally dysfunctional culture, one which relies on damaging propaganda to avoid engaging with the real experiences of people struggling to live on Universal Credit. We are also calling for an apology from the DWP itself for these misleading adverts.  
    
  Why is this important?  The ads are over but the Government must still be held to account. DWP’s misleading culture and their refusal to accept evidence from experts who have continually evidenced DWP harmful practices leading to poverty and deprivation can no longer be ignored.  
    
  At a time when thousands of people are reliant on food banks, the government is spending public money on propaganda.  This has to stop and the DWP must engage with the real stories of people and the ways in which they are being failed by a broken benefits system.  [Join our campaign](https://z2k.us1.list-manage.com/track/click?u=3b0eff0a29af2c710133f7daa&id=3a63051d45&e=3a657838db) to tell the government to #StopMisleading TODAY.
* **REVIEW OF PIP CLAIMS – special diet / medication and monitoring** Announcement from the DWP that they’ve got to review PIP claims on two issues.

**Special diet** If you need help or supervision to follow a special diet prescribed or recommended by a health professional you may score points under the PIP descriptors for managing therapy. You might need help to ensure you don’t eat certain foods, for example, or to make sure that you eat the right sort of food regularly throughout the day. Before 28 November 2016 the DWP refused to accept that help with managing a special diet could count as managing therapy. Even after the upper tribunal decision they continued to make the wrong decision in many cases. Hence the review.

**Medication and monitoring** Where a claimant needed supervision, prompting or assistance to both manage medication and monitor a health condition. The upper tribunal judge in the same case decided that this counted as help to manage therapy. So the review is only looking at decisions made between 28 November 2016 and 15 March 2017. The DWP are not planning to subject anyone to a face-to-face assessment for any part of this review.

**Information Exchange**

* Referral form attached for referring cases to **Prevention Liaison Officer in Housing Options Service London Borough of Tower Hamlets**, they work with tenants and check for all means available to get arrears reduced/cleared i.e. HB reconsideration, DHP, advise tenant on the need to make lump sum (if they are able).  The attached form can be to refer tenants facing eviction. The project is designed for early intervention to be used to refer tenants facing eviction as early as possible that is, from when the NOSP expires but occasionally they will accept a late referral when possession has been granted and you are waiting for eviction date, however this is not the norm. [lizzy.hameed@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:lizzy.hameed@towerhamlets.gov.uk) Tel: 0207 364 3528
* Legal Advice Centre has a Family Law/DV session which from the 10th of December will be held in their main offices at 104 Roman Road. See attached flyer .  Please let your session supervisors and advisers know.

**Vacancies**

* None to promote

**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)