**This is Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network’s welfare rights advisors monthly information exchange, it is sent to over 200 individuals and organisations with an interest in welfare rights in Tower Hamlets.  It is available to view (including past information exchanges) on the link** [**www.thcan.org.uk**](http://www.thcan.org.uk) **Up-to-date information on advice providers services, factsheets and advice services opening times are also available on the website –feel free to send me information / updates on advice services to included on this**

**The outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) has had an immediate impact on demand for benefits and benefit support.**

**It’s a challenge to keep up to date with information but please be reassured that advice services are continuing and support**

**for agencies / referrals / advice to clients is still available in Tower Hamlets**

* **Emergency Advice Services**
* Tower Hamlets Advice services are continuing through telephone and email, CAB have stated high demand but please remember other advice services that are available on the attached website has updated versions of list <http://thcan.org.uk/covid-19-emergency-advice-provision/>
* The **specialist** advice services are listed on the attached (and below)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Organisation providing specialist BENEFIT support/referrals | E-mail | Tel Advice |
| Citizens Advice Bureau | advice@eastendcab.org.uk | 0203 855 4472 |
| Island Advice Centre | admin@island-advice.org.uk | 0207 987 9379 Mon to Fri 10am to 4pm |
| Legal Advice Centre | admin@legaladvicecentre.london | 0203 606 0372 |
| Tower Hamlets Law Centre | info@thlc.co.uk | 0207 538 4909  9.30am-5pm Mon-Fri  |

* **Information and Resources**
* **Emergency Support** in E!4 has been updated and there is also a website version available, also attached are Tower Hamlets food distribution information and companies that are delivering food
* The DWP release and update temporary measures for any claimants who need support due to Covid-19 daily. Information for claimants and employees on emergency provisions  Links to information published on gov.uk
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-what-to-do-if-youre-employed-and-cannot-work>
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-what-to-do-if-youre-self-employed-and-getting-less-work-or-no-work>
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-what-to-do-if-youre-already-getting-benefits>
* **Tower Hamlets provision** and information for people at the highest risk of severe illness from coronavirus and extremely vulnerable residents and urgent requirements 020 7364 3030 or use the [new online referral form](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fforms.towerhamlets.gov.uk%2Fservice%2FCOVID_19_Self_Isolation_Support_Request&h=AT3T9MWgpUyew0NpyCL37ZWRDhxPUWeEVHiP4uvfHGYolG8WyJxubQw2gaEgkczhbUL87v5KS0xQhRGszmNW0uULGdE7MaRVwz0GRycpYSULezMNfgx3W9bFBc2rfnj_6RjvvdF-YVTC21OIH3rRZB_UbXIO0mT0bANA)  <https://forms.towerhamlets.gov.uk/service/COVID_19_Self_Isolation_Support_Request>

[www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/)<https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/health__social_care/health_and_medical_advice/Coronavirus/Coronavirus.aspx>

* **Child Poverty Action group** benefits articles updates and is a one stop for changes to the rules <https://www.askcpag.org.uk/content/200997/benefit-and-coronavirus--early-changes>
* The **Home Office has lifted the no recourse to public funds restriction** during the COVID 19 outbreak. It has also issued revised guidance to staff instructing them to ‘provide sympathetic and expeditious decision making’ during the pandemic when dealing with applicants seeking to have their NRPF condition lifted (something  a client can get further assistance from through praxis). <https://dpglaw.co.uk/home-office-agrees-a-rethink-of-no-recourse-to-public-funds-policy-in-light-of-coronavirus-following-todays-high-court-legal-challenge/>
* Information about how families can access [free school meals](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/health__social_care/health_and_medical_advice/Coronavirus/Schools/Free_school_meals.aspx) during the Easter Holiday (poster with information for local support for families from the Family Information Service)  Information and services supporting families Contact the Family Information Service on 020 7364 6495  or visit the Local Offer - Online directory of services [www.localoffertowerhamlets.co.uk](http://www.localoffertowerhamlets.co.uk)   <https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/health__social_care/health_and_medical_advice/Coronavirus/Schools/Free_school_meals.aspx>
* **DWP freeze on repayment of benefit debt**
The DWP are [suspending repayments](https://citizensadvice.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=f2e5709e33ab37630d8a8d4be&id=a03d5b125f&e=969a485213) of all overpayments and social fund loans. Deductions from benefits, direct debits and direct earnings deductions will stop automatically. If clients make repayments through a bank standing order or other voluntary method they need to cancel these. We’re not sure yet if this will apply to 3rd party deductions and are talking to DWP but we understand that deductions of UC Advances from UC will continue.
* **E- training courses**

There are lots of (advice related) training options to take up which can be done completely virtually

* Fuel Poverty and Health This e-learning module looks at the causes and impacts of fuel poverty with a focus on the health impacts. It aims to help delegates identify those likely to be at risk from fuel poverty and signpost to assistance. Designed for anyone wanting to learn more about fuel poverty, its causes and links with physical and mental wellbeing. Lynsey Thompson email  lynsey.thompson@nea.org.uk
* Housing E training agency has to become a member but then get access to free training courses and webinars <https://www.nhas.org.uk/register>
* Debt E training you have to register but then get access to free training courses and webinars which is up to debt specialist level (and starts with basic / foundation)  <http://www.wiseradviser.org/>
* Some free courses from the open university,(including Law and Social Justice  <https://www.open.edu/openlearn/free-courses/full-catalogue>
* **Surveys**

A number of organisations are doing surveys to identify and address ‘need’ during current crisis – they are mostly for organisations that are offering support so please have a look at and complete them

* The Children’s Society we have been hearing from the different pilot sites we are working with, and other partners, that every day new challenges are arising in regard to responding to the Covid-19 crisis. We therefore thought it would be helpful to put together a form for the collection of evidence from staff and volunteers involved in the provision of emergency financial support through this crisis. The aim of this form is to enable us to share the issues that are arising in real time  - and make sure that these issues are heard quickly by decision makers. The form is available through this link:

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=SOAKNBzYq06IpLdJH6ikCHR939zAbv9Aq3I6KKCCb1xUODM1NklaOFdIUlc1MURFVjBZQjQwTDJBTC4u>

* Community groups and organisations are often working with the most vulnerable in society and therefore the most at risk in this lockdown.  We are therefore contacting you to see how your group is doing, find out how we can help and what support you need to survive beyond this period.  We are also contacting you to find out if you are able to contribute to the Borough wide effort to support the most vulnerable and isolated residents and if so, what support you need to help with this. .THCVS is working as part of the Council’s Covid-19 co-ordinating bodies to secure funding and other support to maintain services and provide the types of support needed by vulnerable residents. Alongside funding, the type of help we may be able to provide includes access to IT resources, support for your employees and volunteers, or help with redesigning your activities. If you have the time, we would appreciate if you can take part in our survey to gather information about the needs of the sector and if/how you are able to contribute to support efforts. If you would like to fill the survey in here is the link <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/THCVS_Covid19> otherwise I am happy to call you if you give me a contact number. If you have any questions or need other support or information, please email us at info@thcvs.org.uk or visit the COVID-19 page of our website <https://thcvs.org.uk/covid-19-outbreak> .