**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 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**

**Emergency Advice Services**

* Tower Hamlets Advice services are continuing through telephone and email – please see attached current list but the [www.thcan.org.uk](http://www.thcan.org.uk) website will have updated versions of list (not till next week)
* The specialist advice services are listed on the attached (and below) so don’t forget they are still available and can be contacted to get support on behalf of your clients, to refer or give details to clients

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

**Emergency Information and Resources**

* Attach a factsheet with updates to 23/3/20 BUT as changes are pretty much being made daily – there are more changes since (such as self employed provision)
* The DWP release and update temporary measures for any claimants who need support due to Covid-19 daily. The full press releases can be found [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-support-for-employees-benefit-claimants-and-businesses) Also information for claimants and employees on emergency provisions <https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>
* With many of us now being advised to work from home, [AskCPAG](https://cpag.us18.list-manage.com/track/click?u=20905b09f42b6e106b0615407&id=cf0ae6a850&e=6b3e88bef2) allows you access Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook as well as a range of decision making tools to ensure you can continue working remotely. This includes  updating on changes due to coronavirus as soon as new information is announced.
* Housing updates and homeless services provision and referrals information attached and updated information attached (housing options office is closed but information on how to refer clients)
* Shelters information on the impact of coronavirus on housing issues and rights can be accessed [here](https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/coronavirus). Don’t forget local advisors are available to advise clients by phone/email
* No new possession claims can be started until the of June 2020
* All claims and warrants that have been issued have also been suspended until that date.
* This May be extended until the 30th of October
* Information on current access to food for Tower Hamlets attached
* Information on access to food, delivery to self-isolators and vulnerable people in E14 area attached
* Tower Hamlet provision and information for people at the highest risk of severe illness from coronavirus and extremely vulnerable residents and urgent requirements 020 7364 3030. Urgent help outside the hours of the phone line, they should call the emergency line on 020 7364 4079. Alternatively use the [new online 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) to let the council know about their situation and any help they may need while isolating and managing their care. <https://forms.towerhamlets.gov.uk/service/COVID_19_Self_Isolation_Support_Request>
* Tribunal services information during covid 19 crisis information. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hmcts-daily-operational-summary-on-courts-and-tribunals-during-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

**Benefit /Advice Issues Up-dates**

* **Coronavirus and welfare – Summary of benefit changes  (accurate from 23/03/2020 when written  Amber van Boost**[**Amber.vanBoost@island-advice.org.uk**](mailto:Amber.vanBoost@island-advice.org.uk)

**Changes to Statutory Sick Pay**

* SSP will now be made payable from the first day of absence (previously the fourth day) if you are unable to work due to coronavirus. You will be eligible for payment if you are required to self-isolate due to government guidance and this measure will take affect from 13 March 2020. Please note that you do not need to be infected as this covers anyone that needs to self-isolate.
* If employers request evidence ‘Isolation notes’ are now available at <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>.
* Please noted that you will only be eligible for SSP if you are classed as an ‘employee’. If you are self-employed you may need to claim Universal Credit instead. To claim SSP you need to contact your employer.

**Changes to Universal Credit**

* A number of new changes have been brought in for Universal Credit since the COVID 19 crisis. From the 6th of April the standard allowance will increase by approximately £20 a week to new and existing claims (also applicable to any existing working tax credit claims).
* In addition the ‘minimum income floor’ has been lifted for anyone self-employed whilst claiming Universal Credit for the period that any claimant has been affected by the virus. This applies to new and existing claims and will be in place for the duration of the outbreak. Claimants will temporarily not need to demonstrate ‘gainful self-employment’.

**Changes to Health Care Assessments and Job Centre appointments**

* All face to face assessments for Personal Independence Payment and Limited Capability for Work have been suspended for three months. Anyone who already has an assessment arranged is not required to attend and should be contacted by the Independent Assessment Service for next steps. This is applicable to new and existing claims.
* Furthermore all in person appointments at local job centers have been cancelled for three months from 19th March 2020. All requirements to attend the Job Centre have been temporarily suspended and job centers are now only open to support homeless and vulnerable people to aid making fresh claims.
* Advance payments under Universal Credit can now be made without attending the job centre and any required checks for new claims and documents will be completed remotely or via phone.

# **Universal Credit Advances- a brief overview about UC Advances and Job Centre services / DWP changes (Stephen Hanshaw) DWP**

Our local Jobcentres are temporarily operating face to face services only in exceptional circumstances. These will be for our most vulnerable residents who cannot access our services by telephone or on-line means and then primarily to ensure timely payment, or for other transactions that cannot be completed through any other channels, again primarily to ensure timely payment.

People already receiving benefits do not have to attend any face to face Jobcentre appointments for at least the next three months (from 19th March 2020) and will continue to receive their benefits as normal, all requirements to attend a Jobcentre in person are suspended. Anyone needing to notify us of a change of circumstance can do so through either digital or telephone channels.     
  
New claims to benefit can be made online or by telephone and all appointments for new claims are being completed by telephone only. There is no requirement to attend a face to face meeting. All new claim related activity, including verifying I.D. will be completed during this interview. Once your I.D. has been verified, and eligibility conditions met,  you can request a new claim advance, either during the new claim telephone appointment itself or alternatively on-line through your Universal Credit journal.

# There is no requirement to be seen face to face to complete an application for any of the other Universal Credit advances. Where a translation service are required this will be arranged through a conference call between the translation service provider, work coach and the person making the claim.  We are automatically extending all awards and reassessments for health and disability benefits to those in receipt of them.  There will be no new reviews or reassessments across all benefits for three months – this includes Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and the Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit. Face-to-face assessments for all sickness and disability benefits have been suspended for the next 3 months including for any new claims. Personal Independence Payment claimants, if an assessment has already taken place this will continue to be processed. If an assessment has been scheduled, claimants will be contacted by the assessment provider to discuss how this will be taken forward. Where a translation service is required this will be done through a conference call between the translation service provider, work coach and the person making the claim.  Local Jobcentres are displaying posters signposting people to use online and telephone channels. The poster includes local telephone numbers to be used for urgent enquiries during core times, 0900-1700, where someone needs to talk to a colleague based in one of our Jobcentres.

# **Advance Payment information (12/3/20) – as there are no personal visits going on at present please note that the requirements to ‘attend face-to-face interviews will no longer apply** There are 4 different types of Universal Credit Advance that can be applied for, each depending on individual circumstances. To note that there are different maximum award amounts and recovery periods associated with each type of UC Advance and the amount of an award and recovery period will vary depending on individual circumstance. The 4 types of Universal Credit Advance are: **A new claim advance -** to be eligibleyou must have attended a face to face interview or had a home visit from a visiting officer, have financial need, have likely entitlement to Universal Credit (i.e. ID verified, no outstanding HRT doubt,) and have the ability to repay the advance, if it is a joint claim this applies to both people in the joint claim and the person making the Advance request has to confirm only that their partner knows and agrees to the Advance request. The maximum amount of an award is 100% of the overall estimated entitlement and the maximum recovery period is 12 months. Can be applied for face to face during a work coach interview or on-line through the UC Journal.   **A benefit transfer advance -** can be applied for when you make a claim to universal credit and have been in receipt of a qualifying benefit within a month beforehand. Qualifying benefits include Jobseeker's Allowance (income based), Employment and Support Allowance (income-related), Income Support, Housing Benefit and Tax credits. If someone has transferred to Universal Credit from a qualifying benefit within one calendar month, they must be offered a Benefit Transfer Advance and not a New Claim Advance. it is possible for a Benefit Transfer Advance and a Change of Circumstances Advance to be paid in the same assessment period. The maximum amount of an award is 100% of the overall estimated entitlement and the maximum recovery period is 12 months. Can be applied for face to face during a work coach interview or online through the UC journal.  **A change of circumstances advance** –can be appliedfor when you report a change of circumstances that result in a significant increase in your Universal Credit award (for example a change of circumstance relating to housing, children, health conditions etc.) and potentially can be awarded in the same assessment period as a new claim advance award. A claimants can request an Advance when they report a change of circumstances which results in a significant increase in their Universal Credit entitlement. To be eligible for a Change of Circumstances Advance, you must, due to financial need, be unable to manage until their next scheduled payment of Universal Credit. You can be entitled to more than one Change of Circumstances Advance in the same assessment period if each Advance relates to a different change. It is also possible for New Claim Advance and Change of Circumstances Advance to be paid in the same assessment period. The maximum amount of the advance is 50% of the increase to the Universal Credit award and the maximum recovery period is 6 months.  **A Budgeting Advance**  - to be eligible you must not have any repayment of a Budgeting Advance outstanding or have a partner who has repayment of a Budgeting Advance outstanding and must have been in continuous receipt of Universal Credit or qualifying benefits for at least 6 months beforehand (an exception may be applied to this if the application is to help start or stay in work). Budgeting Advances are discretionary payments. You can apply for a Budgeting Advance at any point during the assessment period. Budgeting Advances provide access to interest free payments for one-off items (for example essential household items like a bed). They are not intended to help pay for unexpectedly high household bills like a gas bill. The amount applied for must not be for less than a minimum amount of £100. The maximum amount you can apply for will depend on your circumstances i.e. single person, couple or couple with children. The recovery period is 12 months, potentially 18 months in exceptional circumstances. Alternative 30 December 2019