**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**

* **Welfare Rights Advisors meeting  24/4/20**

Tower Hamlets advisors attended a zoom meeting and discussed current service provision and common issues.  We agreed to try having zoom meetings every 2 weeks (facilitated by IAC **email me if you want to attend and I will send you the zoom link**) – we will be providing details of benefit changes/updates, sharing experiences, discussing service provision/ capacity  (possibly inviting speakers) – next meeting dates

* + Thursday 14th May 11am - 12
	+ Friday 29th May 11am -12
* Minutes/information form 24/4/20 meeting:
1. Everyone shared experiences about coping with delivering services in the current pandemic – all agencies are continuing to provide advice services: email, zoom, skype, whatsap, telephone, all by non personal contact means and although there are ‘challenges’ we are coping well.  Most organisations have capacity, CAB states they are very busy, so a reminder to signpost Tower Hamlets clients and consider sharing THCAN website details on their bounce back message for email advice
2. Amber VanBoost delivered a presentation on UC issues that are coming up regularly and information/tactics (attached)

Move from helping with disability benefits to more work around working benefit advice.  Challenges around acting on behalf of clients without good digital skills and whether agencies were logging on remotely on behalf of clients who were not with them.  Different experiences, organisations closer with DWP contracts and others agree to log on with clients agreements

The link below which provides information on third parties accessing UC accounts for clients. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/universal-credit-consent-and-disclosure-of-information>

1. Bushra Legal Advice Centre – Information on ‘employment’ issues/cases that may come up as a result of employers not agreeing to furlough

Ideal thing to do if any client comes in with employment issues other than furlough as the guidelines are what needs to be followed on this topic mainly. But if anything arises outside of this or improper use of guidelines are leading to other issues i.e. breach of contract, you can ask clients to fill in one of our screening sheets (attached), and if you or the client emails this to us on admin@legaladvicecentrelondon, we can then respond to the client query.

* **Emergency Advice Services**
* Tower Hamlets Advice services available during lockdown are on ‘advice services deliver1’ document attached updated versions available <http://thcan.org.uk/covid-19-emergency-advice-provision/> some updates from previous one
* The **specialist** advice services are listed on the attached (and below) – few updates from previous

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 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**
* Carers Centre will support unpaid Carers – in specific caring situations – to access free **Personal Protection Equipment** **(PPE)** to enable them to carry out their caring role safely. PPE consists of, gloves; face masks; and aprons.  This is available to: Carers that have to break the social distancing rule to do their caring role **and** that meet the following criteria are eligible: carers who provide personal/close contact care to loved ones/cared for’s who live in a different property to their ow, carers who live with their loved ones/cared for’s and one or both are classed as having to be shielded and are extremely vulnerable due to a long-term health condition and/or are over 70 years old. This scheme is for unpaid carers *not* Care Workers. Care Workers in need of PPE should contact their Care Agency/employer who can request PPE from Tower Hamlets Council. If they are a carer who fits into any of these categories and they need help in accessing PPE,  please call the Carers Centre on: 020 7790 1765 or email them at: enquiries@ccth.org.uk
* Tribunal Services information on hearings during covid 19 <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-courts-and-tribunals-planning-and-preparation>
* Financial Capability support from Island Advice Please refer clients who would like help with their Thames water bill or utility bills. Client referrals can be emailed to admin@island-advice.org.uk   Help and support can be given for:
* Checking Thames water bills and Utility bills
* Help to apply for discounts on bills
* Support with applications for discounts and debt on bills
* Drafting financial statements for grant applications
* Switching utility companies advise and support
* Checking best deals for utility
* Any queries regarding bills
* Energy efficiency advice-how to save money on utility bills and water bills

# **Tower Hamlets Resident Support Scheme Residents' Support Scheme** Coronavirus update: we have temporarily changed the criteria to allow residents to apply for financial support and more than once in a 12 month period. The Residents' Support Scheme is designed to help residents who are either in or at risk of being in crisis or are in need of immediate help and have no source of financial support available to them  <https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/advice_and_benefits/Residents_Support_Scheme.aspx>

* Increases in **Domestic Violence** may lead to advice centres/other service providers being contacted by or being aware/concerned about service users, the attached ‘DV support organisations Covid 19 give details of support for DV cases
* **Emergency Support** in E14 has been updated - attached
* 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://askcpag.org.uk/publications/-216847/benefits-and-coronavirus>

**Debt Issues  Sarah Sauvat feedback from Wiser Adviser webinar**

* Local Authority have been given money to assist people with their council tax mainly this will be spend on **Section13a discretionary reduction**.

I actually had a client for whom I was doing a Section13 a for last year and I simply asked for him to be considered for this year as well and received full reduction of his council tax for the whole year 20/21 so worth checking with client if they have council tax to pay and if it is difficult for them ?

* Also utility supplier should assist people on **prepayment meter by offering free top up and pre paid cards** – this differs across supplier but worth making client aware
* Bailiffs position some new update came today, although it is cleared **that bailiffs cannot remove goods** at the moment it is not yet cleared if they can still charge for the enforcement stage - I am waiting for further update regarding this
* **Training courses**
* **Housing and Covid 19  1st June 3pm -4.30pm**

We have arranged a THCAN group training session (webinar) on ‘Housing, Homelessness and COVID-19’

Monday 1st June between 3:00pm-4:30pm with Isabel Jones.

Please email me for link to join this if you are interested

* **NVQ Advice & Guidance – deadline for grant first week June**

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are NOT training courses and are unlike traditional qualifications in that they are not classroom based. An NVQ is a qualification that judges a person’s ability to do a job/task/activity. An NVQ will relate to the job you do – paid or voluntary. You gain an NVQ by proving that you can perform that job/ task/activity against set standards.

Level 3 is for advisers (paid or volunteers) involved in casework, action planning with clients and  referrals to other agencies. There are 6 units in this award.

Level 4 is for centre co-ordinators/specialist caseworkers/supervisors who still do some work with clients, get involved in networks or deliver training/workshops for clients. There are eight units in this award – please note we would always recommend that everyone completes a level 3 BEFORE doing level 4

Island Advice is an assessment centre for NVQ’s in Advice and Guidance – there is a charge for the qualification but if you have lived in Tower Hamlets for the past 3 years you should be eligible for a grant for the cost – if you are not eligible for a grant the costs are detailed on the attached information sheet, sometimes employers are willing to pay/contribute to the cost or you could self-fund (have a look at:  <https://grants-search.turn2us.org.uk/> to search for individual grants)

Full details are attached, the deadline to apply for the grant  is usually around the first week of June so I will be assisting anyone interested to apply for the grant to do so within the next couple of weeks – if necessary the qualification can be carried out ‘digitally’  If you are interested please email me and I will provide further information