**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 offering support on benefits to agencies, accepting referrals and providing advice to clients in Tower Hamlets**

* **Welfare Rights Advisors Next meeting  Thursday  11/6/20   2pm**

Jo Ellis is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.  Advisors discussion on capacity, referrals and cases.  Updates on issues around benefits and Covid.

Join Zoom Meeting  <https://zoom.us/j/5190676838?pwd=c0N1dFRQaGI0Ynl1bFlRR2ZKM21hUT09>

Meeting ID: 519 067 6838

Password: 1DcHqf

**Minutes 14.5.20 Welfare Rights Advisors Zoom meeting**

1. Advice Centres represented (Island Advice, Bromley by Bow, Carers Centre, Financial Health Centre, Apaseth, Positive East, Age UK) stated all buildings are closed to clients but they are still offering advice by phone/digital means.  Services are being well used but all have capacity to continue to advise new clients
2. Problems encountered were generally that everything is taking longer, forms for instance are still being done by phone but they are taking a lot more time to do them, also not being able to act on behalf/get authority/see journals, complicates things and makes it harder to sort out problems, everything takes longer (especially with clients with poor digital/communication skills).
3. Types of cases/issues being dealt with:

* No money (income stopped/reduced/waiting for benefit awards).  Advisors help with  foodbank and referrals to resident support scheme (some uncertainty about whether they can award money but I’m checking this), advance payments for UC claimants and generally checking benefits
* Bereavement – all the issues around this, money for funeral expenses, benefits changes, housing tenancies advice
* Free school meals, some confusion with clients as all children used to get free school meals under TH scheme but under government assistance only those on specific means tested benefits are eligible (so less generous than TH’s)
* Carers who can’t care due to self-isolation being concerned about their entitlement to Carers Allowance (advice is its OK, rules have been relaxed and they can continue to claim their carers allowance if they are a) self-isolating themselves or keeping away from other people)

1. Amber Island Advice Centre did presentation on the rules for Self Employed Income Support Scheme – factsheet attached

* **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 also listed on the attached (and below) – few updates from previous

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Organisation** | **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 |

* **Information and Resources**
* Guidance re changes to RSS applications:  We increased the value of both fuel and food awards to cover the average households’ costs for a week’s worth of shopping instead of the previous amount which was calculated to last for 2-3 days. We have also removed the previous limit on the number of applications for those requiring Covid related support.  Prior to the lockdown residents were only eligible for one emergency application within a 12 month period they can now make multiple applications for Covid related support.
* **Digital support for clients** [Ian.McGeough@bitc.org.uk](mailto:Ian.McGeough@bitc.org.uk)  BITC runs a program called [ClickSilver](https://www.facebook.com/clicksilver1/) which matches business volunteers with older people to help them improve computer/tablet/smart phone skills to help them stay connected and limit the impact of loneliness. See attached and please promote
* 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 – updated info attached
* Linkage Plus have developed a phone app to support referrals from the voluntary and the statutory sector to refer residents aged 50+ to their services with their consent. It is a simple app that makes referrals easy.   More information of Linkage Plus can be found here: <https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/linkage-plus/>
* DWP updates X 3
* **Training**
* **NVQ Advice & Guidance**

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are accredited qualifications that judge a person’s ability to do a job/task/activity.

* Level 3 is for advisers (paid or volunteers) involved in casework, action planning with clients and referrals to other agencies.
* 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.

Island Advice is an assessment centre for NVQ’s in Advice and Guidance – if you are interested please contact me for information 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 (deadline for grant is now 24/7/20) – if necessary/preferred the qualification can be carried out ‘digitally’  If you are interested please email me and I will provide further information