

Adviser Checklist

Income Maximisation

www.thcan.org.uk

Income maximisation is one of the 7 steps of the debt advice process, it involves checking clients have as much money coming in as is possible and considering ways of reducing expenditure. Advisors should provide non-judgemental advice to a client, we are not there to tell clients what they should/shouldn't spend money on (i.e. to tell them to give up smoking), however, during the process of preparing a financial statement high expenditure/low income may be identified.

Benefits

Carry out a benefit check (or get client to do it themselves if they are able), may well identify additional (or incorrect) benefit entitlements: www.benefits-calculator.turn2us.org.uk

- Disability Benefits: Personal Independence Payment (working age), Disability Living Allowance (children under 16) and Attendance Allowance for clients/family members with health problems/disabilities
PIP claim: Telephone: 0800 917 2222
DLA and AA forms: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications>
- Backdated benefit – some benefits (ie housing benefit) can be backdated, different rules apply to different benefits. If you've identified an entitlement or client has recently claimed a benefit, check to see if there is any possibility to backdate the benefit - CPAG Welfare Rights Handbook or referral to benefit advisor
- Benefit overpayments: clients may have deductions from benefits for overpaid benefits, sometimes the overpayment can be challenged, overpayment amounts reduced, discretion to not recover due to hardship requested – this would be done by contacting the department who is recovering the benefit, they may need a specialist benefit advisor

Local Authority Benefits (Tower Hamlets)

- Free school meals. Infant/Primary school ; There is national provision to provide universal free schools meals regardless of the parent(s) income Tower Hamlets council has extended this primary schools. Nursery and Secondary school free meals are dependent on income
- School clothing grant can help towards the cost of a school uniform for children aged 11 who is changing from primary to secondary school. Only one grant is payable during a child's school life.
- Tower Hamlets Educational Maintenance Allowance for students staying in education after their GCSEs, £400 a year to help towards the costs of studying. Payments are made after they have demonstrated a commitment to the course.

For most of the above Parent/guardian must be receiving: Income-based Job Seekers Allowance, Income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support , Pension Credit Guarantee Credit, Support from

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NASS (National Asylum Support Service) under part IV of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, or if on Universal Credit there are (different) annual income rate limits

All above can be claimed on the following online system (or form can be printed and hand written)

<https://benefitforms.towerhamlets.gov.uk/>

Tax

A tax refund is a refund of tax which has been overpaid. There are a number of reasons why tax may have been overpaid, including: you start a new job, you marry or form a civil partnership, you have the wrong tax code, if you are self-employed and you make too many payments, you have more than one job.

<https://www.gov.uk/claim-tax-refund>

Crisis / Emergency Food/money

- Food Bank, give food, support and advice to local people in crisis. Each person is given an emergency donation of food (enough for 3 days) and the help they need to resolve their crisis <https://www.firstlovefoundation.org.uk/foodbank/> You would need to be referred to them by advice centre or other support worker.
- Other emergency food suppliers are listed on the WWW.thcan.org.uk/factsheet website
- Resident Support Scheme: Tower Hamlets provides an emergency financial payment where there is a sort term crisis and severe financial hardship [https://forms.towerhamlets.gov.uk/service/Resident support scheme](https://forms.towerhamlets.gov.uk/service/Resident_support_scheme)

Council Tax

In some circumstances, you may not be required to pay full or any Council Tax, some circumstances that mean you might be entitled to a discount or exemption are:

- Council Tax Reduction (low income clients may be eligible for a reduction or won't have to pay)
- Single person discount – 25% reduction if lone person (ignore dependent children/students)
- Disability band reduction – may be eligible to reduce CT band if room required due to disability
- Challenge to CT band
- Some people are exempt from CT charge such as: students, hospital patients, severely mentally impaired (and others check list)
- Section 13a if there is Severe Financial Hardship there is some (limited) provision to completely clear CT debts (need to check with an advisor on this one)

[https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ign/council_and_democracy/council_tax/Do I qualify for a discount.aspx](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ign/council_and_democracy/council_tax/Do_I_qualify_for_a_discount.aspx)

Healthy Start Food Vouchers and vitamins:

Pregnant, child under 4, mother with child under 1. In receipt of qualifying benefit (pretty much the means tested benefits) – eligibility for voucher for each person eligible (worth £3.10 each) to spend on 'healthy food' Form www.healthystart.nhs.uk

Price comparison;

Debt advisors must not provide 'financial' advice, however clients with credit debts should check for cheaper products on: bank accounts, loans, credit cards, and other financial products. Expenditure on items such as car insurances, phones, broadband, utilities, household purchases may be a way of reducing expenditure - top five comparison sites

www.moneysupermarket.com/

www.uswitch.com/

www.confused.com/

Sell unwanted goods/items Ebay Facebook

Energy Suppliers

Warm Home Discount £140 reduction off electricity for pension credit / low income, some suppliers have hardship funds to help with energy debt (for more information visit the individual supplier websites).

Information is all of them are available on 'Let's Talk' website click on energy provider to start the online application process. Each scheme, has different criteria in terms of who can apply, and offers different types of support. Support could be debt write-off, energy efficient white goods, boiler repairs/ replacements.

[Let's Talk \(lets-talk.online\)](http://lets-talk.online)

Water

Water debts may be written off if there is financial hardship (Customer Assistance Fund). Also WaterSure *Plus* Reduces bills by 50% for qualifying customers if both of the following apply

1. Water bill is 3% or more of yearly net household income and

2. One or more of the following applies

- gross household income is less than £16,105 *and*, someone in household is aged over 62, under 5 or registered disabled
- Someone in the household receives one or more of these benefits: Housing Benefit, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, Pension Credit, Universal Credit, Child Tax, Income Based, Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), Income based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

[Thames Water - The UK's largest water and wastewater company](#)

Island Advice Centre and Bromley by Bow Centre assist with applications for write offs, reductions and grants

Health costs;

Prescriptions, glasses, dental and other NHS costs may have full exemption if eligible for (most) means tested benefits but there is also low income and prepayment and fixed fee schemes

www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/help-with-health-costs

Child Care

There may be help available for free/reduced child-care costs whether client is in or out of work (or student).

This could be through benefits (Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit) or other government schemes

<https://www.gov.uk/childcare-calculator>

Employment

Check that you are receiving minimum wage, increase hours (may have impact on benefits you receive check www.turn2us)