

Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) is a partnership of local advice centres that work together to ensure Tower Hamlets residents have access to free, high quality advice and representation in social welfare law (welfare benefits, debt, housing , employment, immigration, etc)

Our website www.thcan.org.uk has information on advice providers services, factsheets, and contact details

- 1.** Welfare Rights Advisors Forum: next meeting 3/3/2022 – Topic Council Tax
- 2.** Free Training Sessions: welfare rights overview, Understanding Homelessness & Housing: Local Authority Duties, Income Maximisation, Employment Rights, Benefit Overpayments
- 3.** Benefit Updates
- 1.** New Projects, Services and Resources Information
- 2.** Vacancies.
- 3.** Advice Services Contacts (specialist advisors)

1. Welfare Rights Advisors Forum

This network is for advice workers in Tower Hamlets. Anyone who has previously attended will be sent a link for the next meeting – if you want to attend and are not already on this list please send me an email. Minutes and information on past meetings is available on [Advice Agencies Information - THCAN](#)

The topic for this meeting is **Council Tax Recovery**, Alan Fayter Principal Council Tax Recovery Officer London Borough of Tower Hamlets will give an update on council tax caseload, breathing space, S13a, recovery post covid and answer questions relating to CT recovery

2. Free Training

Please email me to arrange a place – most courses are delivered on **Zoom** and are free to anyone working/volunteering in Tower Hamlets – places are limited

Course name, date and time	Course details – Zoom Courses	Trainer / Venue
Benefits Overview 2 Day Zoom/Digital	Basic course no experience necessary, suitable for anyone working with clients / service users needing welfare rights advice. By the end of the course, you will be able to:	Jo Ellis Island Advice Centre

<p>1st and 8th February 10am to 1pm</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete benefits check and a 'better-off' calculation 2. Distinguish between means-tested and contribution-based and non-contribution-based benefits 3. Understand the principles underlying Universal Credit (UC) 5. Be aware of legacy benefits and be aware of what could trigger a claim for UC for legacy claimants 6. Understand how housing costs are supported by the benefits System 7. Benefits for specific groups: Sick and Disabled, Young People, Students, Families, Self Employed People 8. Personal Independence Payments 9. What to do if the DWP get a decision wrong 10. Useful resources and where to refer 	<p>Zoom/digital</p>
<p>Understanding Homelessness & Housing: Local Authority Duties</p> <p>Webinar 10.30 – 12 17th February</p>	<p>Aim: To provide an introduction to local authority homelessness duties</p> <p>This webinar will cover: ✓ the duties owed to homeless people by local authorities ✓ the five tests of homelessness using case studies ✓ identify when accommodation duties are triggered and what this means</p> <p>Suitable for advisers who want an introduction to homelessness and local authority duties, so they are aware of the legislation. It is aimed at those with little knowledge so is not suitable for those who are experienced advisers and are involved in dealing with homelessness on a day to day basis as part of their role.</p>	<p>NHAS Webinar Hosted by Island Advice email jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk to book a place</p>
<p>Income Maximisation</p> <p>1st March 10.30am to 12</p> <p>Zoom</p>	<p>Very basic course for anyone helping clients in financial hardship</p> <p>By the end of the session, you will be able to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete a benefits check and a 'better-off' calculation 2. Identify possible benefit entitlements, commonly unclaimed benefits, 3. Have an awareness of other sources of financial help <p style="text-align: center;">Discretionary Housing Payments Resident Support Scheme</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Have an awareness of possible expenditure reduction considerations for people in financial hardship 6. Have an awareness of when and where to refer clients to for help with debts, benefits and or money advice support 	<p>Jo Ellis Island Advice Zoom / digital</p>

<p>Employment Rights</p> <p>8th March Zoom training session 10.30 to 12 noon</p>	<p>This course will cover the following basic aspects of employment,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment status • Terms and conditions of employment • Pay • Grievances • Disciplinary action • Dismissal • Redundancy • Discrimination (very brief) Enforcement (very brief) 	<p>Elizabeth Daley Legal Advice Centre Zoom / Digital</p>
<p>Overpayments</p> <p>24th march 10.00 to 12.30pm Face to face</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ General information about benefit overpayments ▶ Which/when can overpayments be challenged? ▶ How are overpayments recovered ▶ Suitable for experienced advisors and debt workers dealing with clients with overpayments of benefit 	<p>Fatima Begum Welfare Rights Supervisor Island Advice FACE TO FACE ISLAND HOUSE</p>
<p>Recovery of overpayments</p> <p>24th March 1pm to 3pm Face to face</p>	<p>May benefit overpayments ARE recoverable and then become 'debts'. Options such as waiver of recovery, reduction of rate of recovery, insolvency may be used to reduce/write-off or repay these 'debts'</p> <p>This course is for experienced advisors that are dealing with clients with benefit overpayments</p>	<p>Hien Dinh Debt supervisor Island Advice FACE TO FACE ISLAND HOUSE</p>
	<p>Note the 2 sessions on 24th will be face to face in Island House, Roserton Street, E14 3PH Ideally we would recommend you doing both sessions BUT the morning session is benefit related, afternoon debt related and if you only want to do one this is possible</p>	

- Training Money mentor course – information attached
- The Fuel Poverty and Health e-learning will look 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. **FULLY FUNDED PLACES are available Learners must be frontline staff or volunteers that encounter and provide advice to those in or at risk of fuel poverty. CONTENT** The Low-income High Costs Indicator and the causes of fuel poverty How to identify those at risk of fuel poverty, The health impacts of fuel poverty and damp homes
The causes of condensation dampness/ mould and remedial actions that can be taken, Assistance and sources of advice available to those struggling to heat their home adequately – including the Affordable Warmth Obligation of the Energy Company Obligation (ECO), the Warm Home Discount Scheme, Priority Services Register and fuel suppliers' hardship funds for those

struggling to pay their energy costs This course will take approximately 2 hours to complete however each learner is different and e-learning offers the flexibility to study at your own pace.

Please contact lynsey.thompson@nea.org.uk for further details.

3. Benefit Updates

- **DWP NOW ALLOWS CLAIMANTS TO AUDIO RECORD PIP ASSESSMENTS ON THEIR MOBILE PHONES**

The PIP Assessment Guide latest version makes it clear that everyone can ask to have their PIP assessment recorded, whether it is a telephone or face-to-face assessment. If you use a recording for your own information, share it with an advisor or use it as part of an appeal, this is all entirely lawful. All of this guidance relates to audio recording only, video recording by claimants is not permitted. We would encourage everyone to ask for their assessment to be audio recorded

- **Overpayments**

Overpayments of UC are recoverable, even where, the claimant is clearly in the right. DWP's [benefit overpayment recovery guide](#) explains the situations in which DWP may pause, reduce or waive recovery of an overpayment. The threshold for waiver is high, with just [nine](#) overpayments waived in the last year, but that shouldn't stop you from making a request. CPAG has produced a number of [pre-action letter templates](#) to help advisers challenge overpayment recovery, and our Judicial Review Project is on hand to offer guidance about adapting and using them. You might also advise your client to [make a complaint](#) and [ask for compensation](#).

CPAG is also doing ongoing policy work about the recovery of benefit overpayments. We would be interested to [hear from](#) any advisers who have similar cases this year.

Also Public Law Project m.court@publiclawproject.org.uk specialise in judicial Reviews and may be able to take historical tax credit debt overpayments and benefit overpayments where the authority has not agreed to waive recovery and there are hardship/health grounds

- **Limitations to Universal Credit (UC) work requirements reduced** The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has announced that the period in which UC claimants can limit their work search to their preferred type of work will be reduced from three months to four weeks. This is part of [the DWP's 'Way to Work' campaign](#).
- **Fit notes required again** A temporary change to UC guidance suspending the requirement to provide fit notes, which was covered in [our email update of 22 December 2021](#), has now ended. The [DWP's guidance on UC if you have a disability or health condition](#) has been updated to confirm that the self-certification period has reverted to 7 days and claimants must provide medical evidence from the 8th day onwards

- **CPAG's advice contacts**

Advice by telephone 020 7812 5231 Monday to Friday, 10am-12 and 2pm-4pm

Universal credit advice by email 020 7812 5221 Wednesday, 10am-12pm and 2pm-4pm uc-london@cpag.org.uk

Advice for professionals working with domestic abuse survivors 07983 946608 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 10am-12pm and 2pm-4pm. swap@cpag.org.uk

4. New Projects /services and resources in Tower Hamlets

- Foodbank drop in session poster (attached) No referral necessary Service open to anyone who needs it, every Sunday 12PM-2PM
Remind anyone who goes on a Sunday to bring their own shopping bags as the group has a very limited supply

5. Vacancies

None this month

6. Advice Services

Tower Hamlets Advice benefit advice services details [Advice Centres - THCAN](#)

All advice providers are continuing to assist clients through telephone and digital means (video booth, email, whatsapp, zoom, etc) some face to face is now being offered

Specialist advice providers

All the advice providers listed on www.thcan.org.uk provide benefit advice and help with form filling. Complex/appeal/specialist advice is available at the following organisations

Legal Advice Centre - have capacity to take on any type of First Tier Tribunal welfare benefit cases, please refer by emailing benefits@legaladvicecentre.london or completing the form: <https://legaladvicecentre.london/benefit-appeal-representation/>

Organisation	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 Wed 10am
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