

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: 9th June 2pm
- 1.** Free Training Sessions: NVQ Level 3 & 4 in Advice and Guidance, Dealing with Difficult Client Situations, Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment, Council Tax, Housing Costs entitlement, Benefits for Pensioners
- 1.** Benefit Updates
- 2.** New Projects, Services and Resources Information
- 3.** Vacancies: Fair Finance
- 4.** 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 the list, please send me an email and request a link (and recommend agenda items). Next meeting will be **9th June 2pm** Minutes and information on past meetings are available on [Advice Agencies Information - THCAN](#)

2. Free Training

Please email me to arrange a place – some courses are delivered on zoom others face-to-face; they are all free to anyone working/volunteering/living in Tower Hamlets – places are limited

Course name, date and time	Course details	Trainer Venue
	Note the face-to-face sessions will be in Island House Roserton Street, E14 3PG	
Universal Credit 10.30 to 4pm 6th May	Aims: to give a basic overview of Universal Credit. Objectives Learners will be able to understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is universal credit • Who can/should claim UC • Understand basic structure and calculation of UC 	Fatima Begum Welfare Rights Specialist Island House

		Face to Face
Handling Difficult Situations with Clients 17 th May 10am to 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore what is meant by ‘difficult/demanding clients’ and why clients are/become ‘difficult’ • Identify responsibilities of the worker and those of the client • Explore practical strategies for dealing with difficult client situations 	Jo Ellis Training coordinator Zoom
Personal Independence Payment 27 th May 10am to 1pm	Suitable for – basic course for advice workers/support workers no knowledge of the benefit system is required. Aims <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To give an overview of the eligibility criteria and applications for Personal Independence Payment • To examine the structure of PIP and the assessment process 	Fatima Begum Welfare Rights Specialist Face to Face Island House
NVQ Level 3 and 4 Advice and Guidance Information session 25 th May 10am to 11am Grant Application deadline 17 th June Start any time, average 12 months, maximum 18 months to complete	National Vocational Qualification NVQ’s are accredited qualifications NOT training courses, or classroom based (one hour per month meeting). An NVQ judges a person’s ability to do a job/task/activity and relates to the job you do this could be paid or voluntary. You gain an NVQ by proving that you can perform that job/ task/activity against set standards. This involves completing a workbook answering questions around your work practices, observations and providing evidence of your everyday work Level 3 is for advisers (paid or volunteers) involved in client advice and guidance. Level 4 is for supervisors, caseworkers, supervisors who still do some work with clients We require candidates to completes a level 3 BEFORE doing level 4 Cost (if you have lived in Tower Hamlets for past 3 years you can apply for a grant to cover the costs) –guidance on how to apply for this will be covered at the information session NVQ Level 3 £1,400 NVQ Level 4 when you have completed Level 3 in the past 2 years £1,200	Coordinator Jo Ellis Assessors Jo Ellis & Fatima Begum City and Guilds qualification Verification Centre Advice UK Zoom

<p>Council Tax 8th June 10am to 12.30pm</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dwellings, including exempt dwellings • Liability • Reducing the bill • Billing / collection / recovery • Enforcement • Options to deal with Council Tax arrears <p>Suitable for advisors and debt workers dealing with clients with council tax debt</p>	<p>Hien Dinh Debt supervisor Face to Face Island House</p>
<p>Benefits for Pensioners 14th June 10am to 12.30pm</p>	<p>Objectives an overview of the welfare benefits system and the eligibility criteria of benefits for pensioners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retirement Pension • Pension Credit • Attendance Allowance • Housing Costs support for pensioners • Different age couples (one pension age one not) <p>Suitable for: anyone working with pensioners' basic course no benefit knowledge or experience needed, for anyone working with clients with benefit problems</p>	<p>Jo Ellis Island Advice Zoom</p>
<p>Housing Costs Eligibility 21st June 10am to 1pm</p>	<p>Suitable for – basic course for advice workers/support workers, no knowledge of the benefit system is required. Objectives: To give participants an overview and understanding of the rules on: Housing Benefit and the Universal Credit Housing Element</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whose eligible, how to claim, changes in circumstances, • Local housing Allowance • Non-Dependent Deductions • Bedroom tax • Benefit Cap 	<p>Jo Ellis Training coordinator Island Advice Zoom</p>

- **FREE Mental Health & Awareness presentations, workshops & courses**
Mind in Tower Hamlets and Newham to deliver an exciting new project to support mental health and workplace wellbeing among local businesses across the Tower Hamlets. Brian Page Brian.Page@mithn.org.uk

3. Benefit Updates

Citizens Advice / CPAG /LASA / Benefits and Work updates summary

- **New guidance to local authorities on the ‘Homes for Ukraine scheme’**
In [LA Welfare Direct 4/22](#), the DWP provides guidance on the impact hosting a Ukrainian family will have on a claimant’s housing benefit. Guests will not be ‘normally residing with’ their host so there is no impact on the severe disability premium, under occupancy and non-dependent deductions. If a benefit cap is in force that will continue to apply and the rules for discretionary housing payments

will not change. Hosts should declare the monthly £350 'thank you' payment but, as it is a payment of local welfare provision, it is disregarded as income and capital.

- **Guidance on immediate benefit entitlement for arrivals from Ukraine**

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has issued [new guidance](#) on [the recent regulations](#) allowing people arriving from Ukraine to claim benefits straight away. The guidance confirms that the regulations exempt from the past presence test and habitual residence test:

- Those with a pre-existing right of abode in the UK; and
- Those granted leave under or outside the Immigration Rules, who have recourse to public funds

Clients will come under the exception if they were residing in Ukraine immediately before 1 January 2022 and left in connection with the invasion.

- **DWP guidance on new terminal illness rule for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Universal Credit (UC)**

The DWP has provided guidance in [ADM Memo 8/22](#) and [DMG Memo 6/22](#) on the [Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance \(Terminal Illness\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2022](#). From 4 April 2022, for UC and ESA, 'terminally ill' means that the claimant is suffering from a progressive disease and that death can reasonably be expected within 12 months. DWP has confirmed in [guidance on gov.uk](#) that people will only have to submit one form for all benefit claims confirming their prognosis. If your client is told that they may have less than 6 months to live their doctor will complete form DS1500, if the prognosis is less than 12 months it will be form SR1

- **Benefit Rates have been updated** – see attached

- **PIP AWARDS AUTOMATICALLY EXTENDED**

The DWP has developed an "automated digital solution" which extends PIP awards repeatedly when they are close to ending if a review has still not been completed, a government minister has revealed. Chloe Smith, minister for disabled people, disclosed the existence of the automated system in response to a parliamentary question about how many PIP claims are extended more than once. Although Smith said that the figures for the number of claimants whose awards have been repeatedly extended was not available, she did admit that it was happening.

- **Ukrainian arrivals - National Insurance numbers (NINOs)**

This can crop up as a barrier to accessing benefits. It is true that there is a NINO requirement for certain benefits (including UC) but that requirement is only that the person either has a NINO **or provides enough information for a NINO to be allocated**.

Therefore, there is no need for the client to have a NINO before a claim as one is created as part of the claims process.

This policy to treat benefit claims as an application for NINO is confirmed in the DWP's own guidance at paragraph 02178 of [DMG 02](#) and paragraph A2148 of [ADM A2](#) (DMG for legacy benefits, ADMs cover the UC system and PIP):

'There is no entitlement to benefits unless the claim is accompanied by sufficient information or evidence: to confirm the NINO quoted belongs to the claimant and any adult affected by the provisions to enable the NINO to be traced where the NINO is unknown **to enable a**

NINO to be allocated where the claimant or adult does not have a NINO and they apply for one. If the claimant does not have a NINO (for example as a person who has recently migrated to the UK), then an application for a NINO will be initiated from within the DWP if entitlement to benefit is established.

The claimant should provide sufficient information and evidence to enable a NINO to be traced or allocated.'

The [GOV.UK page on moving to the UK from Ukraine](#) explicitly confirms this for UC: 'If you're applying for Universal Credit you'll get a National Insurance number if your claim is successful.'

If you have clients who are being refused benefit on these grounds, you can:

quote the above guidance and case law raise the issue with your partnership teams

issue a complaint and request compensation for any loss caused by the delay

On top of this the client may wish to involve their MP to act on their behalf to rectify the issue. Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) are actively asking advisers to get in touch with them and are able to support with Judicial Review if needed. Further details can be found in the [NINO section of CPAG's website](#).

- **Ukrainian arrivals - valuing property**

Although the government has yet to produce specific guidance, a [minister responded to a written question on 5 April 2022](#) indicating that the DWP would be looking to assign a nil market value to Ukrainian property (as opposed to legislating an exception or applying an easement).

4. New Projects /services and resources in Tower Hamlets

- **Guidance on £150 claiming the Council Tax rebate for Tower Hamlets residents (part of the government's initiative to help households with rising energy costs)** [Energy Grant rebate \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](#)
- **Information from Tower Hamlets CT section on how the payment will be made when not already registered for DD with them – please let me know if this is not happening (debt advisor reports this has been problematic)**

The quickest way to receive your £150 if you pay Council Tax is by direct debit. If you currently are not paying by direct debit you can [sign up for online access to your account](#).

Direct Debit payers Bands A - D

If you currently pay by direct debit you do not need to do anything as we will automatically issue the payment direct to your bank account, unless the direct debit payer has a different name to the householder. In this instance we will contact you.

Empty properties and second homes are not eligible for the grant.

Non-direct debit payers Bands A -D

If you do not pay your Council Tax by direct debit we will send you an email or SMS inviting you to claim your £150 payment. Your bank details will be required at this stage.

Empty properties and second homes are not eligible for the grant.

Council Tax Bands E – H

Local Council Tax Support claimants, in Bands E – H, will receive the £150 Energy Rebate Grant and we will contact you, by email or SMS, for your bank details to enable the payment to be made.

Additional Information from Council Tax Department

So long as a person is set on CTAX as the liable person, regardless of 100% CTR, they can use our online service to set a DD. An exemption (say for students) or 100% CTR does not affect this. The issue will only be is

- 1) The person we have named as the liable party is not matched to any online submissions/bank details. The name spelling must match exactly.
- 1) The person is not liable as is a HIMO and so an Owner is liable

If the person who is named on the bill wants to set a DD & cannot set online, they should call the contact centre. 0207 364 5002. We need to set a DD on a bank that relates to the Taxpayer named, not a 3rd party. So we cannot set the DD on a Non Deps account or where the person is not named.

If we only have 1 person named on a bill, and it is not their bank details, then any jointly liable party who wants to set a DD will need to be added to the bill and only then can we set their bank details. In these cases the named billed resident named should call Customer Services.

- **Further info on Ukrainian refugees support**
(Rafia Meah LBTH Safeguarding and Adam Pervo Age UK)

Just so you are aware there are two types of payment that people may query about at the front door service:

- 1) £200 (one-off payment) for the Ukrainian refugees (per person) and
- 2) £350 per month to be paid to the sponsor (host) who is accommodating the Ukrainian family.

1. The family is encouraged to come in to apply for Universal Credit (UC) with Tackling poverty team (TPT)
1. The UC team will check the spreadsheet to see if the person's name is on the list.
2. TPT will provide £200 payment and add note on spreadsheet
3. Ellie will check if contractor can do the ongoing payment of £350 per month
4. Ellie will check if an international phone number is viable and check whether people can access bank accounts in the UK or whether methods need to be sought

Please note that the £200 is only paid to anyone who is registered on the portal.

In terms of anyone contacting TH Connect with regards to the £200, please advise them that they need to be registered on the Home for Ukraine portal. If they have already registered, please inform them that we are working extremely hard to get through the list of people to assess and request that they patiently wait for us to assess the host, which has already started happening.

If people need support immediately, they can access the residents support scheme. Information on this can be found here: [Residents' Support Scheme \(towerhamlets.gov.uk\)](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/residents-support-scheme)

- **Homes for Ukraine: factsheet for Ukrainians - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)**
- **Ofgem guidance on fuel debt/support**
[Getting help if you can't afford your energy bills | Ofgem](#)

- **Household Support Fund- Pensioner Allocation** - central government are providing additional Household Support Funding which must be spent by the end of September. They have confirmed in their guidance that a proportion of the allocation is specifically ringfenced for pensioners. We want to ensure that we reach as many pensioners as possible who need support, and that we are spending it in a way that guarantees take up. We would like to invite anyone who predominately works with pensioners to meet and discuss ideas on how we might disseminate the funding and how best to reach them. We can only spend it on food and fuel so any ideas must remain within those limitations. If you would like to take part in the discussion please email Amy.Bassi@towerhamlets.gov.uk by 5pm on Wednesday 20th April. I will then send out an invitation to those interested in taking part (date and time to be confirmed).

5. Vacancies

- Attached job vacancy at Fair Money Advice. 0203 475 8811 (ext. 428)
Jahanara Khanom jahanara@fairfinance.org.uk

6. Advice Services

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

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