

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) www.thcan.org.uk website has information on advice providers services, factsheets, contact details and a referrals portal. sarah.sauvat@island-advice.org.uk register to use the portal jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk book training/send info for the mailout

1. Welfare Rights Advisors Forum
2. Free Training Sessions: Housing disrepair, housing costs, personal independence payment, benefits for pensioners, advice skills
3. Benefit Updates
4. New Projects, Services and Resources Information
5. Vacancies: none to report
6. Advice Services Contacts (specialist advisors)

1. Welfare Rights Advisors Forum

This network is for advice workers or anyone dealing with clients on benefit issues in Tower Hamlets. We meet quarterly and discuss services, benefits updates, have presentations from DWP/Housing benefit and other providers. [If you have not previously attended a welfare rights advisor forum meeting email me and I will add you to my \(zoom\) invite list.](#)
Next meeting will be June 2023

2. Free Training

Please email me to arrange a place – some courses are delivered on zoom others face-to-face (either Island Advice Centre, E14 3PG); they are all free to anyone working, volunteering, or living in Tower Hamlets – places are limited and allocated on first come first serve.

Course name, date, and time	Course details	Trainer Venue
Housing Disrepair 18 th April 10am- 1pm	Learning Objectives: Potential options and remedies for tenants experiencing disrepair/bad housing conditions ✓ Landlord and Tenant Act, what are landlord responsibilities? ✓ Fitness for Human Habitation Act, when does this apply? ✓ Environmental Health Dept role in addressing housing conditions ✓ Housing safety rules Suitable for Voluntary Agency advisers who advise clients on housing issues. Attendees should have a basic knowledge of security of tenure. Also local Authority Housing Options staff including housing officers, homelessness officers and homeless	NHAS specialist trainer Webinar

	<p>prevention staff who are required to give advice on disrepair and housing conditions. NOTE: solicitors and housing association staff are NOT eligible to attend this training</p>	
<p>Housing Costs Eligibility 20th April 10am to 12.30pm</p>	<p>Objectives: To give participants an overview and understanding of the rules on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Benefit and the Universal Credit Housing Element • Whose eligible, how to claim, changes in circumstances, • Local housing Allowance • Non-Dependent Deductions • Bedroom tax • Benefit Cap <p>Suitable for – basic course for advice workers/support workers, no knowledge of the benefit system is required.</p>	<p>Jo Ellis Training coordinator Island Advice Zoom</p>
<p>Personal Independence Payment 26th April 10am to 3pm</p>	<p>Aims</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To give an overview of the eligibility criteria and applications for Personal Independence Payment <p>To examine the structure of PIP and the assessment process</p> <p>Suitable for – basic course for advice workers/support workers no knowledge of the benefit system is required.</p> <p>Note this course is full but I will keep a waiting list and if there is enough interest we can do a zoom PIP course in June,</p>	<p>Jo Ellis Training coordinator Face to Face Island Hse E14 3PG</p>
<p>Benefits for Pensioners 4th May 10am to 12.30pm</p>	<p>Objectives an overview of provisions in the welfare benefits system and the eligibility criteria of benefits for pensioners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand Pension Age • Retirement Pension • Pension Credit • Different age couples (one pension age one not) • Disability Benefits / Attendance Allowance • Housing Costs support for pensioners. • Referrals • Resources <p>Suitable for: Basic Course, no benefit knowledge or experience needed, for anyone working with clients of pension age</p>	<p>Jo Ellis Training coordinator Island Advice Zoom</p>
<p>Advice Skills 2 sessions 11th and 25th May 10am to 12.30</p>	<p>Objective: An Advice UK course</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Understand key principles of giving advice and apply/use them within your work. ▶ Understand the advice process and your role as an advisor. ▶ Be able to conduct effective interviews. <p>Explore best practice in working with clients. Key principles which underlie advice giving. Techniques</p>	<p>Jo Ellis Training coordinator Island Advice Zoom</p>

	to improve communications skills (face to face and telephone/digital), stages in the advice process, emergencies, referrals and resources, case recording and reviews, Suitable for: advice workers, anyone new to advice including volunteers, existing advisors as a 'refresher', reception staff	(Advice UK's Advice Skills unit)
Medical priority within LBTH allocations policy TBC - June	Aim: to help developing a better understanding of the criteria for joining the housing register, Medical Priority Process within the housing allocation of London Borough of Tower Hamlets It will include the grounds to apply, the application process and the potential outcomes and options following an application . Suitable for front line non adviser and/or front-line generalist adviser	Shuhel Alom Housing specialist Island Advice Zoom

3. Benefit Updates (Citizens Advice / CPAG /LASA / Benefits and Work updates summary)

- **Future changes to disability benefit** The government is proposing to abolish the Work Capability Assessment and to make all disability support in the benefits system rely on the PIP assessment instead. This won't happen until 2026/27 at the earliest.
- **Reminder of change to bereavement benefits for cohabiting couples with children**

Benefit rules now allow bereavement support to co-habiting partners (where previously it was only for those who were married or in a civil partnership). The government has agreed to allow retrospective claims back to 2018 but people only have until Feb 2024 to make retrospective claims. Approximately 21,000 potential claims could be made in the UK - the government website:

[Bereavement Support Payment: Eligibility - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/bereavement-support-payment-eligibility)

4. New Projects /services, information, and resources in Tower Hamlets

- **Warm hubs** – venues that are open for residents wanting a safe space to keep warm. Refreshments including hot drinks, squash and biscuits will be available (see attachment)
- In March 2022 the **Healthy Start programme** changed, existing and new eligible residents have to re-apply online to receive their Healthy start card. Before the transition 73% of eligible residents in Tower Hamlets were using healthy start

vouchers, however following the digitalisation this number has fallen to 58%. **4 in 10 eligible families are not missing out** on this essential support.

Apply online via: <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/how-to-apply/> as well as new applicants It takes less than 3 mins, they will need: Name , address, National Insurance number

➤ **FIRST 2023/24 COST OF LIVING PAYMENT DATE**

A payment of £301 will be sent out automatically to eligible claimants between 25 April and 17 May. A further £300 payment will be made in Autumn 2023 and a £299 payment will be made in Spring 2024.

To be eligible for the £301 payment you will need to have been in receipt of one of the following benefits during the qualifying period:

- Universal Credit
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Pension Credit

[Cost of Living Payments 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/cost-of-living-payments-2023-to-2024)

- Turn to Us have announced an improvement to their Grants Search tool – use this to check if clients are eligible for any charity help with items and/or cash. Grants available may be based on age, disability or health, family, age, area where you live, current or past jobs, religion, energy provider, water provider

[Turn2us Grants Search](#)

5. Vacancies None to promote

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 Tues & Wed 10am to 12

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