**Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN)**

**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**](http://www.thcan.org.uk/)**website has information on advice providers services, factsheets,**

**Referrals portal contact** **sarah.sauvat@island-advice.org.uk** **contact****jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk****send info for the mailout**

1. Welfare Rights Advisors Forum: February date to be confirmed
2. Training Information: recruiting for advice work training project, free Shelter training 2 days
3. Benefit Updates
4. New Projects, Services and Resources Information
5. Vacancies:
6. Advice Services Contacts (specialist advisors)
7. **Welfare Rights Advisors Forum**

Last meeting 31st October – Minutes are available on THCAN website <https://thcan.org.uk/advice-agencies-information/> – Next meeting will be in February , if you are not already on the invite list for these meetings and would like to attend, please email me

**2.       Free Training**

We are no longer funded to deliver our previous one-off training sessions; however, we are sharing/promoting other organisations free training including DWP training

* **Volunteer Training Program in ‘Advice Work’**

NOTE: we can offer the training to any of your existing volunteers if they are doing (or will be able to do) advice, we are looking for advice agencies that can provide a work placement to a volunteer and applications for volunteering/training

Are you passionate about social justice and helping others? Our comprehensive **Volunteer Training Project** is your chance to make a real impact in your community AND gain work experience, knowledge, and a qualification – enabling you to find work giving advice in the future.

 ✅ **What You’ll Do**

   •     **Train one day a week**: Gain a basic knowledge in social welfare law through a structured professional training course (advice skills, housing, benefits, and debt) location training in E14 area, Tuesdays from March 2025, you would gain a certificate in advice and an NVQ Level 3 in Advice and Guidance

    •     **Volunteer one day a week**: Provide invaluable advice and support to clients in need of help with their benefits, housing and debt problems volunteering in an advice centre, interviewing clients, carrying out casework and helping them, developing your advice skills

✅ **What We’re Looking For**

   •     A genuine interest in social welfare law and helping others.

   •     Commitment to **two days per week** for a period of 12 months

No experience or qualifications are required but you must have good literacy and communication skills.  This is your opportunity to develop skills, make a difference, and be part of a supportive team improving lives every day.  Spaces are limited! Apply now and start changing lives today, application/information attached – email completed application to  jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk for further information and an application pack

* **2 days (free) Shelter Housing Training**

Participants must attend BOTH sessions, Suitable for new(ish) advisors, generalist advisors wanting to increase/update their housing knowledge, housing advisors, volunteers, its **not** available to housing associations/local authority staff/solicitors

* **Introduction to housing status – 24th March 10am to 4.30pm**

Get an overview of the different types of housing status, including tenancies and licences, and understand an occupier's rights.

* **Homelessness training -  25th March 10am t 4.30pm**

Learn about homelessness law and procedure, course covers homeless applications, local authority duties, challenging decisions, and more.

* **DWP meetings (Universal Credit Migration)**

Every 2 weeks from Wednesday 5th February. This meeting is for East London

**Dates:** *(All sessions 2pm Wednesday),* 19/02/2025, 05/03/2025, 19/03/2025

Mee**ting link:  Microsoft Teams**

[**Join the meeting now**](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3Ameeting_YmMyYmMwM2UtNmEwOS00NDQxLTk1ZGYtOThlYTA3MzNmZjQy%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%2296f1f6e9-1057-4117-ac28-80cdfe86f8c3%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%222d84abe8-5ee5-4d8f-a494-2c537ae750c1%22%7d)

Meeting ID: 323 698 325 482

Passcode: UR2uf3yX

* **Home Energy Advice Programme**

BbBC is offering to TH residents and frontline workers, furthermore, they can take up the accredited Energy Champions training which is for 4-6 weeks to become an Energy Champion. The workshop includes the following elements:  -Money Managment and Energy Saving, Financial Health, Understanding fuel poverty, causes and health impacts, Understanding energy usage and appliance costs, Damp and condensation, Budgeting, Developing a conversation about money with clients and patients, Types of energy grants and tariffs available, Additional support available.  We can deliver the workshop online or in person and the duration is 90mins, contact. **Tahmina Begum** Tahmina@bbbc.org.uk

* **Paying for Fuel Webinar**

Paying for Fuel course is suitable for frontline staff and volunteers from organisations that regularly encounter and provide advice to those in or at risk of fuel poverty:  households on a low income, households in a vulnerable situation, those who are struggling to understand and manage their household energy costs.  The course will look at how we are charged for gas and electricity, the types of tariffs we use and how we can limit our expenditure. It will help delegates understand the content of fuel statements and how we can use the information to assist householders.

Please contact [trainingadmin@nea.org.uk](http://r.newsletter.nea.org.uk/mk/cl/f/sh/7nVU1aA2nfsTSzF6d0lJsGS9pN8iMYT/833szzkil2Fo) before booking so we can discuss the main differences. Training session dates 19 February 2025 pm, 27 February 2025 am (2.5 hour webinar)

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| [**CLICK HERE TO BOOK**](http://r.newsletter.nea.org.uk/mk/cl/f/sh/7nVU1aA2nfuMSVkPbZzluclxzjdV6Uz/GcpekouYZZQ1) |

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| **Vulnerable Situations in the Domestic Energy Market Webinar**A crucial aspect of helping vulnerable households is being able to identify them.This course will look at how energy suppliers, distribution network operators, gas distribution network companies and Ofgem define vulnerability. It will also consider the support on offer, such as the Priority Services Register. This webinar is designed for frontline staff and volunteers working with people who are vulnerable/potentially vulnerable and require additional support but are unaware of the support provided by the fuel suppliers and network operators. Delegates can either be supporting the public face-to-face or via the phone **From:** NEA Training <trainingadmin@nea.org.uk>Duration of webinar 1.5 hours Dates 07 February 2025 (AM), 19 February 2025 (AM)

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| [**CLICK HERE TO BOOK**](http://r.newsletter.nea.org.uk/mk/cl/f/sh/7nVU1aA2nfsTSzF6d0lJsGS9pN8iMYT/iJbIEAGrTO-5) |

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1. **Benefit Updates (Information from articles produced by Citizens Advice / CPAG /LASA / Benefits and Work updates summary**
* **ANOTHER HIGH COURT LOSS FOR DWP**

Another claimant has inflicted an important defeat on the DWP in the High Court.  Nathan Roberts challenged the DWP’s right to pay rent direct to his landlord without consulting him, even though he was withholding his rent because of the landlord’s failure to carry out repairs.  In effect, DWP software tells decision makers always to side with landlords if they ask to be paid directly. The judge found that the process excluded and disempowered tenants and was unlawful.  In future the DWP will have to consult individually with claimants before making any such deductions.

[Read More and Comment](https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/another-high-court-loss-for-dwp?utm_source=iContact&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Benefits+and+Work&utm_content=29+January+2025+Newsletter)

* **DWP LOSES WCA CHANGES HIGH COURT BATTLE**

The DWP have lost a major High Court battle over changes to the WCA. The court found that the consultation by the Tories on the changes was so misleading as to be unlawful, because it covered up the truth that 450,000 claimants would be £400 a month worse off, whilst just 15,400 would find jobs.  In addition, the changes would plunge 100,000 more claimants into absolute poverty.  Whilst this decision doesn’t stop Labour redoing the consultation, it does mean it will have to be honest about the real effects of changes to benefits or face having the process successfully challenged in court.  With proposals to change PIP almost certain to be consulted on in March, this was a very timely victory by disability campaigner Ellen Clifford and her legal team.  [Read More and Comment](https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/dwp-loses-wca-changes-high-court-battle?utm_source=iContact&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Benefits+and+Work&utm_content=29+January+2025+Newsletter)

* **LABOUR SAYS IT WILL RE-CONSULT ON WCA CHANGES**

Labour fought very hard in the High Court to defend the Tories WCA consultation process, just hours after the court decision was published. Labour announced it would rerun the consultation.  The result of the court decision is that any changes to the WCA will now take in the region of six months longer to implement. [Read More and Comment](https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/labour-says-it-will-re-consult-on-wca-changes?utm_source=iContact&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Benefits+and+Work&utm_content=29+January+2025+Newsletter)

* **DWP TO GET ENTRY, SEARCH AND SEIZURE POWERS**

Another piece of recycled Conservative legislation has already begun making its way through parliament. This time it’s a bill to give the DWP powers of entry, search and seizure and also the ability to force banks to hunt for, and then report, evidence of possible benefit fraud by their customers. The power to apply to courts for a Suspended Driving Disqualification Order, to disqualify a person who owes the DWP money from holding a driving licence, was the provision in the bill which made all the headlines recently. Instead, banks using AI to comb through millions of claimants’ accounts and passing on names of suspected individuals to an utterly incompetent DWP, is the provision that is likely to concern most claimants.  [Read More and Comment](https://benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/dwp-to-get-entry%2C-search-and-seizure-powers-while-banks-forced-to-hunt-for-benefit-frauds?utm_source=iContact&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Benefits+and+Work&utm_content=29+January+2025+Newsletter)

* **CLIMATE OF FEAR REVEALED BY WORK COACH REPORT**

Citizens Advice receives millions in funding from the government to help move claimants onto UC.  But that hasn’t stopped it producing a damning research report into the reality of the work of UC coaches.  “Found anything yet?” is a 55 page document that exposes the grim reality behind the government’s claim that work coaches offer high-quality, tailored support to claimants.  Researchers found, amongst other things, that:

* Appointments typically last just 10 minutes.
* Coaches are not allocated any time to read case files before appointments.
* Claimants often see a different work coach.
* Work coaches lack understanding of health issues and disabilities.
* Work coaches are often late because of an impossible workload, but claimants are sanctioned for being late.
* Instead of being tailored, generic work commitments are sometimes presented as non-negotiable ones that have to be met or risk sanctions.
* Sanctions are often applied unfairly, leaving claimants terrified that small errors could lead to a loss of benefits.

CA have made a total of 29 recommendations for improvements.  [Read More and Comment](https://benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/grim-climate-of-fear-on-both-sides-revealed-by-citizens-advice-work-coach-report?utm_source=iContact&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Benefits+and+Work&utm_content=29+January+2025+Newsletter)

**Various changes to benefit legislation**

The government has published some new regulations, making several changes. You can [read The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2025](https://citizensadvice.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=f2e5709e33ab37630d8a8d4be&id=c41b5f065a&e=588bae1b2e).

* **The ending of Tax Credits (TC)**

The changes ensure that no one can renew a TC claim for the 2025/26 tax year. All TC payments will end on 5 April 2025.

TC claimants will be able to receive a migration notice with a deadline of less than 3 months. The deadline day will be 5 April.

If a client has a nil award of TC, it’s worth checking whether they can gain entitlement by reporting a change of circumstances, or reporting a new income estimate if their income has dropped. This should be done as soon as possible so there’s still time to get an award of TC, receive a migration notice, and make a claim for Universal Credit (UC) before TCs end on 5 April.

The DWP has confirmed that if a TC claimant has a nil award on 5 April, they’ll miss out on transitional protection. You can [read about the DWP’s statement on the ending of TC on rightsnet](https://citizensadvice.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=f2e5709e33ab37630d8a8d4be&id=f93cbcce6b&e=588bae1b2e). (You can [find details on accessing rightsnet under the national subscription on the intranet](https://citizensadvice.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=f2e5709e33ab37630d8a8d4be&id=611bdb724e&e=588bae1b2e)).

* **Mixed age couples moving from Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) to UC**

A UC claimant who has stopped getting ESA due to turning pension age will now have limited capability for work, or limited capability for work and work-related activity (LCWRA), if they claim UC within a month of the ESA ending. The LCWRA element can be paid straight away without a waiting period.

* **Transitional element erosion**

The transitional element will not be eroded by the addition of a UC housing costs element after a client moves from specified or temporary accommodation. This will apply if they stopped being entitled to Housing Benefit for the specified or temporary accommodation up to a month before the start of the assessment period in which they get the housing costs element.

* **Managed migration with an ineligible partner**

The regulations now make clear that a member of a couple who makes a single claim for UC due to their partner being ineligible, will not qualify for a transitional element. This includes a partner with no recourse to public funds.

* **Children placed for adoption**

The Pension Credit (PC) regulations are changed so an amount can be paid for a child placed for adoption. This brings the rules for PC in line with UC.

* **Case law update**

[PE v SSWP [2024] (JSA) UKUT 424 (AAC)](https://citizensadvice.us9.list-manage.com/track/click?u=f2e5709e33ab37630d8a8d4be&id=a574a9f513&e=588bae1b2e) held that the dedicated ground for backdating new style Jobseekers Allowance where a close relative has died does not prevent the relative’s death being considered for longer backdating under the ground of domestic emergency.

* **LATEST PIP STATISTICS**

The latest DWP statistics, released last month, show that the number of personal independence payment (PIP) claims rose to 3.6 million at the end of October, a 3% increase on the number at the end of July.  PIP award rates have fallen slightly:  44% of new claims were successful, down from 46% in October 2023. For cases that got as far as reassessment, 52% were successful, down from 53% a year ago.  The majority of planned award reviews leave the award the same, though over a quarter end up with a lower award or no award at all. lose their award entirely:  Award Increased 19%,  Award Maintained 55%,  Award Decreased 7%,  Award Disallowed 19%  [Read More and Comment](https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/latest-pip-statistics-show-small-fall-in-success-rates?utm_source=iContact&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Benefits+and+Work&utm_content=15+January+2025+Newsletter)

* **MANAGED MIGRATION SAFEGUARD FOR DISABLED CLAIMANTS**

The DWP’s “complex needs” safeguard could prevent thousands of vulnerable disabled claimants from losing their benefits when they are forced into managed migration to universal credit (UC).  From February, the DWP aims to send out 63,000 migration notices a month to employment and support allowance (ESA) claimants.  It seems likely that some of the most vulnerable ESA claimants, who may not have had contact with the DWP for years, will now begin to be caught in the DWP dragnet.  So, it’s vital that claimants and support workers are aware of the complex needs guidance. This can offer additional help and protection to people who may struggle with making, or maintaining a claim for UC.  Claimants who are accepted as having complex needs are entitled to additional support, including things like:  Additional time to make a claim, A home visit, Communication in alternative formats, Taking your needs into account when considering whether a sanction should apply. There is no strict definition of complex needs, anything that could affect your ability to make and maintain a claim to UC can be considered. This could include issues such as:

* a physical or mental health condition
* risk of suicide or self-harm or risk of harm to others
* abuse of drugs or alcohol
* domestic abuse
* homelessness
* sensory loss (hearing and visual impairments)
* care leaver
* unable to use a computer
* no bank account

If you have already begun a claim to UC, you can report your complex needs in your UC journal and a UC agent must then record these on the support needs section of the DWP’s records.  You should then receive support from a complex case coach.  We’ve included more information in our updated 52 page guide to *Successful ESA to UC Managed Migration*, which members can download from the ESA/UC Guides page  We’ve have also published two DWP documents on complex cases which members can find in the UC Migration Resources section on the same page.  [Read More and Comment](https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/vital-managed-migration-safeguard-for-disabled-claimants?utm_source=iContact&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Benefits+and+Work&utm_content=15+January+2025+Newsletter)

* **BEWARE LATEST PIP AR1 REVIEW FORM**

The latest review form for PIP, which the DWP began issuing in November 2024, seems designed to encourage claimants to give as little evidence as possible and thus risk losing or reducing their award. For most activities you are now **not** asked if your condition has changed, but instead: Can you manage this activity safely and without difficulty?  Do you need an aid? Do you need prompting? Do you need help from another person? Please tell us why and when these needs began.

We have always advised members to give the same level of detailed and up-to-date evidence in a review form as they did in their original claim and not rely on simply saying “No change”. So, from that point of view, the new AR1 form fits better with our approach to giving evidence.

However, whilst the PIP2 form gives you a whole A4 page to describe your needs, as well as providing a sample answer, the new review form gives no examples and offers only tiny boxes in which to provide evidence, our advice is never to be restricted by the boxes on a PIP form, but instead, use as many additional sheets as is necessary to give detailed evidence about your needs.

Our 140 page members’ Guide to PIP Claims and Reviews has been fully updated to take account of the new PIP review form.

[Read More and Comment](https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/beware-latest-pip-review-form?utm_source=iContact&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Benefits+and+Work&utm_content=15+January+2025+Newsletter)

* **Information / factsheets attached**

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| * **Updated Medical priority fact sheet attached**

<https://thcan.org.uk/factsheets/>* **Update on Free TV Licence Application Process for Pension Credit Recipients**

We are writing to inform you about an important change that took effect on Thursday 23rd January 2025. This regards the application process for free TV Licences for individuals over 75 who are in receipt of Pension Credit.  Most customers will no longer need to provide evidence of their Pension Credit status to qualify for the free TV Licence. We will verify Pension Credit eligibility directly with the Department for Work and Pensions automatically when a customer applies for a free licence online or via the phone. This change to TV Licensing's processes simplifies the application process and speeds up the processing time, so that applicants get notified of the outcome of their free licence application shortly after applying.  Please Note: |

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| * Some customers will still need to provide evidence of their entitlement when matching records with DWP is not possible.
* Customers must make sure the name and address provided to TV Licensing matches the records held by DWP.
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* **Attached information regarding the temporary closure of Stratford Jobcentre.**
* **Attached slides/information on debt and housing services in Tower Hamlets produced by residents support/family hub**-  there are more slides on different subjects on website  [**Tower Hamlets | Family Hubs**](https://thfamilyhubs.co.uk/)
1. **New Projects /services, information, and resources**

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| * **Shelter Service update - Expert debt webchat for advisers**
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| Are you an adviser dealing with debt cases for a client? Shelter’s Specialist Debt Advice Service is now available to contact by webchat (Monday to Friday from 9-5pm) in addition to our helpline and web enquiry. |

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| [Contact us](https://email.shelter.org.uk/c/1dOnf6FdbkScIuFiJ7Ekq2ZAx3e)  |

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* **Engagement Request: Parent & Carer Perinatal Mental Health**

Information on engagement work Barnardo's are doing in Tower Hamlets with Parents & Carers to hear about their experiences with their perinatal mental health and parent and infant relationships. This is to develop a new strategy and pathway for the Tower Hamlets Council.  We really want to make sure we reach as many parents & carers as possible, so any support you are able to provide with this, or connections you are able to help us make, is greatly appreciated!  Please let me know if you have any questions, and I look forward to hearing from you.

 **From:** Avery Woodruff <avery.woodruff@barnardos.org.uk>

1. **Vacancies**
* [**Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets – Volunteering Advisor (part time, hybrid)**](https://mailchi.mp/vcth.org.uk/volunteering-advisor-9295587?e=a8e0b1e5b9)
1. **Advice Services**

Tower Hamlets Advice benefit advice services details   [Advice Centres - THCAN](https://thcan.org.uk/advice-centres/)

Specialistadvice providers   All the advice providers listed on [www.thcan.org.uk](http://www.thcan.org.uk/) provide benefit advice and help with form filling.

**Legal Advice Centre**  PIP appeals and Family Law matters.  For PIP, please use the following email Benefits@legaladvicecentre.London

For Family Law, please use the following email Familylaw@legaladvicecentre.London

**Complex/appeal/specialist advice is available at the below organisations**

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| 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 Tuesday 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  |