

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 website has information on advice providers services, factsheets, Referrals portal Sarah Sauvat sarah.sauvat@island-advice.org.uk training bookings or want to share information for mailout contact jo.ellis@island-advice.org.uk

1. Welfare Rights Advisors Forum: Minutes October meeting
2. Training Information
3. Benefit Updates
4. New Projects, Services and Resources Information
5. Vacancies:
6. Advice Services Contacts (specialist advisors)

1. Welfare Rights Advisors Forum

- **Last meeting 8th October** –Representatives from HB attended and gave presentation

<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fthcan.org.uk%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2025%2F10%2Fwelfare-rights-advisors-minutes-8.10.2025.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

2. Free Training

- **Benefits Training delivered by DWP**

Please see attached for this month's DWP Benefit Awareness Sessions, you will need to register via the links on page 2. Please see attached for the upcoming sessions from our disability services team. Any issues please email: DisabilityServices.AdvocacyTeam@dwp.gov.uk. **Harry McElwee** | Partnership Advisor - East London District | Department for Work and Pensions

3. Benefit Updates (Information from articles produced by Citizens Advice / CPAG /LASA / Benefits and Work - updates summary

- **Increase in face-to-face assessments**

The DWP have reaffirmed their commitment to increase face-to-face assessments following the 2025 Green Paper. They aim to increase face-to-face Work Capability Assessments (WCAs) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) medicals to 30% of caseload. This is an increase from 2024 numbers of 13% of face-to-face WCAs and 6% for PIP. Acknowledging the backlog of WCA cases waiting to be assessed, they say they plan to extend the time between PIP reviews - meaning PIP claimants are subject to fewer reassessments.

The press release says the operational changes 'will take effect from April 2026 – alongside changes to Universal Credit that narrows the gap between what people receive for being unemployed compared to long term sickness'.

You can [read the full press release 'Reforms to welfare system set to save £1.9 billion by the end of 2030/31' on GOV.UK.](#)

- **Safeguarding and the DWP**

The Work and Pensions Secretary Pat McFadden has provided a written statement on the DWP's safeguarding strategy. This outlines a multi year approach - the first year will concentrate on:

“raising staff awareness of safeguarding responsibilities, building capability through training, and strengthening relationships with local authorities, health services, and voluntary organisations.”

The statement outlines full details of the proposed actions to be taken in the first year and beyond to deliver improvements in this area.

You can [read the statement on safeguarding in DWP on the UK Parliament website.](#)

- **Concerns over 'bias and discrimination' in DWP AI fraud detection tool**

At a Public Accounts Committee on 4 December 2025 DWP officials gave evidence to explain 'systemic failings' in the DWP's AI fraud detection tools. Questions were asked by the committee regarding bias and discrimination in the targeting of some groups by these tools. Mr Couling Director General, Fraud, Disability and Health at Department of Work and Pensions stated:

“what we used to call the fairness assessment ... I have now renamed an effectiveness assessment. You cannot do a public sector equality duty kind of investigation into these machine learning models, particularly in the fraud area ... Your modelling will pick up that you have 'targeted' a group of people with a protected characteristic to find the fraudsters. You have to find out whether it is better at finding fraudsters than snaring legitimate claimants in the net. It is an effectiveness analysis rather than public sector equality duty kind of work.”

You can [read the oral evidence on tackling fraud and error in benefit expenditure 2024-25 on the UK Parliament website.](#)

- **Upper tribunal decision on universal credit housing costs element**

In [SB v SSWP \(UA-2025-000657-USTA\)](#) the upper tribunal (UT) confirmed that the first-tier tribunal and DWP decision maker should explicitly consider payment, liability and occupation conditions to determine entitlement to the UC housing costs element. The UT also confirmed that the claimant's own oral evidence regarding this should be given weight by a decision maker stating:

“Given the Tribunal's dissatisfaction with the documentation, it was incumbent on the Tribunal as inquisitorial to explore the appellant's circumstances fully with him in oral evidence, and then make findings of fact taking account of both the oral and documentary evidence.”

- **RUSHED REVIEW INTO OVERDIAGNOSIS OF MENTAL HEALTH AND NEURODIVERGENT CONDITIONS BEGINS**

A rushed review, lasting just 3-6 months, to decide whether mental health conditions, autism and ADHD are being over diagnosed has been launched by health secretary Wes Streeting. Fears have been raised that the extraordinarily quick turnaround time is needed to allow the review to influence the outcome of the Timms PIP review.

If significant overdiagnosis is “discovered”, this is likely to be used to try to justify cuts to PIP eligibility. However, Benefits and Work has already pressured the review into saying it will

take into account an NHS report which found that ADHD is actually underdiagnosed. And we'll be pushing hard to make sure that the review doesn't ignore other research that doesn't support its agenda.

[Read More and Comment](#)

- **MORE PIP APPEALS FAIL AS WAITING LIST QUADRUPLES IN 4 YEARS**

PIP appeal success rates have fallen by 5% in the quarter from July to September 2025, official figures released this week show. Meanwhile, the number of claimants waiting for a PIP appeal has almost quadrupled over the last four years.

Overall 58% of social security appeals were won by claimants, compared to 60% last year.

For individual benefits, the success rates were:

PIP 63%, down 5%

DLA 61%, up 4%

UC 48%, down 4%

ESA 46%, down 2%

There are currently 53,000 PIP appeals waiting to be heard, almost four times as many as the 14,000 waiting list at the same point in 2021.

Members can download guides to appeals for all the benefits above from the Guides area of the site.

[Read More and Comment](#)

- **Automatic extensions to managed migration deadline**

The DWP has confirmed that claimants invited to claim Universal Credit (UC) with a deadline falling between 22 December 2025 and 3 January 2026 will receive an automatic four-week extension. Claimants who qualify for this automatic extension should be sent a new migration notice that clearly specifies their new deadline date. Claimants can also contact the Universal Credit Migration Notice Helpline to check if their deadline has been automatically extended.

You can [find contact details for the UC Migration Notice Helpline on GOV.UK](#).

- **Any-time revisions**

We [reported on the case TR & GD in our update dated 22 October 2025](#). New guidance sets out the factors that should be considered when considering the validity of an any time revision request.

You can [read DMG memo 13/25 on GOV.UK](#).

- **Right to reside as a self employed person**

We [reported on the case SSWP v VB and Another \(UC\) in our update dated 4 September 2024](#). New guidance sets out when a right to reside based on self employment can be established by taking preparatory steps to build a new self employed business.

You can [read DMG Memo 14/25 on GOV.UK](#)

- **Managed payment to landlords**

Amended DWP guidance confirms that claimants can object if their landlord makes a request for a managed payment to landlord (MPtL). A MPtL is where housing costs can be paid directly to the landlord if it's in the best interest of the claimant. Advisers should caution clients that if they object to a MPtL, their UC payments will be 'paused' until a decision is made about the objection.

You can [read the amended MPtL guidance on GOV.UK](#)

- **Fraud and error**

New regulations are now in force which require banks and other financial institutions to provide information to the DWP to help them detect benefit fraud and error.

You can [find the Public Authorities \(Fraud, Error and Recovery\) Act 2025 \(Commencement No. 1\) Regulations 2025 on legislation.gov.uk](#)

- **Housing Benefit Portal up-date**

As previously discussed at our last meeting I attach a guide to the new portal, I have redacted some information as it contains a live benefit claim. Please note if a 3rd party or a relative is accessing information with a resident's permission the name used must match the name of the benefit recipient. It can be accessed through the benefits website [Check your benefits online](#)

Darron McDermott Subsidy, ICT and Quality Assurance Manager' Housing Benefits
London Borough of Tower Hamlets

4. New Projects /services, information, and resources

- **Information on Council Tax bands / discounts and reductions**

<https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/reclaim/council-tax-bands-change/>

- **Household Support Fund (LBTH payment)**

We will have the first of our HSF payments going out shortly, probably during the Christmas period. I have attached up to date guidance for partners on how to deal with the types of queries we normally get – it's pretty similar to last time, although we'll be developing the online form over the next week or two to be automated – so residents (or partners on behalf of residents) can get instant responses as to whether they are eligible or not. **Dominic Hinde** Household Resilience Manager, Tackling Poverty Team, London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Please note that I have requested details of who is eligible for this payment but have not received this

- **Freedom Pass: New website**

London Councils has launched a new website for the Freedom Pass, which has been developed to enhance the experience for Freedom Pass users and features improved content, design, and layout. You can explore the new website, which includes all you need to know in using or renewing your pass, and what to do if you have changed your name or address, [here](#).

And a reminder, that If you know someone with an Older Person's Freedom Pass expiring in March 2026, they don't need to do anything. If they are still eligible, they will receive a new pass in January 2026.

5. Vacancies

None this month

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.

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

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