

Benefits Matters

An update on benefits for people living and working in Lambeth



Issue 7
July 2009



Introduction

Welcome to the 7th issue of Benefits Matters. This information bulletin is designed to keep you up to date with:

- The latest news in benefits including what's happening in Lambeth
- Information about national policy development
- Links to useful websites and other useful resources

You will find information on:

- Latest update on the campaign
- Lambeth in the news
- Latest welfare benefits developments

Campaign updates...



Over Five million and climbing ...

The Campaign continues to achieve excellent results and has now raised more than £5.6 million in extra benefits for Lambeth residents. This includes £350,000 from work undertaken with clients under fairer charging. The Every Pound Counts campaign targets residents who are aged 60 or over, or those who are ill or disabled, including children, and the carers of these people.

55% of those contacting our service achieve some level of income maximisation. More than half of this additional income has been raised by helping ill or disabled adults and older people to claim disability benefits. The average income gain for people helped is now over £4,000 per year.

If you would like us to give a talk to pensioners, or to people experiencing specific health problems or disabilities, or their carers that you are working with please contact **Jualanne Hickey** on **020 7926 4713**.



The Every Pound Counts Campaign cited as an example of good practice in tackling child

Department for children, schools and families: Take Up the Challenge

In November 2008 the Government created the Take Up Taskforce to advise on how local services can reduce child poverty through helping poor families to access the benefits and tax credits to which they are entitled.

Their report has now been published. Entitled '*Take Up the Challenge*' the report sets out ways that local services can take action to increase take up of benefits and tax credits by parents, to reduce child poverty.

It includes actions that local authorities and partners can take now to maximise families' incomes and provides case studies of successful approaches.

poverty

The Every Pound Counts campaign has been included as an example of good practice. As well as reporting on the financial gains achieved by Every Pound Counts the report states “The campaign has raised awareness amongst key health and social care staff of the importance of promoting the uptake of benefits to the families they work with.”

The report has been published at the same time as introduction of the Child Poverty Bill, which will enshrine the Government's commitment to eradicate child poverty by 2020 into law. The Bill places duties on local authorities to work with a wide range of partners to tackle child poverty in their local areas.

The Taskforce report, and information on the Bill, can be found and downloaded at:

- <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/ecm/childpoverty>

Training Opportunities



After discussing training needs with our partners, and to help services better identify when users are missing out, Lambeth Adults and Community Services developed a range of free benefits courses. These courses have been very popular with most of the courses offered becoming fully booked. The most popular courses are to be repeated in October and November.

These include:

- Introduction to Welfare Benefits
- Moving people into Work
- Housing Benefit and Reducing Rent Arrears

There are places still available on the following courses:

- Benefits for People from Abroad – 2 day course 21st and 22nd September 2009
- Introduction to Sickness benefits and disability benefits - 23rd Oct 2009
- Benefits for Disabled children and young adults - 30th October 2009
- Employment and Support Allowance - 9th September 2009.

Unfortunately the Introduction to Sickness benefits and disability benefits for people with Mental Health Support needs, which was to take place on Tuesday 7th July was cancelled due to trainer illness. A new course date will be confirmed.

For more information on the training visit:

- <http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/CommunityLiving/InformationForCareProviders/LearningDevelopmentExternalCareProviders.htm>

Booking a place on the courses.

There is no charge for these courses to

- Lambeth Council staff
- Partners in the voluntary and community sector
- Colleagues in NHS Lambeth

However, a charge of £150 will be made to applicants who book their places and then do not attend without giving prior notice of a minimum of 1 week.

You can book a place on one of the repeated courses to reserve your place. Staff in ACS can book via Oracle People.

Partners in NHS Lambeth and the voluntary and community sector are asked to complete the booking form available at:

- <http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/CommunityLiving/InformationForCareProviders/CourseBookingForm.htm>

Send to ACS Learning and Development Training Administrator, Ti George.
If you have any queries regarding booking a place on any of these courses please contact:

- Ti George
ACS Learning and Development Training Administrator
Phoenix House
10 Wandsworth Road
London, SW8 2LL
Tel: 020 7926 4452
Email: TGeorge@lambeth.gov.uk

Lambeth Savings and Credit Union



Have you heard about the Lambeth Savings & Credit Union?

Lambeth Savings & Credit Union (LSCU) has been serving Lambeth's people since February 2006. Operating from a dedicated office on Brixton Hill the credit union is there to help you take control of your finances.

To date, over 1,750 Lambeth residents and employees have already joined the credit union, and are benefiting from convenient savings facilities and affordable loans.

What is a Credit Union?

A Credit Union is a financial co-operative that is owned and controlled by its members.

LSCU is a financial co-operative offering a secure savings and low-cost loans facility to anyone who lives or works in the London Borough of Lambeth.

How is a credit union different from a bank?

Banks are owned by private shareholders and all profits are returned to them. Credit Unions are owned and controlled by every member.

Credit Unions are not-for-profit organisations and are driven by an ethos of service to its members, rather than maximising profit.

Credit Unions are committed to giving their members control of their finances by helping them to save for the future and borrow responsibly.

What are the advantages of a credit union?

Credit unions offer a safe place for your savings

Because there are no shareholders, profits from running the business are returned to the members as dividends

Members are able take out loans at competitive rates, with free insurance and flexible repayment terms.

LSCU is a local co-operative run on ethical principles, which means more money staying locally working for the people of Lambeth.

What services does the LSCU offer?

• **Accounts**

- **Savings Account:** minimum deposit £1.00 per week/£5 per month
- **Easy Access account:** you can have your benefits paid in and easily withdraw money at the branch
- **Planned Saver Account:** do you need to save for a particular occasion like Christmas or a holiday or maybe both? The LSCU can manage your saver accounts for you.
- **First Saver Account:** for under 16's

• **Loans**

- **Member Loan:** eligible after 8 weeks of saving up to £1,000 above your savings.
- **Introductory Loan:** maximum of £250, repayable over no longer than 12 months or 52 weeks.
- **Bonus Loan:** any loan up to the value of your credit union savings

You can find out more about becoming a member of LSCU or fill out your details online to receive an application pack at: <http://www.lscu.org.uk/>

Contact Details:

Address: 244b Brixton Hill, London, SW2 1HF
 Telephone: 020 3256 0000
 Fax: 020 3256 0001
 E-Mail: lscu@lscu.org.uk

Welfare Reform Bill update

Changes to DLA for those with severe visual impairment from April 2011

The Government has announced an amendment in the rules for Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to be included in the Welfare Reform Bill. This will entitle people with severe visual impairment to claim the higher rate mobility component of DLA from April 2011.

The Government decision will allow around 26,000 people in the UK with **severe** visual impairment to receive an extra £29 per week (current year figures) in the mobility component of DLA, allowing them to get out and about independently and safely.

Lesley-Anne Alexander, Chief Executive of RNIB says: "The extra £29 a week really will change lives, giving people with severe visual impairment greater opportunities for employment, further education and social activities previous denied to them. It's a key to their greater independence, safety and quality of life."

Recent Changes to the benefit system

Increase of lower capital limit for Pension Credit and for pensioners receiving Housing and Council Tax Benefit

Savings threshold for pensioners to be raised from £6,000 to £10,000

From November 2009 capital of £10,000 or less will be disregarded in Pension Credit and pensioner HB/CTB, an increase of £4,000.

Historically, low interest rates have particularly affected pensioners who are more likely than people of working age to draw income from savings.

The increase to the lower capital limit in Pension Credit and pensioner HB/CTB were announced in response to the potential impact of the current economic downturn on pensioners with savings.

Half a million of the poorest pensioners stand to benefit from this change with an average weekly gain across all three benefits of £4 a week.

Local Housing Allowance

Removal of Local Housing Allowance (LHA) £15 cap from April 2010

The overall costs of the LHA have exceeded planned expenditure and therefore the government has decided "to bring the costs in line with what is affordable, in a way which ensures that customers affected are not left with a shortfall."

For those claiming LHA the main change is that any excess over their rent (up to a maximum of £15) will no longer be paid.



Permitted work earnings disregard changes

- Customers who make new claims or change address on or after 5 April 2010 will not be entitled to any excess over their contractual rent.
- Existing customers already in receipt of an excess up to a maximum of £15 will move onto the new scheme on the anniversary of their claim.

The permitted work earnings disregard in HB/CTB to be aligned with ESA, IB and SDA

Currently, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) (income-related or contributory), incapacity Benefit (IB) or Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) customers undertaking permitted work may earn up to £92 a week without it affecting any of those benefits.

However, except where income-related ESA is awarded, their HB/CTB awards are reduced on all earnings above £20. These rules may act as a disincentive for customers to try out work.

The government has said that it is important to encourage customers of those benefits to take steps that will help them to return to full-time work wherever possible. This includes undertaking paid work.

Therefore, to remove the disincentive, a new permitted work earnings disregard of up to £92.00 a week will be introduced in HB/CTB for customers who are claiming contributory ESA, IB or SDA. This will align with HB/CTB permitted work policy for those getting income-related ESA.

Current plans are to introduce the change from April 2010.

Improving Basic State Pension

There are still people – mainly women and carers – who will not get a full basic State Pension because their National Insurance record is incomplete.

Some people pay voluntary Class 3 National Insurance contributions to make up the gaps in their records. However, these usually have to be paid within six years. People with gaps in their contributions from earlier in their working lives often find they have missed the boat.

Following a high profile campaign by Baroness Hollis, a new Government measure in the Pensions Act 2008 will mean some people can pay up to six additional years of Class 3 contributions dating from as far back as 1975.

The measure will apply to people reaching State Pension age between April 2008 and April 2015, provided they already have 20 qualifying years, taking into account years of Home Responsibilities Protection. Around 110,000 people are expected to take up the offer.

The new legislation will come into force in April 2009.

Further information:

- www.thepensionservice.gov.uk/state-pension/basic/faqs.asp



Useful Websites

- **For child poverty**
 - www.dcsf.gov.uk/ecm/childpoverty
- **For the Lambeth Credit Union**
 - <http://www.lscu.org.uk/>
- **For pension news**



Benefits Hero!

Do you know someone who needs advice and assistance? Refer them to Every Pound Counts and you might change their lives. You might also become a service hero!

What do you want to read?

This edition our benefit hero is not a named person. It recognises all those people who have promoted our campaign by distributing leaflets and by telling people about the campaign. This enables someone to contact us direct if they prefer.

One of those persons was Mrs B. She had seen a leaflet for the campaign and saw that we can advise on disability benefits for children. She wanted to check if her daughter, who had significant learning difficulties, was receiving the appropriate benefits. On checking the benefits she received for her daughter the advisor was able to assure Mrs B that she was receiving the maximum of the benefits available.

As our service looks at the whole household we always ask about the income of other family members. The advisor therefore asked Mrs B questions regarding her income and that of her husband. The advisor was able to establish that Mrs B and her husband were missing out on a substantial amount of additional income.

Due to changes in their circumstances some years previously an income support claim had come to an end. However at that time no-one advised Mrs B that she could claim child tax credit for her daughter. This alone was over £6,000 per year.

They had not claimed housing and council tax benefit for some years as they had not realised that they were able to claim after their income support ended. They were therefore missing out on substantial amounts of help toward their rent and council tax.

Mr B was of pension age and was in receipt of a state retirement pension. Neither he nor Mrs B was aware of his potential entitlement to pension credit. Additionally Mrs B was a carer for her daughter and could increase her income by claiming carers allowance.

They were referred to one of our partner advisors who assisted them with claiming child tax credit, pension credit, carers allowance and housing/council tax benefit. These benefits alone increased their weekly income by £235.80 per week.

At the same time the advisor discussed with Mrs B her own health situation and established that Mrs B had significant health issues herself. A claim to DLA was made in respect of Mrs B and she was awarded both care component and mobility component. This increased their weekly income by a further £64.50 per week.

In total Mr and Mrs B increased their weekly income from £388.25 per week to £688.55 per week. Mrs M was absolutely delighted. She had only made the call to ensure that her daughter was receiving the correct benefits and she had no idea that her family had been missing out on so much extra money each week.

Share your views Looking for....innovation, information, inspiration

What would you like to see covered in future issues of ACS Update and on our intranet pages? Please send your news, views, comments, and ideas to us. Email: jcharris@lambeth.gov.uk Let us know what you want to see in future issues of Every Pound Counts.

We hope you found the third issue of Benefits Matters interesting and informative. Please send all feedback and contributions to Julia Harris: jcharris@lambeth.gov.uk