

Benefits Matters

An update on benefits for people living and working in Lambeth

February/March 2008

Welcome to the second issue of Benefits Matters - the information bulletin designed to keep people in Lambeth up to date with benefit news, including changes to rules and how to apply for benefits covering all benefits. We also provide information on national policy development, work going on in Lambeth, forthcoming events, details of new publications and links to useful websites.

Issues covered in this issue include: changes to backdating of benefits for older people, new benefit Rates for 2008-09, changes to emergency payments and the Mental Capacity Act.

Moving into work when sick or disabled?

Did you know that benefits regulations have improved the position for sick and disabled people moving into work? 'Linking rules' help a benefit claimant who has come off benefits to start work, but then finds they need to return to that benefit within 104 weeks (eg because their health deteriorates). These rules ensure they return to the same level of benefit entitlement they received before moving into work.

Did you know that people can work up to 16 hours a week and earn up to £88.50 without their incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance being reduced? However, claimants who are sick or disabled and getting a means-tested benefit like income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit, will only be able to keep the first £20. This is because any earnings above £20 will be deducted from their means-tested benefit pound for pound.

This 'Permitted Work' can only be undertaken for up to 52 weeks unless the claimant's conditions are so severe that they are exempt from the personal capability assessment, or they require continual professional support to be able to work.

New benefit rates for 2008-09

The new benefits rates from April 2008 have been published by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Most income-related benefits will rise by 2.3%.

The pension credit standard minimum guarantee and the child element of Child Tax Credit will increase by 4.2%, in line with the rise in average earnings. More information at:

www.dwp.gov.uk/mediacentre/pressreleases/2007/dec/benefit-rates-2008.pdf

Emergency Payments

The Department for Work and Pensions recently closed the London Emergency Office in Southwark. The London region was unique in that claimants could make a personal request for emergency payments outside normal opening hours. The DWP still offers an out of hours service, although contact must now be made either through the police or the emergency social services team. DWP staff will normally make a home visit, or they may arrange for an interview to take place in a police station.

Blue Badge Changes

Following a recent review of the Blue Badge Scheme, a number of changes have been implemented.

There have been some changes to the qualifying conditions for disabled parking permits. The scheme has been extended to include children under the age of two, although the rules are different than for older children or adults. Children under two will qualify if they need to be accompanied by bulky medical equipment, or if they need to be kept near a vehicle so that they can receive medical treatment urgently. People with upper limb disorders can now qualify if they have difficulty operating parking meters. Previously they could only qualify if they had difficulty operating steering wheels.

More information on the Blue Badge Scheme at:

www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/MotoringAndTransport/DG_4001061

Useful websites

Blue Badges - an online map service has been launched to help people find disabled parking bays and accessible petrol stations in 64 towns and cities across the UK.

www.direct.gov.uk/bluebadgemap

Mental Capacity Act

This Act came into force on 1 October 2007. It changes the way that decisions are made for people who lack the mental ability to make certain decisions for themselves. This could be because of a learning disability, mental health problems, brain injury, dementia, alcohol or drug misuse or any other illness or disability. The decisions can relate to their personal welfare, property or financial affairs.

An Office of the Public Guardian (OPG) has been set up in place of the Public Guardianship Office. The OPG supervises deputies, appointed by the Court, who can make ongoing decisions on personal welfare and financial issues. A further change is that Lasting Powers of Attorney will replace Enduring Powers of Attorney. These allow people to plan ahead to set out what should happen if they should lose the ability to make decisions in the future.

More information at: www.publicguardian.gov.uk

Benefits Training Available

Lambeth Council's Adults' and Community Services (ACS) department is offering new benefit training courses for those involved with advising and supporting potential claimants.

Benefits for Carers, an introductory course on benefits for carers, takes place on 4 April at the ACS offices in Phoenix House (next to Vauxhall tube station). Further courses planned for 2008 include 'Benefits for non benefit advisers - an introduction to the benefit system' and 'Benefits for People from Abroad'. More details from Karl Livingston on 020 7926 4452 or

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Feedback

Let us know what you want to see in future issues of Benefits Matters. Please contact:

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