

Benefits Matters

An update on benefits for people living and working in Lambeth



Issue 3
September
2008



Introduction

Welcome to the third 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 news on the Every Pound Counts campaign
- Changes to the rules on backdating on Housing and Council Tax Benefit
- Update on Employment and Support Allowance
- Information on the new Local Housing Allowance
- Summary of key changes introduced by the 2008 Budget
- Service Hero: good practice for people with learning disabilities

Over £1 million extra income for vulnerable Lambeth residents - results from the first year of the Every Pound Counts campaign!

Every Pound Counts just celebrated the end of the first year of our three year benefit campaign. The 'Every Pound Counts' campaign focuses on people aged 60 and over, those who are ill or disabled, including children, and carers. We have achieved some impressive results – we have now raised over £1 million in unclaimed benefit income – with results still coming in! Our service aims to ensure we help maximise people's income and by doing so help improve the lives of some of Lambeth's most vulnerable citizens. Those who have already received their extra benefit are on average over £3,000 better off each year.

Thanks to all our partners who worked with us, referring their service users to ensure they did not miss out. Without their support we cannot reach the people who most need our help. If you would like more information on our project, contact Jualan Hickey, who will be happy to provide further information. Contact Jualan on tel: 020 7926 4713, email: jhickey@lambeth.gov.uk

We will be continuing our campaign until March 2010. Please continue to help by encouraging people you are in contact with to get a benefit check by referring them to our service. To refer someone for a benefit check or detailed advice, phone or email our service.

Contact Every Pound Counts

tel: 020 7926 5555

email: everypoundcounts@lambeth.gov.uk

website: www.lambeth.gov.uk/everypoundcounts



Service changes in Every Pound Counts team

The service is delivered by a small team of benefit advisers in Adults' and Community and Services (ACS) who work in partnership with five local advice agencies. Then ACS in house team act as a service hub, receiving and processing enquiries and developing partnerships.

Every Pound Counts recently welcomed three new team members: Jualan Hickey is the project officer, who leads on developing outreach and partnership working; a support officer, Alison Moore, responds to referrals; and Raj Johal provides outreach services and support on complex benefit cases.

They join Lambeth's welfare benefits adviser Julia Harris who manages the service, Karen Williams who leads on developing outreach and partnership working with our partners in health and Nick Adams, who provides support on complex benefit cases.

The team also welcomes another new benefit adviser, Anni Scholefield, who provides benefits advice to people being assessed through the Fairer Charging process.

Lambeth staff praised for helping people back to work

Lambeth's Revenues and Benefits staff have been praised for their contribution to a joint working initiative with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). Called 'In and Out of Work' the pilot aims to provide a better customer experience for people who move in and out of work on a regular basis. Lambeth was one of six local authorities chosen to take part in the pilot.

The pilot recognised that people may feel discouraged about taking short term employment because of the complexities of notifying different benefit authorities about changes to their circumstances. They may fear delays in calculating their new benefit entitlement and worry about incurring debts as a result. By creating joint working arrangements between the DWP, Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs (HRMC) and the local authority the pilot aims to simplify and hasten the process by providing one point of contact. The agency receiving the information then shares that information with the other agencies and ensures the changes are processed within a shorter timeframe.

New Benefit Training Courses

We would like to draw your attention to the new training opportunities.

Two new courses available: 'Benefits for People from Abroad' and 'Employment Support Allowance'.

Course	Date
Benefits for people from abroad	Tues 7th - Wed 8th October 2008 (Two day Course)
Employment Support Allowance	9th September 2008

The Employment Support Allowance training introduces changes brought in by the introduction of new Allowance (please see article above). The changes affect

anyone claiming benefit because of limited ability to work due to ill health or disability.

The Benefits for People from abroad will be of relevant to all who work with people from abroad. The course content assumes a basic understanding of the benefit system.

There will be no charge for these courses to ACS staff or partners in the voluntary and community section. Staff in ACS can book via Oracle. Partners in voluntary and community section can book by contacting Anne Banyai from Learning and Development in Adults' and Community Services. Contact Anne on Telephone: 020 7926 4563 abanyai@lambeth.gov.uk.

Recent Changes to the benefit system



Reducing backdating on Housing and Council Tax Benefit

Backdating for Pension Credit and Housing / Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) will be reduced from one year to three months from October 2008. Currently, people over 60 who claim can receive up to 12 months automatic backdating, provided they qualified during that period. People under 60 claiming HB/CTB can receive up to 12 months backdating provided they can show good cause for not claiming earlier.

From October the maximum backdated period in all cases will be limited to three months. It is important that anyone who believes they might be eligible for maximum backdating submit their claim now to ensure they receive the full amount possible before October 2008.

The changes mean that some people will lose a significant amount of benefit that they would otherwise have been entitled to.

Benefit	Weekly amount	Current maximum backdated amount	Max b/dated amount from Oct 2008
Pension Credit	£40	£2080	£480
Housing Benefit	£110	£5720	£1320

If you know someone aged 60 or above or who is ill and disabled who needs benefits advice on claiming housing benefit or council tax benefit please refer them to Every Pound Counts.

Introducing the new Employment and Support Allowance

New regulations have now been laid before parliament for the introduction of the Employment Support Allowance (ESA) which comes into effect on 27 October 2008. The Employment and Support Allowance Regulations, 2008 (SI No: 794/2008) can be found: www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si200807.

The new Work Capability Assessment (WCA) is tougher than the current test for ascertaining whether somebody is incapable of work. Government estimates suggest:

- up to 60,000 people will fail the new test compared to the current test
- 6,000 fewer claimants will be put in the support group than are currently exempt from the current test
- 26,500 more appeals against benefit refusals will be generated.

Concerns have been expressed that some groups of people may be worse off. For example, Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants may be worse off during the assessment period.

To help people understand and prepare for the changes CPAG have produced extensive information on the changes to Incapacity Benefits including:

- quick guides to the new legislation
- factsheets, articles
- training

For more information: www.cpag.org.uk



Local Housing Allowance goes live

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was introduced across the country on 7 April 2008. LHA changes the way in which a local authority will calculate housing benefit (HB) for people living in private accommodation.

Who is affected?

People renting privately who:

- make a new claim for housing benefit
- move to a new address
- temporarily stop claiming - when they reclaim they will be assessed under LHA rules.

What is different about LHA?

It is a maximum flat rate payment which is not based on the actual rent paid but on the number of bedrooms needed by the household and where they live. Maximum HB will be the LHA rate for the number of rooms a person's household needs based on the area in which they live. The rates are set monthly by the government's Rent Service.

What if the actual rent is more than the LHA rate?

The maximum amount of LHA a person can receive is the LHA rate for the size of their household, in their area, for the month they make their claim.

What if the actual rent is less than the LHA rate?

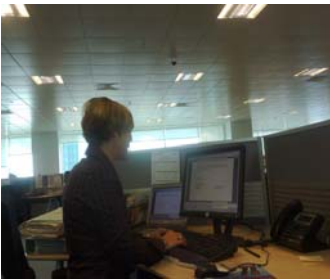
The maximum amount of LHA a person can receive is their weekly rent **plus** up to £15 per week. This means a person who finds a property that is cheaper than the LHA rate can keep up to £15 of the difference.

Are there any other significant changes?

LHA payments **cannot** be paid direct to the landlord (*except in exceptional circumstances*). All payments must be made to the person claiming and paid into their bank account. They are then responsible for ensuring that the correct rent is paid to the landlord.

For further advice and information go to

http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/AdviceBenefits/Benefits/HousingBenefit_EXT_RA.htm



Useful Websites

'turn2us' is a new charity helping people to find out about the charitable grants. It offers an online service where people can access information on what grants may be available to them from both the statutory and voluntary sector. In some instances people can apply for a grant online. There are plans to include an 'advisers' section of the website so advisers can apply on behalf of their clients. The charitable funds available are divided up into sections such as 'open to all', 'older people', 'illness /disability' and 'young people' etc to make it easier to find the most suitable charity.



Benefits Hero!

This month's benefits hero is Livingstone Williams, a Care Manager with Lambeth's Learning Disabilities Partnership. Congratulations to Livingstone who made a real difference to the life of one of the Learning Disabilities service users, by making sure he did not miss out on thousands of pounds of additional income.

Livingstone referred a young man with mental health and learning disabilities to the Every Pound Counts project for a benefit check. The young person had problems with payment of housing benefit, which were threatening his ability to live independently in his own flat.

We helped him to resolve the dispute with Revenues and Benefit regarding his entitlement to receive Housing Benefit. Working with his carer, we also identified he was being underpaid both income support and Disability Living Allowance.

The underpayment occurred because when the DWP were informed that the young man had moved from his family home into his own flat they failed to re-assess and increase his income support. When he moved into his own flat they should have included a premium called the 'severe disability premium' in his income support.

They had also failed to properly assess his Disability Living Allowance (DLA). He had been awarded the middle rate care component whereas he should have received the highest rate because he needed care at night as well as during the day. We successfully requested a review of his income support and DLA to substantially increase the amount in payment.

His benefit was increased by over £85 per week in addition to his housing costs being paid in full. He received several thousand pounds in backdated benefit as the DWP acknowledged they had been underpaying him since 2006. With some of the money awarded he bought a laptop and internet connection. This helps him stay in regular contact with his friends and family. Additionally his mother was able to pay a carer to provide support at night.

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? 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