

# Benefits Matters

An update on benefits for people living and working in Lambeth



October 2011  
Issue 12



## Introduction

Welcome to the 12<sup>th</sup> issue of Benefits Matters. This information bulletin is produced by **Every Pound Counts** and 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:

- Lambeth's project to support Housing Benefit reforms
- Lambeth's response to the Work Capability Assessment Year 2 Review
- Childcare costs and impact on the poorest families
- Government concession on the single room rent
- Tax credits – how to renew a claim and a look at changes from April 2012
- Who can get help with the digital switchover?

## Campaign updates...



## Current Achievements

**Over £22 Million of  
additional income**

**now raised for Lambeth residents**

**Every Pound Counts** has now seen over **6,587** clients, generating additional benefit income of over **£22.13 million**, with average income gains for those helped of over **£3,000** per year for older and disabled people and carers in the borough. Many of the people helped were not aware they were missing out.

**Every Pound Counts** works in partnership with local statutory and community services, to ensure people do not miss on the extra financial help they are entitled to, and that they are helped when they most need support. We are encouraging services working with:

- families with children or adults who experience ill health or disability
- carers
- people aged 60 and over

to refer people to identify whether they are missing out. Recent research has again highlighted that many of the above miss out on extra income.

If you know someone who may benefit from having their benefits checked, please contact us. Any service can refer. Individuals can also self refer.

Referrals can be made by telephone by

- calling 020 7926 5555
- e-mailing [everypoundcounts@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:everypoundcounts@lambeth.gov.uk), in writing, and via an online referral form, available from our website [www.lambeth.gov.uk/everypoundcounts](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/everypoundcounts).

Requests for posters and leaflets for your service users can be made free of charge by contacting us via any of the above channels.

## Training Opportunities



Lambeth Adults' and Community Services has developed a new training programme this year which has been designed to assist services in their work, and to help staff in those services better identify when people in the borough are missing out on benefits.

The current timetable of training courses with agreed dates are detailed below. There is then a list of other courses for which no dates have been set; demand for the course will determine when it can take place.

Full details about the content of these courses, and who they are suitable for, can be found on the Lambeth website at:

[www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/CommunityLiving/InformationForCareProviders/ACSWelfarebenefitsdirectory.htm](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/CommunityLiving/InformationForCareProviders/ACSWelfarebenefitsdirectory.htm)

- Lambeth employees should enrol via Oracle.
- For non-Lambeth employees, there is a course booking form at the bottom of the page under each course outline or go to:

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

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](mailto:TGeorge@lambeth.gov.uk)

- 1. Introduction to key disability benefits (DLA and AA) and sickness benefit (IB and ESA)**
  - 24 October 2011
  - 10 February 2012
- 2. Introduction to welfare benefits**
  - 13 Dec 2011

➤ 20 Feb 2012

### **3. Welfare reform and update**

➤ 04 Nov 2011

➤ 08 Dec 2011

### **4. Migration to ESA from incapacity benefit for mental health and learning disabilities**

➤ 06 January 2012

#### **Other courses that will be available through the coming year:**

- **AA/ DLA revisions, super sessions and appeals**
- **Benefit administration: claims, backdating and challenging decisions**
- **Benefits for carers**
- **Benefits for people from abroad (*two days*)**
- **Claiming disability and ESA for people with learning difficulties**
- **Community care and social security**
- **Disability and incapacity benefits for disabled children and young adults**
- **Employment and support allowance**
- **Housing benefit and rent arrears**
- **Introduction Mental health - claiming benefits for ill or disabled people**
- **Migration to ESA from incapacity benefit for mental health and learning disabilities**
- **Moving into work: disabled people**
- **Pension credit**

#### **Lambeth receives financial boost for innovative project to support Housing Benefit reforms**

#### **Lambeth's Launches Tenancy Rescue Service (TRS)**

The DWP this month announced £4 million funding for ten projects designed to support the government's housing benefit reforms by helping affected claimants get support and advice to 'make confident decisions on their next steps'.

Lambeth was among the ten projects chosen to receive funding with its Tenancy Rescue Service.

The TRS is a scheme in which Lambeth is working with a third sector provider (Broadway) to pro-actively make contact with vulnerable single people in the private rented sector. Once contacted these people will be supported to help them avoid losing their tenancies as a result of the changes to housing benefit. They will be supported to make contact with Revenue and Benefits to access DHP payments, Every Pound Counts to ensure they have maximised their income and Housing to access support on moving where this is unavoidable.

#### **Lambeth provides response in consultation on ESA Assessment Process**

#### **Lambeth responds to Call for Evidence on the fairness and effectiveness of the Work Capability Assessment**

The government has asked Professor Harrington to conduct a year 2 review of the fairness and effectiveness of the WCA.

A year ago Professor Harrington set out a substantial series of recommendations to the Government based on the evidence he collected. He is now reviewing the impact of those recommendations and looking closely at how well the face-to-face assessment is working

in fairly and sensitively assessing those subject to the assessment.

Lambeth has submitted a response to the Year 2 Call for Evidence. We first canvassed providers across Lambeth asking them to tell us the experiences of their service users so that we could send a co-ordinated response. Thank you to those who replied.

It was clear from the responses that people still have big concerns about the assessment process and very particular concerns about the ability of the face to face assessment to capture the difficulties of their service users. The response clearly drew on the level of difficulties experienced across a number of areas of the assessment. It was apparent that further improvements are still urgently required.

We await with eagerness the response of Professor Harrington on this Year 2 review, hopeful that many of the issues raised will be addressed.

## **Launch of New Work Programme**

### **National Rollout of the new Work Programmes**

16 June saw the national rollout of the new Work Programme. The programme aims to provide more tailored support built around the needs of jobseekers and those on long-term sickness benefits. It replaces much of the existing back to work support including New Deals, Pathways to Work and Employment Zones.

Programme providers are free to design support based on the needs of jobseekers and the local labour market. The Government's priority is to get people into sustainable employment so payments to providers will be based on results with higher payments for supporting the hardest to help. The Programme may include work experience, training and further support.

How soon JSA customers will be required to take part is likely to depend on their age and how long they have been on JSA.

ESA claimants who are in the work-related activity group will also have to participate, but there are exceptions for full-time carers and lone parents with a child aged under five.

## **New fund replaces EMA**

### **New 16 to 19 Bursary Fund**

The 16 to 19 Bursary Fund is a new scheme starting in September 2011 to help young people facing financial hardship to stay in full-time education or unwaged training. It replaces the previous Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme. It is made up of two parts:

- a bursary worth at least £1,200 a year for the most vulnerable young people. This includes young people who are looked after or have left care, on Income Support, and disabled young people getting both Employment and Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance.
- a discretionary fund for schools and colleges to distribute, targeted at other students needing financial support to help them stay in education or training. A bursary may be awarded to help with things like travel costs, food, books, equipment and so on.

To qualify, the young person must be aged under 19 on 31 August in the year in which they start their course. The money will be distributed by schools, colleges and training providers during the 2011/12 academic year.

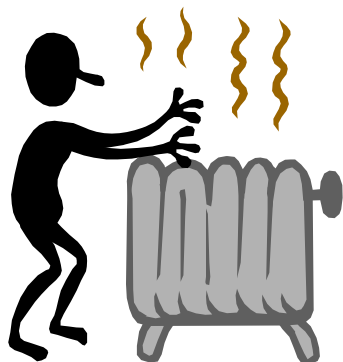
There are transitional arrangements for young people still getting EMA. For example, young people identified as being in a vulnerable group will get the £1,200 bursary instead of their weekly EMA payments.

For more information about the new bursary scheme or EMA transitional arrangements visit

- [www.direct.gov.uk/16-19bursary](http://www.direct.gov.uk/16-19bursary)

or

- [www.ypla.gov.uk/learnersupport/16-19bursary](http://www.ypla.gov.uk/learnersupport/16-19bursary)



### Decreases in the winter fuel payment for winter 2011/2012

We have recently again seen reports of dramatic increases in fuel bills for this coming winter. This is a cause of concern for many older and disabled people. With the cost of energy prices rising steeply, households may find it even harder to meet these costs, particularly if the household income is limited and dependent on state benefits. Older people, children and people with disabilities or long term illness are especially vulnerable.

The yearly tax-free payment to help people pay for their heating in the winter was worth £250 for the over 60s last year, and £400 for the over 80s.

However the payment will revert to £200 and £300 for the two age groups in the winter of 2011-12.

### Who doesn't need to claim

If you receive State Pension or certain other benefits you will be paid automatically and don't need to claim.

You don't need to claim if you're eligible and receiving at least one of the following (during the week of 19–25 September 2011):

- State Pension
- Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Jobseeker's Allowance
- Pension Credit
- Attendance Allowance
- Bereavement Benefit
- Carer's Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Graduated Retirement Benefit
- Incapacity Benefit
- Industrial Injuries Benefits
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- War Pension
- Widow's Benefit

The Winter Fuel Payment won't affect your other benefits and you won't have to pay Income Tax on it.

Call the Winter Fuel Helpline on 0845 9 15 15 15 for a claim form if required.

Or visit the Winter Fuel Payment Directgov website for more information.

- [www.direct.gov.uk/en/Pensionsandretirementplanning/Benefits/BenefitsInRetirement/DG\\_10018657](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Pensionsandretirementplanning/Benefits/BenefitsInRetirement/DG_10018657)

## Universal Credit and Passported Benefits

### Passported benefits

Local authorities use receipt of income-related benefits as the income test for accessing many of their services including; childcare, school meals, cultural and leisure services, home improvement grants.

The Government's Welfare Reform agenda will bring all means tested benefits into one single benefit - Universal Credit, with claims being managed on line by 2013. This change will impact on how local authorities assess and administer claims from those entitled to these passported services.

The DWP are currently in the process of meeting other Government Departments and local authorities to discuss some of the issues, in order to put systems in place to ensure that entitlement to passported benefits are:

- easily understood by claimants and assessors
- easy to claim and administer
- well publicised
- designed to maximise take up in order to meet objectives, such as alleviating child poverty

If your service currently uses benefits as a means of deciding who is eligible for free or reduced cost services, and you want to find out more about the potential impact of the changes, please let us know by contacting Every Pound Counts ([everypoundcounts@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:everypoundcounts@lambeth.gov.uk))

## Three-year vision to reduce child poverty published online

### A three-year strategy designed to reduce child poverty in Lambeth within the next three years has been published online.

The Child Poverty Reduction Strategy 2011-2014 outlines the causes of child poverty and how they can be overcome. Latest Government figures show 59.1 per cent of children and young people are living in poverty in Lambeth (this is measured as children and young people who live in families which receive out of work benefits or tax credits).

The Child Poverty Strategy identifies four overarching priorities to reduce child poverty in Lambeth which include:

- Reduce parental worklessness
- Maximise family income and improve benefits take-up
- Raise aspirations of children, young people and families and improve take-up of services
- Improve child wellbeing and children's life chances.

Four key objectives have been identified to achieve these priorities:

1. Increasing opportunities for parents to enter employment, education, training, supporting adults in gaining new skills, including volunteering
2. Tackling financial exclusion including debt management, financial literacy, affordable credit and maximising benefit take-up
3. Raising the attainment and aspirations of children, young people and their families to ensure they do not become poor adults and perpetuate the poverty cycle in future communities
4. Improving services to families particularly childcare and other parenting support, and ensuring all services are 'thinking family'.

Read the [Child Poverty Reduction Strategy 2011-2014](#)



## Switchover Help Scheme for eligible older people (over 75), or disabled viewers who may find the switch difficult

In April 2012, the biggest change in television since the introduction of colour takes place when the analogue signal is switched off and digital TV is launched in London.

The traditional analogue TV signal will be switched off in our area. This means that anyone who hasn't got digital TV already will lose their current service. Everyone must have some sort of digital equipment connected to their TV in order for it to work after the switchover.

The Switchover Help Scheme has been specially designed to make it easy for older and disabled people to make the switch to digital on one of their TV sets.

The Help Scheme can help people convert their TV to digital if they:

- are aged 75 or over, or
- have lived in a care home for six months or more, or
- are registered blind or partially sighted.

Or if they get or could get:

- Disability Living Allowance
- Attendance Allowance
- Constant Attendance Allowance
- Mobility supplement.

The standard option is available for an **all-inclusive cost of £40**, which includes the installation of easy-to-use equipment, installation by an approved installer and a 12 month aftercare service with a free helpline.

This help is **free** if a person or someone they care for is **eligible and also gets:**

- pension credit
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA(IR))
- income support, or
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance.

All those eligible people need to do is respond to the information pack which will be **sent to every eligible person's home** – they must respond to get help.

People who are eligible do not need to do anything until they get their information pack. However **those packs are going out now to people in Lambeth**, so if you work with someone who can benefit from this help, please support them to do so.

If people are not sure whether they are eligible, there is an eligibility checker on the Help scheme website. For further information on the Switchover Help Scheme visit [helpscheme.co.uk](http://helpscheme.co.uk) or call 0800 40 85 900 (textphone 0800 40 85 936).

**Government provides part exemption to the shared accommodation rate.**

**Certain Groups will be exempt from the Shared Accommodation Rate**

In our last issue of Benefits Matters, we reported that the Government had announced plans to extend the shared accommodation rate of housing benefit to people aged up to 35.

Currently 25 - 34 year-olds can claim housing benefit based on the cost of privately renting a one-bedroom flat, but from January 2012 the Government changed the rules so that most private tenants aged under 35 will only be able to claim enough for a room in a shared house.

An exemption has now been granted to protect some previously homeless people and offenders from this restriction.

The exemptions will apply only to those aged 25 - 34 who are either:

1. subject to an active Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA),  
or
2. who have experienced at least three months in hostel accommodation (not necessarily in one continuous period) specialising in rehabilitating and resettling homeless people within the community.

Various groups of tenants are exempt from the shared accommodation rate and these will continue to apply. These are:

- Local Authority and Registered Housing Association tenants
- Tenants in certain supported accommodation
- Claimants entitled to the severe disability premium
- Claimants who have a non-dependant residing with them
- Claimants under the age of 22 who were formerly in social services care
- Claimants entitled to an additional bedroom to accommodate a non-resident carer

## ESA Changes

### For those who receive contributory ESA...

From 19 September, the DWP is sending out letters to everyone who gets ESA through their NI contribution record. This will warn them that, from April 2012, their contributory ESA will be limited to 52 weeks (including the time they've spent on it already) if Parliament agrees to that amendment to the ESA scheme.

Some claimants will be able to switch to the income-related version of ESA, but two groups could be particularly badly affected:

1. Contributory ESA claimants with working partners, where the income of the person who is working means that income-related ESA wouldn't be payable.
2. Contributory ESA claimants with savings (above £6,000 will mean a loss of benefit; above £16,000 will mean ineligibility for benefit).

If your clients are worried about the DWP letter, contact **Every Pound Counts** to get advice about what they need to do, if anything, if/when this change takes place.

## Changes to Working Tax Credit for Couples with Children

### Couples will need to work longer hours from April 2012

From April 2012, couples with children will generally need to work for 24 hours a week between them (with one working at least 16 hours) to get Working Tax Credit (WTC). Currently couples with children only need to be working for 16 hours a week to qualify.

It's important to get the message out that couples with children will need to be focussed on getting 24 hours work between them well in advance of the change in order to retain WTC next year.

If a partner of a person working 16 hours gets an 8 hour a week job, they will still qualify. The changes do not affect lone parents – they will continue to qualify if they are working for 16 hours or more.

The Revenue is writing to all customers who will be affected by the change. It is crucial for services supporting residents into work to understand that while a couple may get WTC now if one of them works a 16 hour job, they will not get it after April. They will need to increase their hours or fall into one of the categories who will still qualify.

## Tax Credit Annual Review Date Now Passed – lower income levels means many may not have reapplied.

### Have you returned your Working Tax Credit Review Form?

If you work with families/people claiming working tax credit (WTC) to support their earnings then you should be asking them this question.

WTC recipients were obliged to return their review forms by 31st July to continue their claim to WTC. For those who failed to respond, they may already have received a notice terminating their claim.

If papers were not returned by 31 July, HMRC will first of all send out a 'Statement of Account', and if the person completes the renewal within 30 days of the date of the Statement, their claim can be restored from 6 April 2011.

Even if that opportunity is missed, all is not lost, as the claim can be restored if the person shows 'good cause' for missing the first deadline and renews by 31 January 2012 at the latest.

But if this second date is missed, or if HMRC does not accept that there was good cause for missing the first one, the person will drop out of the renewals process and will have to make a new claim for 2011/12 which can only be backdated by a maximum of three months.

As a result, the person will have to repay some or all of the provisional payments they

have received between 6 April 2011 and the date the old claim was cancelled.

**Tax Credit changes from April will increase nil awards – but you can protect entitlement for future claims.**

### **Households on incomes of more than £40,000**

From April 2011, if income for tax credits purposes is more than £40,000 and the amount of child tax credit someone was getting has been reduced to nil, the Revenue may write to them to give notice that their claim will be withdrawn.

This may apply to someone if their income was more than £41,329 and they were getting the family element of child tax credit only (£545 a year or up to £1090 if there was a baby under the age of one in 2010-11).

A change in the rules from 6 April 2011 means that the amount they receive may be reduced to nil so their payments will stop. However, they can still renew a nil award if they contact the Tax Credits Helpline within 30 days to request that it continues.

It is advisable to renew a nil award if there is a possibility that their income in 2011/12 will go down. This may lead to an initial 'nil award' decision for 2011/12, but this can be revised later to make payments for the whole tax year. Waiting until circumstances change before making a new claim can mean that they lose out on a substantial amount.

Some families on more than £40,000 may still be entitled to a substantial amount of tax credits, especially if they have a large family, disabilities or childcare costs. In these cases, the Revenue should not withdraw their claim and it should be renewed as normal.

### **The following changes were made to tax credits from April 2011:**

- Baby element (extra £545 a year) removed
- Family element withdrawn from families on more than £40,000
- Withdrawal rate increased to 41%
- Disregard for in-year income rise reduced from £25,000 to £10,000
- Childcare costs cut from 80% to 70%
- Basic and 30-hour elements of working tax credit frozen for three years
- People over 60 eligible, if working 16 hours
- Child element increased by £180 above CPI

**Changes to benefits for lone parents**

### **Extended conditionality for lone parents on benefits whose youngest child is aged five**

In previous issues, we have detailed changes to income support for lone parents.

From **January 2012**, if a lone parent's youngest child **is aged 5 or over, or will be 5 in the next year**, their Income Support may stop during that year.

The changes apply to lone parents who claim Income Support only because they are a lone parent.

Instead of claiming income support the lone parent will need to make a claim for Jobseeker's Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance with the support of Jobcentre Plus.

### **Are all lone parents affected?**

The changes may not apply to lone parents if they are claiming Income Support for other reasons. For example, if they:

- have children who are entitled to the middle-rate or highest-rate care component of Disability Living Allowance

- get Carer's Allowance
- are fostering and have a foster child living with them.

A lone parent who is unsure should ask their adviser.

## Useful Websites

- [www.hmrc.gov.uk/TAXCREDITS/](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/TAXCREDITS/)
  - For all information related to tax credits
- [www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/Illoinjured/DG\\_171894](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/Illoinjured/DG_171894)
  - For information about employment support allowance
- [www.helpscheme.co.uk/](http://www.helpscheme.co.uk/)
  - For information about help with the digital switchover
- [www.direct.gov.uk/16-19bursary](http://www.direct.gov.uk/16-19bursary)
  - For information about educational financial assistance for 16-19 year olds



## 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!**

**Does your service want to arrange an outreach service?**

Usually we highlight a person who has helped us improve the quality of life of one of their service users by ensuring they do not miss out. This edition we wanted to respond to the numerous press stories around employment support allowance. The migration of people from incapacity benefit to employment support allowance has caused concerns for many people and has had a particular effect on those with mental ill-health.

We decided we would use this section to highlight some of the successful cases we have worked with to show that, with the right support and advice, positive outcomes can be obtained.

**Mr J** had recently failed his work capability assessment (WCA) scoring zero points. His ESA had stopped, leading to a suspension of his housing benefit as well. He had a partner and a child and was worried how to make ends meet. The welfare benefits adviser advised him on making an appeal quickly to enable basic rate ESA to be reinstated whilst his appeal was waiting to be heard. He was assisted to make a crisis loan application to provide some money in the interim. At the same time the adviser made contact with his key worker to obtain more details about his condition. This was all submitted to the appeal, his case was eventually heard and he was awarded 18 points. ESA was reinstated at full rate and backdated to the date of the negative decision.

**Ms B** failed her work capability assessment scoring only 6 points. Part of her medical condition was depression, and the refusal of ESA, despite strong support from her GP and hospital doctor, had had a severe negative effect on her health. She had been told to claim JSA and make herself available for work. She did not believe she was capable of doing this, as her physical health problems left her with very limited mobility. She was in receipt of DLA high rate mobility, which indicated severe mobility problems. Her appeal took place some months later and she was awarded ESA and placed in the support group.

**Mrs R** failed her WCA, scoring only 6 points for her difficulties in walking outside. No points were awarded for any of her difficulties resulting from her long term mental health problems. Having reviewed her history the adviser submitted an appeal, arguing that Mrs R had a condition that meant there would be a substantial risk to her mental or physical health if she was found not to have limited capability for work-related activity. This argument removes the need to score points and focuses on that substantial risk. The adviser provided evidence of Mrs. R's condition as part of the submission to the tribunal. Her tribunal accepted that there was a substantial risk to her health and she was placed in the support group.

These cases show how a successful appeal can be made. Even if zero points are awarded at the WCA, it is possible to argue that someone should be placed in the support group. Even if someone cannot score the required 15 points they may be able to successfully argue a substantial risk to their mental or physical health.

What is important is that each person gets the support they need to make the right choices for them; a negative decision can be challenged, and in many instances should be challenged.

If you work with people affected by the changes to benefits, please ensure they are supported to get the advice they need at an early stage. By taking early action they can remain on basic rate ESA whilst the appeal is pending. If they delay, they may find themselves having to claim JSA while waiting for their appeal to be heard. They will then need to meet all the requirements of seeking employment and this could have a detrimental impact on their health or they could incur sanctions and loss of income by failing to adhere to their job seeking agreement.

Contact **Every Pound Counts** if you need more advice. If you wish to refer someone to the service, please find the referral form on the website at:

- [www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/AdviceBenefits/Benefits/Epcreferralform.htm](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/AdviceBenefits/Benefits/Epcreferralform.htm)

### 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 **Benefits Matters** and on our web pages? Please send your news, views, comments, and ideas to us. Email: [jcharris@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:jcharris@lambeth.gov.uk)

We hope you found this issue of Benefits Matters interesting and informative. Please send all feedback and contributions to Julia Harris: [jcharris@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:jcharris@lambeth.gov.uk)