

# Benefit Matters

Our newsletter for advisers in Royal Greenwich

Directorate of Finance

## Universal Credit

### *Safeguarding legacy claimants receiving severe disability premium*

Disabled claimants receiving disability benefits are one of the biggest group of losers financially under Universal Credit (UC). This is because, unlike legacy benefits<sup>(1)</sup>, UC doesn't include the severe disability premium (SDP).

The government published [The Universal Credit \(Transitional Provisions\) \(Managed Migration\) Amendment Regulations 2018](#) on 5 November in response to an earlier legal challenge which found that the loss of associated disability premiums for claimants who were forced to claim UC when they moved home, amounted to a breach of their human rights.

Regulation 63 introduces a new gateway condition which prevents natural migration where legacy claimants receive SDP and have a change of circumstances that would normally trigger a new claim. They will be able to remain on their existing benefits or make new claims for another existing benefit instead.

The regulations also provide for transitional payments to be included within UC for those who have already naturally migrated to UC and prior to that had qualified for SDP as part of their legacy benefit award.

The provisions are in the same regulations as the managed migration regulations (see page 2) and are subject to further debate before they can be passed.

They were expected to apply from 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019, but the date may change, and at the time of writing had not yet been confirmed. Once the regulations are passed by Parliament and come into force, the DWP will carry out checks to identify claimants who may be eligible and aim to make payments by spring 2019.

Eligible claimants will receive both a lump-sum payment to cover the period since they moved to UC and then an ongoing monthly payment. The monthly payments will be converted into transitional protection, becoming part of the overall Universal Credit award, and treated in the same way as other transitional protection payments. Any backdated arrears will be disregarded for the period covered by the payment or for 12 months, whichever is longer.

The changes do not extend to wider change of circumstances and is only aimed at claimants whose circumstances, other than the trigger for natural migration, remain the same. For example a legacy benefit claimant who becomes a couple with a UC claimant, will still have to make a joint claim with that UC claimant. The provisions specifically exclude claimants who are no longer entitled to UC.

(1) Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit).

*Continued on next page...*

#### Advisers Advice Line

020 8921 6376

E: [wrs.ce@greenwich.gov.uk](mailto:wrs.ce@greenwich.gov.uk)

Weekdays: office hours

#### Public Advice Line

020 8921 6375

Textphone

18001 020 8921 6375

Mon, Wed, Thurs:

10am – 1pm

**Tip – legacy claimants with SDP and starting work** – claimants in this position will be significantly worse off on UC and should wait until provisions are in place when they may be able to claim Working Tax Credit.

### For further information

Contact our Advisers Advice Line (see below) if you need advice about a family you are working with. Want to know more about severe disability premium? Check the October issue of 'Benefit Matters'.

## Autumn Statement Highlights – 29 October 2018

The Chancellor of the Exchequer delivered his Autumn Budget on 29 October 2018 and announced a package of reforms to Universal Credit to 'ensure the system works for everyone' ahead of the start of its further expansion where existing legacy claimants will be moved to UC (known as managed migration).

Although managed migration will begin as planned in July 2019, the implementation schedule has been extended and it will now end in December 2023 (see next page for more on managed migration). Other measures include:

- increasing work allowances for households with children and people with disabilities by £1,000 a year from April 2019. The government estimates that 2.4 million households will benefit from this change, enabling them to keep an extra £630 of income each year.
- extra help for households moving from legacy benefits to Universal Credit. In 2017, the government announced that Housing Benefit claimants moving to UC would receive an additional fortnight's payment. This provision has been extended to Income Support, income-based JSA and income-related ESA from July 2020 and is expected to help 1.1 million claimants. It is currently unclear whether this will apply to claimants who are naturally migrating to UC (as with HB) as well as those formally migrating.
- introducing a 12 month grace period before applying the minimum income floor (MIF) to all self-employed claimants who are gainfully employed.

The MIF enables the DWP to treat self-employed UC claimants as having a higher level of earnings than they actually earn (equivalent to a full-time employee earning the national minimum wage). Currently it applies to all new UC claimants other than those who are within the first 12 months of starting their business.

The new rules apply from:

- July 2019 for claimants who are moved to UC under 'managed migration;'

- September 2020 for people claiming UC due to a change of circumstances.
- reducing the maximum rate at which deductions can be made from a Universal Credit award from 40% to 30% of the standard allowance from October 2019. The government will also increase the period over which advances will be recovered, from 12 to 16 months from October 2021.
- temporarily reducing the scope of the surplus earnings policy in UC. It will continue to affect large earnings spikes (above £2,500) until April 2020, when it will revert to affecting earnings spikes of £300.
- delaying the transfer of rent support from Housing Benefit to Pension Credit by 3 years to align this with the revised UC implementation schedule.

### Non-UC related highlights from the Budget include:

- introducing a new statutory entitlement to two weeks' leave for employees who suffer the death of a child under 18, or a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy from April 2020. Employed parents satisfying the eligibility criteria will also be able to claim pay for this period.
- National Living Wage and National Minimum Wage increases from April 2019.

<b>National Living Wage</b>	Increases from £7.83 to £8.21
<b>National Minimum Wage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- £7.38 to £7.70 per hour for 21 to 24 year olds</li><li>- from £5.90 to £6.15 per hour for 18 to 20 year old</li><li>- from £4.20 to £4.35 per hour for 16 to 17 year olds</li><li>- £3.70 to £3.90 per hour for apprentices</li></ul>

### Further reading:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2018-documents](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-2018-documents)

# Universal Credit Update

## Managed migration from legacy benefits to UC

On 5 November, the Government published draft regulations setting out how legacy benefit claimants will be migrated to Universal Credit. Following widespread concern from national organisations and MPs from all parties, the regulations include concessions which have been broadly welcomed. However, concern remains about the government's expectation that everyone will have to make a claim under managed migration. The Work and Pensions Committee has called on the DWP to withdraw the regulations, concluding that parliament had been given insufficient detail to make an informed decision on the proposals, and in particular, the potential risk to vulnerable claimants by the government's approach.

Concessions included in the draft regulations:

- claimants will get a minimum of three months' notice of the need to claim UC – there is no longer a maximum notice period (it was previously one month). DWP staff will be able to extend the deadline as needed, for example where the claimant has difficulties making a claim due to disability or caring responsibilities.
- claimants making defective claims will no longer lose their transitional protection as long as an effective claim is made within the deadline.
- home visits and telephone claims will be available for claimants who need this help to make a claim.

The draft Universal Credit (Managed Migration Regulations 2018) is available here:

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-universal-credit-managed-migration-regulations-2018-ssac-report-and-government-statement](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/draft-universal-credit-managed-migration-regulations-2018-ssac-report-and-government-statement)

## UC batch payments to landlords

When rent is paid directly to the landlord in UC, this is called an 'Alternative Payment Arrangement' (APA). One of the difficulties we are seeing is that these APAs can only be paid on a particular date, which often doesn't reflect when the money would normally be due to the client.

**Example:** client who is on Universal Credit and receives money for themselves/their children on the 9<sup>th</sup> of the month. Their housing element does not get paid to their landlord until the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the next month – through no fault of their own.

The exact time lapse depends on where the dates fall within the batch payments system – some clients will be more

affected than others. This is due to the mechanics of the payment system within UC and cannot be altered. The only 'solution' is for the APA to be cancelled for clients who will be able to manage the budgeting required and/or to ensure that the landlord understands that the money will be paid eventually. As of January 2019, the DWP has agreed to alter this batch payment system, but no formal amendments have been made or issued as yet.

## Assisting claimants to make UC claims

The online nature of making and managing Universal Credit claims can be daunting for many claimants. Royal Greenwich's Universal Support Team (part of the Welfare Rights Service) has been supporting some vulnerable residents to make claims. The team provides 'drop in' support most days at the local jobcentre, and pre-booked appointments at other times (see next page for details of how you can refer cases).

Top tips to help UC claimants get their claims logged successfully:

### 1. Location, Location, Location...

Think about the best place to make the claim and plan on it taking at least 45 minutes. Options for claimants without computer access at home include:

- Woolwich jobcentre - Woolwich JCP has a limited number of computers on the ground floor, however, it gets very busy.
- Greenwich libraries – this may be a better option for claimants preferring a quieter/calmer environment. A library card is normally needed, however temporary computer access is possible for those without a library card, but I.D will be required.

Claim UC via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-universal-credit> or by googling "apply for Universal Credit".

### 2. Preparation is key

Claimants need to create a UC account to start the claim. They'll need an email address that they can access and a mobile phone number which can receive texts. Sorting these out in advance will save time and make the process smoother.

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Useful links on creating passwords:

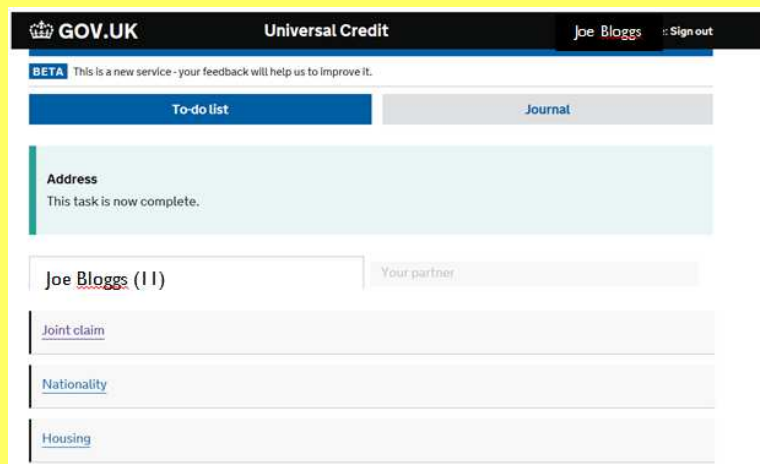
[www.getsafeonline.org/protecting-yourself/passwords/](http://www.getsafeonline.org/protecting-yourself/passwords/).

They will also have to answer two security questions that can be used to recover the account. For example, their place of birth, or the name of their first pet. Pre-warning clients about this and encouraging them to plan how to safely secure this information will make the process easier.

They will be asked about their preferred method of contact (email or text). Despite their preference, they'll initially receive a code via email that they'll need to set up their UC account.

Claimants will need to provide the following information to submit the claim: full postcode, bank account, rent and landlord details, savings/investments and income details (including earnings from work), childcare costs. It helps to have national insurance number available as well; however this isn't needed to set up the claim.

The account will look similar to the screen below and their "To do list" will show the questions that they must answer and confirm in order to submit their claim.



Once this is done, they will be able to use their "online journal" to leave a message for their work coach, report a change of circumstances and so on.

If the client is making a joint claim they will be given a linking code for their partner, and their partner will need to complete their claim and the associated questions before submission.

## Creating usernames, passwords and security questions:

The claimant will need to create a username, password and answer some security questions. Usernames must be between 6-30 characters long and can be made up of letters or numbers. Passwords must be at least 8 characters and include at least one capital and lower case letter, plus at least one number.

## Useful online resources

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7GUu7Xa7Nw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jVeWPsCzUI>

## Referrals to the Universal Support Team

Residents needing more intensive support to make an application can be referred to the Universal Support Team using the form included with this mailing. Completed forms should be emailed to [universal-support@royalgreenwich.gov.uk](mailto:universal-support@royalgreenwich.gov.uk). The team can advise/assist with alternative payment arrangements, UC advances, third party deductions and income maximisation/budgeting.

## For further advice

Contact our Advisers Line (see front page) if you need advice about whether Universal Credit is the right benefit for a family you are working with.

## Making telephone claims

The process for making new claims by phone is being improved. If a claimant calls the UC helpline and it is determined that a telephone claim is needed, the claim will be registered and an appointment made for a callback by the centralised team (based in Glasgow Buchanan) who will complete the claim with them (this will take up to one hour). People making telephone claims will not have access to their online account as a username and password will not be created under this new process.

Work coaches have been advised that they should support claimants to move their claims online wherever possible. The reason a telephone claim was necessary will be shown in the claimant history to assist with this. In addition to placing notifications and notes in the online journal, work coaches will also have to consider what other forms of contact to use based on the claimant's preference and needs.

# Spotlight on Universal Credit and... *non-dependants*



When people claim benefits, amounts are often included for their dependants (partner and dependent children). Other people living in the home (such as an adult son/daughter or other relatives or friends) are not included in the claim. However, the fact that they live there, can have a significant impact on the person's benefit claims. These people are called "non-dependants" because they are not regarded as financially dependent on the householder who is claiming benefits.

Note that Non-dependents are usually expected to contribute towards the rent and the claimant's housing cost element is reduced accordingly. This spotlight considers the differences in the way that Universal Credit and legacy benefits treats non-dependents and highlights winners and losers.

## Who counts as a non-dependant?

The rules around who counts as a non-dependant and when a deduction is made are broadly the same for both UC and legacy benefits. A person is a non-dependant if they normally live in the home of someone else. If they are only visiting or have a home elsewhere they should not be treated as a non-dependant. A person will not be treated as a non-dependant if they only share a bathroom, lavatory or a communal area such as a hall with other people.

The following people do not count as non-dependants even if they share the home:-

- under 18's (Housing Benefit/CTS) or under 21's (UC only);
- resident carers employed by a charitable or voluntary agency, and for whom the tenant/home-owner pays a charge;
- someone who pays or is paid rent on a commercial basis (a sub-tenant or boarder);
- joint owners or joint tenants - special rules apply to close relatives who will usually count as non-dependants - check with us).

## Non-dependant rules - Key differences between Universal Credit and Legacy Benefits

Topic	Universal Credit	Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support & Homeowners on receiving a loan for mortgage interest from the DWP
<b>Definition</b>	Housing cost contribution (HCC)	Non-dependant deduction (NDD)
<b>Homeowners with non-dependants</b>	No HCC	NDD applies unless homeowner is exempt
<b>Amount of deduction</b>	Lower deductions with a flat rate of £72.16 per month (equivalent to £16.65 per week) for each non-dependant regardless of income.	NDD depends on non-dependant's gross weekly income and circumstances – there are 6 bands ranging from £15.25 to £98.30 a week for each non-dependant
<b>Exemptions (claimant or partner)</b>	Same as HB opposite	Limited exemptions apply to claimants (or their partners) in specified circumstances (eg registered blind or receiving PIP daily living or DLA Care – middle or highest rate) – see next page
<b>Exemptions (non-dependants)</b>	Exemptions also apply to non-dependants as well as the UC claimant (see list below).	Exemption only applies if it relates to the claimant (and/or their partner). The non-dependant's circumstances may still mean that there is no NDD (however, this is not the same as an exemption)
<b>Bedroom Tax/ Lodgers</b>	UC claimants are still affected by bedroom tax if spare room is rented to a lodger, but all income received from lodger is ignored	Not affected by bedroom tax if take in a lodger. However, some of the rental income is ignored and some is taken into account. The rules are more generous if a meal (eg breakfast) is provided.

For more information: visit Shelter's website

[http://england.shelter.org.uk/housing\\_advice/benefits/how\\_to\\_deal\\_with\\_the\\_bedroom\\_tax](http://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/benefits/how_to_deal_with_the_bedroom_tax)

Even though someone counts a non-dependant, a housing costs contribution or non-dependant deduction will not apply in the following circumstances (note – this is not an exhaustive list):

### Universal Credit

Claimant or their partner...	Non-dependant is...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is registered blind</li> <li>receives DLA care component - middle or high rate</li> <li>receives Attendance Allowance (any rate)</li> <li>receives either of the daily living components of PIP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) under 21</li> <li>b) responsible for a child under 5</li> <li>c) getting state pension credit</li> <li>d) getting middle or high rate DLA care component, attendance allowance or either of the daily living components of PIP</li> <li>e) getting Carer's Allowance</li> <li>f) a prisoner on temporary release</li> <li>g) an adult child in the armed forces or reservists while deployed on operations</li> </ul>

### Housing Benefit/homeowners on Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or income-related Employment and Support Allowance and receiving a loan for mortgage interest from the DWP

Claimant or their partner...	Non-dependant is...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same as UC above</li> <li>is in hospital for more than 52 weeks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) under 18</li> <li>b) receiving a training allowance (under specified youth training provisions)</li> <li>c) under 25 and on Income Support, income-related ESA (assessment phase only), income-based JSA or UC (and doesn't have earned income)</li> <li>d) is in prison</li> <li>e) Same as c) and g) above</li> </ul>

### Issues and problem areas

The UC claim doesn't gather enough information to establish if an exemption should apply so HCCs are being included incorrectly. Some advisers are also reporting problems with poor decision-making with claimants are incorrectly being advised that exemptions only apply under UC in relation to non-dependants, leading to HCC deductions being wrongly applied to claimants receiving PIP daily living component. Incorrect decisions should be disputed in the normal way and notified to Child Poverty Action Group's Early Warning System - email [ews@cpag.org](mailto:ews@cpag.org), call 020 7812 5226 or visit [www.cpag.org.uk/early-warning-system](http://www.cpag.org.uk/early-warning-system).

### Better off on Universal Credit?

Given the differences in the way that non-dependants are treated in UC and legacy benefits, some claimants will be better off on UC and may wish to consider switching early. However, it's vital that they get specialist advice to ensure that they really would be better off before switching to UC voluntarily as many claimants will struggle with the requirement to make and manage a claim online, the delay in payment and the stricter conditionality regime. Claimants should also be made aware of the issues of poor administration and delays which have left some claimants at risk of eviction.

Winners and losers under UC compared to legacy benefits

Winners	Losers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the standard HCC is lower in most cases than the NDD in legacy benefits</li> <li>working non-dependants are more financially desirable under UC rules</li> <li>Non-dependants aged under 21 –deductions only apply from age 21 under UC (apply from age 18 under legacy system).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>those subject to the lowest NDD (£15.25 a week) under legacy system</li> <li>Non-dependants under 25 and receiving certain legacy benefits (eg Income Support or income-based JSA) are now subject to a HCC</li> <li>Full-time students are no longer automatically exempt, unless a separate exemption applies.</li> </ul>

### For further information or if you need advice about a family you are working with:

- Contact our Advisers and staff helpline on 020 8921 6376 (weekdays during normal office hours) or email [wrs.ce@royalgreenwich.gov.uk](mailto:wrs.ce@royalgreenwich.gov.uk). Royal Greenwich residents wishing to contact us direct can call our Public Advice Line (020 8921 6375, Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays; 10am to 1pm) or visit [www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk](http://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk) to send us an online enquiry.
- Use the order form included with this mailing to request our 'Universal Credit' factsheet.

# HMRC review of High Income Child Benefit Charge cases

In response to customer and stakeholder feedback, HMRC will be proactively reviewing High Income Child Benefit Charge cases where penalties were issued for tax years 2013/14 to 2015/16 and the customer had not registered for the charge. Penalty refunds will be issued over the next six months to customers found to have had a reasonable excuse for not meeting their tax obligation.

Normally customers have to explain why they have a reasonable excuse, however in this case they will not need to do so.

The review will include cases where families claimed Child Benefit before the high income charge was introduced, and where one partner's income subsequently increased to over £50,000 in or after the 2013/14 tax year. This is because the higher earner in a household who pays the charge may not

be the same person claiming Child Benefit on behalf of the household.

However, the review will not include anyone who received communications from HMRC about the charge or who claimed Child Benefit after the charge was introduced in 2012/13.

HMRC are writing to customers who might be liable for the charge in 2016/17 and 2017/18 to help them meet their tax obligations in time to avoid paying a penalty.

For more information about the High Income Child Benefit Charge – visit:

- [www.gov.uk/child-benefit-tax-charge](http://www.gov.uk/child-benefit-tax-charge)
- <https://revenuebenefits.org.uk/child-benefit/guidance/how-do-child-benefit-and-guardians-allowance-work/high-income-child-benefit-charge/>.

## Help to Save Scheme

Help to Save is a new Government savings scheme which rewards low income savers who are in work with an extra 50p for every £1 saved. Savers have to open a Help to Save account to get the bonus, but there's no need to make regular deposits and how much they choose to save and when is up to them.

The scheme is open to claimants who are:

- entitled to Working Tax Credit (WTC) and receiving WTC or Child Tax Credit payments; or
- claiming Universal Credit and income in their last monthly assessment period was £542.88 or more.

Accounts last for 4 years from the date it is opened and there is a maximum savings limit of £50 a month. After two years, savers get a 50% tax-free bonus on savings, with a further 50% bonus payable after 4 years if savings continue. The maximum bonus payable on savings of £2,400 would be £1,200 at the end of the 4 year period.

Visit [www.gov.uk/helptosavelocal](http://www.gov.uk/helptosavelocal) for more information and details of how to apply online.

## Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Support (CTS) – notifying changes online

Claimants now have the option of reporting a change in circumstance online, this is in addition to the usual routes of post, phone and in person. The online form is available here:

[www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200247/housing-related\\_benefits/330/tell\\_us\\_if\\_your\\_circumstances\\_change](http://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200247/housing-related_benefits/330/tell_us_if_your_circumstances_change)

To use the form, claimants will need to have their name/postcode and date of birth. Evidence can be uploaded with the form (as with the online application form).

Remember that claimants who are moving address within the borough can also use this form to notify

of the change. Many claimants mistakenly believe that they have to make a new claim in this situation, which would mean a claim for Universal Credit (UC) – this is incorrect.

*Claimants moving address within the same borough should not need to claim UC, it's just a change of circumstance on their existing HB claim.*

**Note:** Public access PCs have been installed in The Woolwich Centre to enable claimants to notify of changes of circumstances online.

## Greenwich Advisers Forum (GRAF)

**Greenwich Advisers Forum (GRAF)** usually meets twice a year and has a focus on welfare benefits. The meetings provide an opportunity for local advisers to meet to discuss benefit issues and share knowledge and experience. Attendees are typically people whose work includes a significant amount of welfare benefits or benefits related advice. There are guest speakers plus updates about recent/forthcoming benefit changes, an information exchange and liaison with Greenwich Advice and Benefits Service (about Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support issues).

Notes and handouts from the meeting will be circulated in due course. The date of the next meeting has not yet been confirmed; but is likely to be in February. We expect the topic to remain Universal Credit.

## Greenwich Advice Network (GAN)

Greenwich Advice Network meets twice a year and is open to all local providers of free legal information and advice, any sector. It focuses in advice issues in the field of social welfare and only has a light touch on benefit issues. We regret that GAN meetings are temporarily on hold so the date of next meeting has not yet been scheduled, but we expect it to take place in May or June and focus on housing issues. Details will be circulated when available.

### Are you interested in getting details of and attending GRAF (or Greenwich Advice Network) meetings?

Please email Sandra Pierre: [sandra.pierre@royalgreenwich.gov.uk](mailto:sandra.pierre@royalgreenwich.gov.uk).

## Help with winter heating costs

With the cold weather just beginning to bite, remember there are many sources of help towards winter heating costs – these include:

### Warm Home Discounts

This is a £140 rebate off heating bills for some people on low incomes. The discount mostly targets older people receiving Pension Credit (the core group), but other people on low incomes may also qualify for a discretionary payment (the broader group). People in the core group generally get this help automatically, but people in the broader group have to apply. Help for broader group customers is budget limited and generally operates on a first come, first served basis, so remember to advise residents to apply sooner rather than later to ensure that they don't miss out. Our updated Warm Home Discounts factsheet is included with this mailing.

### The Big London Energy Switch

Residents may be able to get a better deal on their gas and electricity bills through the 'Big London Energy Switch', a collective switching scheme run by Royal Greenwich and a number of other London councils. The scheme gathers together a large number of people who want to lower their fuel bills to incentivise energy companies to offer their lowest



prices. The more people who join the scheme, the better the deal is likely to be. Households switching in the last auction saved on average £250 on their annual fuel bills. The next auction takes place on 12 February 2019. Visit

<https://biglondonenergyswitch.ichoosr.com/Product/index.rails?actionId=504> to find out more (including how to register) or call 020 8921 5100.

### For further information

- Energy Saving Trust – [www.energysavingtrust.org.uk](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk);
- GOV.UK – <https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/heating>.

### Other sources of help

As well as providing benefits advice to residents as part of our social prescribing and Stay Warm Stay Safe projects (see page 9), we are also referring residents to Live Well in Greenwich for advice about energy saving measures, energy grants and other linked services and initiatives. Further information is available on the website: (<http://livewellgreenwich.org.uk/>) or residents can contact the service direct on 0800 470 4831.



## Training News

Our latest January to March training programme which was circulated recently, includes new dates for our most popular courses (for example, 'Introduction to Benefits' and 'Universal Credit in Detail'). Given the rollout of Universal Full Service in the borough, the programme also includes new one-day courses on the following Universal Credit topics:

- **Universal Credit – the Migration Process – 30 January**
- **Universal Credit, Housing Benefit and Housing Costs – 22 February**
- **Universal Credit, Employment and Support Allowance and the Work Capability Assessment – 15 March.**

Other new courses include 'Housing: Security of Tenure' on 25 March and 'Young People and Benefits' on 27 March.

The programme is included with this mailing. If you would like to attend any of our courses, please send your completed booking forms directly to us at [wrs.training@royalgreenwich.gov.uk](mailto:wrs.training@royalgreenwich.gov.uk).

**Bookings are going fast, so don't delay – book now to avoid disappointment!**

If you have any questions regarding any of our courses, contact us on 020 8921 6376 (and select option 2). Please note that attending the course may be free, depending on your organisation. There is a charge however if you do not attend or leave early, please check out the terms and conditions before you apply for a place.

## Projects Update

### Social Prescribing Pilot, Live Well Project

We have advised over 265 clients in 2018/2019 so far and have identified over £440,000 in income gains for residents in the borough. These numbers will increase through the financial year.

We are also exploring using new tools to identify those who may be under-claiming benefits in the borough and considering benefit uptake projects in the advance of the UC rollout in the borough. This work will expand on some of the work already completed as part of the identification of underpayments of ESA, which can result in large arrears being paid.

The **Stay Warm, Stay Safe Project (SWSS)** from Live Well Greenwich has recently begun and will also result in an increase in referrals for income maximisation. SWSS aims to ensure that vulnerable residents such as older and disabled people and families with young children are able to stay warm and safe during the winter months. As part of the SWSS offer, WRS will provide benefit checks and ongoing casework support to residents coming under the project, as well as signposting and referrals to other useful services. Other SWSS services available include:

- a free room thermometer;
- advice on keeping fuel bills down;
- home fire safety checks;

- energy efficiency assessments;
- advice on keeping active and healthy in the winter months;
- advice on fuel jabs.

Interested residents can call the Live Well Greenwich Line direct on 0800 470 4831.

### Emergency Support Project

We have advised over 142 clients and identified over £377,000 in income gains for residents in the borough. The rollout of Universal Credit means it is crucial that residents receive accurate and timely advice.

**Case Study:** Mr X is a single parent of three children who claimed UC after being misadvised to do so, which prompted the tax credits and HB to stop as a result and left him in a difficult financial position. We assisted him to contact tax credits and housing benefit to explain that he cannot currently legally make a claim for UC as a parent of three children. His HB and CTC were back in payment within a few weeks in time for Christmas and backdated to the day they had stopped.

## Publicity update

We are currently working on updating our Benefit Rates card and factsheets for 2019/20 and these will be available from April. Currently, council staff can access Welfare Rights Service factsheets on the intranet via the following link: [http://home.greenwich.gov.uk/dirs/CED/ce/socialinclusion/welfare\\_rights\\_home.htm](http://home.greenwich.gov.uk/dirs/CED/ce/socialinclusion/welfare_rights_home.htm) and a limited selection is available on the council website: [www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/downloads/189/welfare\\_rights\\_-\\_advice](http://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/downloads/189/welfare_rights_-_advice). The Council's Webteam is currently reviewing our content on the main website and as part of this work, our entire range of factsheets will be available online. We will update you once this has gone live.

### Remember – if you:

- need advice about a resident or family you are working with, call our dedicated advice line for advisers and staff on 020 8921 6376 (Monday to Friday, anytime during usual office hours).
- would like us to give a talk or attend an event you are planning – please contact Corin Hammersley on 020 8921 3453 or email [corin.hammersley@royalgreenwich.gov.uk](mailto:corin.hammersley@royalgreenwich.gov.uk)

If you would like this information in another format (for example in large print), please contact Pansy Turpin on 020 8921 6376 (or 18001 020 8921 6375 for textphone users).

### Next issue: April 2019

Royal Greenwich's Welfare Rights Service produces 'Benefit Matters'. If you would like to contribute in any way, please contact Sandra Pierre on 020 8921 6378.



#### **Welfare Rights Service**

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