

Benefit Matters

Our newsletter for advisers in Royal Greenwich
Finance Directorate

Coronavirus - Benefits Update

This special issue of Benefit Matters includes a summary of the measures announced by the Prime Minister on 31 October in response to the second national lockdown which began on 5 November and is set to last for 4 weeks. Please note that this information was correct at the time of writing, but the situation is fast moving and constantly evolving – we will keep you updated of developments.

Government announces financial support package for businesses and people affected by new national COVID restrictions

On 31 October, the Prime Minister announced a package of financial support to assist people and businesses affected by the new national restrictions in response to the coronavirus outbreak. The government have already announced further changes since their original announcement was made. As of 6 November, measures include:

- **Extending the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme**

[The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme \(CJRS\) will now be extended until the end of March 2021](#) (it was originally due to end on 31 October and was then extended until December). Under the scheme (also known as the Furlough Scheme), employees will receive 80% of their salary for hours not worked up to a maximum of £2,500. The scheme will work in the same way, with businesses paid up front to cover wage costs. Employers can bring employees back to work part-time (flexible furloughing) or place them on furlough full-time. The extended scheme is more generous to businesses than the previous scheme with employers only required to cover national insurance and employer pension contributions for the hours employees do not work.

Employers and employees will be able to use the scheme even if they have not done so before. To be eligible, employees must have been on their employer's PAYE payroll by 23.59 on 30 October 2020. Other eligibility criteria also apply – the [GOV.UK](#) website includes more information. The government has issued [additional guidance](#) which provides further details and clarifies how claims can be made.

The Job Support Scheme (which replaces the Job Retention Scheme and had been due to be introduced on 1 November) and the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme Bonus have been postponed until the furlough scheme ends.

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Welfare Rights Service
Advisers Advice Line
020 8921 6376
E: wrs.ce@greenwich.gov.uk
Weekdays: office hours

Welfare Rights Service
Public Advice Line
020 8921 6375
Mon, Wed, Thurs: 10am – 1pm
[Via online contact form on website](#)

Universal Support Team
020 8921 3333
Mon to Fri: 10am - 4pm
[Via online contact form on website](#)

● **Increased support for self-employed workers**

Extending the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)

The extended scheme provides support to self-employed workers in the form of two grants payable in two lump sums covering the 3-month period from 1 November 2020 to 31 January 2021 and 1 February 2021 to 30 April 2021.

Chancellor Sunak confirmed on 2 November that SEISS support will be doubled during the second lockdown. The taxable grant will be calculated at 80% of average monthly trading profits for 3 months, paid out in a single instalment and capped at £7,500. The government will confirm the details and amount of the second grant covering the period from February 2021 to April 2021 in due course.

To qualify, the individual or member of partnership must:

- have previously been eligible for SEISS, although they needn't have claimed it;
- declare their intention to continue trading and:
 - are either still trading but experiencing reduced demand due to COVID; or
 - were trading and are temporarily unable to do so due COVID.

Support will be available faster than originally planned, with people able to apply from 30 November 2020 rather than the middle of December. Full details and guidance about the claims process will be included on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) in due course.

[The 2 November Policy paper on the scheme is available on GOV.UK](#)

The Minimum Income Floor in Universal Credit extended to end of April 2021

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Dr Therese Coffey confirmed in [a statement on 3 November](#) that the suspension of the minimum income floor (MIF) which limits how much Universal Credit self-employed claimants can receive will remain extended until the end of April 2021. The MIF had been suspended for everyone since 6 April 2020 but was set to be reintroduced on 13 November. New regulations will be laid before 12 November 2020.

Business grants

Businesses which are required to close due to local or national or local restrictions will be eligible for grant support. The amount payable is based on property rateable values – for example the grant will be £1334 per month, or £667 per fortnight for properties with a rateable value of £15,000 or less.

See the government's 31 October [press release on GOV.UK](#) for further information.

Help for renters and homeowners

Ban on evictions

Bailiffs have been instructed not to enforce evictions during the second national lockdown (from 5 November 2020) except in the most serious cases (such as illegal occupation, anti-social behaviour, fraud, domestic abuse in social housing and where a property is unoccupied following the death of a tenant). The government also intends to include an exemption for extreme pre-COVID rent arrears. This pause on enforcement will apply until at least 11 January 2021.

A ban on enforcement of lender repossessions has also been put in place until 31 January 2021 except in exceptional cases.

See [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) and [Shelter](#) for further information.

Mortgage payment holidays

These were due to end on 31 October but have now been extended. Borrowers who have been financially impacted by coronavirus and have not already had a payment holiday will be entitled to a break of up to six months. People who have already started a payment holiday, will be able to top it up to six months without it being recorded on their credit file. Applications can be made until 31 January 2021.

COVID Winter Grant Scheme

The government unveiled a support package for children and families on 8 November in response to mounting pressure by campaigning groups and spearheaded by footballer, Marcus Rashford. The main measures include:

- A £170 million **COVID Winter Grant Scheme** which will be run and distributed by local authorities in England. The funding (to cover the period up to the end of March 2021) will be allocated at the beginning of December and will be ring-fenced, with 'at least 80% earmarked to support with food and bills'. It aims to enable local authorities to 'directly help the hardest hit families and individuals, as well as provide food for children who need it over the holidays'. The intention is that local authorities will ensure that appropriate support is provided during school holidays, with schools continuing to provide free school meals for eligible children during term-time. At the time of writing, it was unclear how the scheme will work in practice – we will provide further updates as more information becomes available.
- Expanding the Holiday Activities and Food programme covering Easter, Summer and Christmas 2021.
- Increasing the value of Healthy Start vouchers from £3.10 to £4.25 per voucher a week from April 2021.
- £16 million additional funding for food distribution charities.

See the [DWP's 8 November press release on GOV.UK](#) for further information.

UC and ESA claimants must attend telephone assessments

Jobcentre Plus introduced several easements earlier this year in response to COVID19. For example, face to face assessments for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Universal Credit (UC) claimants were suspended and replaced with telephone assessments. Conditionality was also relaxed so that no further action was taken against claimants who failed to attend their telephone assessments.

Please note that this has now changed and from Monday 2 November, UC and ESA claimants failing to attend their telephone appointments without good reason may have their benefit stopped or their entitlement could change. Appointment letters will make it clear to claimants that attending telephone appointments is a mandatory requirement. The DWP say that no one will have their benefit stopped without being contacted first to establish if they have a good reason for not attending or participating. Claimants will be given the opportunity to provide reasons and support will continue where good reason is accepted.

Please pass on this information to claimants who may be affected and contact our [advice lines](#) if the above processes are not followed.

UC rule change for employees paid monthly

Universal credit (UC) claimants who are paid monthly by their employer, and occasionally receive two payments from their employer in one month, will benefit from a recent change in the rules. DWP staff can now reallocate a second monthly payment from a customer's employer into a different assessment period. This means that if, for example, people are paid early by their employer due to their regular monthly pay date falling on a weekend or bank holiday they won't have two wages allocated to the same assessment period. The new rules apply from 16 November 2020. Affected claimants should check their monthly UC payments and ask the DWP to reallocate earnings if appropriate and get advice if necessary.

See [The Universal Credit \(Earned Income\) Amendment Regulations 2020 No 1138](#)

COVID-related New Style ESA easements extended

The DWP have issued new guidance confirming that the temporary easements which were put in place earlier this year have been extended from 12 November to 12 May 2021. This means that the requirement to serve a waiting period before ESA entitlement can begin remains suspended and a new or existing ESA claimant can continue being treated as having limited capability for work if the DWP is satisfied that they are affected by COVID-19.

Extension of PIP awards

We understand that the DWP are extending Personal Independence Payment (PIP) awards that are coming to an end by 9 months due to COVID-19. According to November's South London District JCP Partnership update, the extension will apply to PIP awards with a recommended review date falling between 22/06/20 and 21/12/20 inclusive, and to awards with an end date between 22/12/20 and 21/06/21. The DWP will write to all customers affected.

COVID-19 Hardship Fund Update

Greenwich Advice and Benefits Service have now awarded COVID Hardship payments of up to £300 towards council tax liabilities in 2020/21. The payment has been issued to existing working age Council Tax Support claimants in Royal Greenwich who are not already receiving full help towards their 2020/21 council tax bills. Residents who are entitled to Council Tax Support and haven't yet claimed will need to [apply online](#) in order to be assessed for the additional payment.

Community Hub Update

Residents should be directed to the Community Hub if they have any emergency food needs (for example due to financial reasons or because they must self-isolate due to COVID-19 and have no other support networks to assist them or if they have children under age 5). Food parcels are no longer being provided, but other support needs residents may have will be picked up and referrals made to other appropriate services as needed. The scheme is currently being reviewed and operational details are still being worked out. Residents can call the Community Hub on 0800 470 4831 to find out more or visit the [Royal Greenwich website](#) to request support online. Information about other sources of help is available in our [Help with food and financial concerns](#) factsheet.

New support service for people financially impacted by COVID-19

The Council has launched a new integrated service for residents who have been affected by the pandemic. The Integrated Employment Support and Advice Service will help residents facing unemployment, financial hardship or who are at risk of becoming homeless due to COVID-19. To access support, residents can complete a form on the Council website indicating the service required, with the option to access all three services at the same time. They will then be contacted to go through the type of help needed. For more information about the service visit: www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/covidsupport.

Universal Credit and 'Untidy Tenancies'

'Untidy tenancies' is a term used by the DWP to describe scenarios in which a joint tenant has left the property and is not paying rent or where a UC claimant is not named on the tenancy agreement but is making rent payments to enable them to continue living in the property. UC regulations provide for a person to be treated as liable to make payments where the liable person isn't paying, and the claimant must pay to enable them to remain in the accommodation. However, the DWP computer system has struggled to cope with these 'untidy tenancy' situations which has led to delays with claimants being awarded housing costs or the remaining tenant only being awarded half of their eligible housing costs or not receiving them at all. These claims often had to be paid manually and calculations were needed to resolve errors.

The DWP have confirmed in an advice note sent to the National Housing Federation that they have introduced a new system and issued updated guidance to work coaches and case managers covering cases where one joint tenant has left the property which will 'ensure that cases are automatically correctly paid each month without the need for manual payments or continued claimant intervention'. Work coaches and case managers have been reminded that they must not, for example ask for a new tenancy agreement or letter from the landlord confirming sole liability or for housing costs to be re-declared as a single tenancy.

See the [National Housing Federation's Blog – 16 October 2020](#) for more information.

Brexit and benefits

The October issue of Benefit Matters featured an article on the 'Impact of a possible No Deal Brexit on EU nationals'. The situation has evolved since then and City of Wolverhampton Council's most recent Benefits Bulletin helpfully sets out the latest position and examines the impact leaving the EU will have on the benefit rights of EU nationals living in the UK.

The Bulletin confirms that the draft regulations provide for EU nationals (such as workers and their family members) who were lawfully present in the UK by virtue of a treaty right on 31 December 2020 to continue receiving and claiming the full range of public funds as before between 1 January 2021 and 30 June 2021 (namely social security benefits¹, social housing, housing support and NHS treatment).

However, note that if an EU national applies for residence to the EU Settlement Scheme and is only awarded Pre-Settled Status, as the regulations stand, they are not entitled to the above benefits (except Working Tax Credit). Therefore, if someone knows they are only likely to be granted Pre-Settled Status, currently there may be no financial advantage to making an application. This is a complex area which is the subject of discussion on the [Rightsnet forum](#) (subscribers area). We understand that additional regulations are expected to follow which will clarify the position and resolve this problem for people with Pre-Settled Status. However, at the time of writing details were not available.

Click on the link to find out more: [City of Wolverhampton Council: Benefits Bulletin – Brexit, Benefits and More...](#)

Help with heating costs

Warm Home Discounts – encourage residents to apply now!

Just a reminder that most providers' schemes are now open to applications for winter 2020-21. Warm Home Discounts provide a £140 rebate off electricity bills for customers of participating energy providers. The scheme mostly targets pensioners receiving Pension Credit Guarantee (known as the core group) and they will usually automatically receive this help. Providers also have to offer discretionary discounts to certain vulnerable households or to people who they deem to be at risk of fuel poverty (known as the broader group). Some providers also offer discounts to other groups, so the eligibility criteria will vary from provider to provider. Warm Home Discounts are likely to be particularly in demand this year, so please encourage residents who may be entitled to apply now to ensure that they don't miss out. Most providers operate on a first come, first served basis and will then close to new applications until next year. Our updated [Warm Home Discounts factsheet](#) includes more information, including the eligibility criteria for each provider.

Stay Warm Stay Safe (SWSS)

This Royal Greenwich scheme provides extra services and support for residents who may be at risk during the cold weather. It particularly targets older people and vulnerable households such as families with young children or with a physical/mental or learning disability. Services include: advice on energy efficiency and reducing fuel bills, benefits advice from the Welfare Rights Service, home fire safety checks and advice on keeping active and well during the winter months. Please signpost residents to the Live Well Greenwich Line on 0800 470 4831 to find out more or visit www.livewellgreenwich.org.uk/livingwell/swss

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

Publicity update

Updated factsheets

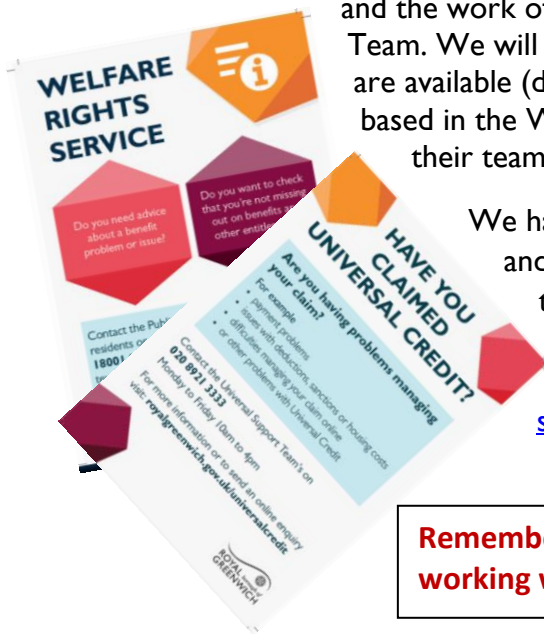
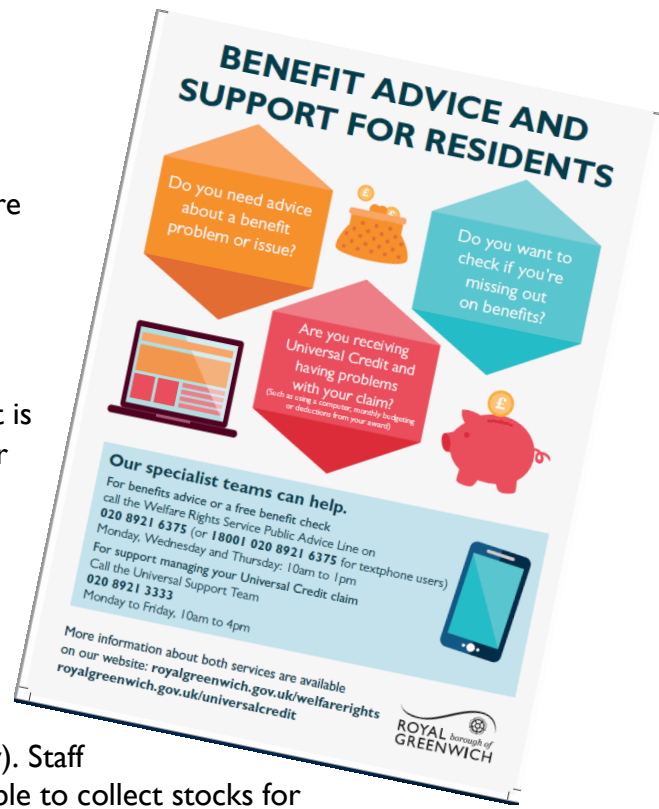
We have been working hard on updating our range of factsheets (including our COVID-related mini-factsheets) and the following are now available on the [Royal Greenwich website](http://royalgreenwich.gov.uk):

- Are you experiencing hardship?
- Help with food and financial concerns
- Help with housing and financial concerns.

Council colleagues – please note that due to technical difficulties it is not currently possible to update our intranet pages, so please refer to the main website for up to date content.

New promotional materials

We have produced handy new pocket-sized flyers and an A3 poster promoting the Welfare Rights Service Public Advice Line and the work of the Universal Support Team. We will let you know once these are available (delivery is expected shortly). Staff based in the Woolwich Centre will be able to collect stocks for their teams from the 2nd floor.



We have also designed 3 screensavers to compliment the poster and flyers and promote our free online benefit calculator (copies are included with this mailing). These will be uploaded onto PCs in Greenwich libraries and we are also happy to make them available to local organisations should you wish to use them. Please email requests to sandra.pierre@royalgreenwich.gov.uk

Remember – if you need advice about a resident or family you are working with, call our advice line for advisers and staff (020 8921 6376).

If you would like this information in another format (for example in large print), please email WRSTraining@royalgreenwich.gov.uk.

Next issue: January 2021

Royal Greenwich Welfare Rights Service produces 'Benefit Matters'. If you would like to contribute in any way, please email Sandra Pierre (sandra.pierre@royalgreenwich.gov.uk).



Welfare Rights Service

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35 Wellington Street
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Textphone 18001 020 8921 6375

www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/benefits