

Benefit Matters

Our newsletter for advisers in Royal Greenwich

Finance Directorate

New Household Support Fund

In September, the government announced the launch of a new £500m support package to 'help those most in need' and to partially compensate for the end of the benefit uplifts and furlough scheme. Additional funds were made available to local councils from October 2021 via the Household Support Fund. Royal Greenwich's allocation is worth £2.34m and must be used by 31 March 2022.

The funding is being used to support residents with essential bills (such as food, clothing, utilities and 'other related wider essentials') and is operating over the winter months alongside existing fuel and food poverty initiatives (such as Warm Home Discounts, Cold Weather Payments and the [Holiday Activities and Food Programme](#) which was available again in Christmas 2021).

Fifty percent of Royal Greenwich funding is being used to continue to assist families with children on free school meals during the 2021/22 holiday periods (in October 21 and February 22 half-terms, Christmas 2021 and Easter 2022). The payments are worth £15 per week for each eligible child or £100 in total across all holidays (£10 extra was included at Christmas). Please encourage residents who qualify for free school meals and are not already receiving them to apply before March 2022. Successful applicants will receive backdated holiday payments from the council.

Targeted payments will also be made to:

- Care leavers;
- Pre-school children in low-income households -

the council is working with children's centres and early year providers to identify children. Families will receive two payments of £50 each. We encourage families who haven't already taken up free early learning places for 2 year olds ([Together for Twos](#)) and [3-4 year olds](#) to sign up to [children's centres](#) to enable them to receive this help. Visit the Royal Greenwich website to find out more about Early Years provision.

- Households with nil recourse to public funds who are being supported by Royal Greenwich's Nil Recourse Team.

The funding is also being used to:

- supplement food availability at the Foodbank and food clubs in the borough;
- enhance the Stay Warm Stay Safe (SWSS) offer by providing additional funding to Charlton Athletic Community Trust (CACT) to enable discretionary financial support to be provided in addition to the current offer;
- run a community grants scheme for community organisations to provide small grants to support residents with essential needs in the New Year. Applications closed on 6 February and a decision is expected soon.
- increase the Emergency Support Scheme budget in readiness for the anticipated increase in applications this winter.

Residents can access support via any of the following routes: [Stay Warm Stay Safe](#); [Live Well Greenwich](#); or [Royal Greenwich's Emergency Support Scheme](#).

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](#)

Royal Greenwich Welfare Rights Service wins backdated benefits and compensation for vulnerable resident

Parliamentary Ombudsman makes finding of maladministration against DWP in Incapacity Benefit migration case

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman has made a finding of maladministration against the DWP in a case brought by Greenwich Welfare Rights Service of a severely disabled client (Ms U) who had been denied compensation after being underpaid benefits for over 5 years when migrated from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance. The case could have significant implications for up to 118,000 claimants in similar circumstances and Ombudsman Rob Behrens calling on the government to urgently rectify the injustice.

Background

Following the introduction of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) for new claimants in 2008, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) made a huge error of law when migrating existing claimants from Incapacity Benefit to the new benefit. ESA is a single incapacity-related benefit comprising of a contribution-based element for people satisfying the national insurance contribution requirement and an income-related element for people satisfying the means-test. It has been replaced by Universal Credit for new claimants.

The DWP migration exercise which was carried out between 2011 to 2014 and involved 70,000 to 100,000 claimants, moved IB claimants to contribution-based ESA, but failed to consider whether these claimants were also entitled to an income related ESA top up to bring their income up to the minimum level they needed to live on as defined by law. This failure meant that many vulnerable claimants received significantly less ESA than they were legally entitled to for several years, leaving many in financial hardship. It also meant that they missed out on associated passported benefits that an award would have made available, such as free prescriptions and dental costs.

The DWP refused to accept they should have done so until they were compelled by a High Court Judgement. Even then, they incorrectly argued they only needed to pay arrears from the date of the Judgement on 21 October 2014.

Royal Greenwich's Welfare Rights Service interrogated Housing Benefit databases to identify and advise affected claimants who had been underpaid by the DWP. We were shocked to discover that many claimants (including those with severe disabilities) had been living in hardship, often having had fifty percent less to live on than they were entitled to for a sustained period. This meant they couldn't afford to meet their essential living costs, such as to buy food to keep healthy or to heat their homes.

The DWP's view was that paying people the benefit arrears which they should have received anyway was sufficient, but we helped them recognise that this was not the case and how being continually underpaid for a long period of time and being unable to access passported benefits severely impacts on health conditions.

Our case

We raised a compensation case with the DWP via their complaints procedure of a vulnerable resident (Ms U) with severe disability who had received 5 years of backdated income-related ESA arrears in 2017. She'd been underpaid by £80 per week for the whole of this period, but had missed out on linked passported benefits (including the Warm Home Discount) for over 5 years. The case went through all levels of the complaints procedure with the DWP refusing to award compensation saying that backdating ESA was sufficient. They also refused leave for the case to progress to the final stage of their procedure - to the Independent Case Examiner. We initiated a further complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman via Clive Efford, the customer's very supportive MP (despite the DWP's failure to advise the claimant of her right to do so).

Parliamentary Ombudsman's findings

After a very long process spanning 3 years, we are delighted that the Ombudsman has made a finding of maladministration by the DWP and awarded substantial compensation to this vulnerable resident (now aged

62 and in need of even more support) in recognition of the injustice and hardship she had suffered. The Ombudsman has further recommended that DWP should award similar compensation automatically to all the claimants who missed out in the Incapacity Benefit to ESA migration. The DWP previously refused to accept a similar recommendation by the Public Accounts Select Committee. However, it is hoped that the Parliamentary Ombudsman formally laying their recommendation to Parliament together with a full report of his investigation into our client's case will result in a change and compensation being automatically awarded to all claimants affected by this injustice. As a result of the case an urgent question was raised in the House of Commons on 13 January – view the debate on [Parliament TV](#).

We're very proud of the adviser involved, Andy Campbell, and would like to commend him on an exemplary piece of work and a fantastic outcome that has not only been life changing for his client, but we hope will also help many other claimants in similar positions in the future. Well done Andy!

For further information

- [Parliamentary Ombudsman's press release](#)
- [Royal Greenwich press release](#)
- [Ombudsman's 28-page investigation into the DWP's handling of Ms U's case](#)

Coronavirus Benefits Update

Help with council tax bills - COVID Hardship Payments

Last year, local authorities were allocated with additional government funding to support working age residents with their 2020-21 council tax bills. Support is available again this year via the COVID Hardship Fund to assist council taxpayers with 2021/22 bills. Greenwich Advice and Benefits Service awarded a one-off payment of up to £150 before Christmas towards council tax liabilities in 2021/22. 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 2021/22 bills. Residents who are entitled to Council Tax Support and haven't yet claimed will need to [apply online](#) to be assessed for the additional payment. There is no need to claim, eligible CTS recipients will receive this help automatically. Please help us to ensure that residents don't miss out by encouraging families you are working with who are entitled to, but not already receiving CTS to apply.

Test and Trace Support Payments

The £500 payment Test and Trace Support Payment (TTSP) is for people who are employed or self-employed and receiving qualifying benefits who have been told to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace. Local authorities also have discretion to award payments to claimants not on a qualifying benefit who will face financial hardship because of having to self-isolate. The scheme has been extended until 31 March 2022.

Since 11 January 2022, people who test positive on a lateral flow device must self-isolate immediately but no longer need to take a confirmatory PCR test. However, residents wishing to apply for a TTSP will still need to take a PCR test.

Since 17 January 2022, people who test positive for COVID-19 can self-isolate for six days instead of ten days if they receive negative lateral flow tests on day 5 and day 6 of their self-isolation period and do not have a temperature. This applies to both vaccinated and unvaccinated residents who test positive for COVID-19. As applicants will have to isolate for a minimum of six days and may incur loss of income, they will remain eligible for Test and Trace Support Payments. There is no change to the guidance for unvaccinated contacts of positive COVID-19 cases who are still required to self-isolate for ten full days after the date of exposure to the virus.

Temporary changes to fit notes

The DWP made temporary changes to fit notes in support of the COVID-19 booster programme. [The Statutory Sick Pay: employee fitness to work guidance](#) provide for the Statutory Sick Pay self-certification period to be extended from 7 to 28 days for periods of sickness from 17 December to 26 January 2022, meaning that evidence of sickness did not have to be provided during this period until the absence exceeded 28 days. There was also no requirement for a fit note to access other benefits.

Benefits and EU nationals

Supreme Court overturns previous ruling enabling EU nationals with pre-settled status to claim Universal Credit

The Supreme Court has unanimously allowed the DWP's appeal and overturned last year's Court of Appeal judgement (in *Fratila and another v Secretary of State for Work and Pensions* [2021] UKSC 53). The Court of Appeal had previously found that preventing reliance on pre-settled status for the purpose of claiming certain social security benefits (including Universal Credit) amounted to unlawful discrimination.

Pre-settled status is a type of status given by applicants to the EU Settlement Scheme who do not qualify for settled status. It lasts for 5 years and allows EU nationals living in the UK before Brexit took effect (on 31 December 2020) to remain in the UK legally and continue to work, rent and so on after the end of the immigration grace period on 30th June 2021.

The Supreme Court decision was disappointing, but not surprising given the outcome of *CG v Dept for Communities* (a parallel first-tier social security Northern Island case) which referred questions on the same points as in *Fratila* to the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). The CJEU judgement on 15 July 2021 in a blow to *Fratila*, found that Article 18 TFEU¹ (which prohibits any discrimination on grounds of nationality) did not apply to people with pre-settled status.

Child Poverty Action Group has updated [their webpage](#) to reflect the new ruling and updated their advice for claimants dealing with what arguments may be left given the new ruling.

The DWP has issued new guidance on how the Supreme Court judgement affects cases where decisions had been stayed (or deferred) pending its outcome (see [ADM Memo 1/22](#) and [DMG Memo 1/22](#) for details).

Please note that DWP decision making can be poor so people affected should always check their position and get specialist advice if they receive an adverse decision.

The EU Settlement Scheme

The DWP and HMRC have been writing to EEA nationals who have been receiving benefits and tax credits but have not yet applied to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS). The grace period for applications to EUSS ended on 30 June 2021, but transitional rules in the EU/UK Withdrawal Agreement enable some EEA and Swiss nationals to access benefits – such as where a valid EUSS application was made on or before 30 June 2021 and is yet to be determined and to appeals against Home Office refusals. This protection also applies to EEA nationals who have reasonable grounds for applying late and receive a validated certificate of application from the Home Office. The DWP has issued new guidance on the position of claimants without status under the EU Settlement Scheme on 30 June (see GOV.UK for [ADM Memo 19/21](#) and [DMG Memo 14/21](#)).

If you are working with EEA nationals who have not already applied to EUSS, please encourage them to apply online via the [GOV.UK website](#) to regularise their position. It's not too late if they can demonstrate that they have reasonable grounds for the delay. Remember that claimants who do not apply will be treated as a person subject to immigration control and their payments will stop.

Further information and advice

If you are unsure of the rights of an EEA national to apply for benefits and need advice, please contact our [Advisers Advice Line](#) or signpost residents to our [Public Advice Line](#).

Please note that the Welfare Rights Service is not accredited to provide immigration advice and can only advise on benefit issues. If a resident needs immigration advice they should be directed to an accredited immigration adviser – use [this link](#) to find an OISC regulated immigration service/adviser.

¹ Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union

Support for people arriving from Afghanistan

Following the collapse of the Afghan government in August 2021, new rules were introduced from 15 September 2021 to help families and those at highest risk to enable them to access support and rebuild their lives in the UK. People entering the UK under one of the Home Office's Afghan resettlement schemes² are exempt from the habitual residence test in benefits, Child Benefit's 3-month residence requirement and the past presence test in disability benefits (Attendance Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Disability Living Allowance). See the [DWP's 21 September 2021 Press Release](#) for further information.

Universal Credit Update

Changes to taper rate and work allowances

Changes to the Universal Credit taper rate and work allowances were introduced on 24 November. The changes increase the yearly work allowances that claimants can earn before UC is reduced by £500 and reduce the taper rate that is applied to income above work allowances from 63% to 55%. The measures were introduced in response to criticism from social welfare groups about the removal of the benefit uplifts. Karl Handscomb, Resolution Foundation has stated that while "these changes mean more support for higher-earning families on Universal Credit this winter, the recent £20 a week cut in support means that 3.6 million families will still be worse off overall, particularly those who have lost their jobs, or who are unable to work."

Rules tighten further for disabled UC claimants who are 'receiving education'

One of the basic rules of entitlement for Universal Credit (UC) is that you cannot qualify if you are 'receiving education' unless an exception applies (such as for people with children or with a disability). The UC exception relating to people with disabilities who are 'receiving education' and in receipt of a qualifying benefit³ has been amended from 15 December 2021 to make it tougher for disabled students to claim based on having limited capability for work. Regulation 14 has been amended to specify that a claimant will only count as receiving education for the purposes of claiming UC if they are determined or treated as having limited capability for work (LCW) before their course began.

The DWP claim that the rule change will prevent a person who has already started a course of education from circumventing the policy intention of regulation 14 by applying for a limited capability for work determination after starting their course.

The amended regulations also provide that claimants migrating to UC from income-related Employment and Support Allowance will be treated as having LCW before starting to receive education for the purpose of establishing entitlement to UC.

It's still worth advising students to continue going through the motions of claiming credits-only Employment and Support Allowance and UC. Even though the claim is likely to be unsuccessful given the current rules, students should still dispute the decision by asking for a mandatory reconsideration and going through the appeals process in case there is a legal challenge going forward and things change. In any event, it's still a good tactic to encourage young people to claim contributory ESA to get credits for limited capability for work. Although they're unable to get UC for any course they're currently on, they could potentially claim during a gap between courses or before beginning a subsequent course.

Remember also that young people who are aged 20 or over and in non-advanced education shouldn't be caught by the UC exclusion if they're not receiving a student grant or loan for maintenance and have no work related requirements that are incompatible with the course.

Useful Links

- [The Universal Credit \(Exceptions to the Requirement not to be receiving Education\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2021](#)
- [Explanatory memorandum](#)

² Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (or the old ex-gratia scheme) and the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme

³ Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, child disability payment, or Personal Independence Payment

New UC jobseekers to be forced to take up work in any sector after just four weeks or risk a benefit sanction

The government's 'Way to Work' campaign was announced during PM Questions on 27 January and aims to get half a million people into work by the end of June. The plans force new Universal Credit jobseekers who are subject to full work-related requirements to take up work in any sector after only 4 weeks. After this, failing to make reasonable efforts to secure a job or turning down any offer risks a benefit sanction⁴. In theory the rules mean that a claimant could be sanctioned before receiving their first UC payment. The DWP have confirmed that claimants can also expect more time with their work coaches.

Currently new UC jobseekers can restrict their availability and jobsearch to their usual occupation for a permitted period of up to 13 weeks after which they must be prepared to widen their availability for work and job searching activity.

The measure has been criticised by welfare experts with Ruth Patrick (University of York) saying that "...the government is right that people need and deserve good jobs but these will not be delivered by compelling people to seek any work, and against a context of continuing in-work poverty." She continues that "pushing people to apply for any job regardless of its suitability, underpinned by the very real threat of benefit sanctions, is corrosive to relationships between claimants and advisers, and risks pushing people into insecure and unsuitable employment."

Further reading:

- The [Government's 27 January 2022 press release](#) for further information
- [DWP Touchbase newsletter – 28 January](#)
- [Universal Credit claimants face tough sanctions in UK job crackdown – The Guardian](#)

Hardship payments and recovery

A judicial review case taken by the Public Law Project last year resulted in the DWP confirming that it has discretion to waive recovery of a hardship payment. The [Public Law Project has published an open letter from the DWP](#) which clarifies the process by which claimants can request the recovery rate of hardship payments are reduced or waived and restates that the DWP can choose whether or not to recover and can reduce or waive recovery even where the claimant has previously agreed to repay.

DWP carry out 'Trust and Protect' review exercise for 'high risk' UC awards

The DWP is conducting a review exercise (called Trust and Protect') of UC awards considered at high risk of error due to the relaxation of verification standards introduced at the start of the pandemic. Claimants whose awards are identified as potentially high risk are being contacted by the DWP (either by telephone or via their online journal) and asked to provide verification information. Awards may be reassessed because of the information supplied. Claimants failing to comply risk having their benefit awards suspended, reduced, or terminated. Details of the process are difficult to find because no regulations have been introduced. However, it's important to bear in mind that existing mandatory regulations set out legal procedures and requirements that decision makers must follow when revising and suspending/terminating awards. These are not at the discretion of the DWP, including in the Trust and Protect exercise.

Problem areas we're encountering

The following are issues to be aware of that we have been experiencing recently:

- **Difficulties requesting mandatory reconsiderations by phone**
UC appear to be heavily gatekeeping the ability to do a mandatory reconsideration (MR) over the phone and are telling claimants that it's no longer possible to do so. Claimants are being told to go to GOV.UK to use the MR template. Please note that the [DWP's own \(Challenge a benefit decision – mandatory reconsideration\) webpage](#) and [operational guidance on Mandatory Considerations](#) confirms that MRs can be requested over the phone, face to face, by putting a note in the UC journal or in writing, so this

⁴ Sanctions are a way of reducing benefit entitlement for a set period for claimants who the DWP determine have failed to meet their responsibilities (as set out in their claimant commitment) without a good reason.

is clearly incorrect. Indeed even the [CRMRI MR form](#) states on page 1 that “You can ask for a Mandatory Reconsideration over the phone. Your claim will be looked at in exactly the same way. It’s much quicker and you can explain why you think the decision is wrong over the phone, without needing to fill anything in. The phone number to call is at the top of your decision letter.” The right to request a MR over the phone is particularly important for claimants without access to a journal so be persistent and quote these references to the UC call handler if you run into difficulties in future and contact our advice lines if you need to ([see front page](#)).

- **UC claimants with no bank details**

When someone has no bank details for UC, GOV.UK says to call the UC helpline. When this happens, DWP staff can input dummy details in order that the claim is submitted and then they can be paid through the Payment Exception Service.

Autumn Budget and Spending Review – Benefit Highlights

As well as announcing the introduction a new Household Support Fund ([page 1](#)) and changes to Universal Credit work allowances and taper rate ([page 3](#)), Chancellor Rishi Sunak also announced the following benefits-related measures in his Autumn Budget and Spending Review on 27 October 2021.

- National Living Wage for people aged 23 or over increases to £9.50 an hour from April 2022. The increases are set out in full below:

	Rate from April 2022	Current Rate (April 2021 to March 2022)
National Living Wage	£9.50	£8.91
21-22 Year Old Rate	£9.18	£8.36
18-20 Year Old Rate	£6.83	£6.56
16-17 Year Old Rate	£4.81	£4.62
Apprentice Rate	£4.81	£4.30

- a new housing element of Pension Credit from 2025 to replace pension-age related Housing Benefit payments. This will be aligned with the timing of the full roll-out of working-age Housing Benefit into Universal Credit.
- Temporary increase in the Universal Credit surplus earnings threshold of £2,500 is to continue until April 2023, before being reduced to £300. The surplus earnings rules are used to reduce UC entitlement where earnings are more than £2500 over the amount you can earn before receiving no UC. If income drops and you reclaim UC, the surplus earnings are considered as income. Significantly more people will be affected when the threshold reduces to £300 and will be off UC for longer periods.

For further information

[Treasury, Autumn Budget and Spending Review 2021 documents](#)

Post Office Card Accounts

The DWP has started writing to customers receiving payments via post office card accounts (POCAs) to notify that these are ending on 30 November 2022 and of the need provide alternative bank/building society/ credit union details to enable benefit payments to continue. We understand that claimants without bank accounts will be automatically moved over to the DWP’s Payment Exception Service and receive payments via digital vouchers which they can opt to get by

text, email or via a reusable payment card.

Claimants needing help and support can call the DWP’s dedicated helpline on 0800 085 7133 (or 0800 085 7146 for textphone users).

Note that HMRC have already stopped making tax credits, Child Benefit and Guardians Allowance payments into POCAs.

Claimants being offered digital Personal Independence Payment forms

All new Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claimants have the option of completing a digital PIP2 form from 6 December 2021. The online form (which was previously introduced on a small scale) is being sent to claimants via a link included in an email. Around 1000 customers a day are expected to take up the offer, however claimants should still have the option of receiving a paper form should they wish.

Healthy Start - extra help for families to buy food and milk

Healthy Start is a welfare food scheme that targets pregnant women and children under 4 years old in low-income households, who are amongst the groups most at risk of food poverty. This important means-tested scheme provides a basic nutritional safety net to support families to make healthy food choices. Qualifying claimants receive a minimum of £221-442 each year to spend on fruit, vegetables, pulses, cow's milk and infant formula. Mothers and children also receive free, good-quality vitamins. There are currently 1,500 families missing out on this additional financial help in Greenwich.

Who qualifies?

- All women under 18 regardless of income;
- Women aged 18 or over who are at least 10 weeks pregnant; and families with children under 4 years old receiving one of the following benefits:
 - Income Support; income-related Employment and Support Allowance or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance;
 - Child Tax Credit only (not Working Tax Credit) and annual income is £16,190 or less;
 - the four-week Working Tax Credit 'run-on' paid because you're no longer treated as being in full-time work;
 - Universal Credit and household income was £408 or less during the last monthly assessment period. Vouchers will continue for a further 8 weeks for claimants who stop being entitled to UC or start earning more than £408.

People who cannot claim public funds can also get this help if their child (aged under 4) is a British citizen and the family earns £408 or less a month.

How much is Healthy Start worth?

- £4.25 per week for qualifying pregnant women (from the 10th week of pregnancy) and children aged 1-4.
- £8.50 per week for children under 1.

Pregnant and nursing women and children over six months old also receive free vitamins which can be collected from local Children's Centres.

The new digital Healthy Start scheme

The new digital Healthy Start Scheme sees the current paper voucher scheme ending on 31 March 2022 and being replaced with a prepaid card. Eligible families and those already using paper vouchers can apply online for the new Healthy Start Scheme to get a prepaid card (see below). Successful applicants will be posted their prepaid card which will be topped up every four weeks. Once the card is activated, it can be used anywhere that sells Healthy Start food items and accepts Mastercard.

How to apply

Apply online on the [NHS website](#). Note that if someone is already receiving paper vouchers, these will stop once they complete their online application. Everyone receiving paper vouchers will have to re-apply to the digital scheme before the end of March to continue receiving their benefit.

Healthy Start Digital Training in Greenwich

Greenwich Public Health will be hosting weekly information sessions about the changes to the new digital scheme and how we can promote the scheme locally. If you would like to attend one of the virtual information sessions below, please email healthystart@royalgreenwich.gov.uk to register.

Date	Time
15 th February	2 – 3pm
23 rd February	1 – 2pm
2 nd March	1 – 2pm
10 th March	11.30am – 12.30pm
16 th March	11am – 12pm
22 nd March	2 – 3pm
31 st March	10 – 11am

Greenwich Advice Network (GAN) and Greenwich Advisers Forum (GRAF)

These meetings normally take place every six months. The last virtual Greenwich Advice Network (GAN) meeting was on 14 December and focused on food and fuel poverty support issues for residents struggling to afford food and fuel costs. We had guest speakers from Public Health, GCDA (Greenwich Co-operative Development Agency), Greenwich Foodbank and SELCE (South East London Community Energy). Topics covered included: The new Household Support Fund, an overview of Royal Greenwich's Food Response, holiday meals provision, Healthy Start, the Emergency Support Scheme and updates from Greenwich Foodbank, SELCE and on this year's Stay Warm Stay Safe Scheme (SWSS). The presentations will be distributed shortly.

The dates of the next virtual Greenwich Advice Network (GAN) and Greenwich Advisers Forum (GRAF) meetings have not yet been fixed but are likely to be in June and March respectively. Details will be circulated nearer the time together with confirmation of the discussion topics. If you are not already on the mailing list and would like to receive information about future GRAF or GAN meetings, please email sandra.pierre@royalgreenwich.gov.uk with your contact details (name, organisation, telephone number).

Help with winter heating costs

The Resolution Foundation has described 2022 as “the year of the squeeze” with the peak of the squeeze expected to come in April as families, already struggling with increasing food costs and below inflation wages are also facing a £1200 income hit from soaring energy bills and tax rises. Against this backdrop, the number of households being pushed into fuel poverty is also expected to increase.

In response to mounting pressure from welfare organisations and both sides of the house, Chancellor Rishi Sunak in a statement delivered on 3 February announced a support package to assist struggling households and soften the blow of the record [increase in the Energy Price Cap](#) which was announced on the same date. Chancellor Sunak claims that this support will halve the extra £693 that average households will have to find because of the increase. Support will consist of:

- A repayable £200 discount for all domestic electricity customers which energy suppliers will apply to bills from October 2022. The discount will need to be repaid from bills in equal instalments of £40 per year over the next 5 years.

- a £150 discount off council tax bills for council tax payers living in property bands A to D. The government estimates this will benefit around 80% of all homes in England.
- a £150m discretionary fund for local authorities to assist low-income households living in higher banded properties.

For further information

[See Chancellor Sunak's statement on GOV.UK](#)

Other sources of help that is currently available towards heating costs include:

- **Warm Home Discounts** - a £140 rebate off electricity bills for pensioners on Pension Credit Guarantee (PCG) element and other vulnerable households. Pensioners receiving PCG get this help automatically, but others must apply. Discretionary discounts are available on a first come, first served basis so residents should apply without delay to ensure that they don't miss out. Check our [Warm Home Discounts factsheet](#) for details or visit [GOV.UK's website](#).
- **Winter Fuel Payments** – a tax-free yearly payment worth between £100-£300 to help pay

for heating bills for older people who were born on or before 26 September 1955.

- **[Cold Weather Payments](#)** – a £25 government payment made to people on qualifying benefits if the average temperature in an area reaches or is forecast to be 0 degrees or below for 7 consecutive days.
- **[Stay Warm Stay Safe](#)** - 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. Contact the Live Well Greenwich Line on 0800 470 4831 to find out more or visit the [Live Well Greenwich website](#). Alternatively, use [this form](#) to send a direct referral (it can also be used for self-referrals).

- **[The Household Support Fund](#)** – see front page.

Useful links:

- [The Resolution Foundation Press Release 29 December](#)
- [Energy Saving Trust](#)
- [SELCE \(South East London Community Energy\)](#)

Training news

You should have already received our February to July training programme. This remains a fully virtual programme as we're currently unable to deliver face-to-face courses. All courses are being delivered via Zoom. This includes our usual popular courses, such as Introduction to Benefits and our Universal Credit courses. There are also new courses: **Universal Credit Stick or Twist** and **Work Capability Assessments – the exceptional circumstances rules**.

February to March courses include:

Personal Independence Payment Questionnaire completion – 11 February

Universal Credit and Housing Costs – 28 February and 1 March*

Mental Health: Sickness and Disability Benefits – 2 and 3 March*

**These are one day courses which are spread over 2 half-days.*

We're not currently using our normal booking form, book your place by emailing your details and the name of the course you wish to attend to wrs.training@royalgreenwich.gov.uk You will also need to confirm that your manager has agreed for you to attend. Places are limited, so book soon to avoid disappointment!

Remember – if you need advice about a resident or family you are working with, call our [advice line for advisers and staff \(020 8921 6376\)](tel:02089216376)

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

Next issue: April 2022

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

The Woolwich Centre
35 Wellington Street
Woolwich SE18 6HQ
Telephone 020 8921 6375
Textphone 18001 020 8921 6375

www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/benefits