

Plymouth Welfare Rights Forum

Training Suite
Plymouth CAB

Thursday 30th July 2009
1.00 to 4.00pm

1. Welcomes & apologies

Attending:

Gloria Davenport	Plymouth CAB (Chair)
Karen Sharpe	Plymouth CAB
Bruce Abbott	DAN
Les Cole	FIS (JCP)
Matt Allison	JCP
Donna Ryall	Plymouth Mind at The Zone
David Burr	Plymouth Mind Oasis Project
Julia Slade	LARK Children's Centre
Mo Rafferty	William Sutton Homes
Alison Jane	Money Advice Plymouth
Julie Jackson	Plymouth CAB
Carlee Carbis	Plymouth CAB
Christina Carter	Plymouth CAB
Pat Newton	PCC
Gill Joyce	Pensions Service
Russell King	Ocean Quay

Apologies:

Mary Partridge	Colebrook Housing
Maria Sullivan	JCP
Sue Archard	CAB
Steve Guy	MAP
Chris Hulbert	MAP
Stuart Toll	Devon Law Centre
Austen Mintern	The Zone
David Hay	Mind Glenbourne

2. Previous Minutes

Corrections:

3.5 Pension Service: Workers are to carry on paying contributions all their working lives but qualifying years will be 30 (not 42 men and 39 women as at present)

Working age will be increased to 68 – sliding scale

Matters arising:

DBC not contacted - **Action:** GD to do

H.M.R.C – not able to attend this time – see note in minutes below re progress

Pathways – Matt's spoken to Jon who has said A4e would be keen to come regularly.

3. Reports

3.1 Housing Benefit

No report.

Sarah Yardley was going to explain LHA 'excess' and numbers of clients this is likely to affect in Plymouth

3.2 Disability Benefits Centre

Members asked what are the current clearance times?

Alison Jane – Child DLA sent one day, received next, decision received day after.

Julia – reviewed case – client in receipt of HRC, went for HRM and refused.

Donna – even when there is good supporting evidence, claims are still being turned down, all elements of DLA refused.

David Burr- MIND – turned claim round in 6 days. Renewals aren't posing a problem, sometimes getting higher rate. New claims being refused.

Is there a reason? Change of staff?
Lack of consistency seems to be evident

Wembley DBC closing – impact?

Asking for reasons doesn't always elicit more information from DBC.
Inconsistency in responses to requests for written reasons.
Turn around times – usually a lot longer than 2 days.

All queries above need to be addressed by DBC at Forum **Action: GD to contact**

3.3 HMRC

Julie Jackson will ask for representative and a report at forum.

KS has since had contact – rep to come to Sept Forum

Social Policy issue with HMRC – Julia has an outstanding appeal case.

Julie J (deals with a lot of appeals): Tax Credit adviser line is very good. Advisers in CAB have said the same.

3.4 Jobcentre Plus

Matt reporting

Chris has sent this response regarding problems with Income Support/Incap/ESA

claims at First Contact Centre:

“The only issue left from the last meeting was about problems in ringing up to claim Income Support as a top up to Incapacity Benefit. I have looked into this and it appears to be a minor issue with the script our staff use when a call is made. This has been fed up the appropriate chain of command to see if a change can be implemented. In the mean time, callers should just ask for a clerical Income Support claim form to be issued, not an ESA claim form as some of the forum members had been advised.”

JCP takes 60 claims/day @ Old Tree Court
2000 last month between OTC/ Queens House

Date of claims + 0 at present

Staffing – new staff have been taken on at both JCPs – period of training but healthier resources.

Office hours (All JCPs): 9.00am to 5.00pm Monday & Friday
8.30am to 5.00pm Tuesday to Thursday
Saturday for overtime – they will arrange to see some customers then. It’s likely that JCP opening hours will increase.

“Day 1” offers – schemes available to Jobseekers from date of claim (as opposed to having to wait 26 weeks) – JCP are starting regular group sessions of those. Also they are providing additional sessions for executive/professional jobseekers.

The Rapid Response Team is going to Toshiba soon, where there are large numbers of redundancies.

New Customer Service Operations Manager – Cheryl George (replacing Sally Kittle)

Crisis Loan applications and payments – still making high numbers of payments despite difficulty getting through on the phones.

F2F interviews for claimants – the FTA (Failed to Attend) rate is much better now.

Current vacancies in Plymouth – 876 (vs '08 1052)
Care work is the only buoyant area in the job market.

Julia – Regeneration money is coming into Plymouth – will JCP be working with claimants re: skills base/ increase, training etc?
Matt – confident we will be.

Pat – Deductions from IS – one client having more than half her IS deducted. CPAG doesn’t give a maximum any more.
Matt will check. Claims + Payments Regulations 34 & 35.
In meantime suggest ask for review of SF & O/P amounts – request that repayments are reduced.

3.5 Pension Service

No major issues to report

Urgent claims are being dealt with within 2 weeks.

All other claims processed in 8 – 10 weeks

Changes to capital limits coming in on 2nd November.

Julie J – People on PC are still not triggering getting SRP – will PS ever link with SRP?

Gill J – Have come across people like this. In one way it can be advantageous because they are treated as having “deferred” and get lots of back pay of SRP without it necessarily affecting their PC. They then have 1 year to reduce the lump sum to within capital limits – This is a loophole but will be closed soon.

3.6 Social Inclusion

KS has heard from DH that an advert for the post of Social Inclusion Officer is due out soon and someone should be appointed by end September.

Action: KS to liaise for regular report

4.0 Themes for future meetings

Matt Allison has contact A4E – they hope to attend next Forum to explain Pathways
KS has contacted HMRC and pressed for a presence – requested an update on current changes within Department

Chris Johnson has arranged for officers from First Contact Centre to attend September Forum to explain HRT & Right to Reside issues

5. AOB

a) Pat Newton explained the new Housing Advice Outreach Centre.

There will be a regular surgery at the Oasis centre in Stonehouse 11.00am 1.00pm on Wednesdays from 8th July.

The Outreach service is targeted at private rented tenants and homeowners. Leaflet drop being carried out now publicising the Outreach.

The service will be to provide advice and signposting only. Any casework will be referred for an appointment.

Plan to extend service to Plympton and Plymstock – currently having meetings with libraries in those areas.

b) Disability Rights Handbooks are now available, as are the CPAG newsletters and Bulletins.

c) Toshiba are making large scale redundancies – As well as the Rapid Response Team for JCP attending, some volunteers from CAB are going to answer any queries employees might have.

Date of next meeting

Thursday 24th September 1 pm – 4 pm

**Warspite Room
Council House**