



Case Studies – June 2012

Age UK Kensington and Chelsea – June 2012

We have already expressed concern that one emerging theme is that clients are being told verbally that they are not entitled to a discretionary housing payment. Therefore they would not appear on any statistics that the council keep and there is no accountability for these decisions.

Another concern we have come across and we have come across many if not all, DHP award decision letters which state:

“We have a limited budget from which we can make a discretionary payment and we can only make an award in exceptional circumstances and in most cases for a limited period. By the time your discretionary payment ends I would have expected you to have found cheaper accommodation or have negotiated a lower rent with your landlord. If you do not, you will be liable to make up the shortfall in your rent”.

This implies that this particular client does not have “exceptional circumstances” and will not be awarded another DHP. This is technically incorrect and a decision should not be made in advance of any potential or hypothetical future claim. These letters, probably template letters, need to be amended by the council to reflect more accurately the legal position.

CAB Case Studies – June 2012

- Client single man aged 60 is unemployed and receiving income of £400 per month. Lives in a shared room in private hostel. Due to cap client has a shortfall of £4.00 pw. Client went to seek advice from CAB as rent went up in April, however housing unable to claim until end of housing benefit anniversary in July. Therefore he has to make up the shortfall. The claimant states that he does not have to move but has incurred rent arrears. Landlord will not reduce the rent but has given no indication yet that he has to move. Person has applied for DDP awaiting result.
- Female client aged 43, unemployed, lives as a couple with dependent child aged 5. Family are private tenants. The LHA shortfall was £190pw due to the reduced cap of £290. The claimant does not have to move, has not incurred rent arrears or other debts. Claimant sought advice on new rules but landlord has agreed to reduce the rent to applicable cap of £290 so will continue to stay in the home.
- Client aged 45 had worked but forced to give up because of physical health problems, was married to a husband with mental health problems who was trying to do some temporary work, they have one child aged 12. They have lived in the same rented accommodation for 10 years and currently paying rent of £525 a week and was in receipt of almost full Housing Benefit to cover the rent.

Due to the Housing Benefit cuts, this was reduced to £290 a week. We assisted them with an application for a Discretionary Housing Payment to RBKC and an award was made to cover the rent, albeit until only August 2012 on the basis that a search should be made for cheaper alternative accommodation.

This is not easy because of the family's health problems and it appears that ultimately if unable to pay their rent, they will be dependent upon RBKC providing them with accommodation as they are 'priority need' within the terms of the Housing Act 1996 because of the child within the family. (Even without the child we believe that they would be considered in 'priority need' because of their health problems). The Bureau is concerned because if she does not secure further Discretionary Housing Payments when the 6 month period has expired, she will need to move and find a property within the £250 LHA Cap.

CAB Statistics

Stats on social policy issues recorded shows that people given advice given on employment support allowance has almost doubled from 8.6% at the end of March 2011 to 15.6% in March 2012.

Poverty Watch Case Studies from Centre Projects – submitted by Dalgarno Neighbourhood Trust – June 2012

Healthworks

Across the partnerships on the Healthworks project we have seen a big impact. Some examples below;

French African Welfare Association

Report people having difficulty managing financially, they are seeing people with no understanding of the changes to benefits taking place. They report that people are actively seeking work, but having difficulties finding employment.

Asian Muslim Women's Association/Midaye Somali Development

Report women they are seeing as suffering from stress, anxiety and depression, there are concerns losing their homes as many have larger properties to accommodate children.

Iraqi Women's League

Also seeing similar issues, they report an individual case of a woman being asked to leave her hostel and not being provided alternative accommodation in London.

African Refugee Project

Report on-going poverty and homelessness for recently arrived families with a recent case of someone claiming disability allowance with severe health problems losing benefits after being re-assessed.

Comments from Local Service Users

“Several of my neighbours and my mum are pensioners who have been hit hard by the pension tax. My next door neighbour lives on his own in what was his mum’s house and already doesn’t use heating that much due to worrying about the costs. He has now found that he is even worse off as the government are taxing him nearly £150 per month on his pension due to new budgeting laws, he is finding it very hard and this has obviously left less for food too. I feel the elderly are a highly vulnerable group, they have the ‘war’ mentality where they are too proud to ask for any sort of help and feel they just have to put their heads down and get on with it, and so I find it very worrying.”

“I wanted to give up my main job but I have been kicked back due to housing benefit caps meaning I have no choice but to continue with two jobs. Also my 2 daughters have been adversely affected. Both of my girls, during their period of unemployment, were having to pay a percentage of their council rents, despite being on benefits, as their rents (council flats by the way) are beyond the amounts that housing benefit can pay for a single person. It is only now that one of them has had a baby that they are meeting the full level of housing benefit again. The other daughter who is now working for the council, is not now receiving any help at all, despite the fact that her council rent is almost £250 per month, meaning that she is left with just £250 for herself at the end of the months wage packet. My daughter finds it hard to buy food and so comes to me but how many young people and mature people for that matter do not have someone that they can go to for food. I feel that the level of hardship out there is most likely to be huge!”