

VOLUNTARY ADVICE AGENCIES FORUM

**Minutes of meeting held Thursday 3rd February 2011
Kensington Town Hall, 2.30pm – 4.30pm**

Chair: Jane Grey, Director, WENAC

1.	Welcome, Introduction and Apologies	ACTION
3.	<p>Presentation and discussion on how changes to housing benefit will be implemented within Kensington and Chelsea; RBKC Andrew Wilson (RBKC) highlighted the five changes to housing benefit, the first being the housing cap as detailed in briefing. (see link below)</p> <p>The second was that Local Housing Allowance (LHA) will be set at the 30th percentile which means that only about 3 in 10 properties for rent in an area will be affordable to people on housing benefit instead of the current 5 in 10 properties. The third change was the loss of £15 per week reward or top up. The fourth change is the abolition of the LHA rate to anyone who qualifies for 5 or more bedrooms or more, this will now be restricted to the 4 bedroom rate. The final change is the LHA calculation for carers which will mean an extra bedroom in the size criteria for a non-resident overnight carer of a disabled person.</p>	
3.1	Existing claimants will have a longer transitional period than new claimants. If claimants are already on LHA on 31 March 2011, the changes won't take effect on 1 st April 2011. The period will usually be 9 months from the anniversary of the claim that falls on or after 1 st April. Which means the anniversary of a claim in July 2011 will not be affected until April 2012.	
3.2	If there are changes during the protection period e.g. if people move or become entitled to a smaller amount of bedrooms they will lose their transitional period protection.	
3.3	Robert Armstrong (RBKC) stated that they have started to write to people to inform them of the caps and this may increase work for advice agencies. The first tranche has gone out for those who will be definitely capped, the second tranche will be going out next and this will be for people who will lose the £15 top up. He concluded that by the end of February all letters would have gone out. As the time gets nearer to the caps taking affect another batch of letters will be sent out again.	
3.4	RBKC is currently liaising with landlords, the view will be that if landlords can reduce their rents they will then agree to pay the rents directly to them rather than via the tenant.	
3.5	To date only 19 cases have been identified with rents over £1,000pw and only one with over £2,000. There are currently 18 and a half	

<p>3.6</p> <p>3.7</p>	<p>thousand claimants in the borough and is on the increase.</p> <p>Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will be providing Local Authorities with guidance on discretionary housing payments which should be out by March 2011.</p> <p>HT highlighted the impact of the changes on outer London boroughs and asked if Local Authorities were looking into the issue of discharging duties to ensure tenants' rents in outer boroughs would be reasonable? The response was that the tenancy deposit scheme will help support that but will need to be looked at in greater detail.</p> <p>HT asked how the voluntary sector can help with the scheme? The response was that once RBKC has a clearer idea, they will consult with clients then they will be able to consult with the sector.</p> <p>The question was asked if an impact assessment carried out? The response was that RBKC did carry out an impact assessment and will this on so it can be sent out with the minutes.</p> <p>Robert Armstrong also agreed to send the breakdown of the demographics of the claimants with rent over £1000pw.</p>	<p>AS</p> <p>AS</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Presentation on the new Carers Service; Carers UK Madeleine Gilkes gave a short talk on the project which is for two years and will provide advice for carers and will also find hidden carers to support as part of its remit.</p> <p>The project is currently running three advice surgeries. There is also a newsletter which is sent out to carers. It also provides an advice line.</p> <p>JG asked if the service also helps people with forms?. The response was that it can support people with forms but they do not take on advocacy work, they will look at needs on a case by case basis. The service also does not take people to advice sessions.</p> <p>Details of the service is attached.</p>	<p>AS</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Minutes of the Last Meeting held 23 September 2010 Minutes approved subject to amendment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Point 3 of Minutes amended to read Members agreed that a letter could be written to the council stating concerns over withdrawal of HASKC and housing advice service placed in-house within the council. <i>This was raised at BVOAG instead that the consultative process was not as good as it should have been. Point was just noted.</i> 	<p>AS</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Members Update Members gave an update of work and news items.</p> <p>NKLC NKLC have been given a small grant to run an employment service</p>	

	<p>which provides a new service to people in work but having problems or have been dismissed from work. The service gives advice and can also issue further support for a small number of organisations. The service will also work with employers and help them improve their employment practices.</p> <p>The Law Centre has had changes to funding which means that the Arabic speaking service will go to CABKC.</p>	
	<p>Advice Now The conference <i>'What Price No Advice'</i> will take place on 3rd March. Bookings for the conference are full and they are currently running a reserve list. A report on the conference will be sent out after the conference.</p> <p>Drop-ins are still going. The e-bulletin is going out to keep people up to date with all the changes taking place.</p>	
	<p>MRCF Are putting in a response to the legal aid cuts. The response has to be in by Monday 14th February.</p>	
	<p>HODAN Once a week Hodan are running a service for older people in partnership with Open Age and Age Concern/Sixty Plus. They provide exercise classes for older people and advice.</p>	
	<p>India Welfare Society There are more calls coming through for help to find work and help with matrimonial problems.</p>	
	<p>CABKC The judicial review was agreed and it will stay. Would like to look at out turns on debt matter starts. It is looking quite hopeful with regards to the state of the stay.</p>	
	<p>HASKC HASKC is winding down but have not stopped taking on more clients as they are taking on small cases. They are concerned about the Green paper on legal aid. Advice UK has put in a response and clients can also feed in to the response and lobby MPs.</p> <p>Malcolm Rifkind needs to be persuaded as an MP to support legal aid. MPs were lobbied in Houses of Parliament to support the Early Day Motion. Click here for information on The Love legal aid campaign.</p>	
7.	<p>AOB none</p>	
9.	<p>Dates of future meetings</p> <p>14th April 2011, 2.30pm – 4.30pm, Committee Room 1</p>	

Attendance List

Voluntary Advice Agencies Forum Meeting
Thursday 3rd February 2011, Committee Room 1, 3 &4, Kensington Town Hall

1. Attendees

	Name	Organisation
1	Charles Barber	KCAB
2	Harry Tedstone	Advice Now
3	Jane Gray	WENAC
4	Asma Begum	Advice Now
5	Barbara king	Advice Now
6	Hilary Grindrod	HASKC
7	Sean Canning	NKLC
8	Angela Fox	Age Concern
9	Suresh Gupta	India Welfare Society and Kensal Community Association
10	Vicki Laville-Davies	DNT
11	Baljit Badesha	Nucleus
12	Judith Blakeman	MRCF,
13	Angela Spence	KCSC
14	Madeline Gilkes	Carers UK
15	Beth Crossland	MRCF
16	Mohamed Farah	Hodan Somali Community
17	Victoria Mekes	NKLC
18	Veneeze Augustine	RBKC
19	Andrew Wilson	RBKC
20	Robert Armstrong	RBKC

2. Apologies - None

	Name	Organisation
	Jean French	Carers UK