



Kensington & Chelsea Advice Forum

Tuesday 10 September 2019, 10.00am – 12.30pm
 Committee Room 1, Kensington Town Hall, Hornton Street, W8 7NX

Chair: Joe Batty (JB) KCSC
 Minutes taken by: Alice Lowry (AL), KCSC

Item	Notes	Action
1	<p>Forum meeting commences – minutes of the last meeting & matters arising</p> <p>Joe (JB) welcomed everybody to the meeting. Minutes from the last meeting were reviewed – outstanding actions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alice (AL) to email Dee Solanki’s details to group • AL to seek update on Homeless Reduction Act. <p>Amendments to the previous minutes included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lorna Reid (LR) stated that the Citizens Advice Universal Credit support contract runs from April 2019 as opposed to April 2010. 	
2	<p>Workshop on dealing with Council Tax Enforcement – Alan Murdie (AM), Nucleus Legal Advice Centre</p> <p><u>Council Tax Enforcement presentation</u></p> <p>AM is the Chair of Nucleus Legal Advice Centre. He was co-founder of the Poll Tax Legal Group in 1990 and is co-author of Enforcement of Local Taxation, published by the Legal Action Group. He writes and lectures extensively on local government finance issues and has been involved in many legal test cases. He gave a presentation on Council Tax enforcement and how it has changed throughout the years.</p> <p>AM focused on organisations advising the public about debt problems and different strategies to help support service users. This included Valuation tribunals which handle council tax related appeals against issues such as a person’s liability to pay the council tax (whether they are entitled to a discount. The right to a valuation tribunal is an important right that a great deal of people are unaware of. He also pointed out the importance of Section 13a of Local Government Finance Act 1992. This allows for a billing authority to allow for a discretionary reduction in the amount of Council Tax you pay. Service users can apply for a discretionary reduction.</p> <p>The key discussion points which arose included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mark Stewart (MS) from RBKC said that some of the information was not entirely relevant to RBKC. If anybody has any questions they can contact MS by email - Mark.Stewart@rbkc.gov.uk. • The percentage of people who paid Council Tax arrears after their first warning in RBKC was high which means that engagement with individuals is crucial to avoid this happening. 	
3	<p>Ethical debt collection update – Mark Stewart (MS), Head of Enforcement and Operations, RBKC</p>	

	<p>MS gave an update on RBKC’s ethical debt collection policies. These were sent out recently to the Advice Forum mailing list and can be found on the website here. The Council have ended the use of bailiffs to collect council tax arrears in Kensington and Chelsea. These services have now been brought back in house at RBKC.</p> <p>The key discussion point which arose was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Digital Economic Enabling Act was briefly discussed – you can find this legislation attached here. 	
4	<p>Key updates from the Department for Work and Pensions – Dee Solanki, Department for Work and Pensions</p> <p>Dee Solanki (DS) introduced himself to the group and gave an overview on the support the DWP are giving to individuals applying for Universal Credit and housing benefit. Citizens Advice have been assisting the DWP by gathering evidence of Universal Credit users.</p> <p>The key discussion points and actions which arose included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AL to re-circulate escalation lists for neighboring boroughs. • AL to re-circulate Dee Solanki’s email (DEE.SOLANKI@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK) so that organisations can contact him and be forwarded on to the relevant officer. • Job Centre’s were discussed and the fact that people returning to work may not be able to commit to full time due to personal circumstances. DS made group members aware of a Jobs Fair focusing on engagement for service users. Group members were given details at the meeting. • ADKC made other group members aware of trends within service users with a disability. The main example was of • Group members have noticed a trend of UC claimants submitting unfit to work notes NOT being sent form UC50 in a timely fashion; in fact, they have had to request the form. This is potentially depriving people of additional income. DS asked that any trends should be emailed to him so that he can circulate amongst his colleagues. 	<p>AL to re-circulate escalation lists for neighboring boroughs and DS’s email address – DEE.SOLANKI@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK</p>
5	<p>Attendance and feedback from other forums</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Main VOF took place in June and focused on discussing the new Council Strategy and Community Engagement priorities for the borough. There was also a presentation from RBKC on implementing the Grenfell Recovery Plan. 	
6	<p>Any other business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephen Duckworth gave a good overview of the Charter for Public Participation response; an initiative of KCSC’s which responds to the Council’s recent Council Plan. JB and SD with the support of several volunteers finessed the document before submitting it with the backing of the Grenfell Network Group. You can find the KCSC paper here and the Councils plan here. If anybody has any feedback on the plan they can send it to JB - joe@kcsc.org.uk. • BB introduced the Law for Life programme to the group. This two-year programme is addressed to small-medium sized community organisations who work directly with people experiencing housing problems and may benefit from basic knowledge of housing law and the skills to deal with landlords and local 	

authorities. The programme will also involve housing advisors, campaigners and pro bono professionals through strategic forums that will tackle key systemic issues. For further information please contact BB at baljit@nucleus.org.uk or visit [here](#).

ATTENDANCE LIST

	Organisation
1	Action Disability Kensington and Chelsea
2	Citizens Advice
3	ClementJames Centre
4	Community Living Well
5	Crosslight Advice
6	Dadihiye
7	Department for Work and Pensions
8	Edith Durham Community
9	KCCA
10	KCSC
11	Latimer Community Arts Therapy
12	LWCCN
13	Nucleus
14	RBKC
15	RBKC Benefits
16	RBKC Housing Services
17	Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea
18	The ClementJames Centre
19	Volunteer Centre Kensington & Chelsea
20	Westpoint-Sustainable Community Development
21	World's End Neighbourhood Advice Centre

