

Hammersmith and Fulham Advice Forum Meeting Minutes
4 December 2014, 2pm – 4pm

Venue: Grove Neighbourhood Centre, London W6 0DT

Attendees:

Amarjeet Mehmi	Shelter
Andrew Wilson	RBKC Housing Benefit
Caroline Wallis	Shepherds Bush Families Project
Cathy Parry	Age UK
Colin Morris	DWP
Cllr Sue Fennimore	Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion
Dominika Michalik	H&F Mencap
Duncan Brown	LBHF (Speaker)
Hasina Begum	LBHF
Jabbar Hasan	Iraqi Community Association
Jenny Stokes	HF Law Centre
Jill Collins	DWP
Jonathan Martin	DEBK
Katherine Green	Crosslight Debt Advice
Lorraine Thompson	HF Law Centre
Mandy Goodall	Advice Station (Minutes)
Mike England	LBHF (Speaker)
Naheed Malik	OnePlace
Nia Bellot	UPG
Paul Rosenberg	LBHF (Speaker)
Phil Cooper	Hammersmith and Fulham Refugee Forum
Pippa Brown	St Mungos Broadway
Richard Goodman	HF CAB (Speaker)
Sara Taylor	HF Law Centre
Sarah Jane Taylor	London Irish Centre
Simon Messenger	Pinnacle PSG
Sonia Kotecha	EEAC (Eastern Europe Advice Centre)
Stephan Wiedmer	Crosslight Debt Advice
Sue James	HF Law Centre (Chair)
Sue Spiller	LBHF
Teresa Itabor	LBHF
Velma Baptiste	LBHF
Wesley Harcourt	AdviceUK (Speaker)

1. Minutes of the last meeting & matters arising

No comments / amendments to the minutes of the last meeting.

Terms of Reference: Amendment made to draft version to change the review period from 6 to 12 months (*The forum will review its role and its membership every 12 months and will agree priorities for the next 12 months*). These have been adopted. HFAF Terms of Reference are attached with these minutes.

2. Homelessness and Welfare Reform update

Mike England distributed an information pack detailing key council contacts within the Housing Options and Housing Services and Rent Incomes teams. The hope is that over the next few months this will lead to better access and communications for the voluntary sector to and with these services. Pack is attached with the Minutes.

LBHF will be carrying out some work on Customer Engagement, mapping the client journey as they interact with the Housing Options service. Mike would want to capture how well council staff deal with clients and how clients perceive the service. Mike is keen to engage advice organisations in this process and would like to run a workshop as part of this project.

Please email Teresa Itabor Teresa.Itabor@lbhf.gov.uk in the Housing Options team if you wish to be involved. Teresa will send out the workshop date and details in the next few days.

Mike also described the current position on homelessness and welfare reform and the difficulty in securing temporary accommodation within the borough. An increasing proportion of people are being housed outside of the borough: this is mainly due to market buoyancy, housing benefit restrictions and the benefit cap. Going forward the hope is to provide more permanent and affordable housing in the borough.

Universal Credit will be arriving soon and Mike would like to involve the forum in preparations for this and in the implementation of a support framework.

New Housing Strategy for Hammersmith & Fulham is being developed. The consultation period will begin in the next few days and Mike encouraged forum members to respond.

Questions asked about:

- Policy for housing people - Primary aim is to place people in the borough.
- Mapping the journey for clients who have been moved out of the borough – LBHF will be including people who have been moved out of the borough.
- Duty of care – Could any concerns be emailed to Mike mike.england@lbhf.gov.uk
- Allocations policy – this will be reviewed, probably in the spring.

3. Housing Benefit update

Paul Rosenberg explained that his department has been concentrating on clearing outstanding work since the beginning of November. Outstanding pieces of work have fallen from 17k to 10k (40% decrease) in one month. In the course of this work they have uncovered some issues that were previously hidden and they are working on reports from HMRC showing income mismatch. They are taking on extra staff now to tackle this and also to keep on top of new work. It takes an average of 26 days to process a change of circumstance and 22 days to process a new claim. These timings have increased due to the focus on clearing the backlog. It is hoped that this will improve by April 2015.

Paul's presentation is attached with the Minutes with all contact details. I have reproduced below the main contact details for assistance with housing benefit issues:

- Gabriel.ziregbe@lbhf.gov.uk 020 8210 8745 - Urgent single claim enquiries
- Hasina.begum@lbhf.gov.uk 020 8753 1295 - Multiple / run of the mill enquiries
- Paul.rosenberg@lbhf.gov.uk 020 8753 1525 - Areas of concern

Please note these numbers are for the use of advice organisations only. They are not for public use.

4. Rental Income and Resident Support update

Duncan Brown explained that the purpose of the H&F Rent and Income team is to maximise rental income and sustain council tenancies. There is an emphasis on supporting residents and early intervention. Better performance on collecting money generally means fewer evictions.

The department is working to improve its service:

- Each resident has a dedicated housing officer
- Contact with advice organisation to find better ways to work together
- Housing officers have visited tenants most likely to struggle with rent over Christmas to offer support
- Menu of Support given to tenants
- Contact details of all rent officers available for advice organisations

CLlr Sue Fennimore is working with the Rent and Income team to tackle illegal subletting and to identify people who are withholding rent (won't pay, not can't pay).

Some statistics:

- 16% of all tenancies in LBHF are council tenancies
- £70 million collected each year in rental income
- **Serving a Notice of Seeking Possession** (correction) triggered on £250, or more than four weeks rent in arrears
- In the last year there have been approximately 300 possession hearings with 26 evictions

5. Advice Station – Training update

Sixteen surveys have been completed. [Mandy Goodall will produce a training programme for 2015 with training in the following subjects:](#)

- Advice skills
- Welfare benefits
- Debt
- Housing
- Employment
- Immigration
- Money Management
- Mental Health Awareness
- Measuring impact

There was also great interest in thematic events – get-togethers to share best practice and issues on specific subject areas. [Mandy Goodall will gather names for each area – Welfare Benefits, Debt, Housing – in Jan 2015.](#)

6. Training and Development Consultancy Offer – AdviceUK

Wesley Harcourt talked about AdviceUK and the services that they offer.

AdviceUK offer a range of chargeable advice courses. We will be buying in their Advice Skills course to deliver free of charge to Advice Forum members. A list of all chargeable courses is attached with the Minutes.

AdviceUK are currently funded by London Councils to provide capacity building and infrastructure support to London's advice sector.

Please visit www.adviceuk.org.uk/london/ for full details. A list of all courses offered under this programme is attached with the Minutes.

AdviceUK also send out a regular Funding Newsletter ([Mandy will provide Wesley with your email addresses to add to the distribution list](#)) and have an annual conference – The London Advice Conference. This year the conference will be on Monday 9 February 2015. The conference is **FREE**.

7. H&F CAB – new delivery model

Richard Goodman presented the new CAB service delivery model. The new service started on 1 December

2014. The CAB will have 20 appointments available each day, with scope for emergencies. Details of the new service are attached with the Minutes.

8. Legal update

Sue James gave a legal update. This is reproduced below:

- New ground for Possession from 20 October 2014.
- There has been a new mandatory ground for possession for anti social behaviour (s94 ASBCPA 2014 for local authority tenants) and (s97 ASBCPA for assured tenancies) The mandatory ground is subject to a human rights, disability discrimination, or public law defence, and subject to the landlord's compliance with the notice and any review requirements, the court must only award possession where one of the 5 conditions are satisfied.
- There is a new injunction power – The new civil injunction will be in force from January 2015.
- Immigration Act 2014 – Received Royal Assent on 14 May 2014 – provisions come into force on 1/12/14 in: Birmingham, Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall and Wolverhampton. The Act prohibits persons with no leave to be in the UK from entering into residential tenancy agreements.

9. Round table update and discussion

No time for this. We had a networking session straight after the meeting instead.

10. AOB

Colin Morris received a reply from the PIP policy team on the query regarding recording an assessment interview. Colin is happy to discuss this with anyone. The reply is reproduced below:

Claimants and companions are entitled to take notes for their own purposes. The claimant or companion may keep the notes and does not have to provide a copy to the health professional (HP), although the HP may record that notes were taken. The notes are for the claimant or companion's own purposes and are not an official record of the process. In addition, the claimant may request a copy of the assessment report from DWP, once it's been submitted by the HP/Provider.

However where claimants do still feel an audio recording would be helpful, they may record the consultation using their own equipment, subject to a few conditions. These conditions are:

- The claimant must inform the provider in advance that they wish to record their consultation.
- The claimant must be able to provide a complete and accurate copy of the recording to the HP at the end of the consultation in CD or cassette format.
- The claimant must sign a form in which they agree that they will provide a copy of the recording and not use the recording for unlawful purposes.

The requirement is that claimants must be able to provide a copy of the recording at the end of a consultation in such a way as to ensure that the recording has not been tampered with to ensure it is a reliable and accurate record of the assessment. For this reason certain devices which are capable of real-time editing or live-streaming are not approved. These include but are not limited to PCs and laptops, tablets, smart phones, MP3 players or devices which cannot provide a media copy that can be easily verified during the consultation.

11. Dates of next meetings

We have dates and a venue for the next three meetings. LBHF are providing the venue free of charge.

21 January (Wednesday)	Small Hall, Hammersmith Town Hall
26 March (Thursday)	Small Hall, Hammersmith Town Hall
20 May (Wednesday)	Small Hall, Hammersmith Town Hall

All meetings will be from 2pm to 4pm.