

**Hosted by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council
Welfare Rights Unit and Neath Port Talbot Communities First**

Friday 6th December 2013
Gwyn Hall, Orchard St, Neath SA11 1DU

AGENDA

- 9.30 **Registration and refreshments**
- 10.00 **Welcome:** Cllr Ali Thomas, Leader Neath Port Talbot CBC
- 10.10 **NAWRA speaker:** Gareth Morgan, Ferret Information Systems
'Under ATOS Wood – Seasonal reflections on welfare reform from the land of Dylan Thomas!'
- 10.25 **Guest speaker:** Fran Heathcote, DWP Group President PCS
'The role of the trade union movement in defending the welfare state and the social security system'
- 10.55 **Guest speaker:** Peter Maddox, District Tribunal Judge
- 11.20 **Questions for speakers, Information Exchange and NAWRA updates**
- 11.45 **Break**
- 12.00 **Workshops** session one (see 'workshop options' on following pages)
- 1.00 **Lunch**
Lunch will be provided – we will ask for a small contribution on the day
- 2.00 **Workshops** session two (see 'workshop options' on following pages)
- 3.00 **Feedback from workshops**
- 3.05 **Guest speaker:** Peter Hain, MP for Neath
'Welfare Reform – Callous or Just Tough?'
- 3.35 **NAWRA speaker:** Patrick Hill, Manchester MIND
'Reflections on 30 years in welfare rights'
- 3.55 **Closing remarks**
- 4.00 **Close**

WORKSHOP OPTIONS

The workshops are one hour long and take place at noon and at 2pm. Please choose two from the following five options.

Please note: workshops 1, 2 and 3 will run in both sessions but workshops 4 and 5 will run only once.

1. Sanctions Busting! (session one and session two)

Martin Williams (CPAG) and Daphne Hall (Bristol Welfare Rights Service and NAWRA Committee)

With Jobcentres ramping up what is required of claimants by way of jobsearch and the “Poundland case” now decided by the Supreme Court this workshop will look at challenging decisions to sanction claimants for:

- Failure to participate in the work programme (ESA and JSA claimants)
- Failure to actively seek work or be available for work (JSA claimants)
- Failure to attend the Jobcentre to sign etc. (JSA claimants)

The workshop will consider a structured checklist approach to challenging these decisions and present some examples of sanction cases collected by NAWRA as case studies in how challenges can be made.

Martin is a welfare rights worker at CPAG. He runs benefit advice sessions at a food bank in the east end of London. He is widely experienced in representing claimants at both levels within the tribunal system having worked at LASA, in a local authority and for an independent advice centre. Martin is an author of CPAG's *‘Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook’* and *‘Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit: the Legislation’*.

Daphne is a part-time welfare rights adviser at Bristol City Council and a freelancer trainer and writer on welfare rights

2. PIP: lessons from the pilot areas (session one and session two)

Julie Henry and Kathryn Wright (Durham County Council Welfare Rights)

A chance to catch up on what’s been happening in the turbulent world of PIP. From the lessons learnt from PIP Pathfinder area, we will be looking at examples of good and bad practice, issues with claiming, delays, special rules and the medical process. We will also be discussing mandatory reconsiderations and appeals.

Julie has worked in welfare rights for most of her career. She has been involved in training other staff for many years including jointly developing and tutoring on Teesside University's Social Security: Policy and Practice qualification. Julie is currently a Principal Welfare Rights Officer with Durham County Council, managing a range of core and commissioned activities, including casework services, tribunal work and dedicated welfare rights provision within other services.

Kathryn has worked at Durham County Council since 2004 initially working on an innovative project developing online and video conferencing welfare rights advice. She now specialises in benefits for disabled children delivering a wide range of training and workshops both to families and professionals. Kathryn has a background in performing arts and has appeared in the seminal British soap *Brookside* and the student drama *Hollyoaks*.

3. Welfare benefits – Alleged fraud – a practical workshop for advisors (session one and session two)

Andy Malik (Luton Law Centre)

Andy is a Welfare Benefits Specialist at Luton Law Centre having been in the welfare rights industry for over 20 years. He has extensive experience of appeal representation in complex welfare benefits matters, both at the First and the Upper Tier Tribunal and is LSC Peer Reviewer for welfare benefits. Andy also has experience of acting in both criminal and civil cases in welfare benefit fraud matters and the vital overlap between these two areas will inform this workshop.

4. Benefit Advice Close to Home – the Communities First Experience (session one only)

Dean Cawsey (Cluster Manager Western Valleys Communities First) and Neath Port Talbot's Communities First Benefits Advisers (Allison Brennan, Becky Founds, Deborah John and Mark Probert)

Communities First is a Welsh Government Programme operating in the areas that are highest on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). Neath Port Talbot has quite a number of these areas. The Welfare Rights Unit has worked closely with the Communities First partnerships and later the clusters since 2002. Find out how we have operated on a neighbourhood basis to promote take up of benefits in these areas and more recently to mitigate the impacts of welfare reform.

5. NAWRA Development (session two only)

Alan Markey (Citizens Advice and Chair of NAWRA) and other NAWRA Committee members

The National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers was established in 1992 and seeks to represent organisations and individuals across a wide range of advice, support and legal services. Our twin aims are to challenge, influence and improve policy and legislation, as well as identifying and sharing good practice amongst our members. Are we able to do this effectively? Is NAWRA able to effectively challenge and influence? Are we currently 'fit for purpose?'

This session will give us an opportunity to look at where NAWRA is now and where you, our members want us to go. Is there a role for NAWRA becoming a professional body for the sector with the ability to offer continuing professional development opportunities? Should we take more of a campaigning role and how might this work? What does it mean to be a NAWRA member? Can we support organisations and individuals equally?

This workshop follows on from a similar one in Edinburgh in September and continues the conversation we want to have with all members with a view to producing some proposals for our AGM in March 2014. Have a think about some of these issues before attending the session as your views are essential.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Fran Heathcote

Fran Heathcote was elected group president of Department of Work and Pensions group in 2012, prior to that she was the elected DWP Organiser for 7 years. Fran lives in Hexham but is based in Leeds and is a trade union activist with a background in campaigning.

Peter Maddox

Peter Maddox was appointed as a salaried District Tribunal Judge in January 2012. He is based in Cardiff. Before this he sat as a fee paid judge for nine years and was HM Coroner for Bridgend and the Glamorgan Valleys and Powys for four years.

Peter Hain

Peter Hain has been the Member of Parliament for Neath since the 1991 by-election. He served in Government for twelve years holding various positions including Secretary of State for Wales and Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions. During his time at the DWP he introduced legislation to get single parents back into employment and a radical new pension settlement to increase the number of people saving for the future. As MP for Neath he has fought and campaigned against the current government changes to the welfare system representing constituents harshly affected by them.

NAWRA SPEAKERS

Gareth Morgan

Gareth is founder and Managing Director of Ferret Information Systems which has for 30 years specialised in information systems in welfare benefits and similar areas. He is focused on affordability and sustainability assessment, in particular the effects of future changes to the benefits system.

He also chairs Dosh, a not for profit company carrying out financial advocacy for people with a learning disability and Welfare Rights Advisers Cymru (WRAC). Gareth is also vice chair of HUSITA, the global association for IT in human services

Patrick Hill

Patrick Hill has been in welfare rights since 1984. Living and working at the centre of what used to be the Lancashire coal field, now sadly demised, he began working as a volunteer in a TUC centre for the unemployed and cut his welfare rights teeth advising miners involved in the strike of '84. He continued to work in the voluntary sector for a further 27 years whilst holding down his full time job as a local authority Welfare Rights Officer. Patrick has had much success at appeals, attending the first of his many appearances at oral hearings before Commissioners as early as 1987. The issues at the Commissioners have included both UK and European points of law. He presently works for Manchester MIND and is attached to an NHS Assertive Outreach Team; but is to start a new job in mid-December.

TRANSPORT AND MAPS

A map of Neath showing the meeting venue, station and our chosen pub and hotel.

<http://g.co/maps/t4xrg>

All are within a few minutes walk of each other.

ACCOMMODATION

The BlueBell Hotel
The Parade
Neath SA11 1RA

01639 644000

info@thebluebellhotel.co.uk

www.thebluebellneath.co.uk

When you contact them, mention that you are attending a conference organised by Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council and you will receive a reduction on the usual rate. For more details on this, please contact Karen George in the Welfare Rights Unit 01639 685225 or k.george@npt.gov.uk

SOCIAL EVENTS

- From about 6pm onwards on **Thursday 5th December**, members of the NPT Welfare Rights Unit will be around to meet up with you in the David Protheroe pub at 7 Windsor Road, Neath SA11 1LS. It is in a very convenient situation being almost immediately opposite the railway station. The David Protheroe is a Wetherspoon's, so don't forget that Thursday night is curry night!
- As this is the December meeting, the NAWRA Christmas party will follow the meeting on **Friday 6th December!** If you have not already booked please contact Becky Founds in NPT Welfare Rights Unit: r.founds2@npt.gov.uk

If you have any queries about the meeting please contact

Kelly Smith, NAWRA Secretary nawra@cpag.org.uk

www.nawra.org.uk