



Friday 9 September 2022

The Vassall Centre, Gill Ave, Bristol BS16 2QQ

Hosted by the Bristol Advice Network

AGENDA

9.30 **Registration and refreshments** (sponsored by [Advice Pro](#))

10.00 **Introductions**

10.05 **Welcome:** Kerry McCarthy, MP for Bristol East

10.15 **Guest speaker:** Mark E Thomas, *We are the 99%*
Malice in Plunderland - The risks to the UK and how NAWRA members can help

The UK has seen an unprecedented (since the 1820s) phenomenon after the global financial crisis: mass impoverishment. Most people are poorer today in real terms than they were in 2008. And the problem is set to get worse unless we see a radical shift in government policy. This session will include an introduction to the facts, and allow time for discussion of two key questions:

1. Is it too late to change track?
2. What role can NAWRA members play in supporting the change?

Mark E Thomas is the author of [99%](#). He has spent most of his career in business; for many years he ran the Strategy practice at PA Consulting Group. During this time, he began to explore whether the tools and techniques of business strategy could be applied to understanding the health and stability of countries. This research led him to the uncomfortable conclusion that many developed countries – including the US and the UK – are unwittingly pursuing economic policies which will result in the unwinding of 20th century civilisation before we reach the year 2050. Hearteningly, he also concluded that this fate is entirely avoidable.

11.15 **Break** (refreshments sponsored by [Advice Pro](#))

11.30 **Workshops:** session one (see 'workshop options' on following page)

12.30 **Lunch** (not provided, but there is a cafe at the Vassall Centre and plenty of shops, eateries and pubs in the immediate vicinity)

1.45 **Guest speaker:** Professor Sharon Collard, University of Bristol
Facing barriers - exploring the relationship between disability and financial wellbeing in the UK

Professor Sharon Collard is Research Director at the University of Bristol's [Personal Finance Research Centre](#). Her research explores the intersections between vulnerability and personal finance. The Centre's work includes [tracking the financial impact of COVID-19 on UK households](#), addressing the 'poverty premium' faced by low-income households; and a programme of [gambling harms research](#) including studies on the links between gambling and problem debt and the family dynamics of harmful gambling. Sharon is also Co-Director of the new Bristol Hub for Gambling Harms Research.

2.30 **Workshops:** session two (see 'workshop options' on following page)

3.30 **Information exchange/workshop feedback/NAWRA updates**

4.00 **Close**

Refreshments sponsored by



WORKSHOP OPTIONS:

Workshops A, B and C will run in both the morning and afternoon (11.30am and 2.30pm) whereas workshop D will run in the morning only (11.30am) and workshop E in the afternoon only (2.30pm).

When you arrive at the conference you will be asked to choose one workshop for the morning session and one for the afternoon.

If you'd like to run a workshop at a future NAWRA meeting, please contact kelly@nawra.org.uk

A. Using welfare rights to prevent homelessness

Tom Bidmead, Bristol Welfare Rights and Money Advice Service

Bristol City Council funds 4 welfare rights workers in its Welfare Rights and Money Advice Service using the Homelessness Prevention Grant. In this session we will look at some of the common welfare benefit problems we find in possession cases, how these can be resolved as well as sharing some of the methods and tactics we have found effective in preventing evictions in Bristol.

Workshop level: Intermediate/Strategic

B. Benefit sanctions: a presumption of guilt

Caroline Selman, Public Law Project

Despite the current cost of living crisis and extensive evidence of their harm, DWP is ramping up the use of benefit sanctions. DWP's most recent [data](#) showed that Universal Credit sanction numbers reached a new peak of 59,000 in March 2022, the highest number since the current data set began and 160% larger than it was at its previous pre-pandemic peak in July 2019.

What is needed is complete reform of the system from one that is punitive and ineffectual to one based on support and respect. However in the meantime, while sanctions continue to be imposed, it is vital that sanctioned claimants have access to meaningful and effective routes of challenge. Evidence shows that isn't currently the case.

Caroline Selman is a researcher at Public Law Project and author of their report [Benefit Sanctions a Presumption of Guilt](#). The report sets out the findings from her research looking at why many claimants do not challenge benefit sanction decisions and recommendations for how the system could be improved.

Workshop level: Intermediate/Theoretical

C. Mixed age couples overview

Pamela Carysforth, Training & Development Manager from UCNotes (Housing Systems)

Pamela has over 20 years' experience in welfare rights and will be joining us to put you through your paces with an interactive training quiz. The Mixed Age Couples rules affect many couples, especially in the years running up to retirement, and getting the right advice is of paramount importance to avoid unnecessary income losses.

In this session Pamela will run through a training quiz, to highlight the rules and raise awareness of some of the loopholes and mechanisms to maximise entitlement and avoid losses where possible. This is a complex area, so don't expect to get all the answers right – but rest assured you are more likely to remember things you get wrong and Pamela will be there to give insight and explanations along the way! Unfortunately no prizes for winning the quiz, it's a learning tool – not a competition.

Workshop level: Intermediate/Practical

D. Tool up: getting the most from rightsnet's web tools and online forums

Daphne Hall, rightsnet

With so much working from home it is easy to feel isolated and lacking the support that you need. But help is there! Come and find out how easy it is to get support from your nationwide welfare rights family via the rightsnet discussion forum who will provide not

just answers to all your queries but some humour too! And usually within a matter of hours, sometimes even minutes.

In addition, we will explore using the rightsnet webtools - [universalcreditinfo](#), [pipinfo](#), and [wcainfo](#) - which can be accessed from any computer or mobile device, and can help you find that bit of legislation or guidance that you need in a matter of minutes.

This will be an interactive workshop so bring your problems and let's see if the webtools can help you find answers!!

Workshop level: Beginner-Intermediate/Practical

E. Perspectives of delivering Household Support Grant and local welfare schemes

Corin Hammersley, Greenwich Welfare Rights

Corin Hammersley, from the Royal Borough of Greenwich, manages the Welfare Rights Service and the council's Emergency Support Scheme. She shares her perspective on the challenges and opportunities posed by delivering the Household Support Grant, and the other welfare/discretionary grants delivered by local authorities in the last few years, including the use of a cash first approach for welfare provision. The session will also discuss how COVID led to an improvement in the joint working between the discretionary support and welfare rights provision in the borough.

NAWRA workshop levels:

Introductory	Assumes little or no prior knowledge of the topic or a refresher session
Intermediate	Assumes a reasonable working knowledge of welfare benefits work or some knowledge of the specific topic under discussion
Advanced	Assumes a good working knowledge of welfare benefits work or detailed knowledge of the topic under discussion

Practical	Focusing on developing good practice or offering some 'hints and tips'
Theoretical	Focusing on policy debates or discussion of emerging theory
Strategic	Focusing on planning and put practical knowledge, and/or theory in to practice

LOCATION AND TRANSPORT

The conference will take place at The Vassall Centre, Gill Ave, Bristol BS16 2QQ. It is a very accessible building and full details can be found at on the [Accessible website](#).

By public transport: The nearest mainline railway station is Bristol Temple Meads - the Vassall Centre is about 5 miles by cab. Alternatively, you can take the 48, 48A or 49 bus from Old Market stop M3 (about a 14 minute walk from Temple Meads) or you can get a train from Temple Meads to Stapleton Road and then pick up the 48, 48A or 49 bus from there (any of these journeys are about 45 minutes including all walking according to Google maps).

To search the bus routes go to the [First Bus journey planner](#) and search for the route from Temple Meads station to Gill Avenue BS16 2QQ.

By car: The Vassall Centre is just 2.5 miles from junction 1 of the M32 and there is a car park.

ACCOMMODATION

For easy access to both the social evening and Old Market for a bus the next day, the best located hotel is Premier Inn Bristol City Centre (Finzels Reach). Also convenient are Ibis Bristol Temple Meads or Travelodge Bristol Central Mitchell Lane.

SOCIAL EVENING

NAWRA members will be meeting up for food and drinks from 7pm on the evening before the conference at the [Royal Navy Volunteer](#), 17-18 King Street, Bristol BS1 4EF.

In the usual spirit of NAWRA meetings we will be retiring to a pub for a post-meeting drink or two.

The meeting is free to attend but open to NAWRA members only. [Find out more about joining](#).

If you have any queries about the meeting please contact
Kelly Smith, NAWRA secretary
kelly@nawra.org.uk

www.nawra.org.uk