



January 2009

Supporting statements for Welfare Rights Unit

In Support of Retaining the Welfare Rights Unit.

I am a social worker based at the Royal Free Hospital. I work with Older Adults needing the assistance of Social Services for a safe discharge from hospital. I am extremely concerned about the proposal to end the service provided by the Welfare Rights Unit. It would be great if this service was provided by the DWPS itself but it is extremely naïve to think they would ever pick up the shortfall. Similarly the CAB has only one visiting officer for the entire borough and so it is clear it is not possible for this person to take on the work which will be left if our colleagues are made redundant.

I worked for a different Local Authority when they disbanded their Welfare Rights Unit. As a result the casework for social workers became very much more complex as we had to have long drawn out arguments with providers of advice services about the needs of our service users before any help was given. Often help was not forthcoming which left service users and social workers battling to get basic benefits sorted out. It created unnecessary backlogs on social worker caseloads and created unnecessary delays in assessing or reassessing new referrals to our service.

It was therefore refreshing to work for a Local Authority which still had this resource. Knowing advice in this complex field of work is available and competent eases the stress in life and work for all parties.

Let's be clear, social workers are duty bound to make sure financial issues regarding service users are resolved. If we cannot resolve them because there is no one competent enough to take on the referral then the allocated social worker remains with that case. If new referrals to social services cannot be assessed because of the delays caused by an inability to resolve financial questions this will impact on our performance indicators which in turn affects the budget for Social Services. More importantly our service users will be more exposed to risk as they do not have the money necessary to live on or they will not be assessed in a timely manner.

Finally there is also the important question of training. The Welfare Rights Unit provides training on Welfare Rights to in-house staff. This is invaluable. It means our staff are at least competent to know when a person's benefits do not look right and to recognise when someone needs further advice and what the advice should be around. Not all of the staff working for Barnet have a good overview of the Benefits system. Those who have, will need to go on refresher courses as the system is constantly changing. Presumably if the team is disbanded we will have to pay the costs for this training to be commissioned?

I fail to see how the disbanding of this service can be cost effective.
Helen Davies

Hi John

I am concerned to hear about the difficulties that the Welfare Rights Unit are facing and wanted to add my support to any work that you are doing to help safeguard the continuation of this service.

My team has relied heavily on the knowledge and expertise of Kieran Lynch, Fran Glassman and their colleagues throughout our existence since 2003. The Housing Support Team contributes to Barnet's corporate objective of Supporting the vulnerable within the community by helping vulnerable Homeless people to apply for welfare benefits that they may be entitled to. The welfare benefit system, as you know, is a labyrinth of legislation and procedures, a labyrinth which my Housing Support Officers have at times needed the expertise of the Welfare Rights Unit to negotiate when advising members of the public. We also have cause to refer our more complex appeal and tribunal cases to the Welfare Rights service and have been secure in the knowledge that having this kind of a service within the local authority would ensure that our clients do not have to wait months before being seen by local Citizens Advice Bureaux. In addition, the work of the Welfare Rights Unit supports the current drive to help people off benefits and back into employment by giving authoritative advice on how much better off clients returning to work could be.

I sincerely hope that the local authority will have the foresight to retain the services of the welfare rights unit as in this time of economic recession and job insecurity, I believe that there will be an even greater call for their service.

Thank you

Regards

Anjana Chakraborty
Housing Support Team Leader

I fully support that the Welfare Right Unit remains part of LBB

MARTINE LEVAUDEL
Children's Occupational Therapist, Principal Practitioner
Complex Needs Division, Children's Services.

Dear John,

The PSI team are circulating a petition stating what an important service the unit provides. I wanted to give a statement on behalf of service users that the unit has earned a reputation for not only amassing knowledge of case law interpretation of legislation but also for being sensitive to individual communication needs. I have a number of former clients who would testify to the skills employed by the team including use of interpreters and support for those with poor literacy skills. As such the unit has been a complement to our service. We do not have their knowledge and expertise and wonder why a recommendation has been made to cut this service without consulting ourselves or service users. We are not convinced that CAB or DABB (itself dependent on Council funding) can fill the gap.

Regards,

Peter Wright

Further to the email below am just letting you know that the Welfare Rights unit have been very helpful and it will be a great loss not to have them around. As an example, I had reviewed a service user who could not tolerate movement as it caused her great pain due to her medical condition. The hospitals were adamant that they could not provide separate hospital transport for her so that she would not have to be wheeled around in the hospital transport buses collecting other patients. With the help of Kieran Lynch and his team we were able to access documents which stated otherwise than what the hospitals were saying. Hence for this woman we were able to get her hospital transport which did not collect anyone else enroute to the hospital. I would not have been able to get this without the support of the welfare rights team.

They have also been very useful in maximising the incomes of service users.

Minal Shah
Reviewing Officer
Physical and Sensory Impairment Team

The extra burden the loss of this team will put on Social Work staff is immense- they are invaluable in their knowledge, advice, representation etc- and in maximising client income and advising SW staff on duty to provide service etc -,for example, to those from outside the EU - they contribute to the income of the borough and protection of resources as well. Their breadth of knowledge cannot be over stated nor can it be replaced. An unacceptable attack on staff and service users.

Laura Kirwan

Yes we would like the welfare rights unit to be kept open.

Chanu Unadkat
Resource Officer
Older Adults Care Group

Dear John

Although our team does not have direct access to the unit – I have had assistance from them in the 3 years I have been at BH. Given the current economic situation it seems even more shortsighted to lose this valuable service. From my 20 years experience in the housing sector I have found that the voluntary sector (CAB etc) are limited in their ability to respond to welfare/benefit queries.

Liz
Liz James
Leasehold Housing Officer
Home Ownership Section
Barnet House

John,

I'm sure you will appreciate that we in HR can't comment on the rights and wrongs of this as a budget cut issue. However, myself and my team do make use of this service in our day to day work to assist staff who are having difficulties, so not only is it an important resource for Barnet's vulnerable residents but also for it's employees.

Bernice Groom
HR Operations Manager | HR Shared Service

Our Service regularly refers parents of children with disabilities and special educational needs to this fabulous team, who offer excellent support and advice on benefits which simply is not available from anywhere else. The parents and children who we support would be even more vulnerable than they already are without the Welfare rights Team.

Kate
Caseworker,
Children's Service

Parent

Ring
Partnership

Hi John,

I am writing to express our staff teams concern at the news that the Welfare Rights Unit is proposed to close in the councils future plans. This service very popular and the best used at our monthly drop in service for parents in the Children's Centre. As a service we use the team to support our work with families and their expertise has been invaluable. We would be very concerned should this service go as it would affect our ability to support families holistically in line with the governments Children Centre Agenda.

Many Thanks
Debbie Dearman
Underhill Children's Centre Manager, Children's Service

I oppose the deletion of the welfare rights unit. It is a vital service for vulnerable Barnet residents.

Chris.Farrell

I think if this service goes it will be very sad. I work in the R&M team and we are always referring people to the service and are instructed to try and maximise peoples benefits so that they can pay for their services. It is a very busy office and will be sadly missed by all.

Diana Lucas

Review & Monitoring Officer

Older Adults

I have always found the Welfare Rights Unit very knowledgeable and helpful for those people who are most vulnerable and needy in our society. We hear all the time about the level of benefits that are unclaimed by those entitled to them and the Welfare Rights Unit helps to redress this.

It would be a terrible blow to lose these valuable resource when so many vulnerable people are assisted by the Unit.

Bernie Vieira

Review & Monitoring Officer

Older Adults Services

Hi John,

I am writing on behalf of the Learning Disability Team to ensure that the good work undertaken by the Welfare Rights Department, and its successful outcomes, is acknowledged within any decision around it's future.

The Welfare Rights Dept has provided a consistent and thorough service to a great number of our clients, in a manner that has both recognised and responded to their learning disability, either through extended interviews, more appointments, simplified information and gentle reminders.

This assistance has greatly benefited our clients both financially and psychologically. This assistance has included information and guidance with the implications for the de-commissioned from residential care to supported living, guidance and practical completion of appeals for Disability Living Allowance awards, practical assistance with Housing Benefit issues and appeals, etc.

For our service users, the increase in financial entitlement has led to an increased involvement in community activities and presence, within both a recreational sense and general standard of living.

A direct benefit of their involvement has been the increased access to the Independent Living Fund, based upon successful appeals for the higher rate of DLA care component. This has provided the service user with an additional support, which would otherwise have been funded by LBB.

In the proposal to de-commission the Welfare Rights Dept, it should be acknowledged that the Citizens Advice Bureaux (as an alternative) is not necessarily best placed to provide the specific support and guidance required for vulnerable people with a learning disability. They are often very difficult to access and are not always consistent. It requires a very tenacious individual to ensure a service from them!

It should also be acknowledged that Social Workers are not in possession of the most up to date information about benefits, and therefore being able to make direct contact with the WRD has greatly assisted them in performing their role and identifying where a person is not maximising their benefit entitlement. This is not a service that can be replicated with CAB.

I would ask that funding for this very much used and successful service is continued.

Regards,
John Binding
Social Work Team Manager
Barnet Learning Disability Service

The welfare rights unit has provided excellent service

Pat Braine
Principal Practitioner
Referral and Assessment Team
Social Care Division
Children's Service

Our Service regularly refers parents of children with disabilities and special educational needs to this fabulous team, who offer excellent support and advice on benefits which simply is not available from anywhere else. The parents and children who we support would be even more vulnerable than they already are without the Welfare rights Team.

Kate Ring
Caseworker, Parent Partnership
Children's Service

It can't be easy to be facing such uncertainty and changes good luck to you all and all the best for your futures.

I hope the people you provide the service to don't end up suffering in the long run.

Anneth Davy
MI Coordinator
Children's Service, Youth & Connexions Service Team

I would like to express my deep concern for the proposed motion to delete the Welfare Rights Team. In the twelve years I have worked for this authority in the various positions I have held within housing and homelessness, I have always felt that this team has provided the advice and support to those most in need of our services. People who are vulnerable and who are less able to cope are clearly in need of this specific type of advice - especially at the moment. I feel that this is a grave mistake, and if it goes ahead, the implications of this move will be felt across the council and ultimately will significantly reduce our level of service to those who need it most.

Heidi Stone

Complaints & Systems Improvement Manager, Barnet Homeseekers

I am writing in support of maintaining the Welfare Rights Unit. Supporting people's rights and welfare is a very important part of a democracy and should be maintained by a council that claims to support the vulnerable.

Paul

Advisory Teacher for Physical and Medical Difficulties - Children's Service, Specialist Team

Prestidge

The Welfare Rights Team do a fantastic job helping the needy and vulnerable in Barnet. Not only does the idea of disbanding this service seem to fly in the face of Barnet's own Corporate priority of 'Supporting the Vulnerable' but to go ahead with this in the current economic climate would be seen as a dereliction of duty towards Barnet residents.

Regards,
Hari Stephens
Customer Services Officer

Working in Safeguarding and Social Care, I can honestly say that I do not know how I could have managed the work that I do without the help and support of the Welfare Rights Unit. I have been on benefits training, but to be honest, the system is so complex that I don't have the time to dedicate to work it all out or keep up with the massive number of changes taking place. I email the Welfare Rights Team on a regular basis asking for advice and to do benefits checks to see whether the parents I am working with are in receipt of the correct benefits. They have emailed me back on many an occasion advising me as to errors in the benefits and who to contact to get it amended. They have been particularly valuable in cases where there has been an asylum seeker in the family (eg unaccompanied minor) and what the carer has the right to claim, and also around disability benefits. The team also run an outreach service at children's centres, and this has saved me a lot of work, as I can send my families there to have support around benefits. This means that I then have more time to do the job that I am being employed to do and focus on the needs of the children. During the "credit crunch" I can only imagine that the number of referrals to Safeguarding and Social Care will increase, and that a significant number of these families will have financial difficulties. If we do not have the Welfare Rights Team, an increasing amount

of my time will be spent trying to work out their benefits and help them apply for the correct ones, meaning that I will have less time to do the other work needed.

I would ask the council to reconsider their decision as the Welfare Rights Unit has been a valued resource by myself and my colleagues. I have only heard people speak highly of the advisers and the advice they give (which is always written in plain English and not benefits jargon).

Regards,
Philippa Selby
Student Social Worker
Hospital Social Work Team
Barnet Children's Service

Welfare Rights Unit

This is a fantastic service, I had help from this unit a few years ago for which I was very grateful, it would be a great loss to members if this service could no longer be provided.

Susie **Drabwell**
Support Officer, Specialist Team, Primary & Secondary Project Team,
Children's Service

I would like to register that I support Unison in fighting to keep the Welfare Rights and Sheltered Housing Schemes operational in Barnet and that proposed cutbacks in funding from Barnet should NOT take place

Sandra Greenyer
Children's Centre Development Co-ordinator
Hampden Way
Barnet Children's Service

Please except our support for the above service from the Family Support Outreach workers, regards

Mieke Ali
Senior Family Support Outreach Worker
Social Care Division Children's Service

Hi John, I was shocked to see the proposed deletion of this service. This is an essential service and I have used them on numerous occasions, especially since the formulation of the team im in re the Primary Care Mental Health Team. As you may know we are the first point of contact for service users/carers and everyone else. Therefore, this service forms part of our support and enablement in which others are given the information or the tools to sort out there issues, hence this service provides a possible hidden pathway that may not be obvious for those who make the decisions on this service, as this maybe just a telephone call from a distressed client worried abot their finaces, which may be just for information and may not be recorded

as an intervention. They have also been of extreme help to me and my colleagues regarding complicated issues of advice which quite frankly is out of my knowledge base.

I also thought the whole set up to the WRU was to get expert advice and to protect professionals such as us by giving clients misleading or wrong advice. I understand there was a liability case in the past which warranted the set up of this service?

I want to send my support to all at WRU and urge the powers that be to look again at the wider implications for both users of the service and professionals who need to access the service. This will leave a big gap in provision.

Regards, Mr Angry of Edgware, (AKA) Tom Mahoney

Primary Health Mental Team

This team obviously offer vulnerable residents of Barnet a good and necessary service – as demonstrated by the amount they raised in benefits for people last year. Given the change in the economic climate and the increasing number of families who will be suffering financial hardship I would think demand for this service would increase significantly. Considering there is already limited alternatives support systems such as CAB due to demand on these voluntary services and the difficulties of accessing such services it will be much harder for vulnerable people to access advice and support and increase the demands made on professionals who are already trying to manage competing demands on their own time and resources. In my view it would be short sighted to dispose of a service which clearly has a role to play in Barnet not only for the residents directly but also no doubt to professionals who need advice for the vulnerable families that they work with. This proposal should be challenged.

Hilary Price

Contact Supervisor, Social Care Division, Children's Services

Hi John,

I wanted to add my voice in support of the Welfare Rights Unit. I have been very impressed with the support they have given to families with whom I have been working. They have helped to resolve benefit problems for families in severe financial hardship, in situations when this financial stress can sometimes have an impact on levels of domestic violence in the home and other family problems. The support they give can therefore have a positive impact on outcomes for vulnerable children.

I believe this to be a particularly critical time for this service given the financial climate and increasing unemployment, and just about the worst possible time to be cutting the service. If anything, the council should be looking to increase resources for the Welfare Rights Unit.

I am pleased to see Unison providing active support for this essential service.

Best wishes,

James Ball

Social Work Trainee, Social Care Division
Children's Service

I am appalled about the Council's intention to delete the Welfare Rights Unit.

The staff at the unit provide invaluable help for me and my colleagues in resolving a multitude of issues across the spectrum of welfare rights for the group of very vulnerable young people (and their own children) that we support.

They are a one-stop shop of highly skilled and knowledgeable professionals who have a clear understanding of our clients' circumstances, and also provide focussed training for the team.

The use of outside agencies could only add to our costs by the need to source information across a range of resources, thus using a lot of our time that would be better directed to direct work with our young people, but additionally we could not rely on such resources having the same high level of professional advice that we receive from the WRU.

The Welfare Rights Unit must stay.

Ruth Nyman

Leaving Care Worker, Children's Service

Dear John,

Can you please pass on my support for the welfare rights team. Last year I did my placement in the Older adults team and found the welfare rights team to be invaluable in assisting my service users. A lot of the people I was working with were not claiming their full entitlements and were struggling financially to the extent that they were not putting the heating on an endangering their health. The welfare rights were helpful, friendly and my service users all gave me positive feedback. If they were not available it would be to the detriment of service users as social workers do not have the time or the expertise to do this effectively.

Kind regards,

Helen Young

Social Work Student

Adolescent Resource Team

Hi John,

I was unaware of the proposal to delete the Welfare Rights Team until your email today.

As a department we have worked with Welfare Rights for many years, helping many more claimants to find help with their rent and council tax payments. Other residents in the borough have been advised of a variety of state benefits and services they were entitled which otherwise they would have been oblivious to. This is largely due to the dedication and caring service provided by Welfare Rights.

Last year we undertook a council tax benefit take up exercise for pensioners in conjunction with Welfare Rights. Kieran Lynch and his team wrote to 1931 pensioners and followed this up with phone calls and visits. This was all meticulously recorded on spreadsheets which made it easier for me to monitor the final results. More importantly it meant that 129 pensioners were awarded benefit who would otherwise have gone without. Although a small percentage compared to the original figure it still adds up to a lot of Council Tax benefit over the year and in many cases we were able to go back and award the benefit for a year prior to the claim. We could not have done this exercise without the co-operation and helpfulness of the Welfare Rights Team.

Finally on a personal level, I have found Kieran, Pat, Maureen and Sue Hofsteede, who retired last year to be one of the most helpful and knowledgeable sections in the Council and a genuinely caring team of people. They quietly carry out their work in a small corner of the Council and this largely goes unnoticed. There is a definite need for a service such as they provide within the authority (don't most other authorities have such a section?) and it would be tragic for the team to be dissolved. I would be very sorry to see them go.

Jane Kearney

Benefits Liaison Officer / Resources

Dear John

The Welfare Rights Unit has been of huge benefit both to professional staff and to our clients in providing a 'tailored' service that gives clients an in depth understanding and analysis of how they can claim benefits and where benefits overlap within income levels and reductions.

As professionals we rely on the expertise of the Welfare Rights Unit that they bring to each service user on an individual basis.

Please, please can we keep this wonderful service.

Annette Jacobs

PSW

I am disgusted at the proposed cuts to this scheme. If - as it appears - people currently employed will lose their jobs - who will provide the care support for the vulnerable/elderly residents? Sheltered Housing is supposed to be exactly that!! My mother is 86 and resides in this type of housing. Her confidence has returned and she feels safe, supported and has good social contact with other residents - all of which are essential for her health and well being. Having chosen this option at a time in life when people need this support - it is disgusting that decisions are taken to undermine the security and peace of mind residents thrive on. Of course there are many demands on ANY budget..whether personal, local authority or government level. But considering the welfare and rights of those in need surely takes

precedence. We pay taxes - national and local..how about recovering some of the \$7million that you are owed in unpaid council tax..that should help considerably!!

Sandra Warner.

Dear John,

I am truly sorry and disappointed to hear that the above service might be deleted. This department have proved to be so useful to my team (ICS) in working with our Service Users. They are ever so helpful and always willing and ready to assist. They have assisted in dealing with complex benefit queries and appeal queries.

Their service shall be surely missed.

Regards

Vivian Ndukwe

Social Worker, Barnet Intermediate Care Services, Older Adults Care Group

It is beyond my understanding that such action can be taken in this current economic climate, when more not less advice and assistance will be required for the residents of Barnet. Increases in unemployment will have a knock on effect on all sections of the community as will greater financial hardship. The expertise of the WRU is vital and there is no suitable alternative.

Monica Dobson

Hi John

Please add my name to the messages of support for the Welfare Rights Unit. I think it is an outrage for Barnet even to consider shutting down as important a unit as this. And to do it in this period when the economic crisis and credit crunch are at their worst beggars belief. This makes a complete mockery of Barnet's Key Corporate Priority of Supporting the Vulnerable in Our Community.

I was reading a report today which says that the rate of inflation for pensioners is much higher than for the general population. If you need it, I can find the exact reference. In the light of the fact that the Unit works with older people as a key component of their target population, the removal of any financial support the old people could get will drive them more quickly into poverty.

We have a further issue, particularly highlighted right now. That is the extremely cold weather which affects the health and welfare of the old and vulnerable more than others in the population. Age Concern reported yesterday that there are millions of pounds unclaimed by older people because they do not know, or are confused, about their rights to claim support in such extremely cold weather as we are experiencing at the moment. Without a unit such as the Welfare Rights Unit, we can surely anticipate that this worrying situation will become even worse.

I hope you can use some of the information I've mentioned to strengthen a case for the continuation of the Unit.

Best wishes

Bahir Laattoe

SEN Budget Officer, Barnet Children's Service

Dear John,

I am not a Unison member but was intrigued to read that the WRU might be threatened with closure. It is difficult to comment without knowing where their work would be disseminated should they be closed but I have always found them very professional and diligent and given the economic downturn welfare rights advice will be needed by more residents than has been the case for many years, so it would seem a closure of such a service could be very ill-timed.

I must couch my comments with the proviso that I am not au fait with the rationale behind this decision nor with the plan for the service to be provided in some other way so I am writing from a position of quite some ignorance. Perhaps the CABx will be given more money to help the same people the WRU currently helps, and maybe this will be at less expense than running the unit in-house, though of course no-one likes to see people losing their jobs.

Regards,

Shaun Flook
Housing Manager Housing Advice & Assessments

I feel that getting rid of this service would seriously damage the wellbeing of people who need to obtain benefits to live or improve their lives, The Welfare Rights Unit provides invaluable support to those who are unable to decipher complex Government benefit forms.

Luke Barwick
Customer Services Officer, Customer Services Resources

I disagree with the proposal to delete the welfare section of Unison; who will then cater for our welfare needs when this is deleted. I believe their role is very important in supporting staff during difficult periods.

I hope they do not implement this plan.

Gladys Edigin
Principal Practitioner, Children in Care Team 4, Social Care Division, The Children's Service

On behalf of colleagues in this team I wish to express deep concern about the proposal to delete the Welfare Rights Unit. The unit provides an invaluable service to older people & their carers which in our view will not be available from other existing agencies should it be deleted. Social workers will not have the capacity to undertake advice work in place of the WRU & vulnerable residents of Barnet will not get the support they deserve to take up benefits & go to appeals as necessary. Social workers were instructed in Barnet not to become involved with welfare rights/benefits some years ago as it was deemed that they did not have the necessary expertise. The existing voluntary sector is most unlikely to be able to meet an escalation in need & demand. Who will therefore fill the gap in the crucial area of work to alleviate poverty & discrimination in this borough? Where is the commitment to 'supporting the vulnerable' & promoting equality & person centred services in this proposal? We have had no warning of this potential cut in the service & there has been no preparation as far I am aware as a team manager, of the impact on clients & staff. Adult Services are being currently restructured in order to implement the choice & independence agenda with its emphasis on enablement & rehabilitation. Maximising people's financial stability is integral to this agenda both in terms of promoting the wellbeing of individuals & diminishing dependence

on the council's resources. We fully support Unison & our colleagues in the WRU in their efforts to oppose the closure of the unit.

Elaine Marriott
Team Manager
Locality 5
Older Adults
Adult Social Services

Dear John

The Welfare Rights Team have been an exceptional service for us at Parkfield Children's Centre, they have helped many of our clients, it has helped us to have a team to refer people to who will give them the support and correct advice.

Regards
Caroline Bischoff

We and the residents of Barnet cannot manage without this valuable service. I have referred to them a number of times from the hospital and the service has been outstanding. We very often have very complex cases with clients who have no means of support, for example living on the streets or in the country illegally and have ended up in hospital, needing to be discharged somewhere and faced with the possibility of being charged for their NHS treatment. The Welfare Rights Unit have always been able to advise as to what would be the best course of action for each client.

Sheila Tran, SW, BGH

Dear John

Please include my message of support for the welfare rights team. Since the Welfare Rights Team have supported our service users there has been a huge improvement to the quality of their lives. Previously, we struggled to provide information to people about what benefits were available in their individual circumstances- being such a complex and ever changing system of welfare benefits, it is impossible for us to keep up to date and ensure we are giving accurate information to service users. Our colleagues in Welfare Rights have always been available for us to consult, or to make referrals to and have always been so helpful and supportive. I can not begin to imagine how we would manage without them- so much social work time will be wasted, as has been the case before, ploughing through an incomprehensible benefits system. The dangers of providing out of date and inaccurate information must also be stressed.

This is, of course, only one of the many benefits of the service- I am sure there are many others who are also very sad to think that such a valuable service will be lost.

Alison Hillman

As a Children's Centre many of our marginalised and disadvantaged families have used Welfare Rights services regularly and to great effect. There are no comparable services which provide the same in-depth and expert advice for free.

It would be removing a service which helps families understand the many facets of the welfare system, specifically the hard-to-reach target groups which are a national government initiative to involve them within our communities. Often Welfare Rights is the first hook with which to draw families into using other services.

It would be a mistake to lose the essential knowledge of the Welfare Rights team for a cost-cutting exercise.

Yours
Coppetts Wood Children's Centre

Hi

On behalf of Newstead staff team I would like to highlight our concern for the proposed action to the Welfare Rights Unit. The staff, Service users and the local community have benefited greatly from this service for a number of years. The staff has always offered an excellent service which is of professional manner and responded to the needs of the family. Particularly since the development of the Childrens Centre, one of the core offer services we have been expected to deliver regular Information and advice surgeries which have been facilitated by Welfare Rights. FYI and Job Centre Plus. Many parents have benefited from advice on Childcare Tax credit, working Tax Credit and Disability Living Allowance. As you can imagine the paperwork is tedious and welfare benefit staff have been able to support families through this process i.e. outreach/ home visiting, filling forms etc. Considering the number of families who are eligible for DLA this will be a huge loss to our service. We pledge for the council to re consider their proposal as this impacts also on the National Targets we are expected to achiev, to support families return to education, employment and to eradicate poverty.

Sajni Sharma
Head of Children's Centre,

Hi John,
The WRT are a brilliant Team!
They do a fabulous job helping the needy and vulnerable people in our very diverse community.

I would to know what kind of borough do we pay our taxes to if it can't even sustain such a valuable Team? Surely the vulnerable count on this Team for support, advice and guidance, if it goes, what's going to happen...People are going to be let down by the same borough that claims one of their corporate priorities is "supporting the vulnerable"! On a positive note, perhaps only the name of the Team is going to be deleted:-)!!

I wish them all the luck, they surely deserve our support as they support our most needed community, and to you a big thank you for all your hard work.

Warm regards,

*Gina Mime
Barnet Children's Service- Specialist Team
STA - Physical Disability/Medical Needs Team*

Hi,

I would just like to give you my support, as I hear that redundancies might be hitting you're service.

I am appalled that this is happening and cannot believe that this is the way the Council looks after its workforce,

Take care and good look,

Julie

**Julie Ashcroft
Contact Supervisor, Social Care Division Childrens Services**

My experience of the Welfare Rights Unit is that they have provided an invaluable service in obtaining crucial benefits for Service Users over the years. At times they have worked directly with my Service Users, and at others have advised me where there are complex issues so that I could support the Service User and family more efficiently and effectively. I have also used and directed families to use, other welfare rights services at times, such as the CAB or Barnet Carers Centre, for straightforward assistance with applications. However, I have not found these services able to offer the kind of expertise that the Welfare Rights Unit do where there are complex issues, appeals and so forth, which is not an uncommon occurrence. In addition to improving the financial outlook for our clients, access to the correct benefits has a knock on effect to the cost requirements for local authority service provision and reduces the burden on other staff groups. I would think that deleting the Welfare Rights service would cost the council money rather than save costs.

Caroline Riley

I am just writing to say that I think it very short sighted and a false economy for the Welfare rights Unit to be closed down. At a time when nationally there are major increases in unemployment and all the financial problems which come alongside this the idea that there will be no problem for all of the work carried out by the Welfare rights Unit just to be picked up by CAB is misguided. Social Services professionals have always found the input of the Welfare rights Unit to be invaluable and have very much depended on this service's expertise in order to ensure the correct advice is given so there will be great losses to the community at a time when it can be ill afforded. The council's own budgets will also be put under stress when less skilfully presented claims are unsuccessful which might otherwise have gained people access to Independent Living Fund monies.

A message of support for all those affected by changes in finance proposed for this year's budget.

Katherine
East Finchley Library

No to the closure of the Welfare Rights Unit.

The council cites the Citizens Advice Bureau as an alternative but it's very busy and people might not be able to get to the office to talk to someone.

Katherine Benford
East Finchley Library

I would like to add my voice in support of this team, who provide invaluable support to families of disabled children. They help them to complete the forms for the benefits to which they are entitled, and support them through application and appeal procedures. Without them, many of our most vulnerable families would not receive the benefits to which they are entitled and which they desperately need to look after their disabled children. The staff in the Welfare Rights team also contribute regularly to training of Early Support key workers and Barnet Support Lead Professionals, both key players in Barnet's Children and Young People's Plan and integral to our agenda to personalise services and improve choice and independence.

Barbara Ball
Acting Divisional Manager Complex Needs, Barnet Children's Service

Good afternoon John
Just read Jan 7 edition of eNews
Is it possible for me to receive this direct, I think either John or Clive passed it onto me
Kind regards
Jacquie

Dear John,
I was very sorry to hear that the welfare rights team and the sheltered housing team are down to be deleted. They are both really valuable services which help people who are often the most vulnerable in Barnet and I hope there is some that these services can be retained.

Deborah Cohen
Specialist Teacher Autism Spectrum Conditions, Children's Service