



Report of the Head of Poverty and Prevention

Poverty Policy Development and Delivery Committee - 27 September 2017

Briefing Note: Swansea Council and the wider Swansea Partnership response to the implementation of Universal Credit Full Service.

1. Introduction

This briefing note provides information about the transition to Universal Credit in Swansea and includes:

- Background about the transition, key dates and exceptions;
- Our service response from the Housing Benefit Section and Welfare Rights Team;
- The way we are working with internal and external partners to provide further support;
- Briefing information (as Appendix 1) from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), which describes their local response.

2. Background, key dates and exceptions

- 2.1 Swansea is currently a Universal Credit (UC) 'Live Service' area, with gateway criteria in place. If a claimant falls into any of the groups defined by gateway criteria, they will not be entitled to UC and will remain on 'the legacy benefits' (for example Housing Benefit). Local authorities, on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), under their rules, administer Housing Benefit.
- 2.2 Swansea becomes a UC 'Full Service' area from 13 December 2017, at which point, DWP remove the gateway criteria and the majority of new claimants, and those who experience certain specific changes in their circumstances, will have to claim Universal Credit instead of Housing Benefit if they need financial assistance with paying their rent. DWP administer UC.

2.3 We have been advised that there are 95 properties within our boundary which fall into DWP's Neath area, which goes into Full Service on 4th October 2017. These properties lie in the SA8 4 postcode.

2.4 Some individuals can continue to claim Housing Benefit in a UC full service area, including:

People of state Pension Credit age.

Working age people in a UC Full Service area who are:

- Living in Specified Accommodation¹
- Their resident partner is of state Pension Credit Age
- There are 3 or more children in the household (new claims only)

2.5 If someone over state Pension Credit Age forms a partnership with someone on UC, the UC claimant can chose either, to remain on UC or claim State Pension Credit & Housing Benefit.

2.6 We have provided DWP with an anonymised list of properties, which usually fall into the definition of Specified Accommodation, to avoid confusion on behalf of DWP or delay with our citizens being advised they should claim Housing Benefit instead of UC, and potential rent arrears that could arise from such a delay.

2.7 Information will be exchanged between the authority and the DWP in cases where they cannot easily determine if a property is Specified Accommodation as has happened in pilot areas.

2.8 Some changes in personal circumstances will cause people to transfer from HB to UC including 'Natural Migration' which includes, but is not limited to:

¹ Specified accommodation is accommodation in which the tenant is provided with care, support or supervision. This could include accommodation provided by a charity, voluntary organisation or a Housing Association and includes domestic violence refuges. Local Authority refuges and hostels (where the accommodation is not self-contained) could also fall into this definition. As far as we are aware, this Authority does not have any accommodation of this type. DWP determine whether accommodation falls under the definition of Specified Accommodation based on the information provided by the UC claimant in their on-line claim and information obtained from landlords. There is also an opportunity in the handover process for the local authority to advise the DWP that the UC claimant is living in Specified Accommodation.

- A move from out of work to in work.
- A move from in work to out of work
- An increase in working hours to the point where Jobseekers Allowance ceases.
- A household becomes responsible for a child for the 1st time
- Partners separate.
- Once UC is established in every area. DWP will move anyone remaining on legacy benefits over to UC systematically. This is called manager migration.

3. The Housing Benefit (HBS) Section's role in the UC claim process?

3.1 HBS role is to:

- Ensure we do not pay Housing Benefit to people who are required to claim UC.
- To close down Housing Benefit claims for anyone moving to UC from Housing Benefit when instructed by DWP. There is no discretion in this.

3.2 If we pay Housing Benefit in error, there will be financial implications for the authority. We would not be recompensed by DWP for the amount paid as we are currently.

3.3 DWP will send us a 'HB Stop notice and Universal Credit Migration Gather proforma' (UC MGP1 LA) which is the instruction that any existing Housing Benefit claim must be closed and from what date. Once the Housing Benefit claim is closed, the authority will advise DWP about the amount of any Housing Benefit already paid for any period after the closure date. This amount will be deducted from the first payment of UC.

3.4 We will work with DWP where possible to avoid issues that have arisen in pilot areas during the handover process.

4. Council Tax Reduction

4.1 When making an online claim for UC, customers are asked if they need to claim Council Tax reduction to help with any Council Tax they have to pay. If they do, they are advised to approach their local authority to make a separate claim for the reduction.

4.2 Answering yes will trigger an indicator to be set within DWP software systems to ensure that the authority is provided with details of the income received from UC. This does not remove the person's requirement to make a claim for Council Tax Reduction with us.

4.3 We will work with DWP colleagues to raise their awareness of the need to ensure our citizens claim any Council Tax Reduction, to which they are entitled.

5. Poverty and Prevention - Welfare Rights Support

5.1 Training:

Welfare Rights Team are holding four seminars, providing an overview of UC:

- 17th October 2017 10.00am to 12.00pm
2.00pm to 4.00pm
- 31st October 2017 10.00am to 12.00pm
2.00pm to 4.00pm

They are also providing two training courses on Universal Credit, specifically aimed at support workers / social workers working with claimants:

- 28th November 2017
- 16th January 2018
- Further courses will be available from April 2018

In addition, they are incorporating aspects of Universal Credit in to their other courses, in particular within:

- EEA Nationals
- ESA
- Introduction to Benefits

5.2 Advice Line:

The team are raising awareness of UC to support social workers and other advocates when they call the advice line regarding their clients benefit entitlement.

5.3 Policy:

The team are working with WRAC (Welfare Rights Advisers Cymru) and NAWRA (National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers) and contributing to a report to the Works and Pensions Committee, Universal Credit enquiry to raise awareness of Universal Credit roll out and plan for our response based on the advice available from DWP and the experience of pilot areas.

5.4 Welfare Reform Leads Meeting:

Attending and contributing to these meetings.

5.5 Benefit Take Up

The team are using HB records to identify underpayment of benefit to the most vulnerable claimants, in order that claimants receive the correct level of transitional protection when they are manually migrated to UC. To date, they have identified 17 claimants who were underpaid on average £62.53 per week and who consequently received (on average) lump sum backdated payments of £6,089.29 per person.

6. Internal and External Partnership Working

6.1 The Adult Prosperity and Well-Being Service, Housing Benefits Team, Welfare Rights Team, and Adult Community Learning will explore the opportunities to provide two levels of Digital support from the Contact Centre, building on the existing support that is available. Digital support will broadly comprise of –

- Immediate help with UC Claims and commitments;
- Further training and support including referral to other partner services to build individuals capacity.

Housing Benefits staff training will take place in mid-November prior to December roll out.

6.2 Following the recent Financial Inclusion Steering Group meeting a Task and Finish Group is being established to identify the current work by the wider partnership to support this issue. This task and finish group will be required to produce an action plan before the next meeting of the FISG in October. This will include areas such as:

- Mapping provision across the partnership
- Understanding duplication and working jointly to maximise the use of resources, save cost and redirect to fill gaps in services.
- Taking a wider partnership approach to delivering Personal Budgeting Support
- Providing joint advice and looking at joint promotional materials to ensure consistent messages.
- Working proactively with local DWP management and personnel to help them to provide advice and work on joint solutions to alleviate the issues faced by claimants.

Appendix 1

DWP Local Approach

The following briefing has been provided by Mark Hurry, DWP Employer and Partnership Manager for Gorseinon, Morriston and Swansea

This what is happening throughout Swansea regarding Universal Credit:

- On 30th June the Local Authority had the handover pack regarding Universal credit Full service. Universal Credit is an agile system and updated every two weeks and The LA were happy for the pack just to be delivered to them. As and when it is updated this is sent to the LA. The Support pack is used by the LA to up-skill their staff.
- Customer Representative Group (made up of various organisation throughout Swansea) – LA, CAB, Welfare Rights, Tenancy support and third party organisations was held on 2nd August at Swansea Jobcentre. Next one planned for 18th October.
- Self-Employment organisations attended an event run by Neath Jobcentre on 24th August (This covered Swansea also).
- Meeting with Welsh Housing in Caerphilly 14th September
- Managers for Registered Social Landlords and LA are having an overview and IPAD presentation on 20th September.
- Citizens Advice Bureau overview and IPAD presentations 25th and 27th September.
- Coastal Housing presentation and IPAD session 28th September
- Welfare Rights presentation and IPAD sessions 3rd October
- Caerlas Housing meeting presentation 11th October
- Third sector presentations and IPAD sessions – 7th, 8th and 9th November (6 sessions run over 3 days various organisations attending).
- Gwalia presentation and IPAD sessions 14th November
- Tenancy Support presentation and IPAD session 15th November
- Childcare Partnerships – presentation and IPAD session 23.11.17
- Swansea Young Families – presentation and IPAD session 29.11.17

IPAD sessions are where we are showing organisations how a customer makes a claim, uses their on-line journal to liaise with their work-coach and the contact centre – this is helping organisations understand what a customer see's and support can be given with this.

Mark Hurry is meeting numerous organisations and happy to take information from organisations as to who he should make contact with.

He is also attending various meetings where Universal Credit Full Service is high on the agenda and encouraging conversations about UC.

All staff in the Jobcentre are being trained for 3 weeks and 1 weeks consolidation.

They are also looking at lessons learned from other (pilot) sites to ensure organisations are aware of Universal Credit, to make sure that all organisations are working together and discussions take place.

They are also working to ensure that vulnerable customers who need help with using on-line services know where to get help i.e. Jobcentre, LA, housing organisations etc.

Personal budgeting support and digital support is offered to all customers.

In the Jobcentre they have created a Complex Hub where customers can come to and they have various organisations attending daily.

Mark is currently organising drop in sessions for private landlords at various venues – dates to be decided.