

**Written response from Cabinet Member for Homes & Energy to question about the private rented sector in conjunction with the rollout of Universal Credit.**

We work with a large number of private rented sector (PRS) landlords who are willing to accept households claiming benefit but it's fair to say many were concerned about the introduction of the Universal Credit benefit system. Given that it's paid 4 weeks in arrears and the administrative issues there were at the start of the rollout, landlords were clearly anxious about non-payment of rent and increasing rent arrears. We have a dedicated Support Worker allocated to supporting households in PRS accommodation and since December 2017, she reports that the majority of her work centres around addressing issues arising from Universal Credit claims. The system of processing a claim appears to be difficult for vulnerable households to find their way through and therefore it's essential there is assistance to do so.

Unfortunately there are landlords, who we have worked with, who will now accept claimants of Housing Benefit but not Universal Credit. They report a steep rise in rent arrears caused by the payment being made in arrears and direct to the tenant. However given that the intention is that Universal Credit will be rolled out to all households by March 2022, it's a matter that the PRS will have to tackle.

We have specific actions in our Homelessness Strategy to monitor the reasons for loss of rented accommodation, to better understand the drivers behind this cause of homelessness and also to work with DWP, Housing Benefit and Poverty and Prevention Services to identify households at risk of homelessness because of welfare reform.