



SHBVN Welfare Reform Forums – March 2015

Universal Credit: Information Sharing &
Communication

Background

- Welfare Reform Act 2012 - there was to be no direct communication between DWP and landlords
- Introduction of UC to live sites in North West England April 2013 exposed risk of such a policy
- Lord Freud speech to CIH, June 2013, pledging that tenants will be switched to managed payments if 2 months arrears

Adapting to reality

- March 2014 ministerial roundtable meeting agreement to set up a “task and finish” group.
- Workaround introduced at Golden Gates Housing Trust to alert association if tenant claiming Universal Credit – claimants asked to get from their landlord an up to date rent statement and to sign mandate allowing DWP to contact landlord directly.

Information Sharing

- September 2014 DWP issues consultation on data sharing with social landlords
- December 2014 DWP issues consultation on data sharing with support providers
- February 2015 *The Social Security (Information-sharing in relation to Welfare Services etc.) (Amendment) Regulations 2015*

Data Sharing with landlords

- SI makes provision for sharing the following:
 - The identity of the UC claimant
 - That claimant has tenancy with landlord
 - The date a claim was made or date UC was awarded, in which case:
 - The date when next UC payment is due to be paid
 - Whether next payment is first payment under the award or the amount of housing costs element under the award

Overcoming Communication shortcomings

- Housing costs not separated from other Universal Credit issues – managed payments haphazard
 - Housing cost teams being set up in Universal Credit Centres
- Local JobCentre Plus offices had no information on Universal Credit Award
 - Being addressed in later releases of software
- Reliance on postal communication



Universal Credit Rollout

- National roll out planned over the coming year in four tranches
- Started in Highland February 16th
- Edinburgh, North Lanarkshire and West Dunbartonshire launched in March
- Roll out to single claimants only – the most straightforward cases – but beware lobster pot

DWP communications

- Local JobCentre Plus offices no involvement in the benefit side – just transition into work
- Benefit side handled by Universal Credit Service Centres
 - Initially only one (Bolton) followed by Glasgow
 - Two more recently opened (Bangor, Middlesbrough)
 - Plans to expand to around 10 centres, one of which will be in Dundee

DWP Communications

- The Universal Credit Service Centre concept is a ‘virtual’ one – when contacting the Service Centre, could be put through to any location.
- Feedback is that the quality of service is variable – the longer the service centre has been in operation, the better the quality of service.

DWP Communications

- All correspondence directed to service centre via Mail Opening Centre in Wolverhampton so inevitable delay in response.
- Once a request for managed payments has been passed on to housing costs team in service centre, direct communication possible if issue needs to be escalated – email address for urgent enquiries:
(UC.SERVICECENTREHOUSING@DWP.GSI/GOV.UK)

Communication concerns

- Virtual service centre concept very reliant on IT – but reports have been critical e.g. Public Accounts Committee
- New service centres getting up to speed – fall off in APA turnaround after initial improvement
- Can system cope with increased volume?
- Reliance on ‘snail mail’ for APA requests