

# Community, Customer & Organisational Scrutiny Committee

– 23 January, 2018

## Chesterfield Borough Council – Full Service Universal Credit

### Update January 2018

Maximising income -	<p>Universal Credit is a less generous benefit meaning that many disabled claimants will have less income. Claimants that go through managed migration onto Universal Credit have their income prior to Universal Credit transitionally protected. A review of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claimants receiving Employment and Support Allowance Income Related identified a number of claimants that were not receiving the right amount of Employment and Support Allowance. They were missing the severe disability premium.</p> <p>The Benefits Advisor has checked approx. 1,100 cases to date with approx. 750 remaining.</p> <p>She has contacted 81 customers which in turn have generated to date 28 cases that have attracted an additional award of benefit at an average of £66.92 per week (£3,479.84 per annum) per customer. A total ongoing additional benefit award across all 28 customers amounts to £97,435.52 per annum.</p> <p>Of the 28 cases, 25 have received a backdated arrears payment. The total amount of arrears paid across the 25 customers amounts to £196,091.43. This is an average of £7,003 per customer.</p> <p>This is purely an in house initiative identified by our Benefits Advisor.</p>
Discretionary Housing Payments –	<p>As at 15.1.2018 out of the 2017-18 DHP budget 15.03% of awards amounting to £33,383 (16.09% of value of awards) is for Universal Credit recipients. This is 55 awards out of the 366 total DHP awards.</p> <p>This is a high percentage since the number of Universal Credit claimants is currently low under Live Service.</p> <p>We have 43k left of the 2017-18 budget left to spend/allocate</p>

Identification of incorrect UC payments -	Benefit assessors processing Council Tax Support claims for Universal Credit recipients currently contact the DWP where they identify errors in awards. For example missing support for housing costs.
Personal Budgeting Support-	<p>We now have 3 Benefits Officers and a Rents Officer trained to offer Personal Budgeting Support to Universal Credit recipients.</p> <p>There are also a number of staff in Tenancy Sustainment that can now offer this service.</p> <p>Since 29<sup>th</sup> November we have completed a total of 25 Personal Budgeting Support Interviews which are proving to be very effective.</p>
Website -	<p>The website is updated to include a Universal Credit header on the Chesterfield Borough Council home page.</p> <p>This then directs customers to a page that gives background information around Universal Credit with a link to find out if they should now claim UC rather than Housing Benefit. This is done via a post code checker.</p> <p>Once the post code has been checked – for those customers who should now claim UC they are able to use a free online calculator to check their benefit entitlement. This is available to both ‘Renters’ and ‘Non Renters’.</p> <p>It also gives information on:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where to get help in their local area</li> <li>• How to claim</li> <li>• Introduction to Universal Credit</li> <li>• When different groups will be affected</li> <li>• What changes might trigger a move to Universal Credit</li> </ul> <p>There is also a page titled – Are you ready for Universal Credit? This provides a raft of information from how to make a claim, what support is available and where, and also what information will be required and in what format to be able to make a claim.</p>
Claim form -	<p>The new shortened claim form for Council Tax Support only customers is now operational and proving effective in streamlining the process of claiming.</p> <p>This will avoid unnecessary data capture and confusion. The existing form will continue to be used for pension aged claimants</p>

	and those working aged claimants still required to claim Housing Benefit
UC start date -	There is an ongoing emphasis on ensuring that anyone contacting our office regarding HB is checked to ensure they are claiming the correct Benefit. This then ensures customers are signposted correctly at the first point of contact.
Staff Training -	Initial training is now complete and will be ongoing as the service develops and the UC legislation settles down.
Assisted Digital claiming -	<p>Chesterfield Borough Council is providing a service where people can access the internet and have help setting up emails and assisted claiming.</p> <p>Front Office and some selected Back Office staff are now trained to offer this service, which is now published on our website. This is a service actively promoted by the DWP.</p> <p>Since 29<sup>th</sup> November 2017 we have completed a total of 95 Assisted Digital Claims. Customers are very appreciative of this assistance.</p> <p>There are currently 3 customer facing PC's with which to provide this service, however, as the scheme progresses there will need to be discussions to extend this to possibly 5 PC's.</p> <p>It is also worth noting that since we are in Central Chesterfield we have been approached by a limited number of other customers that fall in local LA districts. There are potentially discussions to be had with these LA's to provide funding or resource from their funding to assist with assisting these residents. We have not been turning these customers away as it undoubtedly helps with the Chesterfield economy.</p>
Council Tax Support Take Up for Universal Credit claimants -	<p>We already issue a take up letter where we know someone is in receipt of Universal Credit and has not claimed Council Tax Support. We have also done a detailed take up campaign reviewing cases that have not made a claim despite being invited to.</p> <p>We will carry out another take up exercise as soon as the Employment and Support Allowance take up exercise detailed above has been completed.</p>

Council Tax Collection	<p>We have started a study of council tax collection and Universal Credit recipients to inform our payment profiling and recovery activity – this is ongoing due to the nature of the billing year.</p> <p>We want to see if pre-profiling payments with a month free during the 6 week wait will help.</p>
Rent collection and recovery procedures –	<p>Ongoing review of rent recovery action. Where we know a tenant is in receipt of UC we target via phone and letter to advise that they will be paid housing costs and need to pay rent etc....</p> <p>The review of rent recovery action is an ongoing process as this needs to remain reactive, and we need to ensure we are consistently effective and efficient.</p> <p>When we know a tenant is in receipt of Universal Credit we target the customer via phone and letter to advise that they will be paid housing costs and will have a need to pay rent etc.</p> <p>The Trusted Landlord Portal is now an effective tool which enables the recovery team to clarify rent charges, and to apply for managed payments quicker if required – see below.</p>
Trusted Landlord Portal -	<p>The Trusted Landlord Portal is now operational.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enable DWP to request rent verification and speeds up the award of housing costs.</li> <li>- Another route for us to request managed payments (i.e. help for housing costs paid to us as the landlord direct)</li> </ul>
Engagement with housing -	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conversation has started with the role of tenancy support workers and lettings officers in signposting and assisted digital claiming</li> <li>- Ongoing conversation about the removal of housing costs being paid for overlapping tenancies</li> <li>- Period 29.11.17 to 01.04.18 where housing costs for temporary housing is funded through UC.</li> </ul> <p>Housing staff have received UC training</p>
Engagement with the DWP	<p>We are raising areas of areas of concern with the DWP. The main area at the moment is that changes to housing costs are taken back to the beginning of the assessment. We do have the situation where someone with housing costs ending day 28 of an</p>

	<p>assessment period will have no support for housing costs for the whole of the period. DWP confirm this is under review</p> <p>Regular meetings with the DWP. Last one 15.01.18 where discussions included</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Notifying the DWP of council tenant rent changes to avoid being asked to pay back managed payments</li> <li>- Length of time tenants have to notify the DWP of a change of rent of tenancy</li> <li>- Assisted digital support – problems with service centres refusing to take telephone claims for complex cases</li> <li>- The problem with not being able to submit a claim for UC without a bank account</li> </ul>
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### **Rent arrears**

Because Universal Credit is not administered by CBC we do not know the details of every tenant in receipt of Universal Credit. What we do know is which of our Council Tax Support claimants are in receipt of Universal Credit. We are able to extract this information from the benefits system and data match it via property reference to the Housing Northgate System.

At the end of November we had 135 council tenants claiming Council Tax Support with Universal Credit as their income. This has now increased to 177 We know that:

- Previously we had 107 tenants with rent arrears amounting to total arrears of £64,558, with an average rent arrears figure (for those in arrears) of £603. We now have 125 tenants in rent arrears amounting to total arrears of £77,609.33, with average arrears figure of £621.00.

This is compared to an average figure of £649 arrears on the 01.09.17

considering the average arrears figure has only increased by £46 shows how effective our processes are in managing these arrears.

- We have a total of 39 cases on managed payments which is 22% of those tenants we know are in receipt of Universal Credit. The process of managed payments is very fluid as many cases are regularly reviewed by the DWP.

- 13 tenants are paying their rent via direct debit, as at the end of November there were 11.

We can expect an increase in arrears as the gateway to Universal credit includes those residents with limited capability to work.

### **Council Tax arrears**

We know that sanctions are having an impact on the ability to pay council tax since the maximum Council Tax award is 91.5%. Many claimants on the old style legacy benefits have council tax arrears. We have started a study of council tax arrears payment history of a sample of Universal Credit recipients – this is still ongoing.

We know that Council Tax Support is not always being claimed for Universal Credit recipients. Please see summary of support.