

Housing Benefit Direct issue 140 August 2013



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Editorial

You could say this is a real summer special, short and sweet! I am in the Editorial hot seat this month – Clare Elliott is busy finding out about her new role in Housing Delivery Division and Bill Hern is on annual leave.

In this issue we have some important updates on Universal Credit and we're sharing some Benefit Cap Good Practice which shows the real value of collaborative working something which I am sure we'll see more of as we carry on changing the benefit system. And we're letting you know what our latest plans are for our move to GOV.UK. If there are any items that you'd like to see featured please let us know and we will try our best to include them in a future issue, just let us know by email using our distribution enquiries mailbox.

But perhaps most importantly of all I am sure many of you will be looking forward to your summer break rather than reading this guest appearance editorial from me so I won't keep you any longer. Enjoy!

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[Distribution enquiries](#)

Universal Credit Pathfinder roll-out completed

The roll-out of the Universal Credit Pathfinder was successfully completed on 29 July when Warrington and Oldham Jobcentres began accepting claims.

Ashton-under-Lyne and Wigan have already been taking new claims to Universal Credit with the majority of them being made online.

All the Pathfinder sites have been using the new Claimant Commitment and have been reviewing the progress of the activities claimants have signed up to. The Jobcentres are all being supported by the Universal Credit Service Centres in Bolton and Glasgow.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is committed to rolling out Universal Credit in a careful and controlled way. The plan is to start small, to test it, take on board any lessons learnt and to refine it if necessary before rolling it out in six new areas across England, Scotland and Wales from October 2013 and full migration by 2017.

People with queries about Universal Credit should be directed to GOV.UK/UniversalCredit which has been updated.

The [Universal Credit Partner Toolkit](#) has also been refreshed and further products will be added in the coming weeks to help partner organisations explain Universal Credit to their customers.

Universal Credit Local Support Services Framework

The Universal Credit Local Support Services Framework was published on 11 February 2013. The Framework sets out the basic principles for helping people who might need support with the new demands of Universal Credit, such as understanding the new system, help with getting on-line, and budgeting advice. It outlines our current understanding of who will need local support, and describes the means by which local support will be provided, allowing for specific solutions to meet the needs of individuals and different local regions.

The Framework sought comments on this approach, and the department received 149 responses from across the local government, housing and voluntary sectors. The feedback is proving invaluable and is being used in a number of ways, such as finalising aspects of the design of the Framework and the development of a revised, more comprehensive Framework for October 2013. The feedback is also helping the development of the local delivery partnerships that will help support claimants in the new system, and for the wider Universal Credit Programme.

A summary report of the responses can be viewed on the Universal Credit updates page for local authorities (LAs) on the DWP site: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/universal-credit-information/universal-credit-updates/#rucl>

LA Led Pilots

Since September 2012, thirteen LAs have been running pilots exploring how their local expertise can improve support for residents in preparation for Universal Credit.

All thirteen LAs involved in the LA Led Pilot Programme have picked up the challenge and are driving progress by integrating services, making the process simple for claimants and shifting the focus from receiving benefits to finding work.

Oxford City's pilot aims to support customers affected by welfare reform into work by identifying and removing the barriers that prevent customers accessing employment.

The main barriers found so far are:

- debt
- childcare
- a perceived lack of employability
- security of tenure

They are working with a number of organisations to help overcome these barriers including Aspire, Crisis, Skills Training UK, Oxford and Cherwell Valley College and the Citizens Advice Bureau. They have adopted a supportive approach to the way they work with claimants as the traditional mandating and sanctioning system was not appropriate as many residents helped by the pilot have either never worked or have been unemployed for a long time.

It is still fairly early days for this type of pilot but the relationships being built with customers are becoming stronger as are the partnerships being established with the organisations who are working with the LA.

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Moving to .GOV.UK

Many of you may already be familiar with this site as it has been up and running since October 2012 and replaced the information that was previously held on Business Link and DirectGov. It also contains guidance for professionals and comprehensive information about government policy.

Over time government departments have gradually been moving their web based information to this site and over the next few weeks we will be looking at all of the material we have on our LA Housing Benefit (HB) pages. The current pages will continue to be available and we will still be updating the site with bulletins and circulars as they are published.

Only when we are satisfied that the information has been migrated successfully to.GOV.UK will the current LA pages on the DWP website be switched off. Any links that people have saved or bookmarked for the current pages will still work. In most cases, people will be taken straight to the relevant information on GOV.UK.

In the next issue of the General Information Bulletin we will be providing guidance on what information will be available and how you will be able to look for HB guidance on GOV.UK.

Any enquiries relating to this item should be sent to:

housing.correspondenceandpqs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Benefit Cap Good Practice

Phased rollout and many of the Tranche 1 LAs have been working closely with Jobcentre Plus to help claimants potentially affected by the Benefit Cap.

Jobcentre Plus and LAs agreed in advance the support they would provide and gave full consideration to co-locating staff. Colleagues engaging with claimants needed to have the right skills, experience of joint working and knowledge of benefit systems. It was also helpful to include LA Information Technology (IT) suppliers and Benefit Cap Project IT colleagues to ensure that any IT issues could be quickly resolved.

Examples of joint working:

A multi-agency task force has been launched in Barnet to support households likely to be affected by the Benefit Cap. The team which is made up of staff from Barnet Council, Barnet Homes and Jobcentre Plus, primarily focuses on providing joined-up advice and support on getting into work, housing options and benefits advice for residents.

Since summer 2012, Colchester Borough Council and Colchester Jobcentre Plus have been working in partnership to support claimants potentially affected by welfare reform including Benefit Cap. A joint Customer Support Team was formed and has been proactively contacting residents providing bespoke advice covering housing options, welfare benefits, money management and support in finding employment.

If you have any queries or want to find out more, please email:

benefitcap.external@dwp.gsi.gov.uk