

## **In depth Scrutiny of UC**

### **Evidence Gathering 2 March 2012**

#### **Notes**

##### **Landlord Session**

Attendees –

Jo Frawley – WKHA Tenant Rep

Ursula Harris – WKHA

Marion Money – National Landlords Association

Issues discussed –

Tenant's ability to budget monthly

Landlords cannot be seen to 'control' money – need to offer advice only

Money into accounts that are overdrawn – banks not allowing access as overdraft is cleared first

Bank charges incurred where benefit receipt and rent payment dates are not aligned

Tenants not able to cope

Relaxed criteria for direct payment has helped with safeguard applications

Encourage tenants to set up basic bank account for rent only

Consider Kent Savers/Credit Unions

Consider ability to negotiate Post Office accounts with 1 DD to pay rent

When LHA came in rent arrears were huge problem – typically 30% rent arrears

Security for landlords – landlords want to spread risk with mix of tenants

Reducing availability of private rental properties – landlords find Medway towns more economically viable

Rents may increase to compensate reductions in rent due to less HB

Tenants preferred choice is social sector – security of tenure

PSL properties – need to understand who bears the risk – costs/management /modelling/translate into financial terms against increased B&B costs

Jo –

UC dramatic impact on tenants, benefits already so low some cannot cope – can educate people but when they face stark choices juggling budget is difficult

Concerns about HB reduction for over-accommodation – lack of 1 bedroom or smaller properties available

Marion –

Private sector landlords preferred tenancy type - 2 to 3 bed properties although 'accidental' landlords have no profile in mind – difficult to factor a business model

Rising rents – now 30<sup>th</sup> percentile almost equals to 50<sup>th</sup> as was – CPI changes

No identifiable rent element for UC

Loss of HB teams who are skilled and can react quickly – loss of relationships and identification of need

Dealing with DWP is difficult

What NLA are doing – Kent Housing Group piloting tenant training for private tenants building on skills – private landlords will have to work with tenants, potential UC Toolkit – concerned about shrinking help

Ursula-

No plans to 'demolish' walls to change room numbers – difference in space standards

Will families say they have split up?

Risk of fraud

Digital by default - lots of tenants not on line **UH to email survey results**

Computer literacy a problem – tenants will need help and support – essential!

WKHA are funding a Financial Wellbeing Manager post – will undertake workshops

Impact of loss of floating support (KCC/Medway reductions for short-term help) and reductions for older people

What WKHA are doing -telling people - Tenants newsletter, housing officers in specific circumstances, using Adult Education

Difficulty with jobs – how do you resource prioritising housing lists and collection of arrears (London and Quadrant pilot 3 years ago saw rent arrears double

WKHA collectable rent is currently 18 to 20m

Consider –

Cost of homelessness v cost of housing provision

Impact assessments to not provide information of eviction or in longer term

Impact on staff – increased abuse

Social services currently take on cases but they are facing cuts

NLA are involved in studies on direct payment to landlords

Affordable rent is 80% of market rent

Welcomed –

Element to help people back to work and to take ownership

Simplicity – principle is good and economically sound

### **Welfare Group**

Jill – Chief Executive of Sevenoaks Mind

Arthur Rucker – Sevenoaks CAB

Mind -

Mind work to support people with mental health needs (approx 25% of people will suffer from some sort of mental health problem at some point in their lives) – from severe e.g. bipolar to less severe – OCD, acute anxiety, long term depression etc.

11- 16 years old in SDC area – 2500 will have some kind of mental health problem

Majority of people who MIND help are claiming benefits – currently 300 – 400 on books – about 5000 annual contacts per year

Welcome – broad idea of UC plus simplification is good!

However, anything that creates anxiety is bad, such as penalties, fear of going to work.

Jill talked through a case study for the benefit of the group.

#### Issues discussed

Lack of mental health mentors is a huge problem as without support a lot cannot cope

People who are mentally ill do not always present as so

That with UC people who have less diagnosed or medical needs may slip through the net

The end of work related support causes issues for individual and employer  
How do we find a way that highly vulnerable people are supported within a system that lumps people together?

Barriers around digital – especially motivation and knowledge – mechanism needed to ensure people know about system, to find out who needs help, IT access – especially how do people make a case 'on-line'?

Current provision for training on a computer for disable people needs additional funding – Mind have facilities to assist (up to 12 places M to F per week run by volunteers – lack of funding may mean discontinued but could be used to help support people. Capacity to expand? Others such as Age UK and VAWK may also offer similar if assistance provided with funding.

Possible solution – link Age UK, Mind, CAB to build a package of IT and support

#### CAB -

#### Issues discussed

Implementation will be quite difficult

Support funding a concern as CAB experiencing serious financial difficulties – government must consider funding if they expect the voluntary sector to assist UC welcomed as an idea but concerns about difficulty in claiming – especially when HMRC had such huge issues initially

No local people for claimants to meet with face-to-face – experience of JCP+ is not good. National helpline often cannot answer queries and if BDC needs to call back this takes 3 hours – no good if you are with someone!

CAB Advise customers not to complete forms online e.g. DLA as easy to get it wrong and claim needs time to consider – initial form is ok, next form about limited capacity very complex – CAB advise not to complete independently. CAB providing evidence to Prof. Harrington enquiry.

Medical assessments problematic – on appeal 40% succeed generally but this rises to 70% with representation – system set to fail as no access to medical notes only what is in assessment

Need facility in UC to pay to landlords

Conditionality rules create difficulty e.g. can someone really spend 40 hours looking for work if there is no work about?

## DWP – JCP+

Dave Ashton – District Manager for Kent

### Issues discussed

UC Impact – still many unknowns but will be a phased approach

Need to consider may be/could be impacts

Need to identify issues as they happen to identify required support

JCP+ in Kent have 800 staff committed to support vulnerable people and those that are well enough to get back into work.

Want to work with stakeholders

Digital – currently 23% of claims are successfully made online in Kent –

Target is 50% by end of March (will not be met) then up to 80%.

How many applied and were not successful in process – **DA to supply ongoing information on monthly basis**

Customer insight suggests 50 – 80% of customers have access or with support would be happy to access claim on line – **DA to confirm wording of survey**

On line claim will be parametised to provide internal validation.

97 – 98% receive money direct into a bank account rather than giro

DWP considering accessibility of JCP+ offices – also co-location currently exists e.g. children's centres, connexions

Need where there is demand – can deploy staff to be in other locations

DWP considering best model for delivery

Build on liaison and collaboratively keep channels of communication to work with Las

Impacts on JCP+, HMRC and LA staff

Long –term vision for JCP+ in Tonbridge to include terminals – roll out due April 2012 to be completed by September 2012 – will have people on hand to assist

JCP+ in Kent currently recruiting 80+ vacancies due to rising register and youth unemployment as a current need

In Kent current JSA recipients is up 14% and for 16-24 age group up 24%

Provide rapid response teams e.g. Pfzier and Thames Steel

JCP+ has significant telephone contact often long waiting times – cost of 0845 number over £1m to customers – **DA to check!**

Not yet known what will happen to JCP BDC offices – envisage will still use some sites.

Use experience – need to prioritise relocation of existing staff

Clear messages to staff

Keep dialogue open

Benefit Cap is a big issue – potential displacement from London

JCP+ and partners working to assist people into employment

7000 vacancies across Kent

53.5% of JSA recipients go off benefit within 13 weeks, 74% within 26 weeks and 90.5% within a year – predominately into employment

In Kent 1700 participating in work experience of which 33% are kept on – nationally 51%

Direct payment pilots over 5 areas will include budgeting and money matters