

In depth Scrutiny of UC

Evidence Gathering 16 March 2012

Notes

DWP Session

Kim Archer – Customer Insight Team

Kim went through her presentation slides (already provided to members of the group).

Three issues arose which Kim agreed to send further details on –

- Tapers/Income - to provide a detailed briefing note about the effects of income changes against the UC taper
- How the time lag is expected to work - to provide details on when changes in earnings would be effective from when amending the UC claim especially with regard to minimising overpayments and potential claw backs
- What happens to the applicable amount when one partner reaches pension age and the other (who will remain or change to be the claimant under UC) is still working age? i.e. will they receive an additional premium for age as happens currently?

Additional discussion points –

Direct Payment –

DWP are developing a self-assessment tool for customers to provide information on the type of help people need for budgeting and financial management

DWP are working with banks and post office asking them to provide better products for those on low incomes

Significant claimant preparation activity being undertaken which Las could participate in

Message from Cllr Firth to DWP which she requested Kim take back –

You can never wholly replace a human being with a computer. Beveridge set up a safety net for people in need and benefit services and local authorities offer support which cannot be measured simply in £.

DCN Session

Allen Graham – Chief Executive Rushcliffe Borough Council

Issues discussed –

Two considerations –

Taking Housing benefit away from local authorities – remember why we got it in the first place!

Digital access at 80% - how achievable is this in reality?

Is it time for localised strategy for local engagement? Interaction in place at the start of a process to get it right first time.

If HB is removed then other customer service areas may be unsustainable – where is contact to come from? Who fills the gap?

Do not lose Las as a direct deliverer!

Face-to-face is part of core business – we need to assist people to self-serve.

Whilst Lord Freud has designed a service which allows self-service in the main, particular sections of the community will **never** self-serve.

Consider level of investment in face-to-face interface – can this merge and grow?

JCP+ offices – are they fit for purpose – the ‘Woolworths’ of the client group.

As a sector we should not be enhancing a dependency culture. There is a thin line between care and dependency

Who are the people on the margins? – access, complex needs, not average

Behavioural change is led by example - LAs should be proud as a sector of the depth of knowledge they have in this area e.g. recycling.

KISS – solutions need to be simple!

The big society – what are the big society issues? E.g. young people may be able to easily access UC but may have debt management issues.

Conflict between Aims and Actuality – a void to fill within service provision – how is it best to fill changing roles?

Customers need local access and support

Delivery in Rushcliffe – Allen described how customer service works for his authority –

Customer Service is integrated with the police within the Town Centre – LA delivers for the police – staff have access to police databases.

Important to manage expectations and allocate resources in the most efficient way.

Staff are skills based and ‘customer centric’ making them best placed to deliver front line services

Help coming on-line to provide the full picture of circumstances – including health and housing – at the front line with specialists available in the back office.

Aim to deliver face-to-face by building capacity e.g. JCP+ personnel within the building to offer Job side

Includes ‘softer’ specialist skills/interventions e.g. debt advice

High levels of acceptance and low resistance

Aspiration and progress is key
Undertake jobs fairs locally with JCP+_, schools etc
Want to help people get on-line
Big issue for all – who will be the pilots for UC?

Concluding remarks –

Opportunities to make a business case for income to provide a customer interface otherwise may not be viable.

Know/identify your vulnerable groups – consider ‘fairy job-mother’ approach

Issues raised by Cllr. Horwood – Financial planning v. risk and looking at the bigger picture. Overall financial reductions across the LA.

SDC Housing

Jane Ellis – Service Manager

Jane described to the group how the team is arranged.

3 x Housing Officers; 1 x PSL officer; 2 x HERO officers and 1 x support officer

Each Housing Officer has 80 – 100 cases (increases now being seen – more normal to have 100 cases).

From 1000 enquiries around 50 may be accepted as homeless

Team provides homelessness and housing advice – increase seen due to recession, HB changes and affordability issues, plus cases are more complex Kent-wide task and finish group piloting scheme with Credit Union to provide budget accounts with guarantee direct debit to landlord

Housing undertook survey to see landlords concerns – these came out as payment of rent and condition of property.

Tenant accreditation is a useful tool for the above point.

Housing have resourcing concerns moving into UC as expect to see an increase in enquiries and people presenting as homeless – increased B&B use is damaging to the tenants, unsuitable accommodation wise and very expensive.

Customers need to be educated in their option.

Jane also explained that the Housing register belongs to SDC but is administered by WKHA – any application is considered and WKHA apply their applications policy