



Stafford
BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Benefit Service

A Benefit Welfare Reform and Service Update

Topics....

- Benefit Performance
- Supporting People Funding
- Welfare Changes announced in the recent budget
- Housing Benefit Fraud
- Universal Credit Update
- Questions.....

Current Benefit performance

- New claims made via customer services processed in an average of 6 days
- All new claims processed in 13.7....quickest processing time in Staffordshire
- Change in circumstances processed in an average of 5 days.... 2nd quickest in Staffordshire
- Telephone abandonment rate is 10% and on average callers wait 2 minutes to get through to an adviser...best performance in 2 years
- On line forms available, such as changes in circumstances, appeals and discretionary payments and new self serve area in our waiting area.

Current Benefit performance

- Dedicated out of hours visiting service for those people who are housebound or who work during our normal office hours
- Benefit newsletter issued to all landlords who receive payment directly. Newsletter includes updates on welfare reform changes... next edition due October

Supporting People Funding

- Supporting People provides housing related support to help vulnerable people to live as independently as possible in the community whether in their own homes or in hostels, sheltered housing or other specialised supported housing.
- SP ends March 2016
- Usually paid to tenants who are also in receipt of Housing Benefit
- Housing Benefit will continue but many landlords fear that without SP they will be unable to provide the accommodation as SP pays for support workers.

Supported people Funding

- Housing Benefit cannot pay for support and so although there is nothing to stop landlords increasing the rent HB will not pay the increase as this will be seen as an ineligible service charge.
- The Benefit Service has already met with a number of providers and I would encourage any landlords that provide this type of specialist accommodation to get in touch before reviewing their rents
- One issue to be aware of is that if this type of accommodation cannot be sustained, tenants will need to look at general needs housing and obtain the support separately....

Welfare Changes Announced in the recent budget

- A freeze on Local Housing Allowance rates from 2016 to 2020
- A 4% reduction over the next four years in Social rents (housing associations and where the council has it's own council stock)
- Family Premium to be removed from April 16, and limit on the dependants addition to 2 children from April 17 (children born after April 17)
- Reduction in benefit cap to £20k.. No date yet set
- From April 2017, new claims from 18-21 year olds to Universal Credit will not include Housing Costs, a few exemptions but not many

Welfare changes.....

- From September 17 free childcare doubled from 15 hours to 30 hours

Welfare changes...

- There will be a reduction in HB due to increase in free childcare because if people pay less then less of their earnings are deducted and so they get less HB....

Housing Benefit Fraud

- From June this year the responsibility for investigating HB fraud passed to the Department For Work and Pensions
- Allegations can be made directly to the DWP or through the Benefit Service
- Details of how to make an allegation are on our website.
- The Benefit Service remains responsible for investigations of Local Council Tax Reduction (the old Council Tax Benefit scheme), tenancy fraud (ccdc only at this point) and investigations into Council Tax discount fraud, i.e. single discount

Universal Credit Update

- Introduced in Stafford from October 2015
- At this stage, new claims only and only new claims from Single People with no dependants.
- Total number of people affected very small due to one or two exemptions.....

Universal Credit....

- **be single not be pregnant;**
- **a GB national and normally resident in GB**
- **not have given birth within the last 15 weeks**
- **have a valid NINO (excludes temporary NINOs)**
- **not have responsibility for children (including adopting or fostering a child) or provide care for any other person**
- **be aged between 18 years old and 60 years and 6 months**
- **not be required by the Child Maintenance Enforcement Commission (CMEC) to pay child maintenance**

Universal Credit

- **have a bank or building society account or Post Office Card Account**
- **not have a fit note (unless Work Capability Assessment [WCA] confirmed found fit for work**
- **not be homeless or in supported accommodation**
- **not be in a period of self-certification awaiting a fit note**
- **not own their own home (including part ownership**
- **not be making the claim through a Personal Acting Body (PAB)/Corporate Acting Body (CAB)**
- **not have more than £6000 in Savings and Capital**
- **not be a Company Director or in a limited liability partnership**

Universal Credit Update....

- not be self employed
- not be in any form of education or training
- not expect to commence education or training in the next month
- be out of work or in work but does not expect to have net earnings (from employment) in the next month exceeding £330.

Universal Credit Update

Not be in receipt of or waiting to hear about a claim for:

- Job Seekers Allowance
 - Severe Disablement Allowance
 - Employment Support Allowance
 - Income Support
 - Incapacity Benefit (IB)
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- Copies of the eligibility criteria can be requested from the Benefit Service

Universal Credit

- After October 15, where a tenant is currently receiving HB and has a break in their claim due to starting work. If they need to reclaim again because the work ends and they meet the eligibility criteria, they will claim Universal Credit
- The payment of Universal Credit (including Housing Costs) will be made directly to the tenant 4 weeks in arrears irrespective of whether the HB paid previously was paid to the landlord.

Universal Credit

- The DWP say that when a new claim to UC is made and the claimant has housing costs (rent) they will contact the landlord to let them know that a claim for UC has been made and it is at that point that the landlord can apply for direct payment due to arrears or the tenant not being able to manage their finances

Universal Credit

- Problem is the DWP only have plans to do this where the landlord is a social landlord. i.e. a housing association or the tenant is in council owned accommodation ... there are no plans to inform private landlords

Universal Credit

- The DWP have said that they will inform the Local Authority that a new claim for UC has been made and the LA can notify the landlord.
- We will but.. only where the payment of HB was previously paid to the landlord and

Universal Credit....

- From speaking to some Housing Associations they tell me that they only receive notification that a claim for UC has been made in about 50% of the cases and that nearly all of those notifications are received after the payments have been issued.....
- A request by landlords to have payments directly to them instead of the tenant can be made at any time, however unlike now, the DWP see any alternative arrangement as only a temporary measure.

Universal Credit

- There is a meeting next week with UC representatives and I will provide an update following that.

Questions

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