

Appendix F

Responses from DWP Representatives

1. What are the current numbers of Harlow people/households on UC?

2098 live claims as of w/c 05/03/2018

2. How many single people and families will be going on to UC and over what time scale?

Unfortunately we are unable to give any specific or accurate forecast in relation to this question. The aim is that all 6 benefits will be replaced by UC with the only exemptions being temporary housing (Post April), families with more than two children and couples where both parties are over pensionable age. However, the timescale of this change is yet to be finalised. We are currently in the process of transferring UCL customers over to UCFS and expect that to take approximately 3 months to complete.

3. Are you able to provide a breakdown of claimants by housing tenure?

We have requested this information from our National UCFS team. However, due to the nature of the request and MI available we are still awaiting a response at this time. We have been informed that it would be very difficult to obtain this information from existing MI if even possible.

4. What support is being offered to claimants and how are claimants made aware of it?

We have made huge efforts to offer as much support as possible. Leading up to the launch of UCFS we held awareness sessions for all partners and providers, this included a large focus on Q&A. This event allowed us to share a lot of information and give practical demonstrations of how customers could make a claim to UCFS allowing the providers to see the UCFS system in action. We have continued to send regular updates to all the providers and partners who attended and have supported a closer working relationship by making direct links to staff within the jobcentre available for contact. We have informed providers that they can contact us locally to book interviews.

We operate from our site a Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) where we have anything between 12 to 15 partners and providers attend each fortnight to deliver a supportive drop-in surgery for our customers. This allows us to work together with our partners and providers to support and overcome customer barriers including such concerns as

Appendix F

debt management and housing issues. The MAC is widely publicised via both physical means with posters in jobcentres, Doctors surgeries and via digital channels such as Twitter and Facebook. Local providers and partners have also been encouraged to promote as well. Our linked service centres in Bangor & Wrexham have also been provided with the details of the MAC so that they can promote it via the daily contact they have with our customers. Since the launch of UCFS we have also ensured that a UCFS Work Coach attends the MAC to deal with any UCFS queries that any customers or partners/providers may have.

We have computer support in place for all customers that require it when either making new claims or managing their required actions such as journal entries or reporting changes of circumstances. This is again promoted via the jobcentre and service centres at every customer contact.

5. How many and what percentage of claimants are requesting emergency loans or advance payments?

We offer the opportunity of an advance to every customer at the initial interview regardless of circumstances. We explain the full amount they can request but also focus on ensuring that they are also looking at how they budget and promote the Personal Budget Support. For example, if a customer could potentially be eligible to request an advance of £1500 we would talk to them about what they need to pay for essential living costs and how long they will need it to last (until 1st payment of UC). Once this is discussed the customer may only decide to request £200 knowing that they can return to us next week for a further amount if required. We try to minimise customers claiming the full amount but ensure that the full amount is available if required.

We have no official MI on advances at this point. However, from local discussions with our Work Coaches we believe that around 80% of our customers are requesting an advance with most of those accepting a 12 month repayment plan. I can also confirm that we have deferred repayments for some customers to allow them to focus on budgeting. This action is decided at a local level based on individual's circumstances.

Appendix F

6. What is the most effective way for the Council to communicate with the DWP if claimants have any issues with UC payments?

We have a network of shared contacts between the local council and the local jobcentre. We are in contact with each other on a weekly basis to discuss and investigate more complex cases. This contact is mainly via telephone and email but we do organise face to face meetings as well.