

Welfare Aware 2018

Universal Credit Briefing 3:

Homelessness Easements and Hardship Payments

Let's end homelessness together

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Universal Credit: Homelessness Easements and Hardship Payments

Claimant Commitments should be tailored to suit to the individual needs and personal circumstances of each person applying for Universal Credit. This FAQ document gives a brief introduction to helping your clients access a period of easement on their DWP claimant commitments, and accessing hardship payments.

Homelessness Easements

What are they?

The purpose of a DWP easement is to give the individual time to respond to immediate emergency issues affecting their life. Homelessness easements are when somebody informs the Job Centre that they are experiencing homelessness, and require a period of time in which the responsibilities set out in their Claimant Commitment are relaxed. This is in order to allow that person to source appropriate accommodation in which they will then be able to commence seeking full time employment. If successful, the job centre will issue your client with a change of circumstances form, detailing the date, reason and next steps for review.

Who is eligible for a homelessness easement?

Accessing a homelessness easement is available for:

- People currently street homeless and rough sleeping
- Those staying in direct access homeless hostels or night shelters

How do I support my client to access homelessness easements?

It is up to the job centre to decide if your client is eligible for a period of homelessness easement, therefore the more evidence you can provide to demonstrate your clients current position, the better. As a frontline worker, you can help pull together the following evidence to support your client's case:

- Information on when they became homeless
- Details of the circumstances why they became homeless
- Outreach/CHAIN number
- Homeless hostel tenancy/licence agreement
- Details of actions undertaken to seek accommodation
- Information on how long your client is likely to be homeless
- Reasons why your client may find it difficult to continue job searching
- A suitable c/o address

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Homeless Link have developed a 'Homelessness Easement Draft Template Letter' for you to adapt and develop yourself with your clients, published alongside this document.

How long do easement periods last for?

There is no strict period of time that an easement period can last for, neither is there a defined limit on the number of times one person can apply. However, guidance suggests that approximately four weeks is suitable, so make sure your client is aware of this. Any easement period is regularly reviewed by work coaches, so ongoing evidence of someone's homelessness situation should be provided. During a period of easement, a work coach may include specific actions relating to your client's homelessness, for example presenting as homeless at the local authority, registering with a local homelessness outreach service, accessing a day centre or advice service.

Can decision be appealed?

Easements are set at the discretion of work coaches within the DWP. Any decision to remove or end a period of easement can be appealed by presenting further evidence to the work coach.

Hardship payments

What are they?

Universal Credit is temporarily reduced or stopped completely if participants don't complete all of the activities laid out within their claimant commitment. During this time, payments to a claimant's bank accounts can be dramatically reduced. Hardship payments are sometimes available for people who have been sanctioned and are struggling to meet their basic needs.

Who is eligible for hardship payments?

To be eligible for a hardship payment your client must meet all the following requirements:

- Be 18 years old or over
- Struggling to meet their basic needs (this includes accommodation and housing)
- They must have made every attempt to stop funding non-essential items (this includes anything relating to 'leisure or entertainment')
- They must have done everything they can to source financial support from other places
- They must have successfully performed all work-related activities during the previous week

How do you access a hardship payment?

A hardship payment is usually 60% of the amount they were sanctioned with in the previous month.

Do I have to pay the hardship payment back?

A hardship payment is a loan, and is paid back once the sanction ends by deducting small amounts from future DWP payments. This is similar to the Universal Credit Advance Payments.

How do I help someone to access hardship payments?

To access hardship payments, contact the Universal Credit Helpline for free on 0800 328 9344. When you are supporting or advising your client to do this, make sure they have the following information:

- Which specific living costs your client is struggling to maintain
- Information on their struggle to meet basic accommodation needs
- Any up-to-date information on existing savings or assets
- Evidence of cutting down on non-essential living costs (entertainment etc)

Can I appeal a negative decision?

If the DWP has sanctioned your client and/or refuses to provide hardship payments, it is possible to apply for a 'mandatory reconsideration', in order to review the decision. If you are supporting a client to review a decision, make sure you have new or further evidence to support their request.

This list is not exhaustive and is presented as a basic checklist. If you are unsure about how to proceed, speak to your manager or contact the DWP on 0800 328 9344.

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