

WELFARE AWARE UNDERSTANDING AND PREPARING FOR CHANGE



HEALTH CHECK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

GENERAL / CROSS CUTTING ISSUES

Action	Yes	Other actions to take
There is a welfare reform lead officer coordinating the Local Authority's work.		
There is a communication plan to raise awareness for both staff and the public, for example using posters, leaflets, newsletters, road shows and face to face appointments.		
There is a training plan that supports public-facing staff to understand welfare reform and know where to direct people for information, resources and support.		
Local Authority welfare reform lead officer communicates regularly with local voluntary and community service (VCS) providers about welfare reform, including those not contracted by the LA.		
Advice and support on managing money and debt is available and publicised locally.		
Local facilities are evaluated in light of increased demand e.g. IT access in libraries.		
The authority is developing a financial and digital inclusion strategy working with relevant stakeholders to develop provision.		
The authority is developing an Assisted Digital support strategy in line with the Government Digital Strategy		

SIZE CRITERIA (working age households)

Action	Yes	Other actions to take
Local Authority has identified people likely to be affected and contacted them to offer support and access to resources.		
Local Authority staff are trained and have access to resources or referrals into other services in order to advise people referred by DWP e.g. how to find lodgers.		
Procedures for dealing with rent arrears and allocating discretionary housing payments are reviewed in light of the impact of the size criteria.		
Local authority is coordinating or part of any group work with social housing providers around targeting and housing options provision		
There are effective communications and information sharing between the housing team DWP and HB teams to ensure all households are targeted effectively - including targeting households who will be exempt under the 13 week exemptions- 'grace period' (death/new HB claim and not claimed in past 52 weeks)		
Debt and welfare benefits advice services have been mapped and are engaged with a coordinated approach to advice to affected households		
The housing department has access to DHP and has an agreed process for allocation with the HB team - including household types to be prioritised		
There is an agreed approach to households who become benefit claimants post April 2013 and how they will be targeted		
The authority has mapped with their MRS provider or syndicated provider any MRS household impacted by under occupation		
The authority has regular liaison with the local JCP teams and is up to date with Universals jobs match provision and how it is operating locally		
Effective advice and support into employment is provided for households how can achieve earnings of more than £430 per month or more than 16 hours per week		

DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS

Action	Yes	Other actions to take
The authority and HB team has an agreed process for the allocation of DHP in relation to welfare reform impacted households - with reference to the new DHP guidance (April 2013) and prevention of homelessness		
The housing options team and HB colleagues have received joint training on the new DHP guidance and agreed procedure for allocation of funds		
Relevant voluntary sector and other partners have been briefed on the new DHP guidance and how their clients may access payments		
There is an agreed approach to the biannual reporting of DHP spend to DWP		

SUPPORTED EXEMPT ACCOMMODATION

Action	Yes	Other actions to take
Local Authority has identified which provision is exempt (see SITRA briefing)		
A lead officer is keeping up to date with external developments on the definition and maintaining communication with projects/providers affected.		
There is an understanding across partners regarding the impact of UC housing cost payments for residents of exempt accommodation		
Local authorities have registered exempt accommodation on the Single Housing Benefit Extract (to avoid housing costs being rolled into UC)		
Authorities have contingency plans in place for accommodation not defined as exempt to support resident to manage their housing costs and any impacts on overall benefit cap		

SHARED ACCOMMODATION RATE

Action	Yes	Other actions to take
Households living in this accommodation understand the impacts of LHA rates on their housing costs		
Households who are exempt from the restrictions e.g. care leavers or disabled YP have been mapped in conjunction with HB teams		
Authorities have mapped households who are exempt because they have been living in homeless hostel for 3 months or more		
Authorities have mapped and conducted risk assessments for any households subject to MAPPA exceptions, working in conjunction relevant lead professionals		
All partners and stakeholders have been trained in SAR, any relevant exemptions and housing options		

TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PROVISION

Action	Yes	Other actions to take
Local authority and frontline staff have been trained on the new regulations applying for households in temporary accommodation and households who transfer to UC (phased from October 2013) (circular g10-2012)		
Authorities are managing use of B&B usage up to 6 weeks and the impact on households subject to the benefit cap or on UC		
PRS landlords and providers are fully briefed on the impacts of the changes to the regulations		
Local authority PRSO policy is fully compliant with the Suitability Order and revised homelessness Code of Guidance		
Mapping of households living in TA and impacted by the overall benefit cap and advice provided		

BENEFIT CAP (16-64 yrs)

Action	Yes	Other actions to take
Local Authority lead officers monitor external developments are aware of date for roll-out of benefit cap locally.		
Local Authority has identified people likely to be affected and contacted them to offer support and access to resources.		
Procedures for dealing with rent arrears and allocating discretionary housing payments are reviewed in light of the impact of the benefit cap.		
Local authority housing options and homelessness advice teams are fully trained on the overall benefit cap, income maximisation, exemptions, back to work and better off calculations		
The local authority allocation policy and tenancy strategy reflects the impacts of the overall benefit cap in the local area and registered providers are working in partnership with the authority around allocations		
Registered providers and the local authority are working in partnership to target households impacted by the cap and to offer housing options and other advice		
The authority has regular liaison with the local JCP teams and is up to date with Universal jobs match provision and how it is operating locally		
Frontline staff have access to the online benefit cap calculator and have been trained to use it to support households who may be impacted		
The authority conducts regular liaison with HB teams regarding how the overall benefit cap will be applied vi HB payments and how households will be communicated with		
Local authority holds regular meetings with Troubled Families teams to target appropriate support and advice to impacted households who are part of their programme		

UNIVERSAL CREDIT & DIRECT PAYMENTS

Action	Yes	Other actions to take
Staff are trained and can explain the changes, are aware of when groups start to transition to UC, and can refer customers to sources of support and advice.		
The authority has mapped the provision of debt advice providers in the area and has an agreed strategy for targeting households to avoid debt and rent arrears		
Local provision is in place to enable households to access basic bank accounts or credit union facilities to set up direct debit payments. Authorities are fully briefed on any relevant costs to landlords or households in access basic bank accounts or a credit union account		
Local provision is supported to enable clients to access IT and the internet (via neighbourhood offices, libraries and other public places)		
Households are provided with relevant checklist or other information to ensure they can successfully access UC online		
Frontline staff are fully briefed on UC conditionality, sanctions and the process for advance payments where appropriate		
Frontline staff have an understanding of how the Work Programme operates and any requirements for claimants to access the schemes		
There is a strategic group in place made up of key stakeholder such as RPs, PRS landlords, frontline advice providers to regularly monitor the impact of UC on households and to agree an appropriate action plan (to include impacts on revenue and service provision)		
Local authority led UC pilots regularly share experiences and findings		
Phasing of households onto UC is actively monitored		
Regular meetings are held with JCP colleagues to support access to employment, income maximisation and universal jobs match		

SOCIAL FUND

Action	Yes	Other actions to take
There is a new model for Local Welfare Assistance from April 2013.		
Local voluntary and community services have been consulted.		
Existing provision has been considered for commissioning/partnerships e.g. furniture projects, food banks, Credit Unions.		
Local Welfare Assistance is accessible to the public, including excluded groups.		
There is a communication plan to inform the public and VCS about how to access Local Welfare Assistance.		
There is clear information about eligibility criteria.		
There is clear information about repayment plans.		
Local Authority has a plan to mitigate the risk of increased use of payday loans or loan sharks as access to crisis loans is restricted.		
There is coordination between access to different sources of funding e.g. Local Welfare Assistance, discretionary housing payments, and rent deposit schemes.		
Local Authority staff and VCS understand the difference between Local Welfare Assistance and Budgeting Loans/Advances, and how to access them.		
The authority is aware of any provision of food banks and other voluntary or independent sector support available to households with agreements regarding referrals		

COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

Action	Yes	Other actions to take
Local Authority has identified groups who are no longer exempt and informed them of the change and procedure for re-assessment.		
Changes have been publicised to affected groups and to local VCS providers.		
There is adequate provision of debt advice services to support households to budget effectively		
The authority holds regular liaison with CTB teams, social landlords and other relevant stakeholders to target households who may have difficulty managing their finance and to prevent impacts on other housing costs		
Procedures for dealing with Council Tax arrears have been reviewed for those not previously liable.		
Provision of financial services such as basic bank accounts or credit unions has been mapped and households are supported to access these services		

DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE & PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENTS

Action	Yes	Other actions to take
Public facing staff are trained in the changes and can advise people about the timetable for change and the requirement to apply for PIP.		
Frontline services are fully briefed on the phasing of PIP in their area		
Mapping has been completed to understand the provision of advice services to support households via the assessment process (taking into account any impacts of LSC changes from April 2013)		
Local authorities are aware of the Local Authority Data Sharing programme for HB assessments		
Local authority frontline staff aware of any premiums or applicable amounts in relation to HB pass porting		