



Report to Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee Thursday 19th September 2019

Report of: James Henderson, Director of Policy, Performance & Communications

Subject: Universal Credit in Sheffield Update

Author of Report: Cat Arnold, Policy & Improvement Officer

Summary:

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) started to roll out 'Full Service' Universal Credit in Sheffield in November 2018. Eventually UC will replace all working age income-related benefits.

UC represents a significant change in the welfare system. Unlike the benefits it replaces, the default position with UC is one monthly payment to a household, including housing costs, paid in arrears. People then pay their rent, bills and other costs from that payment. Unlike the previous system, UC is usually applied for and managed online.

A Universal Credit Partnership has been set up to coordinate the city's activity on UC, bringing together key representatives from Sheffield City Council, DWP and voluntary, community and faith organisations to share knowledge and create links between the different strands of activity around UC.

When UC was first introduced, DWP provided funding to the Council Housing service and SCC staff provided support (to all tenures) within job centres. From April 2019, after a national agreement, funding was given to Citizens Advice for UC support. Citizens Advice have therefore set up the Help to Claim service (Freephone 0800 1448 444). **The Citizens Advice report appended here provides further details about this service.**

SCC and the Universal Credit Partnership are measuring the impacts of UC on the city and on the Council through both data and case studies.

The overall picture from these information sources indicate that we have not seen the very widespread negative impacts that some other areas of the country experienced when UC was introduced. This is likely to be partly because of

improvements that were made to UC before it came to Sheffield, but also due to the work of support services (public and voluntary sector) in supporting people on UC and the city's strong partnership working on this issue.

However, our anecdotal evidence shows that there are still people struggling on UC in Sheffield. This is particularly those whose lives are more complex or who have vulnerabilities that make managing the system harder.

Solutions to these issues are being sought, including feeding back to DWP to improve their systems, and continuing communications and signposting work.

The information here has been requested by the Committee to enable it to be kept up-to-date on this issue and identify where further scrutiny is needed, if appropriate.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	✓
Other	

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Note the contents of the briefing and provide comments on the response to, and impact of, Universal Credit in the city.

Background Papers: None

Category of Report: OPEN

Report of the Director of Policy, Performance and Communications

Universal Credit in Sheffield Update

1.0 Introduction/Context

This briefing is designed to give members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee an overview on Universal Credit (UC) in Sheffield, roll out of which began in Sheffield in November 2018. In December 2016 an item on Welfare Reform was presented to the Committee, which included some information about preparations for Universal Credit. Since then, members of the Committee have received a number of briefings on Universal Credit in Sheffield.

2.0 What is Universal Credit?

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) started to roll out 'Full Service' UC in Sheffield in November 2018¹. Eventually UC will replace all working age income-related benefits (Income Support, income-related Employment and Support Allowance, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit and Tax Credits), but not Council Tax Support which will continue to be claimed separately through a different process. According to DWP figures, at the end of July 2019 there were just under 14,000 people in the city on UC.

The default position with UC is **one monthly payment to a household**, including housing costs, **paid in arrears**. People then pay their rent, bills and other costs from that payment. UC is applied for and managed **online**. Different arrangements can be made for vulnerable people, although evidence suggests that these do not always work smoothly.

New claims for the benefits above now require an application instead for UC and some claimants of legacy benefits who have a change of circumstances must also claim UC. This is called 'natural migration'. At some point in the future, the DWP will contact all working-age people still on legacy benefits to notify them that their award will be ending and to invite them to apply for UC. This process is called 'managed migration' and a date has not yet been set for it; it is currently being tested in Harrogate.

¹ 'Full Service' differs from a prototype version of UC called 'Live Service'; Sheffield had the latter for some time, with around 3700 people in the city claiming it. All claimants on Live Service were transferred to Full Service at the end of 2018.

Further information about Universal Credit can be found at www.sheffield.gov.uk/universalcredit and www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk.

3.0 What has been done in Sheffield to respond to Universal Credit?

A **Universal Credit Partnership** has been set up to coordinate the city's activity on UC, bringing together key representatives from Sheffield City Council, DWP and voluntary, community and faith organisations to share knowledge and create links between the different strands of activity around UC², covering:

- Universal Credit Information Sheet and website have been developed www.sheffield.gov.uk/universalcredit which set out key aspects of UC and where people can get help in Sheffield.
- UC awareness sessions have been delivered to partner organisations by Sheffield's DWP Partnership Manager and by Citizens Advice Sheffield.
- Community groups and public services are working closely together in localities to bring together support for people on UC and to provide information on UC.
- Comprehensive signposting information about locality-based support has been compiled and made available to staff in libraries, housing offices, job centres, GP receptions, community hubs and other services to help ensure that people are directed to the best support for them.

Internal SCC groups are also monitoring and responding to UC impacts on services and our citizens.

When UC was first introduced, DWP provided funding to the Council Housing service and SCC staff provided support (to all tenures) within job centres³. From April 2019, after a national agreement, funding was given to Citizens Advice for UC support.

Citizens Advice have therefore set up the **Help to Claim** service, which is usually initially accessed via phone (**Freephone 0800 1448 444**) and then face-to-face appointments are arranged if needed. The service can also be directly accessed face-to-face at their drop in sessions. Sheffield Citizens Advice have also set up a local Consultancy Line for partners and organisations to help them support people on UC (0114 354 0656).

² Organisations represented include: Sheffield City Council, DWP, Citizens Advice Sheffield, Housing Associations, Manor & Castle Development Trust, ZEST, SOAR, Sheffield Credit Union, Shelter, Church Action on Poverty, CCG, and Sheffield Food Bank Network.

³ Our Council Housing staff now only provide UC support to our tenants.

The DWP-Citizens Advice contract only covers support up to the first payment – however, Citizens Advice Sheffield also provides support to those who need to manage their existing UC claim. The DWP contract is for 12 months until April 2020. **The Citizens Advice report appended here provides further details about this service.**

4.0 What do we know about the impacts of Universal Credit in Sheffield?

SCC and the Universal Credit Partnership are measuring the impacts of UC on the city and on the Council through both data and case studies.

A data dashboard is regularly compiled with information such as DWP numbers of UC claimants; percentage of Council tenants on UC in rent arrears; SCC Customer Services contacts relating to UC; applications for the Local Assistance Scheme Crisis Grants; homelessness presentations; and Council Tax Support caseload; and numbers of people supported by the Citizens Advice Help to Claim service. We are also seeking data from food banks on their impacts.

Although these numbers are useful, they can only show part of the picture. There has therefore also been work to better understand the specific impacts of UC on people's lives in Sheffield. The Universal Credit Partnership held a workshop in June 2019 to gain a shared understanding of how different types of people in Sheffield are experiencing UC and to explore solutions for improving their experiences, with representatives from community groups, charities, DWP, SCC, NHS, and equality groups.

The overall picture from these information sources indicate that we have not seen the very widespread negative impacts that some other areas of the country experienced when UC was introduced. For example, although council rent arrears are increasing due to our tenants moving to UC, the levels are not as high as some other social landlords have seen. This is likely to be partly because of improvements that were made to UC before it was introduced in Sheffield, but also due to the work of support services (public and voluntary sector) in supporting people on UC and the city's strong partnership working on this issue.

However, our anecdotal evidence shows that there are still people struggling on UC in Sheffield. This is particularly those whose lives are more complex or who have vulnerabilities that make managing the system harder. We have found that this is more likely to include people from BAMER communities, care leavers, people experiencing domestic abuse, tenants in private-rented accommodation, people with disabilities or health conditions, and carers. Issues include: lack of digital skills; an increase in unethical advice in some communities – charging vulnerable people for help completing forms, or 'friends' helping with the process and then taking money;

reports of people being tricked or pressured into claiming UC and having bogus advances claimed on their behalf; lone parents and part-time workers struggling to get their childcare costs paid due to errors in the system; in some cases UC representing a reduction in the amount of benefit paid; whole-household or even split payments not working for people experiencing abusive relationships; and concerns that the capacity of advice/support in the city will not be enough to meet future demand given the number of people who will move onto UC in the future.

Some of the solutions to these issues lie with improving DWP systems, and concerns are being fed back both locally via Sheffield DWP Partnership managers and nationally via Citizens Advice's campaigning work. Further, the chairs of Sheffield's Health and Wellbeing Board wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in March 2019 to express their concerns about the negative impact of UC on people's health in the city⁴.

Other, more local, solutions include continuing communications work to ensure that people and organisations know where to get help with UC, exploring multi-agency support in some localities, improving digital inclusion, and ongoing review of the UC support that is available to people in the city.

5.0 Further information

An information sheet about UC in Sheffield and a detailed signposting guide to UC support in the city is available to download from here:

www.sheffield.gov.uk/universalcredit

Citizens Advice **Help to Claim** service: **Freephone 0800 1448 444**.

6.0 What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

As set out in the report above, the rollout of Universal Credit has significant implications for people in Sheffield and whilst to date, we have not seen a similar scale of negative impacts that other places have experienced, our evidence shows that Sheffielders, particularly those with the most complex lives, are struggling on UC. We are continuing to work with Universal Credit Partnership to support our communities and review the support that we provide to people in the city.

⁴ You can read the letter to the Secretary of State here: <https://sheffieldnewsroom.co.uk/news/universal-credit/>

7.0 Recommendation

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

Note the contents of the briefing and provide comments on the response to, and impact of, Universal Credit in the city.



Sheffield

Help to Claim: Universal Credit

Citizens Advice Sheffield is the city's leading advice service

Through our Help to Claim service, Citizens Advice Sheffield provides people with advice on how to apply for Universal Credit and supports them through the application process.

The support provided will vary depending on the individual needs of the client, but it might include things such as; helping someone gather evidence of their housing or childcare costs; ensuring people know that Alternative Payment Arrangements are available and offering advice on what to expect at a work coach appointment and how to prepare for it.

From the 1st April - 31st August we have advised 2428 people, with 9438 issues. We have helped people in the most deprived wards of Sheffield. We have helped people secure over £4 million pounds in unclaimed benefits, our comprehensive triage also identifies other benefits that people may be entitled to.

A comprehensive triage is at the heart of our service, clients can either contact the Freephone helpline **0800 1448 444** Monday to Friday 8am—6.00pm or attend any of our drop in locations and receive a face to face appointment if required.

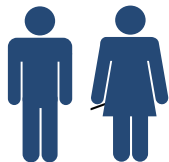
We have introduced conference calling for non-digital claims, this is very beneficial for clients who may have language barriers or lack digital skills and would not be able to maintain a online claim.

We also have a Consultancy Line for partners **0114 354 0656** Monday to Friday 10.00am—1.00pm. This line is for partners who may be supporting a client with a digital claim or who may have a complex or technical issue that needs resolving.

Universal Credit Help to Claim 0800 1448 444 Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm

Help to Claim During April to August 2019

We have helped 2428 people



1217 women

1016 men

2222 working age people

877 disabled or ill people

676 black and ethnic minority people

We have helped with 9438 issues



6970 Initial claim issues

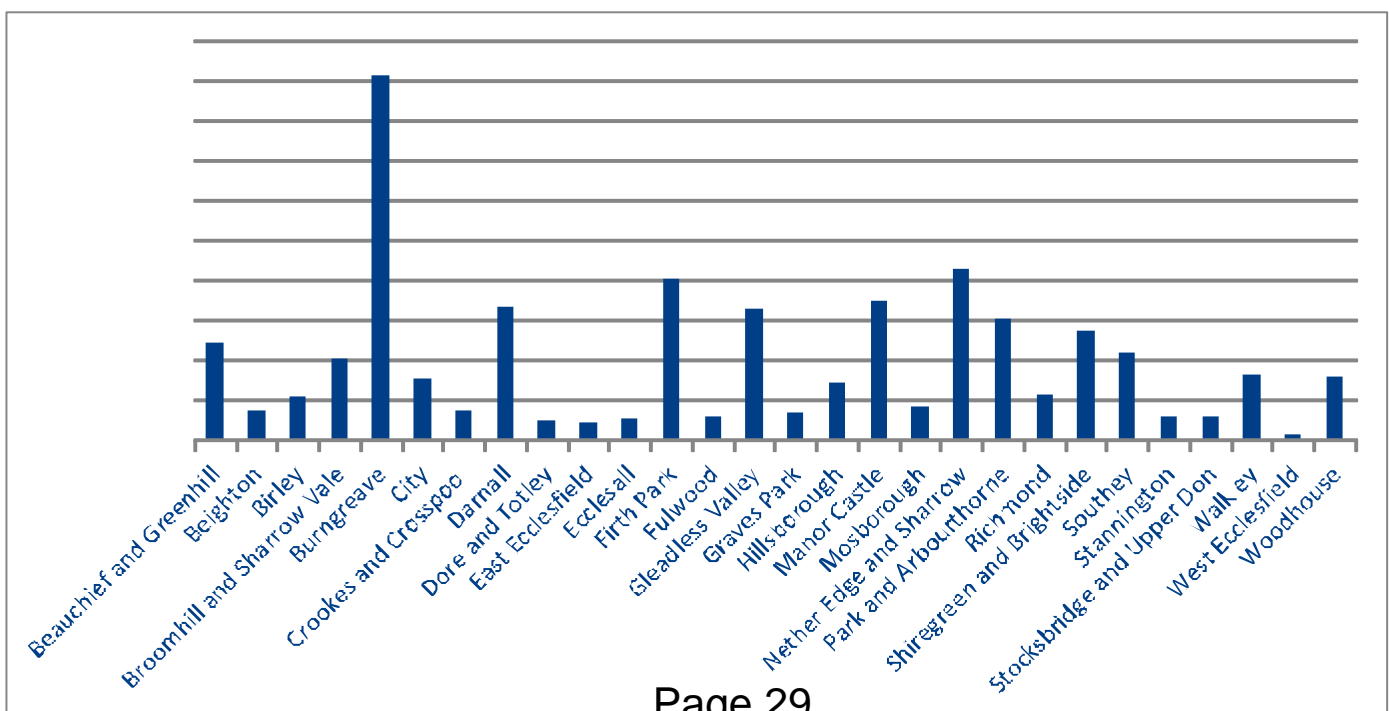
239 Standard element issues

382 Housing element issues

213 Calculation of income and savings

1634 Other issues

We have helped more people where help is most needed



We have helped people maximise their income

	Number of outcomes	Client count	Amount	Average per client
Initial Claim	380	343	£2,866,879	£8,358
Standard element	69	69	£302,655	£4,386
Housing element	67	67	£325,314	£4,855
Limited capability for work element	17	17	£55,781	£3,281
Child element	52	48	£256,354	£5,341
Child care costs	2	2	£5,157	£2,579
Carers elements	17	17	£32,268	£1,898
Child benefit	2	2	£1,166	£583
Working and child tax credits	1	1	£6,105	£6,105
Job seekers allowance	7	7	£26,624	£3,803
Carers allowance	3	3	£10,319	£3,440
Employment and support allowance	18	18	£79,693	£4,427
Personal independence payment	9	9	£51,912	£5,768
Grand Total	644	603	£4,020,227	£9,515



Assessment and support workers, Advice Workers and Volunteers



Dedicated help to claim Free-phone 0800 144 8 444



Face to face appointments

Get help online

Does Universal Credit help work progression?

We recently produced a report regarding 'The experience of part time workers claiming Universal Credit' the report is based on evidence from interviews with claimants conducted by Citizens Advice Sheffield. The research set out to examine how Universal Credit is working for part time workers in Sheffield. In particular we were interested to explore how feasible it is to expect claimants to increase their income through work, and whether Universal Credit is succeeding in enabling claimants to overcome the barriers to work which were present in the legacy system.

Broadly, the findings from this study indicate that the picture of greater work incentives and personalised support is not reflected in the reality of the experience of part time workers claiming Universal Credit in Sheffield.

The full report can be found on our website: citizensadvice.org.uk

Added Value

This report focuses on our Help to Claim service which we deliver to Sheffield communities and being part of the national contact centre we also help people from across the country.

This service is stronger and more resilient in part because they benefit from our skills and experience of delivering services in other areas. Those services are equipped to respond to local demands, drawing strength and resilience from being connected to a wider range of skills and experience across the organisation's diverse delivery areas.



A focus on some of the people we have helped

Kazim's Story

Kazim is a 56 year old man who was referred to us for help with making a claim for Universal Credit. As the referral made it clear that he had limited understanding of English he was called back using Language Line phone facility.

It was assessed that, in addition to his limited understanding of spoken English he couldn't read or write and had no digital skills. He would not be able to make and maintain a digital claim for Universal Credit.

A conference call was agreed for later that day to help Karim make his non-digital claim this would be via a call to DWP. Karim was advised on what information he needed to have at hand in order for the claim to succeed.

At the agreed time Karim was called back using the conference facility. The DWP was called as well as Language Line and the claim was made. At the same time an appointment was agreed in the Jobcentre for Karin to confirm his identity.

Universal Credit is now in full payment.

Ayesha's Story

Ayesha is a 34 year old single parent in receipt of Income Support, Child Tax Credit, Child Benefit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support. Ayesha cannot speak any English, her Benefits were suspended after a return from a four week family visit abroad although she had informed the Job Centre of this.

We established she was away one day longer than period allowed for continuation of benefits, but the Job Centre had not alerted her to the risk when she told them of her intended dates before travelling.

On attending the Job Centre a claim for Universal Credit had been made although due to the language barrier client was not aware of this, we then challenged this requesting a reinstatement of her legacy benefits on the grounds of poor administration.

Our public phone lines are open every weekday

Help to Claim 0800 1448 444 Calls are free and lines are Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm

Adviceline 03444 113 111 Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm

Consumer Advice 03454 04 05 06 Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

Support is available online www.citizensadvice.org.uk/helptoclaim

How you can help us

If you are interested in volunteering, please take a look at our website.

Citizens Advice Sheffield is a charity.

If you would like to support us financially, please see our mydonate page.

www.citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk

Email: getintouch@citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk

Citizens Advice Sheffield is the operating name of Sheffield Citizens Advice and Law Centre Ltd

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Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority: FRN 617731

Regulated by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner: N201300063

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