

Citizens Advice Denbighshire

<p>Expected impact of UC on residents and service</p> <p><u>Impact on customers:</u> We anticipated with the full service roll out an increased demand for advice and digital support due to impact of change and uncertainty, the requirement for digital claim and ongoing support to maintain the UC account. We knew people could be challenged financially in the initial claim assessment period and in cases of natural migration to UC also for some there may be an option to stay on legacy benefits.</p> <p><u>Impact on Service:</u> Expected increased demand predominantly in Rhyl and knew it was important for staff and volunteers to be trained in advice and support for UC and we also knew that clients would need access to digital facilities and support to access digital services. We also anticipated an increased need for our money advice services.</p>
<p>Mitigation put in place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trained all staff and volunteers on all aspects of UC • Provided digital support to claimants across Denbighshire • Employed a UC adviser • Co-located at Rhyl Job Centre • Established strong relationships within DWP to ease solutions for complex issues • Provided personal budgeting service under contract to DCC • Increased outreach services • Set up and extended online referral system to our service • Worked in partnership with library service on assisted digital services
<p>Actual impact to date (April 2018 – March 2019)</p> <p><i>781 Denbighshire residents advised on Universal Credit – 20% of working age clients</i> <i>484 Personal Budgeting Support sessions (208 predicted by DWP)</i> <i>250 Assisted Digital Support sessions (120 predicted by DWP)</i></p> <p><i>25% of Universal Credit clients present with at least 1 debt issue</i> <i>32% of working age non-UC clients present with at least 1 debt issue</i></p> <p><i>12% of Universal Credit clients have received a food bank voucher from us</i> <i>8% of non-UC working age clients have received a food bank voucher from us</i></p>
<p>Lessons learnt</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation and planning proved effective. We have been able to provide the service our clients need, when, and how they need it • Referrals from partner agencies including DCC have been effective and appropriate • We have helped many vulnerable clients, and others who needed support but many UC claimants have self managed and not accessed our service • Some issues were more complex than anticipated (all parties are learning including the DWP) • Personal Budgeting Support was useful in the initial assessment phase but had more impact when we developed a two stage approach, to include after payment
<p>Going forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens Advice are now contracted to provide UC Help to Claim service which will enable us to assist clients to claim. • Personal Budgeting Support is no longer funded and we are continuing to deliver whilst seeking new funding. • We continue to be co-located at Rhyl Job Centre as part of the Help to Claim offer and Help to Claim also supports south Denbighshire customers, including at Wrexham Job Centre. • CAD has been selected by the national organisation as the Best practice Lead for all CAs in North Wales and Powys. We have seconded a member of our team to the national organisation which provides us with a direct access route for support and for influencing on behalf of our clients to government level.

Community Support Services

<p>Expected impact of UC on residents and service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations to Homelessness Prevention have continued to rise, including a 13.5% increase between 17/18 and 18/19 and a number of welfare reforms, including UC (but also the ‘bedroom tax’, the cap on family allowance, and the shared room rate for under 35s) have played a part in this. • Currently 31.5 % of households in temporary accommodation are claiming Universal Credit. • Complex Disability team have found that for those citizens in transition from children to adult services the process of applying for UC is longer. • Community Navigators have reported that they have had a few referrals where citizens are waiting for UC and have needed food bank vouchers due to the time it is taking to get started and the change from weekly/ fortnightly to monthly pay.
<p>Mitigation put in place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website information • New IT system • All frontline staff have UC awareness sessions. • Established good communication channels with Citizens Advice Denbighshire to refer customers. • Over the last year Supporting People have been funding a Homelessness Prevention Navigator post based at Rhyl Job Centre, offering advice and assistance around UC, with a focus on preventing crisis point, e.g. homelessness. • Identification of early cases for preventative work. • Close working links with Housing Enforcement and landlords to support cases at risk of homelessness. • Utilising DHP to ensure where possible vulnerable tenants are in the best position possible prior to UC roll out.
<p>Actual impact to date (April 2018 – March 2019)</p> <p>Within homelessness we do not collect data in relation to the reasons why people present as homeless, we just record the number of households presenting. As a result the information we have on the reasons why households present as homeless are anecdotal. However during the last 12 months 70% of the households that presented as homeless and were accommodated in emergency / temporary accommodation are single people under the age of 35. We are struggling to find permanent accommodation for this age group due to Welfare Reform, such as the Local Housing Allowance Benefit Cap. Similarly within the wider Community Support Services UC does not feature as a reason for referral, but is anecdotally collected as an issue when supporting our citizens.</p>
<p>Lessons learnt</p> <p>Currently there is minimal impact on those households in our leased portfolio as homeless cases are safeguarded by housing benefit whilst in temporary accommodation.</p> <p>For Syrian Refugee Families we have commissioned the British Red Cross to support families for up to the first 2 years of resettlement in Denbighshire. The British Red Cross will assist families with navigating the welfare benefits system. There is also a drop in centre for families to take letters for interpretation.</p>
<p>Going forward</p> <p>We are working across all council departments to implement solutions to address homelessness within the County which includes addressing issues impacted by Universal Credit and Welfare Reform.</p> <p>Awareness raising with people in temporary accommodation for expected move on into the private rented sector and to ensure claims for UC housing costs are made at the point of tenancy start date to mitigate any loss of housing costs payments through Renting Ready Training.</p>

Education & Children’s Services

Expected impact of UC on residents and service
Anticipated rise in demand from people and families in Denbighshire seeking support from our services as they move to Universal Credit and then the impact this would have on our resources.
Mitigation put in place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and awareness sessions for frontline staff • Referral to other agencies as needed including Citizens Advice Denbighshire
Actual impact to date (April 2018 – March 2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases in referrals to family and youth support services • Increased use of food banks or fair-share food schemes • Reports of people having to borrow money from friends or take out loans in order to buy food and electricity
Lessons learnt
<p>The transition to universal credit has been difficult for some vulnerable individuals and families due to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a long gap before receiving payment • difficulty understanding the process
Going forward
<p>Increase in demand on our services from families being referred due to homelessness, risk of becoming homeless through rent arrears or as a result of lack of money to pay for food and energy bills.</p> <p>Larger families transferring to Universal Credit from 1st Feb 2019 and whether we will see an increase in numbers.</p> <p>We are attempting to mitigate the above impact by ensuring that staff are aware of the Universal Credit process and where to signpost people for support at the earliest possible sign of difficulty.</p>

Housing

<p>Expected impact of UC on residents and service</p> <p>Impact on our customers: Income projections inevitably see an increase in arrears due to tenants UC payments being in arrears, as this financial year sees the introduction of larger families onto Universal Credit we also expect an increase in demand for support both digital and financial.</p> <p>Impact on our service We have already been managing new UC cases and getting used to DWP UC process to support customers through the process. Additional resources are required to provide customers with advice and support as well as increased payment transactions following direct housing costs and managing rent accounts in larger volumes due to direct payments to customers.</p>
<p>Mitigation put in place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Inclusion action plan • Tenant Surgeries/Roadshows • Website information • Getting online events and support • New IT system • Developed a Customer Engagement Contract seen as good practice by HQN • New contact centre to manage increased transaction and workloads • Key to Advice project with Citizens Advice Denbighshire • Trusted partner status with DWP
<p>Actual impact to date (April 2018 – March 2019)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We currently have 311 households in receipt of Universal Credit (we have 3423 current tenancies, approx. 1200 are older peoples accommodation who could claim UC until they reach pension age) • As of 01/04/2019 we have arrears on UC of £161,894.20 over 311 UC claimants, this gives an average arrears of £520.56 per case. • Pre UC most tenants who were in receipt of Housing Benefit (HB) had no arrears as HB was paid weekly in advance. The average arrears per case is equal to 6 weeks rent which is as expected due to the UC waiting time. • Research indicates that the amount of arrears is below the national average. • We have had more new claimants than expected, this is expected to increase in the next financial year
<p>Lessons learnt</p> <p>Mitigation measures implemented by the Housing team have been successful and due to UC we have increased the contact/communication with our tenants. Referrals to support agencies have been important to help support the tenants, because of the increased contact to help support tenants through the initial assessment period it has helped to identify other support needs / debt issues and resulted in tenants gaining further support to improve their circumstances. UC arrears is a “cash flow” change from previous weekly Housing Benefit being paid directly onto their rent accounts to monthly UC paid to the tenant</p>
<p>Going forward</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to develop and deliver the Here to Help campaign • A new structure has been developed for Housing Services with 11 Housing Officers having a patch of approx. 300 properties – this will allow the officers to have closer relationships with tenants to provide additional support and advice where required • Social media campaigns including animations and improved support online • Use of our community bus on our estates at events with trained staff that are able to assist with benefit applications and financial assistance / getting online • Potential impact of 53 week rent year 2019/20

Libraries and One Stop Shops

Expected impact of UC on residents and service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anticipated rise in number of people needing digital assistance to get online to make their UC claim and update their journals – and concerns whether there would be sufficient staffing capacity available in libraries to offer the support needed
Mitigation put in place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Library staff trained in supporting UC claimants Co-located provision at Jobcentre by partner organisations to support new UC claimants
Actual impact to date (April 2018 – March 2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The level of demand for the assisted digital support has not been as high as anticipated, and has fallen over the year as the set-up in Rhyl Jobcentre was established. Q1 – 20; Q2 – 12; Q3 – 6; Q4 - 1 Claimants are using library computers and wifi to maintain their journals and search for jobs, but not requiring a great deal of staff support
Lessons learnt
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The demand for assisted digital was difficult to predict before the rollout. The support co-located in the jobcentre has coped with the demand.
Going forward
No concerns currently

Revenues & Benefits Team

Expected impact of UC on residents and service
<p>Impact on our customers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five week wait for UC award • UC customers receiving monthly benefit payments, in comparison to fortnightly payments prior to UC <p>Impact on our service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All members of staff undergone intensive training on UC processes for customer and the application of UC • UC has increased benefit department's workload by 35% • Increase of 13% in the number of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) applications • Impact of UC policy on Council Tax Reduction Scheme process (CTRS)
Mitigation put in place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCC website information kept up to date • Homelessness Prevention Navigator Role based in the Job Centre • Staff training • Expertise and experience provided by Civica's UC Implementation Manager • Landlord Forum • Atkins Consultants - Free School Meals process • Attendance UC Board Meetings/Tackling Poverty Board Meetings • Working closely with Citizens Advice Denbighshire (CAD) in respect of referrals for budgeting advice and making a claim for UC • Additional staffing resources allocated to support CTRS collection rate
Actual impact to date (April 2018 – March 2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1125 UC claims have generated work for our team • Workload increased by 35% - work generated by a UC claim is more time consuming than previous Housing Benefit claims as there are further stages including processing transitional payments, submission of proformas to DWP and removing customer database indicators • DHP processing is also more time consuming as further stages added before making an award • Housing Benefit overpayments more difficult to recover from UC awards than Housing Benefit awards • Issuing of multiple revised Council Tax bills for some CTRS customers
Lessons learnt
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homelessness Prevention Navigator role has been vital in supporting claimants in all aspects of UC and CTRS • Refernet as a secure link with CAD and has been useful to quickly refer UC customers struggling with budgeting monthly UC payments
Going forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to develop staff's knowledge of new aspects of UC and its effects on customers and other benefits such as CTRS and Free School Meals • 2019/20 DHP budget has been reduced – this will have an impact on the amount of vulnerable customers within Denbighshire • Social media campaigns including animations and keeping DCC webpages up to date with any UC changes