

Scotland's Housing Network (SHN): Welfare Reform Forum Report – February 2019

This report outlines the main points from the recent round of SHN welfare reform events held in February 2019 with again over 100 people attending across the three events. The events are chaired and facilitated by Tony Donohoe, SHN Associate and can be contacted at <mailto:info@tonyconsulting.co.uk>. All available presentations from the forum can be found at: <http://www.scotlandshousingnetwork.org/welfare-reform/>.

Event Dates	Speakers	Agenda Topic	Presentation Available
East Forum (Edinburgh) – 19/02/19	Tony Donohoe – SHN	Welcome & programme	Y
	Louise Cook – DWP	UC Implementation Update	Y
	Merlin Kemp & Graham Thomson – Scottish Gov	Welfare Reform & homelessness	Y
	Jeremy Hewer – SFHA	SFHA Welfare Reform Updates	Y
	Tony Donohoe - SHN	Welfare Reform Indicators Project	Y
West Forum (Glasgow) – 21/02/19	Tony Donohoe – SHN	Welcome & programme	Y
	Louise Cook – DWP	UC Implementation Update	Y
	Merlin Kemp & Graham Thomson – Scottish Gov	Welfare Reform & homelessness	Y
	Conor Hill – SFHA	SFHA Welfare Reform Updates	Y
	Tony Donohoe - SHN	Welfare Reform Indicators Project	Y
North Forum (Inverness) – 28/02/19	Tony Donohoe - SHN	Welcome & programme	Y
	Miranda Murray – DWP	UC Implementation Update	Y
	Jeremy Hewer – SFHA	SFHA Welfare Reform Updates	Y
	Tony Donohoe - SHN	Welfare Reform Indicators Project	Y

Resource	Contact/Resource Material	Further Information/Website Links/Email
Scotland's Housing Network	info@tonyconsulting.co.uk (Tony Donohoe) Fiona.Jackson@scotlandshousingnetwork.org (Fiona Jackson)	http://www.scotlandshousingnetwork.org/welfare-reform/ http://www.welfarereformscotland.co.uk/
Scottish Federation of Housing Associations	jhewer@sfha.co.uk (Jeremy Hewer)	https://www.sfha.co.uk/sub-category/welfare-reform
Social Housing & Welfare (SHAW) Bulletin	Catherine.Louch@prospectch.org.uk (Catherine Louch)	Email Catherine Louch at Prospect Housing to be added to Bulletin circulation list.
Department of Work & Pensions	Universal Credit Landlord Guidance Page	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-rented-housing--2
	DWP 'Universal Credit Landlord Engagement Newsletter'	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-landlord-engagement-newsletters
	Kirsty Jackson – External Relations UC Programme	KIRSTY.JACKSON@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK
	Louise Cook – Scotland Partnership Manager UC Operations	LOUISE.COOK1@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK
Scottish Government	Pauline Torley	Pauline.Torley@gov.scot
	Merlin Kemp	merlin.kemp@gov.scot
	Laura Carmichael	laura.carmichael@gov.scot
Social Security Scotland	Allan Molloy – Local Delivery Lead (based in Glasgow)	Alan.Molloy@gov.scot
	Catherine Graham – Local Delivery Lead (based in Inverness)	Catherine.Graham@gov.scot

Key Presentation Topics & Points Discussed

Topic	Presentation/Discussion Points
SHN Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tony advised that forums will continue to run in 2019/20 on the same basis with 3 forums in each location (Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness) across the year. These will be in June 2019, Oct/Nov 2019 and February 2020. • Tony also provided brief overview of NAO Report on Universal Credit published in June 2018. Highlighted main issues including additional costs for local organisations, 1 in 5 claimants not receiving payments on time and claimants struggling to adjust with 4 in 10 in financial difficulties. • Recommendations from NAO report included improving tracking and reporting of benefits of UC by DWP, ensuring improved performance and cost effectiveness before increasing caseloads, working with partners to improve evidence on how working in practice and making it easier for third parties (such as landlords) to support claimants.
Universal Credit Roll-Out (DWP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full Service roll-out now completed in Scotland with all 83 Jobcentres now taking UC applications • Latest DWP figures show approximately 149,000 UC claimants in Scotland with 35% 'employed' and 65% 'not employed'. • Large number of social landlords now enrolled on the landlord portal (640 across the UK) • 'Managed migration' term changed to 'move to Universal Credit' by DWP – timetable remains testing from July 2019 on small-scale with roll-out complete by December 2023. • Nov 2018 budget announcements confirmed – i.e. work allowance increase from April 2019, reduction in deductions cap from 40% to 30% (Oct 2019), two-week run-on of some benefits from July 2020, 16-month period for repayments on advances introduced (Oct 2021), • Other recent announcements include online system for private landlords to request direct payment of housing costs, testing more frequent payments for new claimants, examining options for main carers to receive UC payments. • From 15/05/19 mixed age couples will no longer have choice of being pensioner couple. Pension Credit and associate HB will only be available when both have reached pension age unless already receiving or entitled on 14/05/19. • Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) 'Help to Claim' service will go live in April 2019. DWP currently reviewing 'pilots' and working with CA on planning for implementation. Support for claimants would be provided up to the 1st 'full and accurate' payment of Universal Credit. Various channels would be used for support i.e. digital, phone, face to face. Current contract between DWP and CA only to be for 1 yr 2020/21.

Topic	Presentation/Discussion Points
Universal Credit Roll-Out (Landlord Feedback & Issues)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In relation to mixed age couple changes for pensioners there was a question over whether if someone did not claim their state pension would this be treated as 'notional income' under UC. Post-meeting note: DWP confirmed that this would be treated as notional income. • Across the forums landlords expressed lack of knowledge and engagement from CAS/DWP on the new arrangements for support for UC claimants and how this would work in practice. For example, how it would affect the support that landlords are having to give their own tenants in the UC process? Agreed that aim would be to ask CAS/DWP to present at next round of forums on detail of workings if new arrangements. • Some discussion over what the geographical roll-out of 'managed migration' or 'move to UC' would be. Unclear at this stage but for DWP likely to be on jobcentre basis. Also, not clear whether any areas of Scotland will be involved in the initial testing phase for 10k claimants. • DWP informed that they are developing design changes for Managed Payments to Landlords (MPTLs) with the objective of ensuring landlords receive payments at the same time as UC claimant payment date (anticipated to be implemented Autumn 2019). • In Glasgow one landlord again raised issue of Pre-Action Requirements (PARs) Guidance in Scotland requiring updating to reflect welfare reform changes and specifically Universal Credit Housing Costs. • Annual rent increase notifications – DWP still developing design solution but anticipated will be through bulk upload to landlord portal. • In Inverness one landlord raised ongoing issues of corporate appointees and inability to identify payments as no National Insurance number on payment schedule. • Other issues for landlords include the ongoing resources deployed in supporting tenants and keeping track of housing costs and rental income, concerns over more complex cases emerging through 'managed migration', IT system and digital changes and general difficulties in planning responses given changing policy and practice. • Issue raised about the designation of 'technical arrears' under Universal Credit generally and also the impact on social landlord transfer policies – how are tenants impacted when they have UC arrears?
Landlord Portal	<p>There was some discussion over the need for the landlord portal to be developed to assist in supporting landlords and tenants. At the Glasgow forum some enhanced information suggested by landlords include claim start date, ongoing UC award and payment information, amount of MPTL, UC claim closure etc. Agreed that landlords will continue to raise further development of portal as a priority with DWP.</p>

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Welfare Reform & Homelessness in Scotland (Scottish Government)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SG confirmed that changes for ‘bedroom tax’ from current DHP solution will not take place until at least May 2020. There was some discussion at Glasgow forum over different approaches to DHP administration by LAs (for example electronic and paper forms) and whether this could be more consistent as can be an issue for RSLs working across several LA areas. SG emphasised discretion for LAs in their approach and difficult to prescribe. • SG are ‘reviewing’ Scottish Choices/Flexibilities although not clear when next management information release will be (data published by SG in Oct 2018 remains the latest). • SG continue to work with DWP exploring options for split payments and what can be accommodated. • Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group (HARSAG) Report can be found here: https://www.gov.scot/publications/homelessness-and-rough-sleeping-action-group-final-report/ • SG reported that over 70 recommendations in HARSAG report including some with social security/welfare reform focus. £15m available for implementation over 5yrs and all Local Authorities in Scotland have submitted a Rapid Rehousing Transition Plan to Scottish Government. • Recognition that poverty is key driver of homelessness and welfare system fundamental to improving outcomes. • Generally, landlords at the forums expressed the view that there is no available tangible evidence on a link between recent welfare reform changes and homelessness. However, there is a view that increasing pressures on incomes and changes to housing costs and arrears levels under Universal Credit are not going to help in the overall objective of tackling and preventing homelessness.
SFHA Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DWP Information on consent and disclosure for UC can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-detailed-information-for-claimants/universal-credit-consent-and-disclosure-of-information • 44,000 social housing tenants with housing costs in Scotland – of these 35% have an MPTL in place and 15% have a ‘Scottish Flexibility’ • SFHA highlighted positive developments in UC such as landlord portal, prioritising improved payment system for landlords, enhanced telephony system with quicker access to case manager but also ongoing issues such as benefit freeze until 2020, 5-week wait and other administrative issues affecting landlords. • Also highlighted national arrears figures in Scotland (upward trend for LAs but downward for HAs?) over period 2013-2018. But properties recovered due to unpaid rent increased significantly for LA and HA landlords. Average UC arrear for HAs also remains higher when compared to non-UC tenant arrears (according to SFHA survey).

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Welfare Reform Indicators Review Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tony advised that SHN had piloted the 17 indicators with 6 landlords and had received 3 returns (2 LAs and 1 HA). • After reviewing pilot data returns a final set of 14 indicators has been devised broadly focusing on UC Housing Costs, Discretionary Housing Payments, Rent Arrears data for 'UC tenants' and Managed Payments to Landlord numbers. • The data collection will start in financial year 2019/20 for all social landlords that are members of the SHN. • The first data request will be issued at end of the 1st quarter (June 2019) and will be collected on a quarterly basis. • Tony encouraged landlords to submit the data to SHN to enhance the overall evidence on the impact of welfare reform. SHN will review the data returns and report back to WR forums. With improved data it will also potentially enhance our understanding of different landlord strategies or approaches to dealing with the UC Housing Cost impact.
Dates of next SHN Welfare Reform Forums	East (Edinburgh) Wednesday 5 th June 2019; West (Glasgow) Monday 3rd June 2019 ; North (Inverness) Thursday 20 th June 2019.

Tony Donohoe, March 2019