

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

This report outlines the main points from the recent round of SHN welfare reform events held in June 2019. Around 100 people attended 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
West Forum (Glasgow) – 03/06/19	Tony Donohoe – SHN	Welcome & programme	Y
	Louise Cook – DWP	UC Implementation update	Y
	Rebecca Grant/Laura Plumb – Citizens Advice Scotland	UC Help to Claim service	Y
	Lindsay Geddes – Social Security Scotland	Social security update	Y
	Jeremy Hewer – SFHA	SFHA Welfare Reform updates	Y
East Forum (Edinburgh) – 05/06/19	Tony Donohoe – SHN	Welcome & programme	Y
	Louise Cook – DWP	UC Implementation update	Y
	Laura Plumb – Citizens Advice Scotland	UC Help to Claim service	Y
	Yvonne Stewart – Social Security Scotland	Social security update	Y
	Jeremy Hewer – SFHA	SFHA Welfare Reform update	Y
North Forum (Inverness) – 20/06/19	Tony Donohoe – SHN	Welcome & programme	Y
	Miranda Murray – DWP	UC Implementation update	Y
	Beth Williams – Citizens Advice Scotland	UC Help to Claim service	Y
	Catherine Graham – Social Security Scotland	Social security update	Y
	Jeremy Hewer – SFHA	SFHA Welfare Reform Updates	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
	'Mixed Age Couples' Guidance	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-adjudication-circulars-2019/a92019-mixed-age-couples-further-guidance
	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
	Miranda Murray - District Business Manager/External Engagement Lead (Northern Scotland – Inverness based)	MIRANDA.MURRAY@dwp.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	Lindsay Geddes – Local Delivery Lead (Glasgow)	Lindsay.Geddes@gov.scot
	Catherine Graham – Local Delivery Lead (Inverness)	Catherine.Graham@gov.scot
	Yvonne Stewart – Local Delivery Lead (Dumfries & Galloway)	Yvonne.Stewart@socialsecurity.gov.scot
	Melanie Nairn – Local Delivery Lead (Edinburgh)	Melanie.Nairn@gov.scot

Citizens Advice Scotland (Help to Claim)	Rebecca Grant – Network Engagement Officer (West)	Rebecca.Grant@cas.org.uk
	Laura Plumb – Network Engagement Officer (East)	Laura.Plumb@cas.org.uk
	Beth Williams – Network Engagement Officer (North)	Beth.Williams@cas.org.uk

Main Presentation Topics & Key Points Discussed

Topic	Presentation/Discussion Points
SHN Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tony highlighted the DWP landlord engagement newsletter as useful source of current information (see link above) • Scottish Government has published more comprehensive data on Scottish Choices (to end February 2019): https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/SocialSecurityforScotland/UCMIFeb2019 • Approximately 134,000 have been given either offer of more frequent payment, direct payment to landlord or both • Overall 47% acceptance rate of offers with 37% accepted direct payment to landlord • In total reported that 26,299 APAs in place compared to 16,070 direct landlord payments through Scottish Choices • The data also now includes Local Authority area breakdown
Universal Credit Roll-Out (DWP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Latest DWP figures show approximately 180,000 UC claimants in Scotland (April 2019) with 31% in employment & 69% not in employment • The 2019/20 rent increase process – note on bulk upload functionality was issued to landlords in April 2019. Basically, now being trialled with implementation more widely now likely to be for 2020/21. To date 71% of UC claimants had responded to ‘to do’ or reported change • Overpayment of housing costs – working with 3 landlords in Scotland to understand issues and consider improvements • Maximum single sanction period to be reduced from 3yrs to 6 months and DWP to review how sanctions system helps people into work • ‘Move to UC’ pilot (formerly managed migration) pilot will start in July 2019 in Harrogate for 12-18 months. Full roll-out of ‘Move to UC’ not expected until 2021 but still target that all claimants to be moved to UC by Dec 2023. • In the Highlands there is currently a pilot with NHS of a health and well-being questionnaire to address ‘fit note’ issues and identify health concerns or need for specialist support services.

Topic	Presentation/Discussion Points
Universal Credit Roll-Out (Landlord Feedback & Issues)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At a general level one LA landlord mentioned issues in Tribunal cases due to DWP delays in submitting the necessary paperwork • Another landlord noted lack of clarity of information provided by DWP in demands for overpayments • In terms of rent increases can DWP provide a local report on those tenants who haven't responded (LA landlord)? • In terms of Scottish Choices at least one landlord mentioned that it complicates rent collection where they have engaged with tenant at outset of UC claim and set up /agreed rent payment which then changes when tenant is offered a Scottish Choice • Request from one landlord for a specific 'technical issues' DWP contact for the landlord portal who can deal with IT based queries on the portal • DWP had informed that UC programme had taken feedback from small number of Scottish landlords (attending the DWP Scottish Landlord Gp Meeting) with regard to issues and potential improvements to the landlord portal i.e. scope and type of additional information that would be useful to landlords • Some discussion at forums on mechanism for providing wider feedback on suggested improvements to portal and how DWP will collate and use the information to influence changes to landlord portal • Question over DWP improvements to payment system for landlords (i.e. bringing it into line with date claimant gets paid) – currently being worked on and hoped that will be in place by December 2019. View is that this will assist landlords significantly if it works.
'Help to Claim' (Citizens Advice Scotland)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Help to Claim' is national service across UK running for 12 months from April 2019 to March 2020 • Offers support to new UC claimants from initial claim to 1st full payment and is seen as additional to existing services • Channels to access the service include freephone line, webchat, face to face and digital support/assistance. Referrals can come from jobcentre, local authorities, self-referral, support agencies etc. • Tasks the service can help with include checking entitlement, setting up email or accounts, working through 'to dos', access phone or home visit support, verifying identity, understanding payments etc. Also assist claimants to access longer-term support from other services or agencies. • Since April 2019 circa 4,500 clients assisted with multichannel access popular especially phone, but webchat usage could be improved. Co-location 'working well'. • Feedback at forums appears to support view that social landlords will continue to use their own services/routes to support tenants through the UC process given their interest in ensuring that housing costs are accurate and rent payments are made • There were some queries around the scope and reach of the service i.e. in undertaking home visits, timescales to support people (within 48hrs for CAS) as well as the potential for different service levels and experiences. • Also question in Edinburgh over the extent and list of co-located services – can CAS provide this?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed that would be useful for CAS to return at later forum to feedback on experience of service and future (potentially the Feb 2020 forums when current service contract is nearing end)
Social Security in Scotland Update (Social Security Scotland)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Security Scotland currently in development and implementation stages with recruitment of staff ongoing – will employ circa 1,900 staff when fully operational with two major centres located in Dundee and Glasgow and 400 staff based at more local level • Local delivery teams will provide face to face pre-claims support (i.e. advise on eligibility, application assistance, ID verification etc.) • Local services will be delivered through a mix of mechanisms such as co-location in permanent sites, outreach surgeries as well as home, prison, hospital visits • Implementation of devolved benefits in stages i.e. carers support allowance and best start grant currently live, Funeral Support payment (summer 2019) and Young Carer Grant (Autumn 2019). Disability and other benefits over period 2020-2021. • Scottish Government is approaching assessments of claimants with a view to reducing face to face assessments, greater choice and control for clients as well as audio recording all assessments • Implementation being developed with feedback from experience panel (2,400 members), user research and stakeholders • Social Security Scotland is currently building its own IT system for the administration and payment of benefits • There was some positive feedback from social landlords on initial experiences with Social Security Scotland with one commenting that ‘communication was excellent’ and another who had sat in with a client’s phone call being impressed with how the client was dealt with and onward referral process for as home energy related matter.
SFHA Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe Disability Premium – claimants in receipt of SDP no longer migrated to UC but those previously migrated now due for compensation and High Court ruled that current proposed payment illegal • DWP have spent circa £200k on UC communication campaign including advertorial in Metro newspaper and plan to run 3-part BBC documentary on this • SFHA survey still shows approx. double amount of tenants in receipt of UC in arrears compared to those not in receipt of UC. The average arrear amount is also consistently around double for UC tenants. • Highlighting UC scam where fraudsters imitating DWP staff/advisors to obtain personal and financial details from clients • SFHA asking question if UC Scottish Choices can be integrated with ‘Move to UC’ to smooth over process • SFHA also inputted into suggested improvements to landlord portal – better information on housing costs from DWP made available on portal would assist landlords in managing rent collection more efficiently within UC system
SHN WR Forums (next dates)	East (Edinburgh) Tuesday 29 th October 2019; West (Glasgow) Thursday 31 st October 2019; North (Inverness) Thursday 7 th November 2019.

Tony Donohoe, June 2019