

Scotland's Housing Network (SHN): Welfare Reform Forum Report – June 2021

This report outlines the main points from the recent round of SHN welfare reform events held in June 2021. Approximately 100 people attended the three 'virtual' 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/> and are now also available on the Welfare Reform Channel hosted by the SHN through Microsoft Teams.

Event Dates	Speakers	Agenda Topic	Presentation Available
East Forum – 08/06/21	Tony Donohoe – SHN	Welcome & Programme	Y
	Lynn McAteer - DWP	Universal Credit Updates	Y
	Rachel Ormston – Ipsos MORI	Scottish Choices Research	Y
	Pauline Torley/Andrew McNamee – Scottish Government	Housing & Welfare Reform Updates	Y
West Forum – 10/06/21	Tony Donohoe – SHN	Welcome & Programme	Y
	Lynn McAteer - DWP	Universal Credit Updates	Y
	Maggie Pollok – Ipsos MORI	Scottish Choices Research	Y
	Pauline Torley/Andrew McNamee – Scottish Government	Housing & Welfare Reform Updates	Y
North Forum – 17/06/21	Tony Donohoe – SHN	Welcome & programme	Y
	Lynn McAteer - DWP	Universal Credit Updates	Y
	Rachel Ormston – Ipsos MORI	Scottish Choices Research	Y
	Leigh Sneddon/Andrew McNamee – Scottish Government	Housing & 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	New Contact to Be Confirmed.	https://www.sfha.co.uk/sub-category/welfare-reform https://www.sfha.co.uk/mediaLibrary/other/english/63049.pdf?utm_source=SFHA+Master+List&utm_campaign=72afcae2c-EMAIL+CAMPAGN+2020+06+10+01+01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_44c46ded14-72afcae2c-401812107 (link to Social Housing Resilience Group "Guide to Restarting Services", June 2020 for services paused during COVID-19)
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
	DWP Universal Credit Official Statistics (UC numbers by geography, jobcentre etc)	http://dwp-stats.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f90fb305d8da4eb3970812b3199cf489
	Cathy MacPhail – Senior Customer Service Leader (lead housing contact in Scotland)	cathy.macphail@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
	Miranda Murray - District Business Manager/External Engagement Lead (Northern Scotland – Inverness based)	MIRANDA.MURRAY@dwp.gov.uk

Resource	Contact/Resource Material	Further Information/Website Links/Email
Scottish Government	Poverty & Income Inequality Statistics	https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare
	Universal Credit Scotland Dashboard published by Scottish Government – Scottish Statistics on Universal Credit (DWP-based)	Universal Credit Scotland dashboard 2021 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
	Scottish Government Coronavirus COVID-19 Guidance – Housing	https://www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/#housing
	Scottish Government Discretionary Housing Payments in Scotland: 1 April 2020 to 31st March 2021 – DHP stats for financial year 2020/21	https://www.gov.scot/publications/discretionary-housing-payments-in-scotland-1-april-2020-to-31-march-2021/
	Pauline Torley	Pauline.Torley@gov.scot
	Leigh Sneddon	Leigh.Sneddon@gov.scot

Main Presentation Topics & Key Points Discussed

Topic	Presentation/Discussion Points
Introduction & SHN Updates	<p>Tony updated on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future forums – SHN currently investigating holding some face-to-face WR forums in the Autumn although obviously dependent on COVID regulations, availability of venues etc. There will still likely be some on-line forums. • On the agenda for East and West forums was possibility of holding virtual breakout sessions on MS Teams. However, in the end we didn't really feel need to try this at this stage as both forums discussions and input from participants didn't require this. • No input from SFHA secured for forums yet. • Most recent statistics on UC for UK & Scotland summarised from various publications/sources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – https://dwp-stats.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=8560a06de0f2430ab71505772163e8b4 – https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-8-april-2021/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-8-april-2021#households-on-uc-header – https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2021/03/social-security-for-scotland-update-march-2021/documents/social-security-for-scotland-update-march-2021/social-security-for-scotland-update-march-2021/govscot%3Adocument/Social%2Bsecurity%2Bfor%2BScotland%2B-%2BMar%2B2021%2B-%2Bno%2Blinks.pdf • In UK 6 million people on UC in April 2021 and circa 5,036,000 households on UC (February 2021). In Scotland circa 417,000 households on UC in February 2021. • Total welfare expenditure in Scotland circa £19.1bn for 2019/20 – 85% 'reserved' benefits of UK Government and 15% on 'devolved' benefits by Scottish Government.
Universal Credit Updates (DWP) – Lynn McAteer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational Delivery – some DWP staff back on office sites and customers being invited back into offices. Also in discussion with Scottish Prison Service to return Work Coach presence into prisons to support pre-release programmes. 'Safeguarding Leads' now know as Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders and in place to support most vulnerable customers including working with partner agencies to align support. • Annual Rent Changes – new updates page added to Landlord Portal to communicate with landlord. If tenant does not notify DWP of rent change through 'to do' then facility now available for landlord to notify change on the Portal. • Landlords can also use Portal to notify DWP where tenant has the wrong housing costs on their APA. • Issue around landlord mergers – DWP currently looking at starting testing options to do this safely for Portal but subject to wider prioritisation within UC Programme. • Third Party Deductions – to stop these phone UC number 0800-328-5644. • Help to Claim contract for CAS extended for another year to end March 2022. • Move to UC Pilot continues to be suspended given wider impact on UC implementation from COVID (i.e.. increased demand for UC)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU Settlement Scheme – deadline on 30th June 2021 for EU, EEA or Swiss citizens wishing to apply for this. Important for continued access to work, welfare benefits, healthcare etc. <p>There some points made by landlords with DWP summarised below (we have also now included some of the main specific points/questions in Annex 1 of this report extracted from the on-line discussion at each forum):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Third Party Deductions (TPDs) – There are general continuing concerns over the operation of TPDs with landlords finding it difficult to stop TPDs, others finding that they are stopping without them knowing etc. However, some landlords reported more success in stopping them by emailing ucfull.service@dwp.gov.uk b) Landlords requesting a form for TPDs to be made available? c) Landlord Portal – one landlord reported missing direct communication route through the Landlord Portal Manager in DWP. Other comments about perhaps notifying landlords of Benefit Sanction against tenant through the Portal? d) How does the ‘untidy tenancy’ process work? e) Queries over how to resolve overpayments? (Lynn from DWP is in contact with Debt Management colleagues to look at the process) f) There was a query about why the annual uprated increase of UC (12th April) was not being applied at the earliest assessment period with some claimants waiting until June for increase?
<p>Universal Credit Scottish Choices Research Findings (Ipsos MORI – Rachel Ormston & Maggie Pollok)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The research was conducted May-Sept 2020 and focused on Direct Payments to Landlords & More Frequent Payments • Qualitative interviews of both UC claimants and landlords (social and private) • Among the main findings were lack of awareness of the term ‘Scottish Choices’ and variable around what the two options were under the policy • Evidence of some confusion over how it works in practice i.e. payment dates, interaction with other aspects of UC system, over-reliance on customer journal notification • Impact of Direct Payment to Landlords for claimants – ensures rent paid, simplifies money management & reducing worries about housing security • Impact of More Frequent Payments for claimants – easier to make money last, helps people to manage their own money & worry less about it • Social landlords less unified on perceived impacts of Direct Payments – mitigates impact on increased arrears but won’t solve all issues i.e. new payments system more important and time lag in DPL assessment period when choice offered • Main suggested improvements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improve awareness and understanding of “Scottish Choices” - i.e. improve content & nature of notices on UC account, offer different method to communicate not just UC on-line journal – Improve operation of system – i.e. allow from start of claim, allow fortnightly payments – Other – support among claimants for ‘Split Payment’ policy for UC and some for more wider improvements to UC system

<p>Housing & Welfare Reform in Scotland (Scottish Government) – Pauline Torley/Andrew McNamee/Leigh Sneddon</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scottish Government updated on <i>Housing to 2040</i>'s four themes including “Affordability and Choice”. Improving affordability etc across the rented sector through a new Rented Sector Strategy and introducing a right to an adequate home. • Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) spend forecast for 2020/21 – total of £78.6m of which £59.7m for bedroom tax mitigation and £18.9m for “other” DHPs including LHA, Benefit Cap and COVID-19 support. • Tenant Hardship Loan Fund – 921 applications received to date with 180 loans awarded totalling just under £500k. A total of 392 unsuccessful applications. • UC Scottish Choices – no major change apart from aforementioned evaluation which Scottish Government looking to take forward improvements on. • Split payments policy – still under discussion internally within Scottish Government and with DWP. <p>The main points of discussion from landlords were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Tenant Hardship Loan Fund – some points reiterated about examples of unsuccessful applications and how scheme could be improved as well as request for a geographical breakdown of statistics of applications etc by LA area. b) DHPs – request for breakdown of allocation and spend by LA area – link to Scot Gov stats here: https://www.gov.scot/publications/discretionary-housing-payments-in-scotland-1-april-2020-to-31-march-2021/ c) A housing association commented that they noticed a difference between how LAs administer the DHP scheme and levels of award d) Another LA pointed to the fact that rising numbers of UC claims were correlating with an increase in demand for DHPs to cover “Bedroom Tax”? e) Tony D also asked for clarification on 2 points from Scottish Government (1) whether the split payments policy would be applied across the Scottish Social Security system and Benefits as a principle and not just UC? (2) Whether the Scottish Govt under devolved powers could increase the level of UC paid in Scotland?
<p>SHN WR Forums (next dates)</p>	<p>East (Edinburgh) - Tuesday 26th October 2021; West (Glasgow) - Thursday 28th October 2021; North (Inverness) - Thursday 4th November 2021.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tony Donohoe, June 2021</p>

Annex 1

Questions/Comments Posted on Teams from Forum Participants – June 2021		
East Forum 08/06/21	West Forum 10/06/21	North Forum 17/06/21
Lynn can you confirm if TPD deductions are fixed at 10% or 20% and not 5% as previously happened?	We have been asking for a specific form for a number of years to request that deductions are stopped. UC47 is the request to start deductions and would be good to have a form to stop deductions. Very time consuming to call to stop deductions	<i>No comments posted on chat facility.</i>
Is there a way the uc portal could notify a landlord that a tenant is at risk of a sanction? we have had a recent case where tenant sanctioned but not engaging with landlord nor DWP - we are now working with tenant and safeguard officer but if we were given early notification from DWP we may have been able to prevent this There are forms you have to complete as we get this often (response from other landlord)	Can I comment that some monthly apas are being added to 4 wkly TPDs payment list rather than being paid when due	
This person has been helpful in TPD issues - Johnson Steve DWP FINANCE GROUP BPSG STEVE.JOHNSON2@DWP.GOV.UK	You will sometimes get pyts and the TPD list if its a backdated payment or a payment that needs to be assessed manually.	
We get this too, try a load of email, telephone numbers until someone does what we need.	But payments we are receiving are monthly rent payment and backdated rent payments. given the time that 4 wkly schedules get to landlords, tenants are negatively affected by this method of paying landlords rent that is well overdue	
We notice a huge difference between local authorities as to what is awarded and how the dhp scheme is administered	To confirm we're having some success stopping UC Third Party payments by using this address 'UCFULL.SERVICE@DWP.GOV.UK'	
We see the APA dropping off regularly when couples go from joint to single claims and vice versa I had UC Service Centre confirm this is an issue. I would escalate with partnership manager (response from other landlord)	We use email as well and things seem to have started moving again after having issues last 6 months.	
	We have had problem with returning money given as overpayment of apas emails and phone calls have not resolved problem	
	What is the new untidy tenancy process?	

Questions/Comments Posted on Teams from Forum Participants – February 2021		
East Forum 16/02/21	East Forum 16/02/21	East Forum 16/02/21
	Perhaps Lynn can pick this one up at a later date? In this digital age is there ever an expectation that DWP will accept information in support of claims for legacy benefits by email? I have 1 example that I have info in support of an IS10 application.	
	Should there not be more of a focus again on the budgeting support that was initially offered when UC started but seems to have fell away. I know there was not much take up due to it being voluntary.	
	Is it possible to have a further breakdown of the Tenant Hardship loan fund by LA area?	
	Is there a breakdown available of what each LA has spent the DHP fund on?	
	100% agree should never be credit checked. It defeats the purpose (this refers to the Tenant Hardship Loan Fund).	
	I know DHP isn't recoverable but I'm finding a few examples whereby DHP covers shortfall in relation to SSSC only to find that UC cover full award at a later date as the tenants says they need the spare room for overnight care. It would be more beneficial if UC could put the note on the journal earlier about asking if a spare room is needed, this will prevent DHP getting paid in error by the LA. In these instances tenants are asking for a rent credit refund.	