

Scotland's Housing Network (SHN): Welfare Reform Forum Report – February 2022

This report outlines the main points from the recent round of SHN welfare reform events held in February 2022. 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 – 15/02/22	Tony Donohoe – SHN	Welcome & Programme	Y
	Lynn McAteer – DWP	Universal Credit Updates	Y
	Andrew McNamee & Helen Robertson – Scottish Government	Housing & Welfare in Scotland updates	Y
West Forum – 17/02/22	Tony Donohoe – SHN	Welcome & Programme	Y
	Lynn McAteer & Andrew Weir - DWP	Universal Credit Updates	Y
	Leigh Sneddon – Scottish Government	Housing & Welfare in Scotland updates	Y
North Forum – 24/02/22	Tony Donohoe – SHN	Welcome & Programme	Y
	Lynn McAteer & Andrew Weir- DWP	Universal Credit Updates	Y
	Leigh Sneddon & Helen Robertson - 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=72afccae2c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_06_10_01_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_44c46ded14-72afccae2c-401812107 (link to Social Housing Resilience Group "Guide to Restarting Services", June 2020 for services paused during COVID-19)
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
	Lynn McAteer – DWP Scotland Customer Experience Manager	Lynn.McAteer@dwp.gov.uk
	Andrew Weir – DWP Advanced Customer Support Senior Leader	ANDREW.WEIR@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/
	Leigh Sneddon – Housing Affordability Policy Manager	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 – Tony updated that the forums will continue for next f/y 2022-23. He also informed that he was finishing up as the host of the forums after this round and Ross Morris from Scotland’s Housing Network will take over hosting the forums supported by Fiona Jackson. His email is Ross.Morris@scotlandshousingnetwork.org. • Ross introduced himself to all participants at the forums and explained that the future delivery of the forums would likely be a mix of online through MS Teams and face to face. It is hoped that the next round in June will follow this format to some extent. • Andrea Finkel Gates (CEO of SHN) also attended the West and East events and thanked Tony for his contribution over the past 8 years and outlined the hybrid approach to future delivery of forums. Note that most landlords who commented on this are supportive of a hybrid approach to future delivery of forums. However, noted that ‘West’ forum participants particularly supportive of face to face forum given the networking opportunities. • Tony thanked everyone for all their help and support for the forums over his tenure, particularly the DWP, SFHA and Scottish Government. • In UK 5.678m people on UC as at 09/12/21 with 38% of these in employment. The numbers have decreased slightly over the past few months. In Scotland latest figures show that 454,721 people were on Universal Credit with 34% of these working.
Universal Credit Updates (DWP) – Lynn McAteer & Andrew Weir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational Delivery –Prison work coaches now back in all prisons across Scotland. Four Temporary Jobcentres in Scotland with 1,300 new workcoaches. • Andrew outlined the role and remit of the Advanced Customer Support Teams in DWP and provided some examples of work that had been done with clients. These are usually the most vulnerable clients. • Lynn outlined that the process for the Annual Rent Increase has changed with 100% verification now required by landlords. The variances reported by landlords ranged from 4%-14.5% so DWP decided that 100% verification required to assist in combatting wider fraud issues. Similar to recent years a ‘To Do’ will be issue to UC claimants on their individual accounts. • Also some work ongoing on ‘Untidy Tenancies’ and trying to incorporate into the Landlord Portal. • ‘Move to Universal Credit’ – those moving from legacy benefits due to be complete by the end of 2024. <p>Some points made by landlords with DWP summarised below (the main specific points/questions in Annex 1 of this report extracted from the on-line discussion at each forum):</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Overpayments and resolving these an ongoing issue for landlords. Overpayments to landlords need to be resolved with DWP and not paid back to tenant. Normal escalation routes should be followed by landlords although DWP aware of need to look more closely at process and systemic review. b) Customers not on landlord portal still causing some issues for landlords. c) Can DWP provide most recent contacts for escalation routes and Advanced Customer Support Team Leaders?
Housing & Welfare Reform in Scotland (Scottish Government) – Leigh Sneddon, Andrew McNamee & Helen Robertson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bedroom Tax abolition at source – Minister Shona Robison has asked for update as to when this will be progressed and Scottish Government awaiting response from DWP. • Scottish Government progressing review of the DHP Guidance and will be published this year. • Scottish Government is looking at ways to support people affected by the UK Government Benefit Cap. • The Tenant Grant Fund to assist tenants with arrears accrued during the COVID pandemic is currently being implemented across Scotland and administered by Local Authorities. Positive feedback from landlords at the forums on the operation of the scheme. The Scottish Government is aiming to publish some monitoring data on the scheme but has no plans to expand the scheme beyond this financial year 2021-22 although LAs will be able to carry forward unspent allocations into the next financial year. Queries on the Scheme can be sent to tenantgrantfund@gov.scot with the main Scottish Government contact Denise.Buchanan@gov.scot. The Guidance can be found at: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Tenant Grant Fund: guidance for local authorities - gov.scot (www.gov.scot) • Scottish Government continuing to consider Scottish Choices Evaluation and UC Split Payments. Intending to have a Policy proposal on UC split payments by Spring/Summer 2022 and discuss implementation with DWP.
SHN WR Forums (provision dates)	<p>East (Edinburgh) - Tuesday 7th June 2022; West (Glasgow) - Thursday 9th June 2022; North (Inverness) - Thursday 16th June 2022.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Tony Donohoe, March 2022</p>

Annex 1

Questions/Comments Posted on Teams from Forum Participants – February 2022		
East Forum 15/02/22	West Forum 17/02/22	North Forum 24/02/22
TGF (Tenant Grant Fund) is working well but we thought there was to be household living expenses help and Falkirk and Perth have in place but nothing from Fife yet.	Andrew - we have had great support through ACST for particularly vulnerable claimants. However our local common escalation through Ayr Jobcentre has fallen away. Is there a change of staff, or a new list of local escalation that can be circulated at all?	Lack of invoices to repay overpayments is an ongoing problem at PKC (Perth & Kinross Council).
	Andrew - I just want to thank you personally for the help you have provided us with the cases you and the other ACSL's picked up prior to our new ACSL being in place. thanks support was invaluable	I sent a spreadsheet to our partnership manager detailing all the overpayments we had received last September and as yet have not received any invoices. Is there anywhere else I should send it to?
	At a time when RSLs are experiencing rises in rent arrears and the upcoming further squeeze on household finances, this is going to place a huge resource issue for RSL staff (referring to Rent Increase Verifications). RCH will have almost 1900 to verify!	Hi Lynn last year UC sent a verification notice on the 2nd period if the housing costs had not been updated through the to do list will this still happen this year?
	It would be better if banner never had dates on it as this can be confusing to tenants if their rent increase is not within these dates.	
	Our rent increase happens 29th March so for us, it is good there are dates on it as we want tenants to report the change on 29th March otherwise those with assessment periods ending before 1st April won't get increased housing costs.	
	Landlords can only intervene if customers are on the portal - we still have people missing from the portal, this leads to arrears for vulnerable tenants.	
	There have been ongoing issues with the DWP and UC overpayments from the start of UC. Don't think anything will be resolved until a dedicated team is in place at the DWP.	
	We have some issues with uc claimants in sheltered housing being told they should claim hb incorrectly	
	Yes - East Ayrshire use near me. Not great if they have no or limited digital capability.	