



Leicester  
City Council

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***Response to the  
Leicester Advice Sector:  
A report outlining the risk and  
demands in the city***

Briefing for: Neighbourhood Scrutiny & Community  
Involvement Commission

To be taken on: 25<sup>th</sup> January 2017

Lead director: Alison Greenhill

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## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Caroline Jackson
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- Report Version: 1.4

### 1. Purpose of report

1.1 This report responds to the issues raised in the annual Social Welfare Advice Partnership (SWAP) Report. (Appendix 1)

### 2. Summary

2.1 Members of the NSCI Scrutiny Commission received a report from the SWAP in July 2016 which provided information on the advice sector and the challenges and risks they face. This report forms the Council response to the SWAP report.

### 3. Main report

3.1 The second annual SWAP report offers valuable insight into operational issues the city's advice agencies face and also provides example case studies to illustrate the impact on city households.

3.2 The issues raised have been responded to in turn, along with some broader analysis and potential ways to mitigate these issues.

#### 3.3 Welfare Rights Service (WRS) Report

##### a) Employment & Support Allowance (ESA) reassessment

The report highlights that 16,000 claimants could face reassessment<sup>1</sup> however whilst the number of ESA claimants is at an all-time high, DWP statistics appear to demonstrate that the number of claimants facing imminent reassessment has declined. As of February 2016<sup>2</sup>, 3,800 claimants (23.3%) in Leicester were due for reassessment, compared to 4,300 (27.6%) at the same time last year. Clearance times and the number of people waiting for their first medical assessment have fallen considerably and the DWP anticipate this will continue.

Concerns with the suitability and capacity of the existing provider have been raised locally through the SWAP forum with the DWP liaison officer particularly in relation to accessibility and appointments for highly disabled customers. The DWP are responding to these issues and undertaking home visits, where required, as per their contract. Analysis of local statistics relating to benefit sanctions and caseloads can be found in Appendix 2.

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<sup>1</sup> ESA assessments are now conducted by the private contractor, Maximus, following the termination of the previous government appointed provider, Atos.

<sup>2</sup> This is latest data available.

## **b) Disability Living Allowance (DLA) transition to Personal Independence Payments (PIP)**

PIP is a non-means-tested, non-taxable cash benefit that clients can choose how to spend. It is assessed on a different set of criteria to DLA, where people need to score a certain number of points in relation to 12 everyday activities. PIP is made up of two components, compared to DLA having three.

Approximately 2.3% (360) of current DLA claimants, in Leicester, are due to be reassessed in the next 12 months as their DLA award is ending. In addition, new claimants or current DLA recipients, who have experienced a change in their circumstances, will move onto PIP.

The Advice Sector has advised that clients tend to receive a lower award where there has been a change of circumstances. SWAP is monitoring this to establish if the anticipated income reduction differs from the policy projection.

Since July 2015, long-term working-age claimants have also been contacted to re-apply. The latest data demonstrates that over 3,000 had already made this transition by February 2015. Also, that over 5,500 had been assessed as eligible for PIP in the two years to February 2016.

If the transition to PIP is to be completed by 2018, the rollout will need to continue at a similar pace (250-350 per month) and will therefore remain a high-priority.

## **c) New rules for European Nationals**

The high level of 'right to reside' appeals indicates a continued impact on European Nationals, claiming Job Seekers Allowance. The Government's response focuses on repatriating over-stayers.

There are a number of policies and initiatives in place to reduce and support individuals and families facing this issue. These include:

- No Second Night Out - endeavours to address repeat rough sleeping;
- Community Support Grant – offers emergency one-day food parcels to those struggling to access welfare benefits, together with a mandatory emergency appointment with Citizen's Advice who will meet with the customer to support, advise and collate evidence. They will also make benefit applications in order to establish a 'right to reside' for benefit purposes;
- Direct access to CSG for clients of Citizens Advice Leicestershire, Community Advice and Law Service, STAR and The Bridge Project (homeless mental health support);
- Children's Services Section 17 funding – this safeguards and promotes the welfare of children, who are in need. It provides a range of services to enable parents to raise their children in a way that meets their children's needs.

- Access to furniture and charitable assistance, provided by Leicester Charity Link.

#### **d) Sanctions and Appeals**

We concur with the SWAP comments on the introduction of Universal Credit sanctions and appeals, and we will be monitoring this situation. The number of sanctions, applied across Leicester, demonstrates a continuing downward trend.

- JSA, which is an income based benefit, has reduced by 24% (4,380) on the previous year<sup>3</sup>;
- JSA sanction rates have reduced at a higher rate than the reduction in caseload, from 4.9% affected per month in March 2015 to 2% per month in February 2016;
- The ESA (Income related) caseload increased by 6% (16,210) in 2015/16;
- ESA sanction rates have halved to less than 5 per month during 2015/16;
- Overall, monthly sanction cases in Leicester have more than halved over the last 2 months.

Sanction rates have also declined nationally at a similar rate from a high watermark in October 2013, following responses to the Oakley Review (Work and Pensions Committee) and the trialling of a new 'yellow card' sanctions system from 2016, which allows an additional 14 days for claimants to give reasons for failing to meet commitments. SWAP has worked closely with the Jobcentre Plus Liaison Manager to minimise the impact this policy had on residents in the city.

The monitoring undertaken by SWAP provides an insight into why sanctions are being applied and over one third of those presenting for advice, where a sanction applies, are classified as disabled. SWAP will continue to monitor this and will liaise with Jobcentre Plus, in order to mitigate any impact.

#### **3.4 Advice Leicester Partnership (ALP) Report**

The 'Advice Leicester' project was funded through the Big Lottery's Advice Services Transition Fund which established a common, web-based referral system. Although this funding has now ended, the organisations within the partnership continue to work together to ensure customers are accessing services most appropriate for their needs.

The ALP outreach advice provision in schools and GP surgeries has provided additional local access to advice. This service has now ceased however ALP are currently looking for alternative funding sources to continue this work. ALP members also attend and contribute to the work of the Social Welfare Advice Partnership (SWAP).

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<sup>3</sup> February 2016

We note the comments in relation to the loss of face to face services and this will be considered during the re-procurement exercise.

### **3.5 Universal Credit – Citizen’s Advice LeicesterShire Report**

On 25<sup>th</sup> January 2016, Universal Credit (UC) began its gradual introduction in Leicester for single, childless JSA (IB) claimants through the ‘live service’.

Everyone who receives Universal Credit will be placed in a conditionality group based on their circumstances and work capability. This will determine what is expected of people during their claim.

- Group 1 - No work related requirements
- Group 2 - Work-focused interview only requirement
- Group 3 - Work preparation requirement
- Group 4 - All work-related requirements

Thought it might be useful to set the context above but sure what to put here about the impact on single parents.

From 25 January 2016 to 31st March 2016, there were 388 Universal Credit claimants in Leicester, with only five Housing Benefit claims closed. This indicates the vast majority of UC claimants have either no rental liability, were new claimants without a Housing Benefit live claim or adult children in a household without a liability.

The current caseload is expected to increase slowly until the ‘digital full service’ is introduced, replacing all new claims for housing benefit, tax credits, jobseekers allowance, income support and employment & support allowance from late 2018. Migration of long-term claims will then continue until 2022.

The authority has signed up to a DWP-funded year and two month contract to provide Universal Support to customers in order to help them access the internet and provide personal budgeting support facilitated by Citizen’s Advice LeicesterShire to Universal Credit claimants. Revenues & Customer Support continue to work in partnership with the DWP and third sector organisations to mitigate the barriers identified in developing our Universal Support offer in the following areas:

### **3.6 Universal support**

#### **a) Internet access**

- Expanded computer and wireless access available at the Customer Service Centre, Libraries and JobCentre Plus. City locations have been mapped and promoted on LCC website at [www.leicester.gov.uk/universalcredit](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/universalcredit);
- Development of a user-friendly kiosk digital offer rolled out across outreach hub locations across the city, now available in Pork Pie Library and St Matthews;

- Mapping of digital assistance sites through the third sector promoted through the DWP in partnership with SWAP at [www.ukonlinecentres.com](http://www.ukonlinecentres.com). Further work to map the availability and expertise of IT skills workshops and training. This will be done in partnership with SWAP.

**b) Client capacity (Literacy, language and IT skills)**

- A referral system has been established, which operates from the Customer Service Centre and is also available at [www.leicester.gov.uk/universalcredit](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/universalcredit), enabling customers and support workers to self-serve. Library staff provide assistance to customers to enable them to use the Council's computers to access application routes easily. IT skills workshops, on an intensive one-on-one or group basis, and additional qualifications are encouraged through referrals to the Adult Education College.
- More intensive support is provided through a referral to Citizens Advice where Universal Credit customers are treated as priority cases and seen within an hour.
- Online supported access is available through triage floorwalkers at both CSC and Libraries, enabling assistance with accessing the UC claim website, determining what evidence is required to complete a claim, and UKONLINE modules explaining UC and the claim process. To date, fifty Universal Credit claimants have received support from the CSC or Libraries to complete their claim;
- For customers with no IT skills, for example those customers with severe literacy/language/disability issues, referrals are made to Citizens Advice LeicesterShire (CAL) for electronic form filling services. Staff have received additional training and materials to facilitate this. The CAL volunteer base covers all the main languages spoken in the City including those of emerging Arabic communities; and an additional translation service is booked where the customer identifies a specific need. CAL also encourages family member support and translation where appropriate and available.

**c) Client knowledge (financial capability)**

- Contracted service through Delivery Partnership with the DWP – financially vulnerable UC claimants will be identified from their initial work coach appointment and referred for Personal Budgeting Support to the Local Authority.

Contract variation was agreed with CAL to deliver a tailored service to improve financial capability, including managing on a monthly payment, priority debts and budgeting, setting up a bank account and accessing appropriate financial support.

Monitoring and reporting arrangements will ensure that where Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs) are appropriate (for example managed payments to landlords) these will be requested at an early stage. Only three referrals to date have been received from the DWP and therefore further

awareness training has been completed, in partnership with their staff, to highlight this issue. Thirteen appointments with UC customers have been successfully completed by CAL;

- Those missed in the initial interview process on UC are able to self-refer for support, either directly with CAL or through self-referral, or a support worker, at [www.leicester.gov.uk/universalcredit](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/universalcredit). Feedback to the DWP will then lead to APAs being put in place and allowances are made towards their job search conditionality requirements, where time for budgeting assistance has been necessary. To date, 39 referrals have been received through this route, with particularly successful joint working established with the Housing Income Management Team.
- Continued promotion of assistive services, including debt and specialist benefit advice available through CAL, Welfare Rights and other SWAP partners such as Community Advice and Law Service (CALS). The service has developed a new Financial and Debt Advice Booklet signposting all appropriate statutory and discretionary support for UC claimants. This booklet has been advertised and distributed to all the city's jobcentres, emailed to all new UC claimants and published on the advice pages of the Council's website.

#### **d) Client behaviour**

The Council has introduced the following measures:

- Targeted Communications Plan focusing on advice agencies and frontline services explaining Universal Credit operationally, how to access relevant financial support through DWP and Council, and referrals for additional support through [www.leicester.gov.uk/universalcredit](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/universalcredit);
- Increased awareness through a variety of communications media including: new debt advice booklet, change in circumstances leaflets, advice booklet, PFA guide, EEA guide, travel aid pass leaflet, Jobcentre Plus banners for use in their offices, awareness training delivered to Jobcentre Plus frontline staff on Alternative Payment Arrangements, Universal Support and Leicester City Council discretionary funding, social media, website updates. All were distributed and communicated to advice agencies and frontline services. Posters were placed in libraries and community centres, and briefings were given to councillors, landlords and other stakeholders;
- Continued development, in partnership working between the DWP, Local Authority and the voluntary sector, to promote coordinated sharing of information and timely, appropriate support to influence client long-term behaviour;
- The developments of closer partnership working, as evidenced by the recently redeveloped Leicester Emergency Food Network (LEFP) and improved engagement through the Community Support Grant Crisis Support Scheme have already demonstrated the benefits of this approach.

## **4. Summary**

- 4.1 The Local Authority values the contribution and commitment SWAP makes to the city's advice provision. We welcome their continued contribution to the partnership and recognise the valuable part they play informing the Local Authority's strategic planning for Social Welfare Advice.
- 4.2 The Council has developed a targeted communications plan focusing on advice agencies and frontline services which provides details about:
- Universal Credit from an operational perspective
  - How customers can access relevant Universal Support, including digital and financial support through the DWP and the Council;
  - Referrals for additional support through [www.leicester.gov.uk/universalcredit](http://www.leicester.gov.uk/universalcredit)
- 4.3 A Mystery Shopping exercise has tested the training given to front line staff in Universal Credit services at the main Customer Service Centre at 91 Granby Street and libraries, since implementation. The overall result has demonstrated a high level of Universal Credit awareness and basic 'problem-solving'. Areas for improvement include signposting to the currently commissioned services and a programme of improvement has been developed where needed.
- 4.4 Increased awareness through social media, leaflets and guides were distributed through advice agencies and frontline services, posters in libraries and community centres, and briefings to councillors on welfare reform; universal credit; briefing notes and FAQs on a number of relevant subjects. Welfare Rights have also briefed councillors on PIP and EEA Nationals. In addition, landlords and other stakeholders.
- 4.5 Continued development in partnership working between the DWP, Local Authority and the SWAP partnership to promote coordinated sharing of information and timely, appropriate support to influence client behaviour.
- 4.6 The Local Authority values the contribution and commitment the SWAP make to the City's advice provision. We welcome their continued contribution to the partnership and recognise the valuable part they play informing the Local Authority's strategic planning for Social Welfare Advice to ensure we meet the advice needs of those who most need it in Leicester.

## **4. Details of Scrutiny**

This is the second annual report of the Social Welfare Advice Partnership to scrutiny.



## **5. Financial, legal and other implications**

### 5.1 Financial implications

There are no financial implications for the City Council arising directly from this report. However, any specific proposed initiatives that might arise would need to be properly costed and resourced.

Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance, ext. 37 4081

### 5.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report as it is for information only.

Emma Horton, Head of Law (Commercial, Property & Planning) ext. 37 1426

### 5.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

There are no climate change implications arising from this report.

Mark Jeffcote, Senior Environmental Consultant, ext. 37 2293

### 5.4 Equalities Implications

The SWAP report on the experiences of benefit claimants in the city, particularly in response to sanctions, and the Council's report responding to the issues identified by SWAP provide an excellent overview of the operational issues in the delivery of benefits locally that have in the past given rise to negative impacts on recipients.

Changes being made by DWP and the effectiveness of challenging DWP decisions, demonstrate that there is scope to improve outcomes for recipients through partnership action.

Page 9 of Appendix 2 provides an analysis of the profile of JSA caseloads and those receiving sanctions, by disability and ethnicity. The following protected groups are over-represented in terms of their proportion of the city's population as cited in the 2011 census: disabled (30% sanctioned compared to their being 13.3% of the population); Black ethnic background (13% sanctioned compared to their being 6.2% of the population); White ethnic background (55% sanctioned compared to their being 50.6% of the population). The proportion of Asians sanctioned (25%) is significantly under-represented in terms of their being 37.1% of the City's population.

Irene Kszyk, Corporate Equalities Lead, ext. 37 4147.

5.5 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

None.

## 6. Background information and other papers:

- SWAP response paper presented July 2016:  
<http://www.cabinet.leicester.gov.uk:8071/documents/g7521/Public%20reports%20pack%20Wednesday%2006-Jul-2016%2017.30%20Neighbourhood%20Services%20and%20Community%20Involvement%20.pdf?T=10>
- SWAP paper presented January 2016:  
<http://www.cabinet.leicester.gov.uk:8071/documents/g6965/Public%20reports%20pack%20Thursday%2007-Jan-2016%2017.30%20Neighbourhood%20Services%20and%20Community%20Involvement%20S.pdf?T=10>
- DCLG Homelessness Prevention and Relief Statistical Release January to March 2016:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/533099/Statutory\\_Homelessness\\_and\\_Prevention\\_and\\_Relief\\_Statistical\\_Release\\_January\\_to\\_March\\_2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/533099/Statutory_Homelessness_and_Prevention_and_Relief_Statistical_Release_January_to_March_2016.pdf)
- Communities and Local Government Homelessness Inquiry 2015:  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmcomloc/40/4002.htm>
- Benefit Sanctions: Beyond the Oakley Review, Work & Pensions Committee October 2015:  
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/news-parliament-2015/benefit-sanctions-committee-report-15-16/>

## 7. Summary of appendices:

1. Appendix 1: Leicester Advice Sector: A report outlining the risks and demands faced in the City of Leicester based on data for the year to 31 August 2016.
2. Appendix 2: Analysis of local welfare reform data 2015/16

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

9. Is this a “key decision”?

No