



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions



# Local Authority Led Pilots: A summary of early learning from the pilots

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# Summary

This paper presents early findings (October 2012 to March 2013) from the Local Authority Led Pilots analysis and is based on information prepared by each pilot authority. (See Appendix B for a full list of participating authorities.)

Much of the pilot evaluation work is still in progress and the findings presented here represent early insight into the pilot process. Case study material is presented that provides an indication of some, but not all aspects of each pilot. A more detailed interim report will be produced in the early autumn which will provide a more comprehensive review of the pilot activity.

The paper is broken down into the six core themes which are being explored by the pilot authorities. Some, but by no means all, of the key issues or challenges identified under each theme are highlighted and examples of how authorities have addressed them are detailed.

**It is worth noting that as the information presented in this paper has been provided by each of the local authorities, findings and basic statistics presented here cannot be independently verified by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) analysts. Caution needs to be exercised in using the numbers presented as they are based (in many cases) on small population samples.**

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# The Author

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# 1 Digital inclusion

## Challenge

Not all customer groups have access to the internet.

**Local authorities (LAs) have attempted to understand what proportion of their customers are able to make online applications.** Survey work has been undertaken in an attempt to define the proportion of people who are IT literate, and/or have internet access (either at home or via a mobile device). This survey work suggests that there are large groups of service users who have limited access to the internet from home and who lack IT skills. Lewisham Council reports that 52 per cent of social housing tenants in the borough do not have internet access from home, while Birmingham City Council discovered that 50 per cent of social housing tenants visiting their letting suite did not have an email address. In other areas, internet access from home was found to be slightly higher, with Bath Borough Council reporting that 62 per cent of council service users had access to a personal computer (PC) at home and 86 per cent saying they could make online claims.

## 1.1 Action

In order to address some of these internet access issues authorities have taken the following steps:

- **Providing a network of internet enabled public access points** – Dumfries and Galloway Council initially proposed that customers making online benefit claims should be encouraged to use library-based internet access points. However, this policy did not yield the expected results, as many customers rarely visited local libraries. The authority is now installing internet access points in the customer reception areas of council premises. Staff are also being trained to provide customer assistance in making online claims.
- **Placing easy access internet terminals in council premises** – Rushcliffe Borough Council has placed a number of internet terminals in their customer contact centres located near front doors for ease of access and visibility. Reception staff at the contact centres are trained to quickly assess the needs of each customer and direct them towards the self-service points. Rushcliffe Council reports the provision of self-service internet terminals at the point of first contact is important in improving customer use of online services. Current usage of the internet terminals is relatively low, with about five per cent of all service users choosing this option.
- **Mapping internet access points across a locality** – Caerphilly Borough Council has engaged in a process of mapping internet access points across the borough, and has produced detailed leaflets and information boards explaining exactly where computers and online access are available. Research undertaken by the council suggested that council service users were unaware that computers could be accessed at local libraries. The council's marketing campaign now makes it clear that there are 16 local libraries all offering internet access, 'Claiming Online' services and one-to-one digital skills training support.

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- **Providing wifi access points in rural areas with limited broadband coverage** – West Lindsey District Council became aware that some rural areas within the district lacked significant broadband coverage. The council has, therefore, begun to install wifi access points in village halls and other community centres. These wifi access points act as a central hub for free broadband and local residents are encouraged to bring their own devices to gain access to the internet. In addition, community digital champions have been established in three separate villages to provide help and assistance to their fellow residents in accessing internet services. The digital champions have been briefed to include Universal Credit (UC) and Housing Benefit-related services.

### Challenge

Authorities have identified resistance from some customers to using online services and to making online benefit claims.

Authorities have noted some customer groups are reluctant to using online services, despite efforts being made to encourage increased online engagement. It is felt that resistance stems from customer reluctance to try new methods; there is also a lack of understanding about the availability of new services and the associated benefits of using online services. There may also be issues to do with trust concerning how online data is used and stored. Authorities recognise that moving to digital services will take time to achieve and customers will need to adapt to this change in culture.

In order to address the reluctance to using online services, authorities have taken the following steps:

- **Better marketing of services** – Newport Council has developed a ‘save time go online’ logo and URL which it is adding to all paper-based claim forms in an attempt to encourage increased online use. The council estimates the number of online applications for the disabled parking Blue Badge has increased to from 15 per cent to 30 per cent in the past three months. Rushcliffe Council has run a similar marketing campaign to promote the services offered from its community contact centre, including promotion of online services through their ‘Don’t Stand in Line, Do It On-Line’ campaign. It has distributed flyers and issued more general communications to its residents as well as developing a ‘Do It On-Line’ business card for customers to keep.
- **The introduction of digital by default services** – Birmingham City Council has introduced a digital log book to support social housing tenants manage payments. Initially, the log book was an optional feature of establishing a new tenancy, but after limited take up the council has opted for a ‘digital by default’ policy. All new social housing tenants must sign up to the digital log book as a condition of their tenancy. To date 1,063 new tenants have opened digital log books and early feedback suggests customers are generally positive about the product. It is hoped that further evidence will emerge about how tenants are using the digital log book and if the service is having a positive effect on personal budgeting. It must be remembered that his feedback cannot be independently verified by DWP analysts.

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- **Providing mediated support and encouraging customers to build up their digital skills** – West Lindsey District Council has installed internet enabled PCs at its Guildhall offices and, in partnership with Jobcentre Plus staff, support and assistance is offered to customers wishing to access a range of online services, including claim forms and Universal Job Match. The council monitors the support service and has found that as people continue to use the service their confidence grows; many of those who initially required support are now able to access the services unaided. (In March and April 81 per cent of new customers requested some form of support, while only 44 per cent of repeat customers required assistance<sup>1</sup>.)
- **Investing in staff training and supporting digital champions** – Rushcliffe Council has a designated member of staff in its community contact centre who provides mediated support to help customers with online access and site navigation. Evidence to date shows that this approach has been successful with customers showing a willingness to use online services once their initial concerns have been alleviated – In April, the council estimated that 95 per cent of new customers used online methods to claim Housing Benefit.
- **Provision of IT training for customers** – North Dorset District Council identified that a number of people attending job clubs in the district required IT training. As a result a training course has been set up in partnership with Adult Learning Services and claimants are signposted to this provision. To date, 67 people have attended the basic courses including an introduction to computers, email, word processing and internet access. In addition, a further 20 people have enrolled on the Functional Skills IT programme.
- Caerphilly Council reports that significant efforts have been made in directing customers to its digital skills training programme ‘Get Caerphilly Online’. The council has designed new customer contact scripts and leaflets, and front-line staff and visiting officers are evaluating personal circumstances, signposting residents to ‘Digital Fridays’ and referring them to group or one-to-one IT skills sessions. As part of the training process, residents are offered ‘assisted self-service’ of e-Claim and Online Change of Circumstances or other suitable online interaction such as registration with Universal Job Match and an online request for council services. To date, the council estimates that 2,500 residents have been supported in getting online.
- **Undertaking further analysis to understand what specific barriers customers face in using online services** – Dumfries and Galloway Council is hoping to gain a better understanding of why local residents are reluctant to make online claims, by undertaking a survey of customers who have made paper-based claims. The council hopes that this research will provide insight into what barriers exist and what policy changes can be made to boost online engagement.

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<sup>1</sup> Survey base 318.



## 2 Budgeting and financial management support

### Challenge

Many social housing tenants have problems with debt and rent arrears, compounding problems they might have with personal budgeting.

There is reluctance among social housing tenants to attend group financial management sessions.

Concern that some tenants are poor money managers and they will face additional problems as a result of welfare reform changes.

Local authorities report that some customers and, in particular, social housing tenants suffer from high levels of debt and are unable to budget effectively<sup>2</sup>. Councils recognise that these issues need to be resolved before welfare changes are introduced that demand a higher level of budgeting skill.

A number of authorities have also noted reluctance from customers to take part in budgeting and financial training in group sessions (again this finding is echoed by the evaluation of the Direct Payment Demonstration Projects<sup>3</sup>). It is assumed that this reluctance is, in part, due to the stigma of engaging in sessions which may highlight personal debt and rent arrears issues. The uptake of group financial education sessions in some authorities has been so low that sessions have been cancelled. This evidence is mirrored in the Direct Payment Demonstration Pilot areas.

### 2.1 Action

In an attempt to address some of these issues LAs have engaged in a series of activities:

- **Running financial management sessions in small community-based interest groups to boost attendance** – North Lanarkshire council has found that group financial management sessions tend to be better attended and received if they are delivered to smaller community-based groups. In one Registered Social Landlord area, 54 per cent of claimants affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy attended a group session.

<sup>2</sup> However, evidence from the Direct Payment Demonstration Projects suggests that poor budgeting skills only affect a small minority of social tenants (DWP Research Report No. 822, *Direct Payments Demonstration Projects: Findings from a baseline survey of tenants in five project areas in England and Wales*).

<sup>3</sup> DWP Research Report No. 839, *Direct Payments Demonstration Projects: Learning the lessons, six months in*.

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- **Running financial management sessions with trusted and respected local partners** – Although not a pilot authority, lessons have been learnt from Milton Keynes Council which runs budgeting support sessions in partnership with a local football club. The sessions have been well attended by local residents and the council believe their success is partially due to the involvement of the local team. Milton Keynes Council claims that residents have a strong affiliation with the team and, therefore, events supported by the club benefit from a strong positive association.
- **Developing online budgeting tools to assist in the development of monthly budgeting schedules** – Birmingham City Council has developed a budgeting tool which can be accessed through its digital log book and allows all new tenants to create monthly budgets, helping also to identify peak spends, for example in September, when school uniforms need to be purchased, or in winter when extra fuel payments will be made.
- **Working in partnership with financial support agencies and Credit Unions to assist in setting up specialised budgeting support** – North Dorset District Council reported that attendance at the financial training courses they ran was initially poor. This poor attendance motivated them to work in partnership with the ‘First Dorset Credit Union’ and a local housing association in an attempt to encourage and also incentivise tenants to attend training sessions. It has been agreed that all those tenants who attend the training and open a credit union account will be paid £10, which covers the cost of joining and provides them with a small credit. If they then save on average £1 per week for 12 weeks, a further £10 will be paid into the savings account<sup>4</sup>.
- **Support in developing income maximisation policies** – Birmingham City Council’s letting suites are being used to this effect and provide customers with access to advice and support, whilst also ensuring that they receive the monies to which they are entitled. Birmingham suggests that this has yielded in excess of £10.4m up to the end of April 2013 for their customers.

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<sup>4</sup> It is known that other social housing landlords have used payment cards such as ‘Allpay’ to encourage take up of credit union accounts.

## 3 Work access

Local authorities have started to develop work support services to encourage customers to view work as the best option for income maximisation. A number of these services have been developed in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, but progress to date has been slow in many areas.

Authorities' report that take-up is limited and that many potential customers are already enrolled on the Work Programme, which is incompatible with council programmes. Caerphilly Council has suggested that after conducting a number of home visits with tenants affected by the removal of the spare room subsidy, only 31 of the 618 visited said they would be interested in receiving additional employment support. However, Lewisham and Oxford Councils both report that they have received unexpected interest in their work access support services from lone parents in particular.

### Challenge

Providing work access support encourages customers to focus on employment as a way of maximising income.

### 3.1 Action

In order to make work support services more attractive to customers LAs have engaged in the following activities:

- **Designing work support services that meet the needs of customers** – Melton Borough Council has an Employability and Skills Worker who assists individual customers and families who face multiple issues which prevent them returning to work. The worker devises an action plan with the customer which aims to resolve their issues, enabling the individual to return to work more quickly than might have otherwise been possible. This intensive help is proving effective and resulting in positive outcomes, although only a small number of individuals can be on the caseload at any one time. It must be remembered that this conclusion cannot be independently verified by DWP analysts. As the pilot continues it will be interesting to see how this intensive provision is supporting people back into work and if it can be effectively scaled up to draw in more participants.
- **Working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and other relevant agencies to provide joined up services** – West Dunbartonshire Council are operating a model which brings together advice, community learning and employability services to present a holistic service to customers. The partnership is working closely with Jobcentre Plus to identify customers and join up services.
- **Rushcliffe Council has focused on integrating a variety of partner services into their community contact centre** – A number of partners, including Jobcentre Plus, operate from the centre on a part-time basis. It is clear that there are tangible benefits to customers in providing access to multiple partners in this way and the council reports there is evidence suggesting less signposting, speedier resolution of issues and increased customer satisfaction where a number of services are provided under one roof.

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- **Providing internet access points in council premises to support customers' job search role** – West Lindsey District Council has set up a joint team with Jobcentre Plus where customers are directed to self-service PCs within the council offices. If required support is available from either a Housing Benefit adviser or a Jobcentre Plus adviser. Most attendees are coming back on a regular basis to use the PC to access Universal Job Match and one customer was successful in obtaining a job on the day, with the support of Jobcentre Plus adviser who was able to help him complete the application.
- **Undertaking 'better off in work' calculations that include a review of all benefits to show customers that work pays** – Lewisham Borough Council has done a lot of work with local residents in an effort to understand their barriers to employment. Lone parents in particular have been identified as a key client group. In a small survey of 100 customers, just under 50 per cent identified childcare as a key barrier to employment. Lewisham have also discovered that for many customers a significant barrier to them returning to employment is a belief that given the number of children they have they will not be better off in work. Many customers have cited that childcare costs would offset any financial benefit they received from employment. As a result, Lewisham has worked with a local IT consultant to develop an online 'better off in work' calculation tool. The tool is a powerful visual image that shows how household income would be affected by the benefit cap and how income could then be dramatically improved by moving into employment. Lewisham reports that the calculation tool has been effective in breaking down the misconception that work does not pay and has encouraged many customers to move towards active job search.
- **Hosting job fairs in an attempt to match local employers to potential employees** – Rushcliffe Borough Council in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, the Nottingham Post and Central College Nottingham, jointly hosted a jobs fair in April. The central aim of the fair was aimed at helping benefit customers reduce their dependency on state benefit by encouraging them to move into employment. The event proved to be a success with 31 separate employers represented offering 3,000 separate vacancies. Approximately 1,200 visitors attended the fair, 800 of whom had been referred by Jobcentre Plus.

## 4 Vulnerable groups and the triage process

### Challenge

Effective triage processes are essential in allowing authorities to identify customer groups most likely to be affected by welfare reform and who require additional support services.

Authorities understand that welfare reform changes are likely to have a disproportionate effect upon some groups within the community and it is the role of authorities to effectively identify these groups and provide support and guidance services where needed. Authorities are also mindful of the fact that resources are limited and support needs to be targeted at those in the most need.

A number of authorities have designed effective triage processes which assist in the identification of vulnerable customers. Lewisham Borough Council has based its triage system on a scoring and trigger system for managing customer contact and ensures a consistent approach to the identification of need. While Oxford City Council reports that 100 per cent of its face-to-face triage meetings have led to ongoing customer engagement with council support services.

### 4.1 Action

- **Developing effective customer triage process to identify customers who are most in need of support services. Working in partnership with other agencies to provide a joined up consistent service** – Birmingham City Council are using their social housing letting suites as a location where an initial customer triage process is undertaken. A 90 minute interview is conducted with each new tenant to assess their needs in terms of housing, employment and financial management. Tenants are then offered a 12-week support programme to ensure they remain focused on the conditions of their tenancy and access the required help to maintain their tenancy.
- Caerphilly Council is undertaking home visits and is assessing customers' needs as part of this process, offering access to online skills training and Jobcentre Plus referrals were required.
- **Working with other partnership agencies to ensure all key customer groups are reached/identified** – Bath and North East Somerset Council has built up a strong local partnership with a wide range of local partners in order to ensure as many groups within the community as possible are provided with representation. The partnership includes large public bodies such as Jobcentre Plus and HM Revenue & Customs, national charitable organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and MIND as well as a wide range of local charities and service providers who represent the needs of local carers, housing association tenants, the homeless, those with skills needs, ill health, housing repair needs, financial and budgeting support, etc.

### Challenge

Authorities report difficulties in getting people to engage with the welfare and benefit changes that are likely to affect them.

- **Actively engaging customers in discussion about welfare changes – including home visits**, Caerphilly Council has undertaken an extensive programme of home visits and to date has contacted 618 separate households, the information gained during a short survey undertaken during each visit has been invaluable to the council. All households visited receive expenditure reduction advice and, if appropriate, signposting or referral to specialist support (e.g. Citizens Advice Bureau for debt/budgeting advice, Jobcentre Plus for employment support). Expenditure reduction includes energy and water savings advice and support in applying for services/support.
- **Developing different approaches for contacting and engaging with customer groups** – In an effort to maximise the effect of all their customer contact processes, Lewisham Borough Council has been in consultation with the Cabinet Office's Behavioural Insights Unit. The Unit proposed a number of modifications to the contact process and the council is now trialling a number of different methods to improve the low response rate they currently get from issuing standard format letters. This trial includes the issuing of handwritten envelopes, reworded and personalised letters and the sending of supporting text messages and reminders.

# 5 Partnership development

## Challenge

Some authorities report that existing partnership arrangements do not facilitate the effective joint delivery of local services. More work is needed to understand the core business and service delivery processes of each partnership agency.

Local authorities recognise that building strong local partnerships is key to developing integrated and effective services that reduce the duplication of activity and increase access to vulnerable groups. Many authorities already have established partnership arrangements in place, but have recognised that a greater level of engagement and understanding of each others services is required to provide truly joined up local services.

## 5.1 Action

- **Local authorities are working on the development of strong partnerships with other local agencies** – Melton Borough Council has put in place a ‘Partnership Delivery Forum’ which brings all key partners together in a monthly meeting and enables them, on an ongoing basis, to resolve issues that are specific to an individual or are of wider importance to the delivery of services across their area. In addition, Melton has a number of partners co-located in their council offices which enables quicker, simpler resolution of issues for mutual customers.
- Rushcliffe Borough Council has opened up its community contact centre for use by a range of other local service providers and to date eight separate agencies, including Jobcentre Plus, Central College, Citizens Advice, The Probation Service, The Small Business Adviser, Metropolitan Housing, The Blind Society and the Drug Misuse Clinic, all have weekly representation – there has been a steady increase in customers using these services since December 2012.
- **Mapping the activity of partnership activity across a given locality to ensure that duplication of services is reduced and effective signposting is developed** – North Dorset Council firmly believe that signposting customers to other local support services is an important element of their partnership programme. The council compiled a signposting guide which lists all organisations and contact points within the district, and this has been distributed for use among all partnership members and volunteer groups.



## 6 Data sharing

### Challenge

Local authorities report that data sharing amongst partners is a significant problem and the lack of shared data is limiting their ability to identify and target particular customer groups.

The sharing of data among local partnerships remains a concern for the pilot authorities who report that the terms of the Data Protection Act constrain their ability to share personal level data. Some authorities have managed to agree the transfer of aggregated (anonymised) data between partners, but point out that this type of data has limited use in being able to effectively target services at vulnerable individuals.

- Some authorities have developed a potential workaround to the data sharing restrictions that they face by ensuring that all local partners deliver a common and consistent message about the work of partnership services. It is hoped that individual customer, will be identified by one agency and directed towards other local agencies which provide specialised support services.
- **Rushcliffe Council has been exploring the possibility of using** a software package called Patchwork, which is a web-based communication tool. Front line professionals from multiple agencies enter the name and address of their clients, no details as to why, just a flag that the person is known to the professional. Users across these multiple agencies can quickly and simply access the contact details of other frontline professionals working with their clients. Sitting behind Patchwork is a data-sharing agreement signed by all partners. It is currently being used by Brighton and Hove, and Staffordshire Councils. This product could be a possible solution to data sharing concerns experienced so far by this and other pilots, though it does still rely on partners being willing to sign up to the data sharing agreement and also updating the software regularly to keep it up-to-date.



# Appendix A

## Local Authority Led Pilots

### A.1 Background

The Local Authority Led Pilots have been set up to inform UC design and roll-out and to support LAs in their planning for UC delivery. The pilots started in September 2012 and will run through to December 2013. The initial stages of the pilot programme have been used to establish the pilot process and develop core activity. From March 2013, early findings from each of the pilot areas has begun to emerge. It is important to remember here that these are based on information that has been provided by each of the LAs. Findings and basic statistics presented have not been independently verified by DWP analysts.

Twelve pilots operating in 13 separate authorities from across England, Scotland and Wales are involved in delivering core pilot activity. (See Appendix B) Two additional authorities (Oldham and Wigan) are also running similar Pathfinder Preparation pilots and providing additional pilot learning.

It is the intention that the pilots will improve claimants' experiences of UC by ensuring that:

- the risks at UC 'go-live' are minimised;
- opportunities are taken to improve service through innovation and collaboration in developing partnership working; and
- they deliver simplicity for the customer.

The LAs are trialling work around a number of areas of activity:

- **Triage:** managing claimant interaction and access to the appropriate UC channel. This includes assessing immediate need and vulnerability.
- **Work focus:** working with DWP's labour market services to assess commitment to work, any barriers to finding work, and monitor activity to seek or increase levels of work.
- **Financial inclusion/budgeting support:** supporting claimants to budget effectively, provide access to support in potential hardship and, where applicable, identify and manage those claimants.
- **Digital inclusion/online access:** advocacy and other ways to achieve channel shift.
- **Claimant support:** providing a smooth tailored service for those with ongoing complex needs.

## **A.2 The evaluation process**

The primary focus of the pilot evaluation is to capture evidence from individual pilot activity to inform the delivery of UC. In order to do this each LA is designing and managing the evaluation of its own pilot activity. The process is being supported by the UC Evaluation team in Strategy Directorate and a team of 'Evaluation Buddies' drawn from across the analytical community. Relationship managers are working with each of the pilots to provide support, facilitate pilot activity and act as a conduit to/from the DWP UC programme.

Each LA is carrying out a process outcome and impact evaluation of its pilot activity. A variety of different methods are being used to achieve these outcomes including:

- the establishment of baseline data;
- surveys of customer and user groups (via telephone and face-to-face methods);
- the recording and analysis of customer interactions data;
- the review of new processes via observation and engagement with delivery staff; and
- customer and social tenant focus groups.

## **A.3 Evaluation objectives/questions**

Each LA has established its own set of evaluation questions and critical success factors which reflect the objectives of their own individual pilot activity. There are, however, a number of key evaluation questions which straddle all pilots. These include:

- What is different about the approach taken by the LA?
- How has this contributed to more effective delivery?
- What difference has this made to net outcomes for claimants?
- What are the net savings attributable to the approach taken by the LA?  
And what form do those savings take (e.g. direct, indirect)?
- What approach will LA's take to assessing what would have happened without support (i.e. the counterfactual)?
- Which aspects of service delivery didn't work as well as intended? And would you do differently?
- What is the potential contribution from adopting the approach more broadly across the LA, for other LA's, and more broadly in supporting UC?
- What are the main lessons for the development and roll-out of UC?
- Are there any strong examples of promoting more effective partnership working between LA's, DWP and other local partners?

# Appendix B

## Local Authority Led Pilot areas

### **B.1 Pilot authorities**

Lewisham Council

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Oxford City Council

Birmingham City Council

Caerphilly County Borough Council

Newport City Council

Dumfries and Galloway Council

North Lanarkshire Council

West Dunbartonshire Council

Rushcliffe Council

Melton Council

West Lindsay District Council

North Dorset District Council

UC Pathfinder Authorities

Oldham Council

Wigan Council