

# Universal Credit Local Authority Bulletin

Department for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA



**8 December 2017**

**UC1/2017**

<b>WHO SHOULD READ</b>	All Working Age Local Authority Staff
<b>ACTION</b>	<b>This circular is for information only</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Universal Credit updates on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Introduction</li><li>• Universal Credit Announcements</li><li>• Free Helplines for Universal Credit Claimants</li><li>• Automation of LCTRS notifications in UC Full Service</li><li>• Local Authority Funding</li><li>• Trusted Partner and the Landlord Portal</li><li>• Third Party Deductions</li><li>• Updated Universal Credit Full Service Support Pack</li><li>• Funding for Supported Housing</li><li>• DWP LA Welfare Steering Group</li><li>• LA Practitioners' Operational Group</li><li>• Universal Credit Statistics</li><li>• Housing Benefit Information</li></ul>

## Queries

- about the
  - **information in this bulletin**, contact [uclocalauthority.liaisonteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:uclocalauthority.liaisonteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)
  - **distribution of this circular**, contact [housing.correspondenceandpqs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:housing.correspondenceandpqs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

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## Introduction

Welcome to the first Universal Credit Local Authority (UC LA) Bulletin.

The aim of the UC Bulletin is to provide LA colleagues with updates on developments with Universal Credit and Universal Support.

These bulletins will be issued as and when and are designed to mirror the style of Housing Benefit circulars and bulletins that have been a regular communication tool from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) over the last few years.

We hope you'll find these bulletins useful and we would welcome any feedback you may have.

Please see the "Queries" section on the cover page for the respective email address to submit your feedback.

Regards,

The Universal Credit Local Authority Engagement Team

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## Universal Credit Announcements

On 23 November the Chancellor of Exchequer, as part of the 2017 Autumn Budget, outlined some changes for Universal Credit. This was followed up on 24 November by a speech in the House of Commons from David Gauke MP, Secretary of State for DWP outlining some further changes that will be coming into effect shortly. Below is a summary of the changes that have been announced.

DWP is working to develop further guidance for local authorities on the changes announced in the budget and this will be circulated when ready.

### Abolishing Waiting Days

From February 2018, we are removing the seven-day waiting period for new Universal Credit claimants, reducing the length of time claimants wait to receive their first full payment.

Subject to satisfying the conditions of entitlement, all new claimants will be eligible for Universal Credit from the first day they claim it.

### Increasing Universal Credit Advances

Presently in Universal Credit, claimants are entitled to an advance of up to 50% of their estimated entitlement which can be repaid over a period of up to six months. A claimant's Universal Credit payments will be adjusted to account for this.

From January 2018, we are increasing the amount a claimant can receive from 50% to 100% of their estimated entitlement. In practice, this means that new claimants in December 2017 can receive an advance of up to 50% of their overall entitlement, and may receive a second advance to take it up to 100% in the New Year. Taken

with the first payment, this means that claimants in need could receive nearly double the money they would usually get, helping them to make the transition on to Universal Credit.

We will also be making all payments of advances recoverable over a period up to 12 months (if this is what claimants want) regardless of the level of the advance claimed, making it easier for claimants to manage their money. In addition, from spring 2018, we will be making it possible to apply for an advance online; further increasing accessibility for those who need it.

### **Support with Housing Costs**

From April 2018, claimants who were previously receiving Housing Benefit (HB) and are transitioning on to Universal Credit will receive a transitional payment; an extra two weeks support. This will be unrecoverable, automatic and received early in the first assessment period.

This payment will be made by LAs and will not require any additional intervention from the claimant, unless they have a change of circumstance such as moving address, in which case they will need to inform their local authority.

### **Alternative Payment Arrangements for Landlords**

From December 2017, new guidance will be issued to DWP staff to ensure that claimants in the Private Rented Sector, who have managed payments to landlords for their legacy HB, are offered this option when they join Universal Credit, provided the relevant criteria continue to be met. This gives additional continuity to claimants when they join Universal Credit.

### **Temporary Accommodation Housing Support**

This measure is expected to help LAs, who currently see a significant funding shortage when they are placing people into temporary and emergency accommodation in Universal Credit full service areas.

From 11 April 2018 any person on Universal Credit and entering Temporary Accommodation (not just emergency temporary accommodation) after the change comes into effect will not make a claim for the UC Housing Element and will instead make a claim for Housing Benefit.

From 11 April 2018 any person on Universal Credit and already in Temporary Accommodation (not just emergency temporary accommodation) after the change comes into effect will continue to have their UC Housing Element paid for the period of time in Temporary Accommodation (not just emergency temporary accommodation) and will not move on to Housing Benefit unless they have a change in rental amount, or change to service charges. This means that when a claimant declares a change of circumstances in their Housing rent or service charge, their UC Housing Element will cease and Housing Benefit can then be claimed for the remaining period in Temporary Accommodation.

From 11 April 2018 any person already in Temporary Accommodation and making a new claim for Universal Credit they will continue to have their housing costs met through Housing Benefit and will not receive UC housing element.

## **Providing Budgeting Help**

Finally, those claimants who have difficulty managing their finances can currently qualify for help under the Universal Support scheme, delivered by LAs. We are also exploring with Citizen's Advice the scope for greater collaborative working to help claimants locally as they move to Universal Credit, and hope to be able to offer an update on this in due course.

## **Helping Claimants Progress in Work**

In addition to these measures, the government has allocated £8 million over four years to conduct a suite of tests and trials to support development of the evidence about what works to help people progress in work. This includes women who are returning to work and those who are in insecure work.

## **Universal Credit Full Service Rollout**

To complete the necessary system changes for the Universal Credit full service, our rollout schedule will now be completed by December 2018 rather than September 2018.

The rollout up until February 2018 will progress as previously announced. From February 2018 and up to and including April 2018 we will be rolling out to 10 Jobcentre areas per month, increasing to 41 in May 2018 and around 60 thereafter, with a firebreak in August 2018.

An updated rollout schedule can be found on GOV.UK at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-transition-to-full-service>

## **Universal Credit Live Service**

To allow all the policy changes (mentioned above) to be implemented, we will be closing the Universal Credit live service to new claims from 31 December 2017.

This means that unless claimants are living in a Universal Credit full service area, new claimants will be asked to claim legacy benefits or tax credits.

Those already on the Universal Credit live service will remain unaffected until they transition to Universal Credit full service once it has been rolled out in their area.

The gateway direct for new claims for families with more than 2 children onto legacy benefits will also be extended from October 2018 to January 2019.

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## **Free Helplines for Universal Credit Claimants**

All DWP Universal Credit phone lines are now free and nobody will be charged when they need to call to get help with their Universal Credit claim.

The key Universal Credit Freephone numbers include:

- Universal Credit live service: 0800 328 9344  
(this replaces 0345 600 0723)
- Universal Credit full service: 0800 328 5644  
(this replaces 0345 600 4272)

Anyone calling the old numbers will hear a message informing them of the change and the new number to call. Freephone numbers for other DWP benefits and services are set to follow, with all numbers switched over by the end of 2017.

Further information can be found on GOV.UK at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/free-helplines-for-universal-credit-claimants>

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## **Automation of LCTRS notifications in UC Full Service**

### **Background**

Where an award of Universal Credit is made, changed or terminated UC full service are currently providing notifications to LAs to assist with the administration of Localised Council Tax Reduction Schemes.

These notifications are currently provided in both Extensible Mark-up Language (XML), which is a machine readable format and also in Portable Document Format (PDF). However, we are aware that LA IT systems are not able to support the full service XML output and have to rely on the PDF, which must be actioned clerically.

LAs have been raising concerns about this through various channels including their partnership managers, steering groups, forums, and LA engagement events.

### **What have DWP done?**

DWP have undertaken a number of site visits to LAs across the country to better understand the impact and obtain further data and evidence.

When consulting with LAs the common ask has been for DWP to automate these notifications.

### **Solution**

Universal Credit have listened to LAs and agreed to fund the LA IT software suppliers to implement automation within their LAs.

Automating these notifications will mean that they can be processed by LA IT systems, reducing the amount of clerical action required. This complements how LA systems manage other DWP notifications for legacy benefits and UC live service.

DWP's Housing Delivery Division are working with the LA IT software suppliers to deliver this functionality by the end of December 2017. The implementation date for individual LAs will be dependent on their respective IT software supplier and be notified through the usual channels.

If you have any queries you should contact the LA Data Share (LADS) team

[lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

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## **Local Authority Funding**

### **2017/18 Universal Support Grant Funding**

For 2017/18 we changed the financial support model for LAs to help support claimants make and maintain a claim for Universal Credit as well as budget their payments.

Unlike previous years we have moved away from the Delivery Partnerships that required LAs to invoice DWP for the Universal Support they were providing. We have now asked all LAs to sign a standard Universal Support grant agreement which sets out how much funding we will provide to help with Assisted Digital Support (ADS) and Personal Budgeting Support (PBS). Payment will be made quarterly subject to Management Information (MI) returns.

These MI returns are important to help shape the future delivery of Universal Support. The information will be shared with District and Group Partnership Managers to help support and improve take-up by claimants.

The Q1 and Q2 MI returns have shown lower take-up of both PBS and ADS than expected and efforts are being made to improve referral rates. Referrals can come from any source including social landlords and voluntary organisations. LAs and DWP Partnership Managers should be meeting regularly to review the numbers of vulnerable claimants who receive support and agree what can be done to improve take up.

All Q1 and Q2 payments have now been made to LAs who have signed up to deliver ADS and/or PBS and completed their MI return. Q3 payments will be made in December 2017.

### **2017/18 Universal Credit New Burdens Funding**

The Universal Credit New Burdens funding for 2017/18 to cover administrative duties was paid to LAs at the end of September 2017.

### **2018/19 Universal Support and UC New Burdens Funding**

The forecast for both Universal Support and Universal Credit New Burdens funding is being revised following the budget announcements. We will let LAs know their allocations for 2018/19 in the New Year.

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## **Trusted Partner and the Landlord Portal**

Following successful pilots of the 'Trusted Partner' scheme and the 'Landlord Portal', DWP will rollout both initiatives together.

The Trusted Partner scheme allows Social Rented Sector (SRS) landlords to play a key role in engaging with their tenants who are Universal Credit claimants by helping those who can't manage their housing payments to access the support available.

The Landlord Portal provides SRS landlords with the ability to submit information directly to the Universal Credit online system, which supports timely and accurate payment of housing costs to Universal Credit claimants.

Landlords who are given access to the Landlord Portal will also be given 'Trusted Partner status' which will enable them to make recommendations on whether an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA) should be put in place. All APA recommendations from Trusted Partner landlords will be implemented in good faith by DWP.

We are currently in the first phase of implementing the Landlord Portal and Trusted Partner status, enrolling the largest landlords in those areas where UC full service is rolling out during October to December 2017.

In line with the UC rollout plan, we will use the January 2018 pause to assess and learn lessons from rollout and to determine the next set of landlords for the second phase of implementation between February and April 2018. As we implement the Landlord Portal, we will ensure that staff are trained to operate the Trusted Partner status that sits alongside it, identifying vulnerable tenants who need support with their rent payments and putting that support in place.

An independent review of the Trusted Partner pilot identified many benefits of this approach. This is the link to the published report:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-social-landlords-review-of-the-trusted-partner-pilot>

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## Third Party Deductions

As part of our continuous improvement of Universal Credit, the new contact point for any Third Party Deduction queries is Diane Warburton.

Her contact details are [Diane.Warburton@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Diane.Warburton@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

Please remember to

- send one form, per claimant, and to send each form on an individual email
- enter the subject title as 'OFFICIAL SENSITIVE DATA LA UC TPP'

The full process is explained within the Universal Credit full and live service Local Authority Support Pack.

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## Updated Universal Credit Full Service Support Pack



The Universal Credit Local Authority **live and full service** support packs are currently being updated to incorporate service improvements, recent budget announcements, policy/process changes and user feedback. We anticipate that both packs will be ready to share in mid December 2017. Your DWP Partnership Manager will be in touch shortly to ensure you receive the new version.

Thank you for your continued cooperation and feedback.

If you have any enquiries about the information contained within this update please contact DWP UC Local Authority Liaison Team.

[uclocalauthority.liaisonteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:uclocalauthority.liaisonteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

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## **Funding for Supported Housing**

On 31 October 2017 DWP alongside the Department for Communities and Local Government published a policy statement outlining the government's proposals for a flexible funding approach for the supported housing sector, to come into effect from April 2020. At the same time two consultations on the details of the models were launched.

Alongside this, responses to the joint Communities and Local Government and Work and Pensions Select Committee report, and our November 2016 consultation 'Funding for supported housing' were published. Also some research into the projected future demand in the sector has been commissioned.

As part of the policy statement, two consultations were launched; one on housing costs for sheltered and extra care accommodation, and one on housing costs for short-term supported accommodation.

Both of these consultations seek the views on the design of the government's new supported housing funding models which relate to England only, though we would nevertheless welcome comments from respondees across Great Britain. We are seeking views on the funding models from the sector, providers, commissioners and residents alike.

The consultation period for each of the consultations is 12 weeks commencing on 31 October 2017 and closing on 23 January 2018 at 11:45pm.

The policy statement and consultations can be accessed on GOV.UK at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/funding-for-supported-housing>

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## **DWP LA Welfare Steering Group**

The DWP LA Welfare Steering Group is responsible for considering and providing a strategic expert view from an LA perspective into all Housing Benefit, Universal

Credit, Universal Support and other DWP welfare related matters, to support their on-going development, refinement, implementation and delivery.

Terms of Reference and minutes from previous meetings can be accessed on our LA pages on GOV.UK at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/dwp-local-authority-welfare-steering-group>

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## **LA Practitioners' Operational Group**

The joint DWP and LA Practitioners' Operational Group discusses operational issues relating to Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. It meets on a bi-monthly basis and summary minutes of those meetings are published on our LA pages on GOV.UK at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/dwp-and-local-authorities-practitioners-operations-group>

If you have any questions please email [mont.goldman@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:mont.goldman@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

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## **Universal Credit Statistics**

Universal Credit statistics are published monthly and can be accessed on GOV.UK at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/universal-credit-statistics>

Recently some ad hoc statistics have been published covering Universal Credit payment advances and Universal Credit payment timeliness. Both of these publications can be accessed on GOV.UK at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ad-hoc-statistical-analyses-2017#ad-hoc-statistical-publications>

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## **Housing Benefit Information**

The latest HB General Information Bulletins can be accessed on GOV.UK at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-general-information-bulletins-2017>

The latest HB Direct newsletters can be accessed on GOV.UK at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/housing-benefit-direct>

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