

Local Government North Yorkshire and York**7 March 2014****Impact of Welfare Benefit Reforms on North Yorkshire Residents****1 Purpose**

- 1.1 To provide an update on the impacts of benefit changes brought about by the Welfare Reform Act 2012 and associated regulations.

2 Background

- 2.1 Local Government North Yorkshire and York (LGNYY) received a report in October 2013 detailing the initial impacts in North Yorkshire and York of the benefit changes being introduced by The Welfare Act 2012. LGNYY requested an update report to be provided for its meeting in March 2014. This is intended to be the final report unless LGNYY see the need for further updates.
- 2.2 The following welfare benefit changes have or are in the course of being implemented:
- Council Tax Support (CTS)
 - Housing Benefit Size Criteria in the social rented sector
 - Local Welfare Assistance, replacing Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans
 - Local Housing Allowance (LHA), uprated in line with the Consumer Price Index (previously capped to the 30th percentile of rents in the locality)
 - Personal Independence Payments (PIP), the replacement for Disability Living Allowance – affecting at present new claimants only
 - the benefit cap for working age people (introduced from 15 July to 30 September 2013)
 - the cap on the annual increases in most working-age benefits
- 2.3 A number of other significant changes are planned to take effect between now and 2020:
- the roll-out of Universal Credit (beginning with claims from the newly unemployed - current benefit claimants will be moved onto Universal Credit in a phased approach)
 - the migration of existing Incapacity Benefit claimants onto Employment and Support Allowance
 - the migration of existing DLA claimants to PIP
 - the rise in the State Pension age to 66 years for both men and women

3 National developments

3.1 Court rulings – benefit cap and Housing Benefit Size Criteria in the social rented sector

- 3.1.1 The High Court ruled in November 2013 that the new capping regulations introduced by the DWP were lawful. The capping affects housing benefit, child benefit and child tax credit to families who do not work sufficient hours to qualify for working tax credit, and is set at £500 per week for couples or lone parents.
- 3.1.2 The High Court judges in dismissing the case said that ultimately it was a policy issue, and it could not be said that the scheme was manifestly unfair or disproportionate as to justify interference by the courts.
- 3.1.3 The limit on the sum that each household can claim in benefits could be lowered further. Iain Duncan Smith, The Work and Pensions Secretary announced in January that the £26,000 maximum imposed by the Government would be kept “under review”¹.
- 3.1.4 In February 2014 the Court of Appeal ruled that the benefits cap and size criteria do not unduly discriminate against disabled tenants. Judges ruled that the two measures were not unlawful and that the Court could only intervene if the measures “were manifestly without reasonable foundation”².

3.2 Cap on overall welfare spending

- 3.2.1 The Government announced last year that it intended to introduce a cap on a significant amount of Annually Managed Expenditure. The cap will apply to total welfare spending excluding the basic state pension and benefits directly affected by cyclical increases in unemployment such as Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). The precise level of the welfare cap will initially be set in this year’s Budget announcement, and will apply from 2015 onwards. The level of the cap will be reviewed at the beginning of each Parliament. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) will assess the government’s performance against the cap once a year alongside the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement.

3.3 Universal Credit: revised timetable for roll-out

- 3.3.1 The DWP has acknowledged that it might miss its own deadline for moving all claimants to Universal Credit by 2017, with only 400,000 benefit claimants forecast to be added to the system in 2015-16 compared with the 4.5m that had been planned. Instead, the vast majority of the seven million people due to transfer will do so in the two years leading up to 2017³. All new claims, apart from those currently entitled to Employment Support Allowance (ESA), will be within Universal Credit by 2016; all existing claimants, apart from those

¹ <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/politics/article3974563.ece>

² <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/politics/article4013102.ece>

³ <http://cdn.budgetresponsibility.independent.gov.uk/Economic-and-fiscal-outlook-December-2013.pdf>

on ESA, will be transferred by 2017. The government estimates about 700,000 people receiving ESA might not be moved to Universal Credit until after 2017⁴.

3.4 Universal Credit Pathfinder/Pilots

3.4.1 DWP evaluation from the pathfinder authorities (Greater Manchester) found that 90% of claims were made successfully online; and 78% of those getting monthly payments were confident they could budget over the month⁵.

3.4.2 Research conducted by the Citizens Advice Bureaux ('Managing migration pilot project') however shows that the transition to Universal Credit is not simply about people mastering ICT. The research examined the readiness of clients in the Universal Credit pilot areas affected by Universal Credit for the transition. Clients were mapped against five key capability areas: budgeting, monthly payments, banking, staying informed and getting online. Nine out of 10 CAB clients were not ready for Universal Credit in at least one capability area and 38% were not ready in all five. However after receiving advice and support from the CAB service over half of clients had improved skills in all five key areas. The importance of the CAB and local authorities working together is underlined in the research, including in respect of getting people online.

3.5 Housing Benefit Size Criteria in the social rented sector (a.k.a. 'spare room subsidy' or 'bedroom tax')

3.5.1 The DWP has confirmed that social housing tenants who have had a continuous claim for Housing Benefit since at least 1 January 1996 and occupied the same dwelling since that date should not have been subject to the size criteria rules. Transitional protection should have applied. Claimants have been asked to contact their local authority if they are in this position to have their claim reassessed under the correct rules and receive money backdated to April 2013.

3.5.2 The government intends to change the law so that these same households will not be exempt from the size criteria in the near future.

3.6 Personal Independence Payments (PIP)

3.6.1 From 28 October 2013 the DWP started to invite some existing DLA claimants living in Wales, West Midlands, East Midlands and East Anglia to claim PIP. From 3 February 2014 the reassessment of DLA claimants for PIP began in our region for the following postcodes: CA, DL, HG, LA and YO6.

3.6.2 The DWP has said that further decisions on extending reassessment will be communicated to the rest of the country in due course. However the DWP expects that from October 2015 all the remaining claimants in receipt of a

⁴ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-25230158>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/universal-credit-working-together-for-improved-outcomes>

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/275656/pip-toolkit-factsheet-reassessment.pdf

DLA award will be invited to make a claim for PIP. By October 2017 all existing DLA claimants (aged 16 to 64 on 8 April 2013) will have been invited to claim PIP.

3.7 Council Tax support

3.7.1 From April 2014, unitary/district councils will fund council tax support through their general resources with Government no longer providing a separate dedicated stream of funding.

3.7.2 One in three councils affected is likely to have to reduce levels of council tax support for 2014/15, according to a survey carried out by the Society of District Council Treasurers⁷.

3.8 Macro and micro economic prospects

3.8.1 The latest labour market statistics⁸ show that unemployment has continued to fall nationally - the jobless total was 2.34 million in the final quarter of 2013, down by 125,000, giving an unemployment rate of 7.2%. People claiming JSA dipped to 1.22 million in January, down by 27,000 - the 15th consecutive monthly fall. More women are also in work than at any time since records began in 1971. However 1.4 million people are in part-time jobs because they cannot find full-time work, a fall of 29,000 over the latest quarter but 46,000 higher than a year ago. Youth and long-term unemployment have both fallen, but there has been little change in the number of people classed as 'economically inactive', which has remained just under nine million. Average earnings increased by 1.1% in the year to December, 0.2 percentage points up on the previous month. The number of people out of work for longer than a year has fallen by 45,000 to 845,000, while 451,000 have been unemployed for over two years, down by 7,000. Job vacancies were up by 28,000 to 580,000 - the highest since 2008.

3.8.2 Conditions in the North Yorkshire labour market in January were mixed⁹. There was a rise in the total number of JSA benefit claimants. This rise though was offset by a small fall in the number of people claiming for more than a year. There was a small rise in the number of claimants' aged 18 to 24 years old while the number of people claiming for over six months was unchanged. However, all of these measures of unemployment showed an improvement over the same period in 2013. Craven and Richmondshire districts were least affected by the rise in JSA claimant numbers.

3.8.3 According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, pensioner poverty is at its lowest level for 30 years. However for the first time there are more people in working families living below the poverty line (6.7 million) than in workless and retired families in poverty combined (6.3 million)¹⁰.

⁷ LGA press release, January 2014,

http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/5819176/NEWS

⁸ *Labour Market Statistics, February 2014*, Office for National Statistics

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lms/labour-market-statistics/february-2014/statistical-bulletin.html>

⁹ North Yorkshire Economic Monitor, February 2014

¹⁰ *Monitoring Poverty & Social Exclusion*, JRF/NPI, 2013

3.8.4 Despite the signs of national economic recovery, personal debt in the UK remains close to its all-time high of £1.43 trillion, with unsecured consumer debt reaching £158 billion, according to the Centre for Social Justice. Indebted households in the poorest 10% of the country have average debts more than four times their annual income¹¹. Research¹² by the Money Advice Service (MAS) found that nearly nine million people across the UK are living with serious debt problems but of those very few people access free advice. Using data produced from Experian, the credit reference agency, the MAS has ranked each district and unitary authority area in the country by the proportion of the resident population who are over 'indebted'¹³. The results for North Yorkshire and York are shown in the table below.

District/unitary local authority area	Rank <i>(where '1' has the highest level of indebtedness in the population (43.11%) and '406' has the lowest level (1.2%))</i>	Percentage of population identified as indebted.
1. Scarborough	119	22.8%
2. Selby	198	14.7%
3. York	202	14.5%
4. Richmondshire	229	13.2%
5. Craven	282	9.8%
6. Ryedale	290	9.1%
7. Harrogate	297	8.8%
8. Hambleton	309	8.1%

3.8.5 The number of people receiving benefit sanctions has continued to grow over the past year, following the introduction of the new JSA sanctions regime in October 2012¹⁴. The new regime is intended to encourage people to engage with the support being offered by Jobcentres by making it clearer to claimants what they are expected to do in return for their benefit. Parliament's Work and Pensions Committee¹⁵ has, however, called on Jobcentre Plus to revise its key performance indicators immediately to ensure that staff are

<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/monitoring-poverty-and-social-exclusion-2013>

¹¹ *Maxed Out: Serious personal debt in Britain*, Centre for Social Justice, November 2013

http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/CSJ_Serious_Debt_report_WEB_final.pdf

¹² *Indebted lives: the complexities of life in debt*, MAS, November 2013

<https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/static/indebted-lives-the-complexities-of-life-in-debt>

¹³ Individuals who have been at least three months behind their bills in the last six months or have said that they feel their debts are a heavy burden.

¹⁴ DWP figures show that there has been a rise in the number of sanctions compared with last year – between November 2012 (the first full month of the new sanctions) and September 2013 there were 789,000 sanctions. This compares to 705,000 sanctions between November 2011 and September 2012.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/benefit-sanctions-ending-the-something-for-nothing-culture--2> Food banks nationally and locally have reported that one of the main reasons that people are citing for needing to use a food bank is due to them having received a benefit sanction or because their benefits have been delayed. A recent study commissioned by DEFRA (*Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid*, February 2014) notes that there is evidence that benefits payment problems – either administrative errors, or the temporary withdrawal of benefits as a result of sanctions – are a factor in the increase in demand for food aid. More generally it found that people are accessing food banks because of "crisis" poverty levels. No evidence was found to support the idea that increased food aid provision is driving demand.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/283071/household-food-security-uk-140219.pdf

¹⁵ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/news/jcp-rpt/>

incentivised to get jobseekers into work, not just to get them off benefits. A limited independent review of sanctioning has now been established by the DWP. The Committee has also recommended that there should be a separate, broader independent review, which amongst other things would look at whether, and to what extent, sanctioning and benefit conditionality (the use of negative incentives to encourage a return to work) is having the desired effect of encouraging claimants to engage more actively in job-seeking.

3.8.6 Crime in England and Wales fell to its lowest level in at least 32 years in the 12 months to September 2013 according to the Crime Survey of England and Wales. However the survey also showed an increase in some types of 'austerity-related' offences. These included a 4% rise in shoplifting, which was up by more than 11,000 to more than 313,000, and a 7% increase in 'theft from the person', which includes pickpocketing. The rise in shoplifting was seen in 29 of the 43 police force areas¹⁶.

4 Impact of the changes introduced to date

4.1 Housing Benefit Size Criteria in the social rented sector

4.1.1 Local authorities in North Yorkshire and York continue to report that the majority of the work has been to explain and advise customers about the size criteria. As detailed in previous reports, a range of measures are in place to provide support including home visits to identify potential exemptions for carers and disabled children and a programme of direct intervention with support and advice provided to enable home moves etc. City of York Council for example is helping those seeking to downsize through the Home Swapper scheme by matching those under occupying with tenants who are overcrowded and wishing to move. The Council's downsize incentive scheme provides grants of £2,500 to move to help pay for a wide range of associated costs such as moving fees, reconnection of utilities etc.

4.1.2 Most of the tenants who are affected by the size criteria in North Yorkshire and City of York have one excess bedroom. Taking Harrogate and Scarborough districts as examples, 86% and 85% of cases respectively relate to tenants with an excess of one bedroom. The average weekly loss for council tenants living in Harrogate district with an excess of one bedroom is £13.42; and £27.98 for those with an excess of two bedrooms or more. For Selby the average weekly loss for council tenants with an excess of one bedroom is £11.56; and £22.22 for those with an excess of two bedrooms or more. The average weekly loss for housing association tenants in Selby

¹⁶ North Yorkshire Police recorded an increase in the number of shoplifting offences related to food during the summer months of 2013, with the yearly average being around 95 a month. The Christmas period was higher than expected for theft of food as historically the cold weather has put people off from shoplifting, with shoplifters being more likely to steal non-consumable items for presents rather than food. Police intelligence suggests however that in the vast majority of cases food is not being stolen by an individual for the purposes of feeding themselves or their family; instead it is being sold on, usually for drugs. This is because individuals supplying drugs are now willing to take a range of items as payment for drugs instead of money. North Yorkshire Police has confirmed that if it is clear that individuals who have been arrested have a genuine need for food then in the right circumstances they would be referred on for further support.

district with an excess of one bedroom is £12.93; and £24.42 for those with an excess of two bedrooms or more.

- 4.1.3 Hambleton District Council's Housing Department has seen an increase in homelessness representations along with a rise in advice and support needs. It reports that the size restriction legislation has affected homeless clients and the properties for which they can bid i.e. due to the limited amount of one bed accommodation for single people/couples. Also the extension of the single room rate to include under-35 year olds is impacting on younger clients as there is a shortage of houses in multiple-occupation. In general there are limited housing options for residents due to high private sector rentals and limited housing association stock.
- 4.1.4 Most but not all of the Housing Associations across North Yorkshire and York have consistently reported that the size criteria has had a negative impact upon the total level of their rent arrears, even though they have put support measures in place. Broadacres reports that of the 482 households affected (not including those on the DHP allowance), over the 36 weeks since the size criteria came into effect, the shortfall between the additional income that it should have received and actual outstanding rental arrears is just under £195,000. The Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust has managed to reduce the number affected in York and North Yorkshire from 111 tenancies to 77 by proactively assisting tenants to downsize. However the total arrears for the remaining 77 tenancies affected by the size criteria rose from £16,000 at the end of September 2013 to £28,800 at the end of December 2013. The average arrears figure per tenancy was £208.12 at the end of September and £373.48 at the end of December 2013: an 80% increase.
- 4.1.5 As detailed in previous update reports the Housing Associations in our area are implementing a range of initiatives to help their tenants try to cope with the welfare benefit changes, including tackling rent arrears, and assisting tenants to downsize properties. For example the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust has suspended the requirement for a tenancy to have no arrears to be eligible to move.
- 4.1.6 The numbers affected by the size criteria in 2013/14 in North Yorkshire and York have varied from the initial estimates taken at the start of the financial year. This is due to a number of factors such as the ruling that transitional protection should have applied to social housing tenants who have had a continuous claim for Housing Benefit since 1 January 1996 and occupied the same dwelling since that date. Other factors include families having downsized to smaller properties; the size of households increasing so that there is no longer a 'spare room' in the property; a change in a household's benefit circumstances; and exemptions because of easement of rules on foster parents, severely disabled children and non-dependants on active military service.

4.2 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

- 4.2.1 The amount of DHP funding left in local authority budgets varies across North Yorkshire and York, though most have seen significant increases in applications when compared with 2012/13. All housing authorities received additional transitional funding in 2013 and Craven, Richmondshire and Ryedale district councils received a further tranche of funding provided to the 21 least densely populated areas in Great Britain.
- 4.2.2 For Ryedale District Council the number of claims received year to date (283) has increased significantly compared to the previous year (60). However it anticipates that it will not spend its entire DHP budget this year when taking into account the additional increase in funding.
- 4.2.3 Craven District Council also qualified for the rural sparsity DHP funding, albeit for a smaller amount, and is using the funding to provide a benefit maximisation project. Its DHP budget is currently underspent but it anticipates a large spend from this fund within the next month as it implements a homeless prevention measure aimed at tackling the large rent arrears that have accumulated since April 2013.
- 4.2.4 Hambleton District Council has almost spent its DHP budget (£85,775) for this financial year and it too has seen a significant increase in DHP applications from last year (£24,180).
- 4.2.5 Selby District Council has £13,739 unallocated or 15.36% of the annual fund left for the financial year.
- 4.2.6 For City of York Council the number of applications made during the 12 months to 31 January 2013 was 268, and for the period to 31 January 2014 there were 830 – over a 309% increase. It expects to have a modest underspend of £10,000 in its DHP budget by the end of the financial year.
- 4.2.7 Harrogate Borough Council has found that following an initial spike in activity earlier in the year, the number of DHP claims has fallen to only marginally above 2012/13 levels. Take-up has been lower than expected, with expenditure being less than 40% of the total fund. The key influence on the growth in DHP applications has been the introduction the social sector size criteria. The second highest reason has been due to the value of the Local Housing allowance being below rent liability.

4.3 Benefit Cap

- 4.3.1 City of York Council in common with other local authorities has found that the actual number of households affected by the benefit cap has been lower than earlier DWP estimates (28 households against a predicted 40). The average loss per week is £41.06 but as family circumstances change and the reduction varies it is difficult to estimate an annual loss figure. Actual losses range from £1.02 to £99.98 per week.

- 4.3.2 Hambleton District Council has found that despite earlier indications that a small number of cases would be affected, to date no claims have been affected by the benefit cap.
- 4.3.3 Selby District Council has identified five households in the district with losses ranging from £0.50 per week to £91.58 per week.
- 4.3.4 Ryedale District Council has so far identified 34 cases with potential losses ranging from £11.87 to £138.93 per week. However of those the cap has only been applied to four households, which is a direct result of proactive working.
- 4.3.5 There are 25 cases adversely affected by the overall benefit cap in Scarborough district. All cases have been written to by DWP and the Borough Council has shared information with its main Registered Social Landlords for their affected tenants.
- 4.3.6 Craven District Council has identified four households affected by the benefit cap, with potential losses ranging from £29.42 to £108.19 per week. The Council is working in partnership with its Housing Options team and Citizen's Advice Bureau to provide help with budgeting and opportunities to relocate to smaller properties if appropriate. DHP is generally the last resort after all other avenues have been explored.
- 4.3.7 Harrogate Borough Council has found that of the 15 cases affected in the district only two are currently claiming DHP. This is because the majority are trying to budget taking advantage of the Council's in-house budgeting service.
- 4.4 Council Tax Support (CTS) – 10% reduction in Council Tax Benefit introduced nationally for claimants under pensionable age.
- 4.4.1 Local authorities in North Yorkshire continue to report that although the amount of Council Tax collected to date remains in line with last year's figures, or has fallen only very marginally, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of reminders and, in the case of some, an increase in the number of summonses issued.
- 4.4.2 Hambleton District Council reports that the number of reminders sent out in 2013/14 has increased by 1000 (14% increase). Summonses issued up to the end of January 2014 have increased by 930 compared to the previous year.
- 4.4.3 Craven District Council reports that Council tax collection rates overall remain broadly in line with the previous financial year, at 86.7% at the end of December 2013, compared to 87.3% as at the same point in 2012. For claimants in receipt of Council Tax Support the figure is 80% across all claimants. The collection rate for pensioners is higher than the average for all taxpayers (89.9%), whilst for working age claimants the average collection rate is 70.7%. For claimants classed as vulnerable the collection rate is 78%.

- 4.4.4 Ryedale District Council reports that Council Tax collection is down by approximately 0.5%. However part of this is due to some ratepayers opting to pay over 12 instalments. The monetary value collected in respect of Council Tax in 2013/14 has increased by over 4% (£300,000) compared to the same time last year. An additional recovery cycle has been also be implemented. It is anticipated therefore that the collection rate for 2013/14 should be no less than 0.3% down compared to the previous financial year.
- 4.4.5 For City of York Council the overall Council Tax collection rate was 0.43% below last years as at 31January 2014, though the expected end of year outturn is expected to be at breakeven. The collection rate for pensioners is 97.1% and the collection rate for working age customers is currently 57.9%. The number of reminders sent out in 2013/14 has increased by 1949 (15% increase). Final Notices have increased by 687 (91% increase). Summonses issued up to the end of January 2014 have increased by 4016 (56% increase) compared to the previous year.
- 4.4.6 Harrogate Borough Council will be maintaining its current scheme and so will not be making any cuts in the Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2014/15.

4.5 Universal Credit

- 4.5.1 As reported in the previous update report, Harrogate district has been selected as a progressive roll-out site for Universal Credit with effect from February 2014. The role of Harrogate Borough Council in supporting Universal Credit is limited to the provision of personal budgeting and support; on-line access and support for people to apply for the benefit; and expert support and advice to Universal Credit processing teams in relation to housing costs.
- 4.5.2 Work is on-going to establish working practices and organise partnership arrangements to deliver these services. The numbers of claims are expected to be very low, approximately 100 per month, and not be of significant impact to services or the households who claim the new benefit.

4.6 Personal Independence Payments (PIP)

- 4.6.1 Harrogate district has been selected as an area to extend the roll-out of the migration of disability living allowance claims to the new PIP benefit. Data has been requested from the DWP on the impact expected by this change in the district but has not been confirmed.

4.7 Local Welfare Assistance/Emergency food provision

- 4.7.1 From 2015/16 unitary and upper tier local authorities will have to fund the cost of their local welfare assistance funds from their base budgets, with no additional funding provided from central government. This could lead some local authorities to abandoning their schemes.

- North Yorkshire:

4.7.2 The bulk of awards made in relation to the County Council's Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF) from the beginning of October to the end of December 2013 have been from families under exceptional pressure (42% of all awards made), followed by people experiencing mental health problems (19%) and thirdly people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (18%). The total amount of applications made for this quarter has been higher than for previous quarters.

4.7.3 46% of all applications have been from Scarborough district followed by Harrogate district at 13%.

4.7.4 Food has been the most requested item (37% of awards) closely followed by white goods (36% of awards). 31 % of white goods awarded were made to Scarborough district followed by Richmondshire (23%).

4.7.5 Recent changes to the fund have included extending the provision within each food parcel to at least five days, and introducing utility top-ups. Scarborough district has by far the highest number of food applications awarded at 66%. However the figures are likely to be skewed slightly due to the NYLAF having provided one-off funding to the Rainbow Centre in Scarborough to provide food parcels. Scarborough district has also made the most applications for utility top-ups, making 49% of applications. Eligibility for utility top-ups is much the same as it is for food parcels; applicants do not necessarily have to fall within a vulnerability category but need to be able to demonstrate an urgent need for utility top-up that cannot be met by other forms of support.

4.7.6 Expenditure is budgeted on monthly basis and is being fully spent.

- City of York:

4.7.7 As reported in the previous update, City of York Council has been reviewing its scheme ('York Financial Assistance Scheme'). A report was taken to Cabinet in January 2014 following analysis and consultation of the scheme. These key recommendations were agreed:

- The full administration of the Scheme remaining within the Council's Benefits Service with a strengthening of advice, referrals and researching of other sources of funding.
- The Financial Inclusion Steering Group having overall control over the general distribution of the fund and the commissioning of other organisations as necessary to target specific initiatives.

4.7.8 Expenditure is below that based on historical DWP data. From April 2013 to end of January 2014 1062 awards were made amounting to a value of £178,062. The majority of spend for 'community' need has been for 'white goods' and furniture, and for 'emergency' need it has been primarily for daily living expenses.

4.8 Other welfare benefit impacts

- 4.8.1 North Yorkshire County Council's Benefits, Assessments and Charging Teams in Health and Adult Services have continued to see a further increase in demand for benefits advice and information as part of the recent decision to review the way the Council charges for services. As a result of the review the County Council will be supporting potentially another 6000 people in the community and this will include benefits maximisation for them as well as on-going clients.
- 4.8.2 Debt and benefits advice remain the largest types of enquiry locally by some margin for North Yorkshire and York CAB (Q3 figures 2013/14).
- 4.8.3 The North Yorkshire and York CAB carried out a joint piece of research last year into the concerns facing clients using an on-line Universal Credit service. Concerns included: lack of skills to use the internet; costs associated with accessing the internet; lack of privacy when entering personal data at public internet sites; lack of confidence and increased anxiety when applying for benefits online; and signs of discrimination against disabled people and those living with mental health problems. This highlighted the need for readily accessible support, in particular, personal face to face contact when dealing with complex benefit claims; customised training for claimants in the use of the internet and email; locally based, free access to the internet; privacy considerations for claimants using public access terminals; and optional, multi-channel access available for disabled people and those living with mental health problems.
- 4.8.4 The Welfare Benefits Unit for York & North Yorkshire Unit continues to be busy with training requests from second tier support for organisations working with clients with benefits issues. It remains the case that outside of the City of York the Unit does not have external funding to provide support to organisations with benefit appeals elsewhere in the county.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 Local Government North Yorkshire and York is recommended to note and comment upon the findings in the report.

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North Yorkshire County Council

24 February 2014