

Report of the Strategic Director Corporate Resources to the meeting of the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee to be held on 18 March 2021

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Subject:

Universal Credit

Summary statement:

Universal Credit was first introduced in the Bradford District towards the end of 2015, replacing six existing benefits and tax credits (often referred to as legacy benefits) for working-age claimants. The roll-out of Universal Credit has been incremental, with different household types falling within its scope over time.

The latest data available from the DWP shows that the number of households in the Bradford district in receipt of Universal Credit (51%) now exceeds the number of households in receipt of legacy benefits. The DWP forecast that the full roll-out of Universal Credit, nationally, will be completed in 2024.

This report examines the progress of, and future plans for, the roll out of Universal Credit, the impact of Covid 19, and the arrangements in place to support residents.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

There are no Equality and Diversity issues for the Council arising from this report given Universal Credit is a national Government scheme; however any national policy decisions about Universal Credit impact on the residents of Bradford district hugely.

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Portfolio:

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Corporate

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1. Universal Credit was first introduced in the Bradford District towards the end of 2015, replacing six existing benefits and tax credits (often referred to as legacy benefits) for working-age claimants. The roll-out of Universal Credit has been incremental, with different household types falling within its scope over time.
- 1.2. The latest data available from the DWP shows that the number of households in the Bradford district in receipt of Universal Credit (51%) now exceeds the number of households in receipt of legacy benefits. The DWP forecast that the full roll-out of Universal Credit, nationally, will be completed in 2024.
- 1.3. This report examines the progress of, and future plans for, the roll out of Universal Credit, the impact of Covid 19, and the arrangements in place to support residents.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. Universal Credit for working-age claimants has gradually been introduced across the Bradford District since November 2015. The benefits and tax credits being replaced by Universal Credit, often referred to as “legacy benefits”, are;
 - Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
 - Income-based Employment and Support Allowance
 - Income Support
 - Working Tax Credit
 - Child Tax Credit
 - Housing Benefit
- 2.2. Pension-age claimants do not fall within the scope of Universal Credit. The Government is not expected to confirm any decisions about the future of Housing Benefit for pension-age claimants until full implementation of Universal Credit approaches.
- 2.3. Those in receipt of Universal Credit are either working-age households that were previously in receipt of one or more legacy benefit and had a change of circumstances that required them to move onto Universal Credit, a process known as Natural Migration, or are households that have made a new claim (except in limited circumstances, legacy benefits are closed to new claimants).
- 2.4. From a date still to be announced, DWP will move all remaining legacy benefit claimants to Universal Credit. As part of their ‘test and learn’ approach, DWP began a pilot scheme in Harrogate to better understand and improve the systems for moving claimants across, and to identify their support needs. However, the pilot was suspended due to Covid-19. DWP estimates that the completion date, nationally, for the roll out of Universal Credit will be September 2024.
- 2.5. Between 2015 and early 2019, differing arrangements were in place to help claimants prepare and make a claim for Universal Credit; delivered primarily by Customer Services, and by Citizens Advice and Incommunities on behalf of the Council. The Government introduced new arrangements for the provision of support from, 1 April 2019. Citizens Advice has been contracted to provide support through

a new, national, service – Help to Claim.

- 2.6. Similarly, local, and national, arrangements are in place, or have been developed, to help the most vulnerable to adapt and cope with the requirements of Universal Credit and the way payments are made, such as; increasing financial and digital literacy and capability, increasing Universal Credit payment flexibility, and delivering work experience and work training programmes.
- 2.7. Covid-19 has had a significant impact on residents and businesses across the district. Household incomes have, for many, decreased as a result of increased unemployment, businesses taking advantage of the furlough scheme for its workers, and a reduction in self-employed earnings.
- 2.8. To mitigate the impact on low income households, the government increased the standard allowance in Universal Credit and the basic element in Working Tax Credit for one year from April 2020. Both increased by £20 per week on top of planned annual uprating and will remain in place until 31 March 2021.
- 2.9. This report considers progress on the roll-out of Universal Credit, the impact that Covid-19 has had on residents, and the additional support available to them.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Progress of Universal Credit Roll-out

- 3.1. Previous reports have mainly focused on the impact on the housing benefit caseload, the challenges and support for residents making and maintaining a new UC claim and on the financial and other impacts for households moving to Universal Credit (UC). Identifying progress in terms of UC roll-out more broadly has been more difficult. However, as the number of households claiming UC has increased, and data reporting by the DWP has improved, a clearer picture of progress is emerging. This almost linear, if somewhat lengthy, transition from legacy benefits to UC has been complicated by the impact of Covid-19.
- 3.2. When UC was first introduced there were just over 30,000 working-age Housing Benefit claimants (Table 1). Since then, a large proportion of them moved to UC because they had a change of circumstances that required them to; a process DWP calls natural migration. The rate at which claimants migrated was relatively low initially, but increased significantly from 2018 onwards as the scope of UC was expanded. From 2019, all but those in receipt of the Severe Disability Premium (SDP) or who live in Supported Exempt Accommodation (SEA) were required to claim UC for their housing costs. As at December 2020, there were 16,000 working-age housing benefit claimants remaining; a reduction of 14,000 (47%) from when UC was first introduced.
- 3.3. The reduction in the housing benefit caseload during 2020 was less than in 2018 and 2019. There are likely two main reasons for this. Firstly, the less able a claimant is to secure employment, the less likely it is that they will have a change of circumstances that requires them to claim UC; this is increasingly likely to be the case for much of the remaining caseload. Secondly, but to a much lesser extent, the

Government announced funding for the ‘Everyone In’ scheme in June 2020. The scheme provides help to those who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough, and at risk from Covid-19. This can include the provision of emergency accommodation. As an exception to prevailing UC requirements, some of those provided temporary accommodation through this scheme must claim housing benefit for their housing costs, not UC.

Table 1: Reduction in Working-age Housing Benefit Caseload

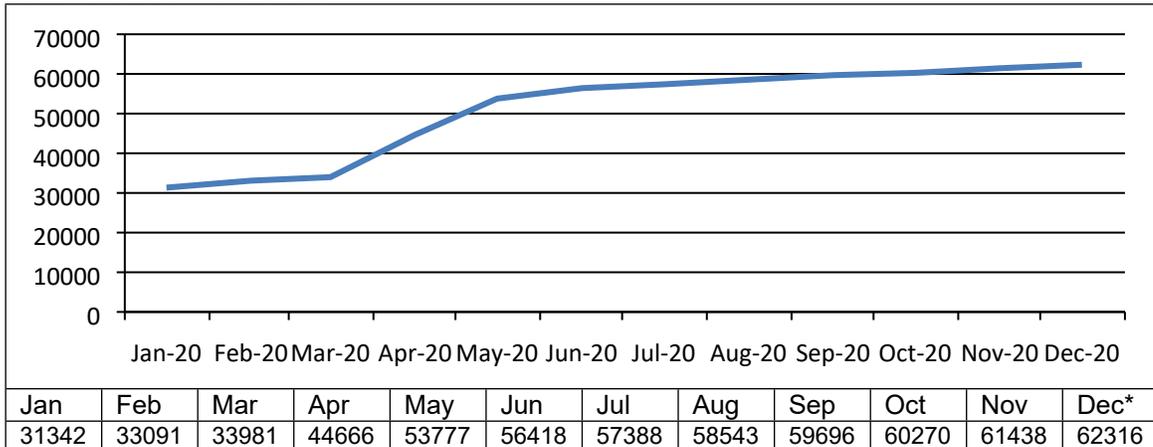
	2015	2016	2017	2018*	2019	2020
UC Eligibility	Single claimants	Single claimants	Single claimants	Singles and Families ≤2 children	All (except SDP&SEA)	All (except SDP&SEA)
W/A HB Caseload**	30,188	29,363	28,811	24,128	18,638	16,036
Annual Reduction		825	552	4,683	5,490	2,602
Total Reduction		825	1,377	6,060	11,550	14,152

*UC closed to new applications January to May 2018

**Working-age housing benefit caseload as at December in each year

- 3.4. The effect of Government’s response to Covid-19 on household incomes can be seen clearly in table 2. There was a sharp rise in the number of households claiming UC between the middle of March and May, which coincides with the first lockdown, and then continued to rise, but at a lower rate.

Table 2: UC Claimant Count



*As at 10 December

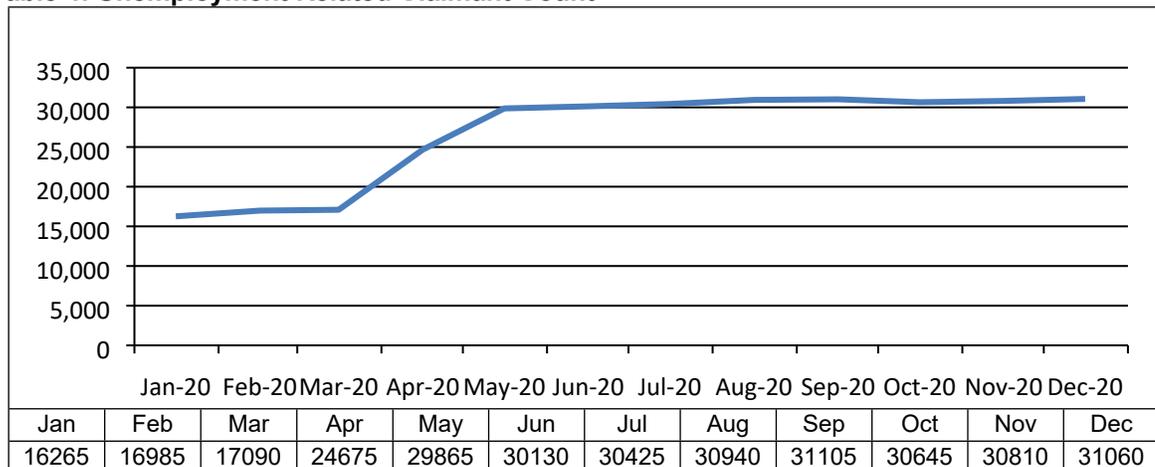
- 3.5. It should be noted that for some it will be the first time that they have made a benefit claim. As the economy begins to recover a proportion of these will end their UC claim. However, those households that were already in receipt of a legacy benefit, such as child tax credit, before claiming UC will not be able revert back and will continue to claim UC. Except in very limited circumstances (see 3.17) legacy benefits are closed to new claims.
- 3.6. As at January 2020, there were 31,342 households across the district claiming UC. This has increased significantly during 2020 so that by January 2021 there were 63,134 households with a UC claim (Table 3). Of these, 19,380 households are in work, 43,754 are not in work (It should be noted that some of those not in work are not required to look for work, for example because they have a young child).

Table 3: Work Status of UC Claimants by Job Centre

to 14/01/21	Worth House	Eastbrook Court	Westfield House	Total
Preparing for work	405	1288	786	2479
Planning for work	189	738	527	1454
Working (no requirements)	2167	5312	2814	10293
Working (with requirements)	1525	4494	3068	9087
No work requirements	1899	6149	3874	11922
Searching for work	3767	13647	10485	27899
Total	9952	31628	21554	63134

- 3.7. Under UC a broader span of claimants are required to look for work than under Jobseeker's Allowance. At December 2020 there were 31,060 people across the district claiming UC principally for the reason of being unemployed and it is this figure that is typically quoted as the Claimant Count Unemployment figure for the district. The figure includes those still claiming the legacy Job Seekers Allowance benefit and those claiming the unemployment-related element of Universal Credit. In some cases UC claimants are not unemployed but are eligible because of low wages and hours. This is increasingly so as more people are moved onto UC.
- 3.8. 31,060 people equates to 9.4% of the working-age population (those aged 16-64). The Bradford District unemployment-related claimant rate is the highest in West Yorkshire and significantly above the rate for the Leeds City Region (6.6%) and for the UK (6.3%). In terms of all local authorities outside London, Bradford has the 8th highest rate in the country. In terms of city local authorities - the 4th after Birmingham, Wolverhampton and Hull.
- 3.9. The unemployment-related claimant has risen by 13,970 since March 2020. This represents an 82% increase since March compared to a UK increase of 106%. Table 4 below shows how the count increased throughout 2020.

Table 4: Unemployment Related Claimant Count



- 3.10. The 18-24 years old claimant count rate at December 2020 was particularly high. It was 7.8% (3,155 claimants) in March, and by December this had increased to 14.7% (6,755 claimants); an 87.6% increase over that period.

- 3.11. The latest figures available from DWP (August 2020) indicate that at least 50% of benefit claimants now claim UC. Table 1, Appendix 1, shows claimant count by Parliamentary Constituency as at August 2020, and also provides a breakdown of progress by benefit type. This information is provided for interest only; the differences between constituencies are not meaningful in any way.

Benefit Cap

- 3.12. As at January 2021, there are around 270 households that have a benefit cap applied to their Housing Benefit, compared to 480 at the same time in 2020. It is not possible to apportion the causes of this reduction, but it will be because the household has; migrated to UC; has had a change in circumstances, such as securing employment, which means they are no longer capped; or they have left housing benefit entitlement entirely, such as; finding employment, moving out of the district, bereavement, reaching state pension age etc.

Severe Disability Premium

- 3.13. The Severe Disability Premium (SDP) is not a benefit in itself, but rather a premium that exists within other benefits. The SDP can be added to Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance or Housing Benefit.
- 3.14. From 16 January 2019, those in receipt of the SDP were prevented from moving to UC, and new benefit claimants with a SDP could claim housing benefit. The restrictions were removed from 27 January 2021. This means that no new claims for a legacy benefit can be made (except in limited circumstances, see 3.17). Existing housing benefit claims will continue until the claimant is required to move to claim UC. Currently, there are around 340 working-age housing benefit claimants currently in receipt of the SDP.
- 3.15. Those in receipt of a SDP within their Income Support, JSA or ESA in the month before they claim UC, and continue to meet the eligibility conditions for SDP, will be considered for a new Transitional Element (there is no SDP element in UC). However, people who receive a SDP only within their Housing Benefit and those claiming benefits for the first time are not eligible for the transitional element. There are three levels of transitional element;
- £405 a month where joint claimants were both receiving SDP.
 - £285 a month for eligible single claimants and eligible couples where only one member is eligible for SDP
 - £120 a month for eligible single claimants and couples where only one member is eligible for SDP, who have been determined as having limited capability for work-related activity
- 3.16. It should be noted that the amount of support that a household receives will be limited to an amount to compensate only for the loss of SDP; which means that any other reductions in a claimant's entitlement, as a consequence of moving to UC, will not be compensated. Further, the transitional element is designed to decrease over time, so that it will eventually be phased out.

Supported Accommodation

- 3.17. Supported accommodation can be best described as any housing scheme where housing, support and sometimes care services are provided to help people to live as independently as possible in the community. There are around 1,300 claimants living in supported accommodation across the district at any one time.
- 3.18. Many residents in supported accommodation will claim both UC and Housing Benefit, the latter for support with their housing costs. The Government has yet to make a decision on if, or how, working-age residents in supported accommodation will move to having their housing costs met through UC; or if other arrangements will be introduced. Residents in supported accommodation will, therefore, continue to claim Housing Benefit until Government makes a decision. This also means that, other than Pension-age claimants that do not fall within the scope of UC, residents in supported accommodation are the only group required to make a new claim for housing benefit
- 3.19. The local authority receives subsidy from the DWP towards the cost of Housing Benefit that is paid. Normally this subsidy is 100% of the amount paid but in supported accommodation this subsidy can be less; and any shortfall has to be met by the local authority.
- 3.20. Should the landlord be a registered social landlord the amount of subsidy received is 100% of the benefit award. However in cases where the landlord is a registered charity or a not for profit organisation the local authority must refer the rent to the Rent Officer. We can receive 100% subsidy up to the Rent Officers valuation but any Housing Benefit paid above that valuation will receive no subsidy or if the claimant falls into a protected group only partial subsidy. Legislation does not permit us to simply restrict payments at the Rent Officers valuation.
- 3.21. In 2019/20 unsubsidised Housing Benefit for the supported housing sector amounted to £676,764. The amount for financial year 2020/21 at December 2020 was £529,719, and is forecast to be £686,689 by the end of the year. This shortfall has to be met from Council budget.
- 3.22. There is a risk that, if the sector continues to expand at the present rate and the expansion is by providers who are not registered social landlords, the cost to the Council will increase. Where the Council are commissioning services it should, where possible, be with a registered provider in order to mitigate financial loss through unsubsidised Housing Benefit.

UC Roll-out Timetable

- 3.23. The last DWP forecast stated that UC roll-out will be completed by September 2024. However, this forecast was made in 2019, and will not take into account the impact of Covid-19. It is not known what, if any, impact the increase in the rate of legacy benefits claimants moving to UC during 2020 will have on plans, or capacity, for the roll-out of UC. Similarly, the rate of economic recovery and the on-going effectiveness and duration of government's business support schemes will also affect those considerations.

- 3.24. The timing and manner in which Managed Migration is to be implemented is still to be announced, and is dependent upon the outcome of pilot arrangements to test the approach. The government has undertaken to pilot 10,000 cases before it rolls out Managed Migration nationally. The Managed Migration pilot scheme that was running in Harrogate, the only pilot in operation, was suspended in March 2020 due to Covid-19. At that time, only 13 households had been migrated to UC. It is not known when piloting will recommence.
- 3.25. The timeline for the completion of the roll-out of UC has been revised a number of times since 2014. Given the 'test and learn' approach being taken by DWP, forecasting the completion of the roll-out has always been difficult. The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has, at each stage, maintained that the roll-out of UC will take longer than DWP forecasts; saying that the 'test and learn' approach is naturally more prone to delay than acceleration. In March 2020, the OBR revised its own forecast for the completion of the UC roll-out to September 2026. Again, this forecast was made before the impact of Covid-19 began to manifest.

Support for Claimants

- 3.26. As previously reported (12 March 2020), DWP has made changes to UC over time to ease the financial shock of migrating to UC, or when making a new claim., These changes include reducing the waiting period to 5 weeks, as advance payments, split and more frequent payments, and a two week 'run-on' (non-repayable) payment of the benefit for existing HB, JSA(IB) and ESA(IB) claimants when they migrate to UC.
- 3.27. However, the waiting period before the first UC payment is received has always been a contentious Issue. Of particular concern is the impact that the 5 week wait has on household debt levels, rent arrears and food security. In October 2020, the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee published a report of its review of the impact of the waiting period. The Government has responded, saying that it does not intend to reduce the waiting period and that claimants can claim an advance payment so do not need to wait 5 weeks for their first payment.
- 3.28. Data analysis supplied to the review by the National Audit Office shows that 57% of households making a new claim received a repayable UC advance in the six months to February 2020, and that 80% of low-income households have their first UC payments reduced as they are more likely to claim an advance and have other debts to repay.
- 3.29. Payments not being made on time, or not being paid in full, are also often cited as contributing factors for the accumulation of rent arrears; problems that that DWP says it has worked on to address. The latest available figures show that 96% of new claims received their payment in full and on time, compared with 80% reported in the 12 March 2020 report; and that performance in respect of all claims receiving their full payment in full and on time was maintained at 98%. It should be noted that the latest figures published were for the April 2020 period. It is not known if, or to what extent, the increase in UC claims during 2020 has impacted on DWP's payment performance

- 3.30. There have been more recent increases in financial support provided by Government. From 1 April 2020, in response to the impact of covid, the standard UC allowance was increased by £20 per week. This increase will remain in place until 31 March 2021. The Government has also increased the weekly Local Housing Allowance rates in 2020/21 – the maximum contribution towards housing costs – as set out in Table 5.

Table 5: Local Housing Allowance Rates

Accommodation Type	2019/20	2020/21	Increase
Shared Accommodation	£60.01	£68.30	£8.29
One bed	£80.55	£80.55	£0.00
Two bed	£97.81	£103.56	£5.75
Three bed	£111.83	£120.82	£8.99
Four bed	£123.58	£141.53	£17.95

- 3.31. As detailed in the 12 March 2020 UC report, Citizen’s Advice National Help to Claim service was established to support residents to make a claim for UC. The service was provided via telephone or webchat. Both the outbreak of covid, and the end of the EU Withdrawal transition period, has impacted on the provision of the service; requiring changes in the way the service is delivered. The demand from the help to claim service has increased by almost 300%, and there has been significant demand from Europeans living in the country needing help to apply for settled or pre-settled status. Bradford & Airedale Citizens Advice & Law Centre has provided a briefing, Appendix 2, of these impacts and on the work they have been doing to support residents during 2020.
- 3.32. In response to the pandemic, the DWP started to accept telephone claims from people who did not have access to the internet at home. Previously, telephone claims were only accepted from claimants who were not reasonably able to make and maintain an online claim. However, the Council’s Customer Services has remained open throughout the pandemic to help residents wanting to make a new online claim for UC, or to maintain their existing UC claim; and to provide access to IT for claimants that do not have online access themselves. Around 500 residents were helped with their UC claim during 2020.
- 3.33. The Council Tax Reduction (CTR) scheme provides means tested support by way of a reduction in the amount of council tax payable by low income households. The number of households claiming CTR has increased significantly during 2020 due to the impact of Covid-19. As at the end February 2021, there were 32,281 working-age CTR claimants compared to 27,208 at the same time in 2020; an increase of 18.6%. The government has provided £5.8m in additional funding for CTR claimants in 2020/21; providing each household with a further reduction in their bill of up to £150 (as detailed in the 7 January 2021 Council Tax Collection report).
- 3.34. Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) continues to provide those in most need with help with their housing costs. The policy aims in regard to awarding a DHP haven’t changed with the introduction of UC. However, greater flexibility, both in value of awards and the periods of awards, is being used to help UC claimants with rent arrears because of the length of time it takes for them to receive their first payment. By the end of December 2020, 822 UC claimants have received support.

- 3.35. As previously reported, the Council meets the cost of the Fuel Payments Scheme, run in conjunction with participating debt advice services. The scheme provides financial assistance in the form of Fuel Top Ups for those people who have a fuel meter up to a maximum of £80 per year, one off contributions of up to £300 towards fuel arrears, and payment of the £90 Debt Relief Order administration fee for suitable cases.
- 3.36. Winter grant funding was used to help households, who only have children under six, with the additional cost of gas and electricity because they were at home more during the pandemic. The scheme has helped 3,106 families with each family receiving £80 in two payments; one just before Christmas and the second at the beginning of February.
- 3.37. The No Child Cold scheme is accessed through the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and a selected number of partner organisations. The scheme is designed to help low-income families with children entitled to free school meals, who have increased fuel costs because of school closures. The Council and CAB make payments directly to utility companies; each payment under the scheme is £80. For households on a key or card meter the Council issues them a Paypoint voucher. As at 15 February, CAB report that 506 applications have been received, of which 459 had been paid to date, totalling £36,720; helping families with 1,326 children.
- 3.38. The Assisted Purchase Scheme provides an interest free loan (326 by the end of December 2020) to help applicants obtain essential furniture or white goods, both new and pre used items. The amount loaned is based on the applicant's ability to make repayments which are of a nominal weekly or monthly amount. Participating partners include Newlands, British Heart Foundation, CHAS and Sue Ryder. The scheme continued during the first lockdown period in 2020. Whilst the above partners were required to close, the Council was able to obtain goods from other suppliers for those applicants whose need was greatest.

Other Matters

Homelessness

- 3.39. At the 12 March 2020 meeting of this committee, Members asked if there was any link between UC and homelessness. At that time, the Council's Housing Options Service had reported that they had not seen any changes in the type and number of homeless presentations since the introduction of UC. It should be noted that the cause of homelessness is not limited to evictions; breakdowns in relationships, fleeing domestic abuse, or evicting those without protection, such as lodgers, can also result in homelessness. However, the impact of covid-19 has prevented any meaningful assessment of this.
- 3.40. The Government passed legislation in March 2020 to prevent bailiff enforced evictions (except in limited circumstances: illegal occupation, false statement, anti-social behaviour, perpetrators of domestic abuse in the social sector, where a property is unoccupied following death of a tenant and serious rent arrears greater than 6 months' rent). This suspension of proceedings will remain in effect until at

least 31 March 2021. In addition, until at least 31 March, Landlords are required to give 6-month notice period to tenants before starting possession proceedings; again, except in the most serious circumstances.

- 3.41. The Housing Options Service report that the number of approaches they have had because of Section 21 evictions (evictions from the private rented sector) has reduced. Figure 1 illustrates the reduction in the number of such presentations from 2020 compared to the last quarter of 2019.

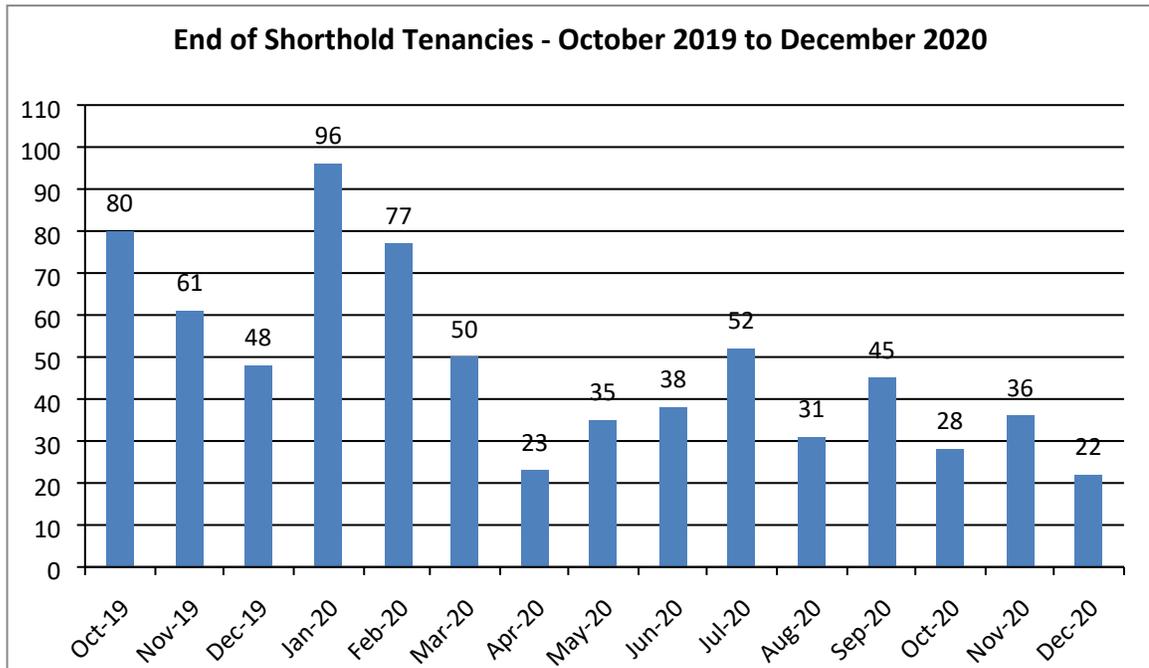


Fig.1

- 3.42. In February, 2021, a new mediation scheme was introduced nationally to support landlords and renters who face court procedures and potential eviction. As part of the new court arrangements, tenants will have access to free legal advice from the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme on the Review day (the day the court considers the case sets a hearing date). If both parties agree and the case is considered suitable, the case will be referred for the free mediation service.
- 3.43. The Government believes that mediation between the landlord and tenant can be quicker, less expensive, and more flexible than a court process; and it leaves landlords and tenants in charge of the outcome, allowing them to resolve a range of issues in ways that would not be possible in a formal hearing.
- 3.44. If an agreement is not reached through mediation, then the hearing will still take place on the date specified. Agreeing to mediation does not make the court possession process any longer.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

- 4.1. The working age housing benefit caseload will continue to reduce so that by September 2024 (the latest Government projection) all working-age claimants will have migrated to UC – with the possible exception of those living in supported accommodation. Administration of Housing Benefit for pension-age claimants will continue. The reduction in caseload has impacted, and will continue to impact, on both the level of resource required to administer housing benefit, and the amount of administration funding paid by Government.
- 4.2. The number of CTR claims increased significantly during 2020 as a consequence of the impact of the pandemic on household incomes; requiring additional resource to process and maintain existing claims. The need for this resource will reduce as the economy recovers and reliance on UC by low-income families reduces. It should be noted that the increase in CTR claims does not correlate directly to the increase in UC claims. Households with a reduction in income, perhaps because they are furloughed, may become eligible for CTR but are not required to claim UC, and conversely, a household maybe required to claim UC but are not eligible for CTR.
- 4.3. To date, the working-age Housing Benefit caseload has reduced from around 30,000, when UC was first introduced, to 16,000, although the majority of this reduction occurred over 2018/19 and 2019/20, with numbers only forecast to drop in total by around 2,000 during 20/21. Housing Benefit administration has likewise reduced over this period. The Council received £2,070,035 of administration funding in 2017/18, and had fallen to £1,612,423 received for 2020/21; but is only due to fall slightly to £1,593,296 for 2021/22. This includes funding for pension-age claimants.
- 4.4. The full, longer-term implications for staffing are not yet known; as these become clearer and better understood, consultation will take place with trade unions and affected staff. Staffing reductions to date have been managed through vacancy control.
- 4.5. In respect of unsubsidised benefit for supported housing, there is a risk of a resulting increasing budget pressure, although limited at the moment. This should be kept under review during 2021/22.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

- 5.1. The reduction in Housing Benefit administration requirement has been met through vacancy control; and will continue to be the case until such time as all working-age claimants have been migrated to UC. The extension of the timeline for the roll-out of UC to September 2024 is likely to provide sufficient time to fully manage the reduction in staffing requirement through vacancy control; even more so if the roll out is delayed further due to the impact of the pandemic. The Trade Unions will be consulted on any proposed changes to staffing should vacancy control prove insufficient.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

- 6.1. The primary legislation enabling the introduction of Universal Credit is contained in the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

- 6.2. The Council can provide financial support for certain housing costs. The legislation enabling the payment of Discretionary Housing Payments by the Council is contained in the Discretionary Financial Assistance Regulations 2001.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

None

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

None

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

There are no Human Rights issues for the Council arising from the introduction of Universal Credit as this is a Government scheme.

7.5 TRADE UNION

The Revenues and Benefits Service made changes to the staffing structure in 2019; including changes made within Benefits administration reflect the impact of Universal Credit on current and expected future workloads. This process complied with Bradford Council's policies and procedures on Trade Union consultation and workforce change. The trade unions will continue to be kept up to date.

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

None

**7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS
(for reports to Area Committees only)**

N/A

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

None

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

N/A

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None

9. OPTIONS

N/A

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee notes the progress being made in the roll-out of Universal Credit in the District

11. APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Benefit Uptake by Parliamentary Constituency
- Appendix 2: Help To Claim Service – Universal Credit 2020-2021

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- CO&SC Report, Council Tax Collection, 7 January 2020
- CO&SC Report, Universal Credit, 12 March 2020
- CO&SC Report, Universal Credit, 14 February 2019
- Economic and fiscal outlook – March 2020, Office for Budget Responsibility, March 11 2020. ISBN 978-1-5286-1631-7
- Constituency Data: Universal Credit rollout, House of Commons Library, 15 December 2020. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/constituency-data-universal-credit-roll-out/>
- National Audit Office Report, Universal Credit: getting to first payment. 10 July 2020. HC376
- HOC Work and Pensions Committee Report. Universal Credit: the wait for a first payment. 19 October 2020. HOC204
- HOC Work and Pensions Committee Report. Universal Credit: the wait for a first payment, Government Response. 12 January 2021. HOC1117

Benefit Uptake by Parliamentary Constituency

The latest publicly available figures from DWP relate to the progress of the roll-out of UC, and other benefit uptake by household, as at August 2020. This information is provided for interest only; the differences between constituencies are not meaningful in any way.

DWP data indicates that at least 50% of legacy benefit claimants now claim UC. Table 1 shows claimant count by Parliamentary Constituency as at August 2020. It provides a breakdown of the remaining uptake of legacy benefits in comparison uptake of the individual UC element equivalent.

Table 1: Households by type of support received

		Total	Housing Costs	Children - Tax Credits	Incapacity	Jobseekers
Bradford East	UC	13342	6627	5328	1240	7640
	Legacy	12673	4295	8492	3324	484
	%UC	51%	61%	39%	27%	94%
Bradford South	UC	10,529	5410	4393	1016	5508
	Legacy	9883	3728	6185	3028	426
	%UC	52%	59%	42%	25%	93%
Bradford West	UC	13421	6221	4613	1148	8444
	Legacy	13266	3877	8862	3446	523
	%UC	50%	62%	34%	25%	94%
Keighley	UC	6407	3255	2458	643	3329
	Legacy	6317	2108	3785	1973	304
	%UC	50%	61%	39%	25%	92%
Shipley	UC	5317	2683	1969	475	2701
	Legacy	4453	1823	2492	1643	256
	%UC	54%	60%	44%	22%	91%

*Note: components may not sum to totals due to disclosure control in the source data. Data on People on UC are published between two and four months ahead of Households on UC

Help To Claim Service – Universal Credit 2020-2021

In late March 20, Citizen's Advice National Help to Claim service's response to the breaking Corona Virus pandemic was to almost immediately transfer the entire local services of HtC to the national telephone advice. Since then, Bradford's Citizens Advice Help to Claim Universal Credit team has been working from home answering the national Help to Claim telephone line.

The Universal Credit team based in Bradford and Keighley originally had 4 staff based at either at council office at Britannia House, Keighley Town Hall or Westfield House and one dedicated telephone advice worker based at Bradford CA.

Prior to the first national lock down, advisers on the Citizens Advice national line had the ability to refer clients to their local HtC service via a dedicated task list which was usually dealt with by the telephone worker(s) of the local office. This task list was particularly helpful if the client involved needed digital access to claim UC and so could be directed to the nearest on site adviser at DWP or Council offices. This referral system was suspended and to date remains suspended. The role of the telephone adviser from the beginning of the project was to advise and support the client, who contacted the service through telephone or webchat to first payment of UC (or assist with a challenge if appropriate to the first UC decision).

The DWP response to the pandemic was to accept telephone claims not only from people who did not have the digital know how or confidence to make and sustain a digital UC claim but also, for obvious reasons, to accept claims from people who did not have access to the internet. According to official statistics there were 1.2 million new claims made for UC in the first 3 weeks after lockdown, which hugely increased the demand for Help to Claim advice. All the UC team members reported that as soon as they put the phone down on one call, another would come through immediately after.

Advisers had to learn and advise on a number of new schemes such as the Corona Virus Job Retention Scheme (furlough scheme) and the Self Employment Income Support Scheme, and local schemes such as the Small Business Grant funding as well as changes to benefit rules to Statutory Sick Pay, Shielding and other benefits which relate directly to Help to Claim advice.

In July 20 most Jobcentres were supposed to be open to the public. As Bradford was in tier 3 for most of 2020, the local Jobcentres in Bradford and Keighley were only open to the most vulnerable clients. Access to the DWP was via appointment, normally arranged at the door.

One of the issues that came to the fore in the administration of Help to Claim was the difficulty in getting clients advised on the national Help to Claim line directed to the local HtC service for the area. Whilst the intention of every UC worker on the national line as stated above was to assist a client – no matter where they were calling from in the country- to complete their claim for UC as quickly as possible, local knowledge sometimes assists some clients much more quickly and coherently rather than repeated contact with

different staff on the national service line who often do not have knowledge of the local area.

To deal with this, one UC team member was assigned to a spreadsheet which was populated with call backs from Generalist Advisers from Bradford & Airedale Citizens Advice as well as any referrals received via the national line by the administration team from other local Citizens Advice centres. In our experience it was often Eastern European clients who had made more than one claim for UC who needed direct contact with the local Jobcentre to escalate action on their claim. The adviser concerned can and does make repeated appointments with the client to chase up the client's claim with the local DWP office, who in turn contact the national DWP staff to resolve the delay with the delay processing the clients claim and assist them to get paid.

The HtC team interacts with the Generalist advice team in Bradford to provide telephone appointments to advice about making a claim for UC, and from time to time vice versa where the client needs advice beyond the scope of the project, such as in-depth advice on Personal Independent Payments, debt issues etc.

As many will know, any European who has continued residence in the UK before the 31/12/20 will be able to stay in the UK as long as they have applied for settled or pre-settled status before June 2021.

From 1/4/20 to 27/1/21, the team has dealt with 1,978 clients from all over the country- including Bradford- and recorded over 2,500 case notes. Contact has been predominately over the telephone at 1783, the remainder 792 over webchat.

The number of clients who accessed the Help to Claim Service by Jobcentre Area across Keighley and Bradford areas over the same time frame (via the national Help to Claim line) was 1,775; more than three times than the previous year.

I would like to thank the team who have worked so hard and have shown dedication and commitment to the UC all through the last financial year.

Help to Claim Universal Credit Manager
Bradford & Airedale Citizens Advice & Law Centre