

SCRUTINY REVIEW – UNIVERSAL CREDIT – MEETING WITH ISLINGTON LEARNING DISABILITY UNIVERSAL CREDIT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Present: Councillors: Una O'Halloran, Rowena Champion, Sheila Chapman, Clare Jeapes, Representatives of Centre 404, Elfrida Society, Family carers, DWP and Adrian – Service User Representative and Disability Champion

During discussion the following points were made –

- A range of computer courses are available in the Borough and additional computers are available at 222 Upper Street and Job Centres
- Staff at the Job Centre can support people to make an application and staff can support claimants. These staff have had extra training in working with adults with additional needs –although not LD specific
- The DWP also offer support over the phone and home visits take place if required
- The DWP will signpost people to support organisations, although most of these organisations have not had UC training
- Training needs to take place for social care staff, and support organisations to be able to offer support to potential claimants. The DWP can accommodate up to 12 people at a time at Finsbury Park Job Centre to look at the UC application form, although this may be an unrealistic way of upskilling large numbers of people across the borough
- Concern was expressed that for a number of claimants, especially those with disabilities, there should be a paper copy of the form available so that it could be checked or claimants/carers could go back to it to complete at a later time if it became stressful. The DWP stated that they would look into this
- Claimants with support needs will need ongoing support to manage tasks associated with maintaining their payments, this is not within the capacity of existing (commissioned specialist LD support/advocacy) services. The CAB (based at 222 Upper Street) are available for managing the application once it is submitted
- Severe Disabilities – there is no enhanced disability premium nor a severe disability premium in Universal Credit, which is likely to make people with severe disabilities worse off. This cohort is exempt from natural migration and will only move under managed migration and this has been delayed for another year. The DWP stated that they would look at the form in relation to availability for work and check the situation
- It was queried if the form states that you must be available for work, even if you are not (i.e. you are unable to work as a result of your disability – the DWP stated that they would check this

- Budgeting – claimants will need to budget to pay their rent (replacing HB) and care contributions out of their UC payments, which is a significant challenge for people who struggle to understand budgeting and puts them at risk of getting into debt. Exempt accommodation is exempt from natural migration, although they will be migrated eventually – most supported housing is classified as exempt accommodation but not some of the schemes for lower support needs and not anybody with an LBI tenancy
- Reference was made to the fact that if family carers had experienced problems these should be notified and the DWP could investigate
- It was noted that it takes approximately 40 minutes/one hour for a claimant without LD to complete an online UC claim
- It was noted that there is at present no Saturday opening for DWP offices although this might take place in the future
- Concern was expressed that DWP staff could visit claimants in hospital and this added to the stress that claimants were under whilst in hospital. The DWP responded that the visiting team may occasionally visit claimants in hospital but this would be done in a supportive manner and it happened on only a very small number of cases
- Reference was made to those claimants with terminal illnesses and that there were special arrangements for those with terminal illnesses and there is a fast track system around the work capability assessment and PIP ‘assessment – it was helpful if someone who knows the claimant’s circumstances could attend with them for interview and assessment
- Reference was made to the fact that the DWP did not keep records of the number of failed claims and the DWP stated they would investigate this with the Belfast office, to try to ascertain this information
- It was noted that a change in circumstances this would trigger a review of the UC claim, until managed migration takes place
- Discussion took place as to whether job centre staff would be aware if a claimant had a disability when looking at adjustments to a claim or when there were e mail messages sent automatically and it would not be possible to change this for disabilities. It was however confirmed that sanctions are only used as a last resort. It was stated that first time claimants still had to complete a UC claim, even if they are in receipt of DLA and there is a need for this group of claimants to be offered support
- In response to a question as to how often a person is assessed for work eligibility, if they had a lifelong disability, the DWP stated that they would look into this. Initially once a claim is completed there may need to be a face to face meeting or a written medical report could be requested, and then it will be referred to the decision maker
- It was noted that some positive job outcomes for claimants with severe disabilities had been achieved
- With regard to Personal Independence Payments, it was noted that a lifelong award could be granted, but a light touch review may be required at some point
- It was also noted that the Single Homeless Project had identified that there had been problems setting up direct deductions via UC, assessing ID, as many clients do not have a form of ID, setting up on line accounts for people

who are not IT literate, and have no IT experience, and problems setting up face to face appointments

- CAB staff are present in Job Centres to assist claimants but it is unclear whether the CAB will be funded adequately by Government going forward
- It was stated that the Council were liaising with CAB on support that could be offered to claimants and that consideration would be given as to how specialist information could be provided
- Each work coaches to link in with other support networks. It was stated that it would be useful for support organisations to be provided with details of these workers
- The DWP also stated that they had school's advisers that work with schools to support transition from school to work
- It was noted that there is mandatory mental health training for work coaches