



NOTES

**Welfare SDG
Virtual Meeting**
Date: Monday 28 June 2021
Time: 2pm-4pm

In attendance

Organisation	Name	Job Title
1. Adra	Arwel Jones	Assistant Rent & Income Manager
2. Aelwyd	Gemma Watkins	Director of Housing & Communities
3. ateb Group	David Tovey	Customer Services Manager
4. ateb Group	Lee Bridges	Money Solutions Team Leader
5. ateb Group	Sue Mackie	Community Development Team Leader
6. Cadwyn	Agnieszka Rutkowska	Income and Customer Service Manager
7. Cardiff Community Housing Association	Lucy Mannings	Financial Inclusion Officer
8. Cartrefi Conwy	Daniel Hall	Assistant Director of Neighbourhoods
9. ClwydAlyn Housing Limited	Jenni Griffiths	Housing Services Manager
10. ClwydAlyn Housing Limited	Janice Peterson	Welfare Rights Officer
11. Coastal Housing Group	Paul Langley	FH Manager



12. Community Housing Cymru	Laura Courtney	Policy & External Affairs Manager
13. Community Housing Cymru	Sarah Scotcher	Policy & External Affairs Project Officer
14. Family Housing Association	Lisa Rees	Area Housing Manager
15. First Choice Housing Association	Maureen Lee	Operational Housing Manager
16. Grwp Cynefin	Darren Thomas	Welfare/Housing Team Leader
17. Hafod Housing Association Ltd (Hendre Group)	Linda Lewis	Neighbourhood Manager
18. Hafod Housing Association Ltd (Hendre Group)	Martin Webb	Neighbourhood Income Coach
19. Linc-Cymru Housing Association	Michael Rosser	Housing Officer
20. Melin Homes	Claire Pearce- Crawford	Income & Inclusion Manager
21. Merthyr Tydfil Housing Association	Lisa May	Rents & Customer Services Manager
22. Monmouthshire Housing Association	Michele Morgan	Director of Housing & Communities
23. Newport City Homes	Martin Fury	Homes & Income Manager
24. Newydd Group Limited	Nicola Eynon	Housing Team Leader
25. Pobl Group	Jaime Williams	Welfare Benefits Advisor - East
26. RHA Wales Group Ltd	Annalisa Beavan	Head of Housing
27. Tai Tarian	Mark Windos	Income Manager
28. Trivallis	Richard Haddock	Money Advice Manager



29. Trivallis	Vikki Baltzars	Money Advice Officer
30. United Welsh	Karen Thomas	Income and Money Advice Manager
31. Valleys to Coast	Keryl Jones	Money Advice Team Leader

Apologies

Adra	Kate Ellen Sutton	Rent & Income Co-ordinator
Bro Myrddin	Louise Scarr	Financial Inclusion & Housing Officer
Cardiff Community Housing Association	Victoria Miller	Head of Housing & Communities
Pobl Group	Mike Bailey	Advice and Support Manager
Taff Housing	Ryan Miles	Income Manager

Summary & actions

1. CHC updates (Laura Courtney, Policy and External Affairs Manager, CHC)

- CHC lobbying update
- Data Alignment Task and Finish Group report back
- Rent verification – key messages for the DWP

Slides available [here](#).

2. Income Maximisation and Welfare Policy – Welsh Government Update and Q&A (Paul Neave, Welsh Government)

Income maximisation

- The Welsh Government benefits take up campaign ran for 25 days during March, but was then paused due to the pre-election period.
- The campaign used digital methods alongside adverts in local paper, targeted mail shots in high areas of deprivation or target groups.



- One key call to action was to encourage people to get people to contact Advice Link Cymru. This allowed for the tracking of outcomes. Those who did contact Advice Link Cymru have now accessed over £650,000 extra income.
- In addition, Welsh government ran a project based on targeting of specific groups across Wales who are less likely to claim everything they are entitled to. The project ran for six months approx. It was successful as used a trusted intermediary of the household to get them to apply for benefits.
- Learning: WhatsApp was the preferred platform for some groups of people.
- Training for frontline (non-benefits advisors): High demand from front line agencies asking for sessions. Easily exceeded target of 150 sessions.
- Follow up with participants after sessions – those who respond, over 55% of them said that they have identified service users who could claim – some have ensured their service user now has more income.
- Asked participants whether they would like further training. Majority have said they would like more benefits training.
- Paul is in conversation with colleagues at Welsh government about the future of this work, and will keep the SDG updated.
- Action: Laura Courtney to invite Paul to future meetings of the Welfare SDG

Charter

- Welsh government are responsible for a range of benefits including the Council Tax Scheme, passported benefits (such as Free School Meals), Discretionary Housing Payments and the Discretionary Assistance Fund.
- The purpose of the Charter is to ensure they take a more a person centred approach.
- Elinor Jones at Welsh government has kick started a process setting down key statements in a draft Charter. She would like comments on whether it goes far enough, and whether anything should be added.
- Action: Laura Courtney to write up comments of SDG attendees in response on the Charter.

Universal Credit Uplift

- Jane Hutt has raised concerns around the ending of £20 per week UC uplift, the two child limit and the PIP assessment process with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Q&A

Comments on the use of WhatsApp for engagement:

- It is useful and has a translate function.
- However, it is important to ensure that WhatsApp for Business is used and that the organisation has a clear GDPR policy



Q: What is the Welsh government Income Maximisation group that is working on this?

A: It includes relevant government agencies and 20 stakeholder groups. CHC is represented by Laura Courtney on the group. Laura ensures that information and views received from attendees at the Welfare SDG are reflected as appropriate.

Q: What are the timescale for decisions for the future of the Welsh government income maximisation work.

A: An internal funding bid has been made to Welsh government. Decisions on internal funding bids in relation to the health service are being made first, but Paul will keep this group updated.

3. Update and plenary discussion: UC uplift report and influencing plan (Laura Courtney, Policy and External Affairs Manager, CHC; Lisa Rees, Area Housing Manager, Family Housing & SDG Vice Chair)

Laura Courtney provided an update on the UC uplift influencing work – see [presentation](#) (from page 4).

Q&A

Comment: In terms of timing and communications, the UC eligibility checker is still prompting on the £20 uplift. The DWP needs to ensure that the infrastructure is changed within good time.

Comment:

- It could be that we have no time to left to influence decision making, and should concentrate on communications from the DWP. There may be an opportunity from some shared communications across the sector, a bit like the YBAC campaign, as plan B.
- We have been disappointed with the DWP's approach to the fact this uplift is temporary and have as yet failed to notify any potential affected persons of this. In fact, 440 of the 726 survey responses in Cwm Taf (over 61% of those we surveyed) weren't aware it was temporary.
- We need the DWP to take some of the responsibility in advising their claimants, landlords should not to have to do this alone. As part of the lobbying, can we ask them what their communications strategy is and how they will tell people? The cynic in me believes there may be no prior warning via someone's UC account etc.

Action: CHC will create a plan to facilitate conversations around this, and support as appropriate. It is important to also bear in mind though that it is still possible that the DWP will reverse their position, and they have done before. As a result, we will continue to



call on the to retain the uplift, and take this into account in conversations related to the planning of any communications.

3. Break out groups: 'The Welsh Benefits System' – Influencing opportunities

Plenary feedback

Group 1

- Charter needs more teeth, and changes to make it work would have cost implications
- WAC inquiry – we need data from Scotland on the bedroom tax mitigation and direct payment to landlords from day one.

Group 2

- Removal of £20 uplift – concern at end of furlough and uplift; hospitality, catering and leisure jobs don't exist as they were
- England doesn't translate to the type of regions we have in Wales – it is totally different in terms of wage levels, rural areas (transport)

Group 3

- Training for the benefits teams – confusion on exact entitlements as so complex
- Investment that we are making in HAs, keeping up to date with training and training colleagues. Promoting the burden we take from other areas.
- Geographical locations and digital inclusion. Learning from the take up campaign work WG did in terms of engagement and the channels we use.
- DWP issue – certain benefits are prioritised over others when we are trying to contact DWP.
- WAC: acknowledge the extension of DAF and the number of times you can apply. Reinvent and destigmatise benefits
- UBI – how would that interact with Welsh Benefits system?

Group 4

- We didn't have the knowledge to give real insight into what the Committee should be looking at. We did say that if anything is going to change, we need to make sure it benefits the customer. We need to identify what they need to change. There are lots of local relationships we have in Wales.
- We don't know the full extent of this. People will be just coming off furlough. We will see the full impact over the next few months.

Group 5

- Mixed views – people having more money in pockets and bringing together would be great, but this is just a shiny package on something that has been going on for years.
- HAs have acted to mitigate on Welfare Reform, we've unofficially funded it.



- If we haven't got it right on UC after 10 years, it would be difficult for Wales to solve that
- Why now? Could the money they are spending on this be spent on something else. Feels like it is going back to the old advice Charter.

Action: Laura Courtney to draft responses and share with SDG members.

Actions

- Laura Courtney to invite Paul Neave to future meetings of the Welfare SDG
- Laura Courtney to write up comments of SDG attendees in response on the Charter.
- Laura Courtney to draft responses and share with SDG members.

Next meeting

Tuesday 12 October, 11am-1pm – Joint meeting with Housing Management SDG.

** Booking information will be circulated closer to the time*