

# **Local Review of the DWP Operation of Job Seekers Allowance Benefit Delays and Sanctions.**

**Gloucester City**

**Interim Review – Oct 2015**

**Faith & VCS Homeless Forum.**

## **Aim.**

The aim of the full Review is to: -

1. Ascertain the extent and nature of concerns with DWP service delivery locally.
2. Seek and encourage the involvement and cooperation of all concerned and to raise awareness.
3. Look at the local position to include operation and management of our local Job Centre Plus as being a critical element in a fair and just welfare benefits system. Concerns were raised back in January 2014 re punitive sanctions but it is said that concerns have escalated recently. Why?
4. Look at emerging trends. Has Oakley been implemented locally?
5. Initiate discussions with our local DWP Manager on ways to resolve or mitigate any issues of concern or apparent service failures.
6. Seek the help and cooperation of our MP, Richard Graham, in this review. We are pleased that Richard Graham MP is now on the Parliamentary Select Committee.

## **Background.**

The Forum requested a Review of the operation of the benefits regime particularly with respect to:-

- A) Benefit delays and punitive sanctions.
- B) Operation & Management at our local Job Centre Plus. Is there a gap between policy & practice?
- C) The effect on residents of Gloucester, particular homeless and those with mental health issues.
- D) Health & Wellbeing Board Involvement and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

### **Interim Executive Summary.**

1. Major concerns that delays, decisions and system failures by the DWP and our local Job Centre Plus are forcing CHILDREN into extreme food poverty, malnutrition and destitution.
2. There is an apparent failure to understand and identify/take account of vulnerable individual's situation. Is there a culture of bullying & harassment, is this endemic?
3. Is the above typical of the present work place culture at our JCPlus?

## **Data/ Evidence.**

To be gathered locally from all involved. Service users/customers/clients, Foodbank, CAB, 'Helping Hands', Faith Groups, DWP, Job Centre, Agency's, NHS (re malnutrition, hospital admissions, etc), public and private body's/ charity's, etc.,

Initial investigation of data from the Food Bank, in the following table, has identified some very disturbing trends, hence this interim review. This table covers a period in Aug/Sep15.

There are cases of benefit sanctions for minor offences, which we are concerned often hit vulnerable individuals particularly those with mental health problems or communication barriers. JCP clients have referred to bullying and feelings of fear and anxiety.

## **Recommendation**

That we seek:-

- To encourage dialogue with DWP as to whether this is a local problem, the extent and seek resolutions. Would like to see effectiveness of pilot of the DWP 'yellow card' system.
- An internal JCPlus review of working practices, training, sanctions applied appropriately & fairly.
- Support of relevant agency's, public and private bodies, etc., involved in public health and wellbeing to prevent food poverty and destitution especially when CHILDREN are involved.
- To encourage change of JCPlus organisational culture from any bullying and harassment to one of respect with positive behaviour principles. There is no evidence of the effectiveness that using destitution, stress of being unable to pay rent, etc., helps/ supports individuals into work.
- To make contact with and liaise with CAB.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Crisis</u>	<u>Applied For</u>	<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Impact</u>
02/09/2015	2	2	BD	ESA	Mental Illness	No Funds for food and fuel. Rec'd food & Fuel
09/09/2015	1	2	BC	ESA	_____	Borrowing from family to make ends meet. Rec' food.
02/09/2015	1		BD	Inc. Support	New Claim	applied 2-3 wks ago, told will be another 2 weeks, no Money & partner paying bills, relationship now ended
02/09/2015	1		Sanctioned			Rec'd letter with Appointment. Went to JC+ for app't, told not on their list, then rec'd letter sanctioning him for 4 weeks. Has appealed. Now awaiting for new appointment. Has no funds at all. Rec'd food
26/08/2015	2		BC	ESA & PIP	Change in Circumstances	Told by DWP may have to wait 4 weeks, left without funds relying on hand outs. Rec'd food
26/08/2015	2	2	BC	ESA	Reassessment	DWP say they sent letter with appointment, not received. Left without income, all money stopped, rec'd food & fuel
02/09/2015	2	1	Sanctioned	ESA		Sent in sick note and duplicates, DWP say not received. Rec'd food & Fuel
21/08/2015	4	2	BC	ESA & PIP	DWP declined PIP	Waiting 5 weeks, and has run out of money. Having to borrow money to pay bills etc. Rec'd food & fuel
19/08/2015	2	4	BC	ESA & Tax Credits	Moved to Gloucester	applied 4 wks ago, has no money to pay bills etc, rec'd food & fuel
19/08/2015	1		BD	JSA? Universal Credit	Lost Job	told by DWP will have to wait until Sept. 1st before receiving funds, no money left, rec'd food & fuel
19/08/2015	1		BD	Universal Credit	Lost Job	Applied 8 weeks ago, DWP say claim being re-evaluated, Payment due 12 Sept, borrowing from father, rec'd food & fuel
19/08/2015	1		BD	Universal Credit	Finished HNC	{Claim effective from 13th Aug, as UC paid monthly will have to wait until 26th Sept (approx). Applied for hardship payments
						{which have to be assessed and will be 1/2 of total amount. Food only
19/08/2015	2	2	BC	JSA? Universal Credit	On Zero hr contract, lost job	Waiting 4 weeks, no income to pay bills & school uniform etc. no money left for food etc. Payment expected this wk. Food only
19/08/2015	1	2	BC	Inc. Support	Relationship Breakdown	Claimed 07 Aug, DWP advised will have to wait until 07 Sept. Also awaiting housing benefit claim to be processed. Food only
19/08/2015	1		BD	ESA	Illness	Applied week ago, advised by DWP will be 3 weeks before 1st payment, no cash for food etc. Rec'd food & fuel
19/08/2015	1	2	BD	Inc. Supp't & Tax Credits	Partner Left	Not working, looking after Children. Advised will be 2-3 weeks before 1st Payment. No cash. rec'd food & fuel

Note: Key BD=Benefit Delay. BC=Benefit Changes

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19/08/2015	1			ESA	in hospital	Missed, as 2015 annual medical in hospital. Provided proof to DWP of hospitalisation, DWP say not rec'd. Took 6 wks to obtain info again. DWP said not good enough and took too long to submit therefore out of date. Awaiting new medical. Surviving on support from friends, housing assoc., Food Bank. Food only
19/08/2015	1		BD	ESA	Change of address	No benefits until documentation amended by DWP, 2 week delay. Housing benefits suspended as well. No funds. Food only
19/08/2015	1		BC	ESA	Change of address	No benefits until documentation amended by DWP, 2 week delay. Housing benefits suspended as well. No funds. Food only
16/09/2015	1		BD	JSA	Lost Job	Applied 2 weeks ago DWP said another 2-4 weeks before processed. No money, in arrears with rent & borrowing. Food only
09/09/2015	1		BD	JSA	Unemployed	Applied 6 wks ago. DWP unhelpful. No funds, not managing at all, causing depression, not eating/washing, Rec'd Food & Fuel
09/09/2015	2	3	BC	ESA	Child tax credits	Child tax credits stopped no explanation from HMRC. Unable to cover rent facing eviction. Rec'd food
09/09/2015	1		BD	ESA	?	On ESA for 1 yr 6mths, arthritis & Osteoporosis. Delay due to Bank Holiday. Benefits to be paid following Tues. Rec'd food & fuel
04/09/2015	1	1	BD	JSA	Finished Degree	No funds for first 7 days. Still waiting for payment. No funds for sch uniform, food, electricity etc. Rec'd food & Fuel
02/09/2015	2	2	BC	JSA	New Baby	Waiting 3 wks for benefits to be reassessed. No income inc housing benefit, bills not paid reliant on Foodbank. Food & fuel rec'd
02/09/2015	1		Sanctioned	JSA	Helping sick father	Missed appointment. Claiming Hardship Payment. Unable to cover bills, food & items for college. Rec'd food
26/08/2015	2		BC	JSA	New info submitted	waiting 2 weeks. Child now adult, all benefits need to be reassessed, all income stopped. Rec'd food & fuel
19/08/2015	1		BD	ESA	Illness	Applied July has phoned DWP every week, told awaiting medical decision. No funds borrowing from friends etc. Rec'd food & fuel
10/09/2015	1		Sanctioned	JSA	Not using universal Job Match	Was carer for partner who died. Has been applying for jobs, attended interviews. Rec'd food & fuel
09/09/2015	1	2	BD	Tax Credits		Working 16hrs/wk, waiting 6 wks for tax credits. Wages not enough to pay for food, school uniform etc. Rec'd food

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