Secretary of State’s response to Committee letters on Universal Credit

Summary of data and information provided

Payment timeliness

1. Data since May 2016: in what (a) proportion and (b) number of full service claims was the housing element paid after the living cost element? We would be grateful for any statistics you have which demonstrate the distribution of lengths of such additional waits for the housing element.

Response: The Department referred to data published going back to January 2017. This shows that 81% of claimants were paid on full in six weeks in September 2017, and 89% in part. In September 2017, 1 in 6 claimants has not signed their Claimant commitment or passed identity checks. The remainder have outstanding verification issues, eg. housing, self-employed earnings, childcare costs.

No data is supplied on reasons for earlier months.

No data is provided on the distribution of waits where payment has not been made in full.

2. For each month since May 2016, what (a) number and (b) proportion of UC full service claims were paid within (i) six weeks; (ii) seven weeks; (iii) eight weeks; (iv) nine weeks; (v) 10 weeks; (vi) 11 weeks and (vii) 12 weeks? Of those claims not paid within 12 weeks, what (a) number and (b) proportion were paid (i) after that period and (ii) remained unpaid?

Response: The Department does not have published data on any of these questions.

3. The Department’s assessment of reasons why claimants have waited more than six weeks for payment; the relative contributions of those different reasons to the overall picture; and any related substantiating data.

Response: The Department supplied data on reasons for delays relating to September 2017 only (see above).

4. Do you please have any statistics of the characteristics of claimants who have waited over 6 weeks for their first payment? Have any groups been particularly likely to face delays?

Response: The Department does not hold this information.

5. What geographical variation is there in the proportion of claims that have been paid within six weeks? What proportions are being achieved by the highest and lowest performing Jobcentres by this measure?

Response: The Department does not hold this information.

Advance Payments

6. For each month since May 2016, what (a) number and (b) proportion of UC full service claimants have (i) applied for and (ii) received an advance payment?

Response: The Department does not hold data on the proportion of claimants who apply for an Advance Payment. The number and proportion received is now publically available.
7. Are you able to provide statistics of the reasons why applications for advance payments have been refused?

Response: The Department does not have published data on this question.

8. What has been the average value of advance payments awarded (a) as a proportion of the value of the first payment and (b) in £ terms.

Response: The Department does not hold data on the value of advances as a proportion of the value of the first payment.

9. How does the Department define "hardship" in determining eligibility for an advance payment? We would be grateful for copies of any guidance, training material or other documentation issued to Work Coaches, relating to a) publicising and b) determining claimant eligibility for advance payments at the initial claim appointment.

Response: “Hardship” is determined by the Work Coach asking the claimant if they have enough to live on until they receive their first payment. The Guidance has been supplied and circulated.

10. Details on announcements in Secretary of State’s conference speech: what changes you have made, or intend to make, to the guidance; 2. whether the Committee could receive a copy of the existing and new guidance; 3. when the revised guidance will be available to front-line staff; 4. how "immediate need" will be defined for the purposes of determining eligibility for fast track payments; and 5. how you intend to monitor these new policies across Jobcentre Plus sites.

Response: The Department has sent the revised guidance and details of a poster and social media campaign on Advance Payments aimed at staff and claimants. It has not given any detail on how it intends to monitor implementation of the guidance.

**The Landlord portal and support for private rented sector**

11. For each month since May 2016, the (a) number and (b) proportion of claimants using an Alternative Payment Arrangement (payment of rent direct to landlord)

Response: Data supplied for June 2017 only (6% in Private Rented Sector, 34% in Social Rented Sector).

12. The current proportion of (a) social landlords who have access to the Landlord Portal and (b) the proportion of social housing stock covered by it, and your schedule for the rollout of that service.

Response: Data not supplied.

13. How is the Department working with landlords to evaluate the Landlord Portal, and to identify any additional features necessary? What additional features are planned, and what is the timescale for rolling these out?

Response: The Department has been testing a version of the portal with extended features. The response gives no detail of what these are, or a timescale for rolling out the new portal.

14. What a) number and b) proportion of UC full service claimants receiving the housing element are in i) council accommodation, ii) housing association accommodation and iii) the private rented sector?
Response: 55% of households receiving housing element are in Social Rented Sector; 45% in Private Rented Sector

15. What resources are available to support private sector landlords with UC full service claimants as tenants? Are there any plans to invest in either expanding this support, or making new means of support available?

Response: the Department is talking to representative organisations, and is “currently looking at improving online communication for private landlords.

16. Could you therefore please confirm whether your announcement on the length of time taken to receive an Advance Payment was a restatement of existing policy?

Response: Not acknowledged.

Telephone helpline and complaints

17. For each month since May 2016, (a) the number of claimant calls made to the UC telephone helpline, (b) the average wait for calls to be answered and (c) the number of complaints received by the Department that relate to UC full service.

Response: No data supplied on numbers of calls. Data supplied for September only on call waits: the average is five minutes. Complaints are running at less than 1% of the full service caseload.

Benchmarking and decisions on the rollout

18. Could you please provide details of the quality control you will apply at each stage of the UC full service rollout in order to ensure that it is ready to continue, and any (a) local and (b) national benchmarks that the service is expected to achieve.

Decisions to proceed are subject to scrutiny from DWP, the Cabinet Office, and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority. In determining whether to proceed, DWP asked:

- Can the IT cope with additional claimant volumes;
- Will there be enough staff in place and trained to manage the work;
- Will claimants receive an acceptable level of customer service.

The Department uses six key measures to answer these questions. These are payment timeliness, system response times, staff recruitment, system availability, fraud and error, and unit costs. The Department determined that “on all these measures, with the exception of unit costs, we determined that Universal Credit was operating within acceptable parameters”.