



GREAT YARMOUTH
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Director of Customer Services

Town Hall
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NR30 2QF

For the attention of Mr Ian Hart

workpencom@parliament.uk

DX: 41121 Great Yarmouth 1

Please ask for: **Mrs Jane Beck**
Direct Line: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Our ref: JEB/SP

6th February 2017

Dear Mr. Hart,

Thank you for your letter and below are the statistics requested:

- Total number of tenants 5905, as at 30/1/17 total number claiming UC 624.
- Total number of tenants claiming UC in rent arrears compared to our total number of tenants in arrears – 25.68%
- Average rent arrears of tenants claiming Universal Credit, compared with all tenants – £141.15
- Rent collection rate for tenants claiming Universal Credit, compared with all tenants – We are unable to provide this for UC tenants although our arrears have increased and rent arrears collection rate at week 34 (21/11/16) peaked at 1.68% and as at week 42 1.42% (16/01/17). The reduction is the anticipated year on year reduction due to the rent free weeks – 19/12/16 & 26/12/16.
- % of total rent arrears attributable to tenants claiming Universal Credit – unable to accurately answer as some tenants were in arrears prior to UC.

With reference to Great Yarmouth's experiences around the introduction of UC we are and remain committed to working very closely with local agencies and services for a multi-agency local approach to the implementation of Universal Credit (UC) for the benefit of our residents to ensure the transition is as smooth as possible, however, there have been continued issues that are negatively impacting on our residents which I would like to bring to your attention.

Locally we have been working with DIAL a voluntary sector provider to support customers through the UC process but this has been difficult due to the conflicting and inconsistent information provided to all parties particularly around eligibility, state of claim, information required etc. It would be beneficial if a Freephone number for customers and organisations could be made available. Feedback locally is that telephone bills ever increasing due to the level of contact required and this has a financial impact on customers who are spending their money trying to resolve their UC claims.

One of the biggest areas of concern still remains around communication with Landlords. Feedback for private and social landlords has also been extremely challenging with a lack of timely decisions on UC47 requests having a particular impact for providers. There has been a lack of and in some circumstances no acknowledgement of receipt of these requests and no communications on when and what decisions have been made. This is causing a number of problems between tenants and landlords including a worrying development in bullying behaviour being identified by ourselves and Job Centre colleagues with some of our private landlords.

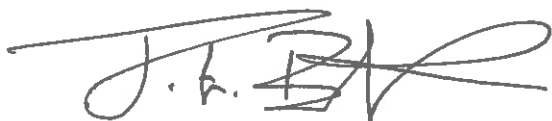
Within our own GYBC housing stock, as of 30th January 2017, we have 624 tenants in receipt of UC and of these 364 in arrears. These tenants owe a combined amount of £132,118 in rent arrears. These arrears have predominantly been caused by the systematic issues in how UC operates and is paid

Temporary accommodation has also been and continues to be a concern in relation to UC. In many cases applicants would have left temporary accommodation before they receive their first payment of UC and have no incentive to pay us if they have received a negative decision. We are able to request direct payment in the same manner as other landlords; however, we are informed that this is dependent upon the applicant agreeing. If possible the ability for temporary accommodation to operate outside the UC system would provide a significant improvement and reduce LA arrears.

We welcome the local partnership working to try and resolve some of the ongoing issues our customers are experiencing including the trialling a process with local JCP to identify vulnerable clients which will assist with ensuring appropriate payments can be directed straight to landlords if necessary to secure customers accommodation.

We are continuing to meet locally with Job Centre Plus and also regularly attend the LA Engagement Sessions held in London.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Beck', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jane Beck

Director of Customer Services