

# FOR FIGHTING POVERTY

## Pledge 63 – Support people to navigate the Universal Credit system

**What we said we would do:** The refusal of the government to pause and fix Universal Credit means a faulty system is being rolled out in Plymouth causing misery for many people. We will work with advice agencies and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to ensure that people in the city get the support they need to navigate this complex and broken system.

**What we wanted to achieve:** Every eligible customer receives their Universal Credit payment within five weeks of making a claim.

**What we have done:** We have taken several steps to ensure that eligible customers receive their Universal Credit payments in a timely manner. These include:

- Ensuring that the impact of Universal Credit is considered as part of ongoing work in the city to tackle child poverty, and assessing the impact of Universal Credit on children in Plymouth who receive free school meals and the potential for them to lose their entitlement.
- Improving data sharing and communication between statutory and non-statutory agencies, landlords, and the community and voluntary sector. As part of this, we met with the Permanent Secretary Peter Schofield's focus group in September 2018 to force the issue of data sharing. The DWP has since confirmed that improving communication with local authorities is one of Peter Schofield's top four priorities.
- Using Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) wherever possible to support UC customers who will be waiting for their assessment for 5 weeks, in order to keep them in their home.
- Providing further training for staff so that they can signpost support for Universal Credit customers. This includes introducing a work shadowing programme between the DWP work coaches and Plymouth City Council customer advisers to better understand and improve the customer journey.
- Held Select Committee Reviews on the impact of Universal Credit.
- Managing a Universal Support scheme to help customers apply for Universal Credit and to access free debt advice. This scheme was moved to Citizen's Advice nationally which resulted in a drop in intelligence and data available to the Council. This provided a challenge for us to focus our resources in the most effective way to the most financially vulnerable customers in our City.
- Implemented a new Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme to mitigate against the effects of multiple Universal Credit assessments affecting CTS eligibility.
- Introducing a fast-track service for local debt advice agencies so that we can put a hold on council tax debt recovery when a customer is being supported by a debt adviser.
- Provided additional funding through the COVID emergency food and essential supplies grant to Advice Plymouth which helped to support more Universal Credit Customers maximise their income.

**What's next:** Continue to work with the DWP and advice agencies to maximise data sharing, uptake of Universal Credit, support customers to make valid applications and signpost them to other forms of support.

### Find out more!

Here is a news story about our work to deliver the pledge:

<http://plymouthnewsroom.co.uk/city-council-takes-action-help-minimise-impact-universal-credit/>

