

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (REGULATORY, COMPLIANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES)



Sefton Council 

Benefit Claim and Calculator

[Switch to accessible version](#)

You and your household

Do you live with a partner as a couple?

A partner is:

- your husband or wife; or
- the person you live with as if you are husband or wife; or
- the person you have a same-sex civil partnership with; or
- the person you live with as if you have a same-sex civil partnership.

You should also answer Yes if your partner is currently living or working away from home.

Yes No

Reference Number: ST2-002-MYF

[Show your answers](#) [Calculator home](#) [Stuck? Get help](#)

Come Back Later

You can save what you have done so far, and come back to the same point later. Your session will be saved for 12 weeks. Simply choose your own password, and put it in the space below; your password must be at least eight characters long and include both letters and numbers. Then press 'Save' below.

Upon pressing 'Save', your reference number will be displayed; please note down the reference number AND your password as you will need both to return to this point.

Enter Password:

Confirm Password:

[Helpful tips](#) [Your privacy](#) [Calculator disclaimer](#)

One Stop Shop

Housing benefits
Council Tax
Taxi Licensing
Business Rates
Payments
Self Service Computers

Parking Services
Blue Badges
Electoral Services
Refuse Collection
Recycling
Waste Items Collections
Social Care Enquiries

Building Control
Planning
Roads & Highways
Street Lighting
Abandoned Vehicles
Pest Control
Dog Wardens

Opening Hours: 9am - 5pm Monday to Friday

South Sefton and Crosby foodbank

citizens advice bureau

jobcentreplus

DWP Department for Work and Pensions

OneVision HOUSING

Sefton Council 

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE OF CLAIMING COUNCIL ADMINISTERED BENEFITS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT WORKING GROUP FINAL REPORT JUNE 2016



Overview & Scrutiny

**'Valuing
Improvement'**

www.sefton.gov.uk
scrutiny@sefton.gov.uk

CONTENTS PAGE

Page No.

Paragraph and Title

	Lead Member's Introduction	2
1.	Executive Summary	3
2.	Background	4
3.	Terms of Reference and Objectives	4
4.	Methods of Enquiry	8
5.	Details of Working Group Activity	8
6.	Key Witness Interviews	9
	6.1.1 Sefton Council Public Engagement and Consultation	9
	6.1.2 Sefton Council Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme	10
	6.1.3. St. Leonard's Foodbank	12
	6.1.4. Sefton Council Care Leavers' Corporate Parenting Service	13
	6.1.5. Sefton Citizens' Advice Bureau	14
	6.1.6. Sefton Council Benefits Service	14
	6.1.7 Sefton Council One Stop Shops	15
	6.2. Department for Work and Pensions Job Centre Plus	15
	6.3. One Vision Housing	18
7.	Visits to Customer Contact Centre/Call Centre St. Peter's House	18
8.	Visits to Bootle and Southport One Stop Shops	18
9.	Visit to Wigan Life Centre	19
10.	Background Reading	20
11.	Case Studies	20
12.	Summary of Working Group Findings and Recommendations	22
13.	Vision	41
14.	Acknowledgements and Membership Details	42



LEAD MEMBER'S INTRODUCTION

I am very pleased to introduce this Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) Customer Experience of Claiming Council Administered Benefits and Financial Support Working Group Final Report.

The Working Group adhered to its established terms of reference and objectives (see paragraph 3 below) in interviewing witnesses and its drafting of recommendations; and it is hoped that the recommendations will help Sefton's citizens to receive an improved service not only in their engagement with Sefton Council but with partner agencies such as the Department for Work and Pensions and One Vision Housing.

I wish to thank all those people who gave up their valuable time to be interviewed by the Working Group. The input and expertise of interviewees greatly helped the Working Group in the formulation of its recommendations. Finally, I am extremely grateful to my fellow cross-party Working Group Members for their commitment to the well-being of our citizens and for their ideas and contributions.



Councillor Dave Robinson,
Lead Member, Customer Experience
of Claiming Council Administered
Benefits and Financial Support
Working Group



1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF WORKING GROUP

The Working Group focussed on the customer experience of claiming Council administered benefits and financial support. This Final Report has been developed from the learning that has emerged starting from the case studies etc. However, particular regard was given to the interaction between centrally administered benefits, such as Universal Credit, Job Seekers Allowance and the locally administered Housing Benefit and Council Tax support. Recognition was also given to the demands placed increasingly on the local Council by the Government's welfare reform agenda and how many low income working families in the Borough are seeking further support from the Council simply to meet their day to day needs, for example by the use of the Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme.

This Final Report reflects on the experiences of using different channels of communication through which the relevant services are delivered.

Customers increasingly want to access Council services on line with self-serve using the Council's website www.sefton.gov.uk to find out information, contact us, pay, report and apply for services and assistance.

A lot of good work is already being undertaken by service areas. More web based services are being developed at a pace, with on line Council Tax billing and web chat recently being launched. Most of the Council's application forms for financial assistance and support can be completed and submitted on line at any time of the day or night and are routed through to back office services immediately. However, not everyone has the internet or the technology. PC's are available for the public to use at both our One Stop Shops located in Southport (north of Borough) and Bootle (south of Borough), all Sefton libraries and the OVH offices in Bootle Village. Free Wi-Fi is available at a number of Council public locations (such as Bootle and Southport Town Halls, Magdalen House reception areas). In terms of website accessibility Browse Aloud and Google translate are featured.

There is strong support from its customers for face to face contact at our One Stop Shops, particularly for people with complex circumstances and also for those with language/hearing or sight impairments. Waiting times in the main are viewed as reasonable, particularly if the customer's enquiry can be dealt with at first point of contact. There is a high level of customer satisfaction overall. Over 96% of customers stated that they were satisfied with the number of visits needed to resolve their enquiry. However, not everyone can get to the One Stop Shops. Our customer advisors have developed skills in debt management in partnership with CAB, received dementia awareness and sign language training, provided outreach work and attendance at events such as at the Salvation Army centre in Southport; Ability Network; Lydiate and Maghull Community Groups and invited a local Portuguese group into the One Stop Shop for a briefing session.

Written communication is valued in that there is a record of contact and a point of reference. However, concerns were identified about written communications not always being accessible or understandable. Some customers need help from



advocates, such as care workers, to understand what they are being asked to provide or pay. Some customers simply ignore letters and turn to loan sharks to repay debt.

Telephone contact is good for ease of access but customers sometimes have to wait in a queue and their enquiries may not always be dealt with at first point of contact. There are certain barriers faced by some customers due to mobile phone charges, although this has been mitigated by the use of 0345 number of late, or struggle to be understood or understand what they are being told.

The Council should identify the customers preferred method of receiving information.

The Council is looking to extend its customer survey to cover more aspects of the services and to adapt its services to better respond to public feedback.

Whilst it is acknowledged that lots of good work is being undertaken, in its recommendations, the Working Group has identified opportunities to make further improvements, simplify processes and address customer concerns.

It is encouraging to note that projects such as First Point of Contact and digital initiatives such as web chat, 'Browse Aloud' are now gaining momentum.

A range of recommendations, many of which have already been actioned, are progressing, or for decision in due course can be found in Section 12.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 At its meeting on 14 July 2015, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services), upon consideration of its Work Programme, agreed to establish a Working Group to review the topic of "customer experience of claiming Council administered benefits and financial support".

2.2 Councillors Cluskey, Dawson, McGuire, Owens and Robinson were appointed to serve on the Working Group.

2.3 At the first meeting of the Working Group held on 10 August 2015 Councillor Robinson was appointed as its Lead Member.

3.0 TERMS OF REFERENCE AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 The Terms of Reference and Objectives of the Working Group were approved as part of the scoping exercise at the first meeting and are set out below. The comments of the Working Group are set out below each Terms of Reference and Objectives.

3.2 Terms of Reference



To better understand and make recommendations regarding the customer experience of claiming Council administered benefits and financial support.

Working Group Comments:-

The Council recognises that the customer experience is critical to its role as a provider of the many services that it facilitates and delivers. By looking at the experience of customers who claim benefits and financial support and how well the Council interacts and handles their claims, what is viewed as the most important aspects of a good customer experience and the most frustrating aspects of a poor customer experience and the expectations for self-service, social and mobile channels, improvements may be identified and resources aligned accordingly.

3.3 Objectives

1.	<p>To improve access to consistent and high quality information</p> <p>Working Group comment –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters, forms, website should be under continual review with assistance of the Council’s Adult Social Care team’s Easy Read consultant. Plain English should be used, avoiding jargon and tailored to meet individual needs. • Browse Aloud now on Sefton’s website (support software which adds speech, reading, and translation to the website facilitating access and participation for people with Dyslexia, Low Literacy, English as a Second Language, and those with mild visual impairments. Online content can be read aloud in multiple languages). • Google Translate/Language line also available. • Use of a redesigned customer survey to capture customer feedback.
2.	<p>To improve customer satisfaction with access to our services</p> <p>Working Group comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council will continue to monitor and respond to customer feedback from Customer Care Satisfaction Surveys. A series of quarterly surveys on the One Stops Shops is being reviewed in line with Corporate Standards. Feedback from the Consultation panel in May 2016 is to be considered. . • The Council is to consider widening the scope of the One Stop Shop survey to all contact streams using “e-consult” survey software for a trial 3 month period when customers will



	<p>be asked, amongst other questions, about their preferred method of communication and if they have tried to resolve their queries on line before contacting the call centre, One Stop Shop or writing to us.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charges applied to the Council’s 0845 number have been resolved by the Council introducing 0345 number. • “Rate this Page” and “Comments, Complaints and Feedback” analysis to be kept under review.
3.	<p>To increase the resolution of customers' needs with one visit or call</p> <p>Working Group comment –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Working Group identified a framework of continuous improvement that is being implemented by our customer services team leading to more enquiries being resolved at first point of contact, reducing the need to hand off to the back office for resolution. • Case studies have been and will continue to be undertaken to identify where continuing improvements can be identified. Where opportunities have been lost further training has been delivered to front line staff. • Enhanced skills training for Customer Service advisors • Location of experienced benefit assessor in One Stop Shops to support advisors with complex enquiries and influence the way forward by identifying ways that we can continue to improve the customer journey.
4.	<p>To simplify access to services by streamlining the whole process from first contact to resolution - thereby reducing the need for multiple return contacts</p> <p>Working Group comment –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Level Agreements and Protocols in place with Council service areas and its partners to ensure streamlined approach to work processes. • Council Staff located in partner organisations (OVH). • Appointment based welfare/money advice services available at One Stops Shops. • Tell Us Once project in place. • Cross training in place with CAB and OVH. • Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme – root cause analysis to be undertaken where patterns emerge in order to reduce

	<p>future requests and direct customers to CAB for money advice, particularly where there is evidence of severe financial deprivation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case studies have been and will be undertaken to identify where continuing improvements may be identified. • Co-location of services with the DWP is under consideration.
5.	<p>To reduce failure demand by ensuring robust processes and accountability between front-line hubs and service areas, and clear ownership of complex cross-service enquiries</p> <p>Working Group comment –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More generic, holistic approach to working with our customers • Appointment based services are provided • ‘One Council’ approach. • Joined up processes in place to handle complex cross service enquiries. • Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme – root cause analysis to be undertaken where patterns emerge in order to reduce future demand by better supporting customers which will include directing customers to CAB for money advice. • Improvements to content of letters to ensure customers better understand what is being asked of them, particularly with regard to the evidence required to support their claim.
6.	<p>To increase access to "self-service" information and automatic transactions where appropriate</p> <p>Working Group comment –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self Service PC’s in One Stop Shops and libraries in order to facilitate and improve customer journeys, helping towards a reduction in customer waiting times. • As part of the Council Digital Inclusion Programme, OVH customers can be directed to the availability of self-service PC’s at the OVH Offices in Bootle Village. OVH also have PC’s available to residents at some of their sheltered housing schemes. • Dedicated Self Service champions at One Stop Shops to help people access our services on line. • Self Service to be more widely promoted and used across the Borough • Free Wi-Fi availability at Council buildings.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Self Service channels continue to be developed. • Twitter and Website updates to head off frequently asked questions. • Reductions in e-mail traffic by increasing availability of web forms, self- service links to website, phoning back customers. • Three month pilot for web chat underway. • E-billing for Council Tax bills launched April 2016.
7.	<p>To reduce costs through eliminating duplication</p> <p>Working Group comment –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to avoid delays or chain of visits or phone calls in order to resolve problems or obtain financial assistance when claiming. • More enquiries being dealt with at first point of contact reducing the need for hand off/escalation to back office. • Integration of service areas to be considered which will reduce the need for the customer having to provide the same information to different service areas • Single point of access to service areas • Use of social media (in 2016 the Council was able to post FAQ's about Council Tax bills on Twitter which reduced the number of telephone enquiries).

4.0 METHODS OF ENQUIRY

- Background reading – case studies
- Presentations
- Briefings
- Interviewing key witnesses
- Reports
- Site visits – Bootle and Southport One Stop Shop's and Contact/Call Centre at St. Peter's House; Wigan MBC Life Centre

5.0 DETAILS OF WORKING GROUP ACTIVITY

Date	Activity
14.08.15	Scoping document approved
14.09.15	Sefton Customer Care Satisfaction Survey and case studies considered (Minutes of meeting)
28.09.15	Visit to Customer Contact/Call Centre at St. Peter's House (Minutes of meeting)
12.11.15	Visit to Bootle One Stop Shop Stanley Road Bootle



17.12.15	Interview Key Witnesses - Jayne Vincent, Sefton Council, Public Engagement and Consultation; Wayne Leatherbarrow, Sefton Council, Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme; Debbie Shelley, St. Leonards' Foodbank; Karen Gray, Sefton Council, Care Leavers, Corporate Parenting Service; Diane Turner, Benefits Manager, arvato; Grant Bernard, Sefton CAB; Mark Quillan, One Stop Shops Manager, arvato (Minutes of meeting)
04.02.16	Visit to Southport One Stop Shop Town Hall Southport
29.02.16	Visit to Wigan Life Centre, The Wiend, Wigan
01.03.16	Interview Key Witnesses – Alan Murphy, Senior Operations Manager, Job Centre Plus along with his colleagues Margaret Denton and Linda Usher. Bootle One Stop Shop Customer Satisfaction Survey considered (Minutes of meeting)
22.03.16	Interview Key Witness - Neil Kenwright, Income Manager, One Vision Housing (Minutes of meeting)
17.5.16	Meeting to “sign-off” Final Report and recommendations

6.0 KEY WITNESS INTERVIEWS

Members had the opportunity to interview a number of key witnesses, various Officers and Partners.

Paragraphs 6.1 to 6.3 provide details of the actions arising from the interviews with key witnesses.

6.1 Minutes of the Working Group meeting held on 17 December 2015 can be viewed [here](#)

6.1.1 SEFTON COUNCIL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

Action	Response/Outcome
Jayne Vincent (Sefton Council Public Engagement and Consultation) to put Diane Turner (Benefits Manager arvato) in touch with colleagues to discuss letter style/content to improve accessibility information standards for customers.	Simple concise messages should be got out to customers. Benefit decision notices being reviewed by the Councils “Easy Read” accredited assessor. Whilst software limitations prevent the calculation of benefit entitlement being shown differently, changes can be made to the accompanying information to better support claimants, particularly those with impairments. All letters to have similar logos (One Council approach) and consideration to some having photos or pictures to better support claimants with impairments A service user forum is being



	established with representatives who have a learning or sensory impairment to help the Council quality check the information that is being sent to service users.
Jayne Vincent (Sefton Council, Public Engagement and Consultation) to provide Diane Turner (Benefits Manager, arvato) with information about accessibility issues/One Council approach.	<p>The accessible information standard comes into force in July 2016 and as requested by the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel. Initially Health and Social Care service areas will be reviewing systems, policies and processes to meet the new guidelines; however the guidelines offer best practice for all Council service areas to consider. Accessible Information Training is being refreshed to meet the new guidelines. A briefing note for the Strategic Leadership Board is being devised to inform of the standard and the work to implement it.</p> <p>The “Easy Read” training is being refreshed – consideration to be given to rolling out training across the organisation.</p> <p>Important that customers receive information in their preferred way (e.g. hearing impaired people prefer electronically, some people prefer face to face interviews)</p> <p>After a two month trial “Browse Aloud” has been purchased for two years.</p> <p>Web chat facility being piloted and People First will be taking part in a trial in the coming weeks.</p>

6.1.2 SEFTON COUNCIL EMERGENCY LIMITED ASSISTANCE SCHEME

Action	Response/Outcome
Wayne Leatherbarrow (Sefton Council, Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme) to consider locating a member of ELAS team in One Stop Shops to speak to customers face to face and speed up the application process.	It has been found that arvato customer contact/customer service advisors in the One Stop Shops are providing clear information, advice and guidance in relation the local welfare support. Locating a member of the team in the One Stop Shop



	<p>will severely restrict the capacity to consider and respond to applications in a timely manner as we only have two staff who actually consider the applications, decide on an appropriate support plan, authorise awards, notify applicant of the award and refer to partner agencies across the private, voluntary and independent sector for additional support.</p>
<p>Wayne Leatherbarrow (Sefton Council, Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme) to give consideration to issuing Emergency Food bank vouchers by Trussell Trust.</p>	<p>The Local Authority actively promotes and markets Sefton CAB for debt/budgeting and to assist with budgeting skills.</p>
<p>Wayne Leatherbarrow (Sefton Council, Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme) to give consideration to issuing emergency food bank vouchers by Trussell Trust which is open 9am – 5pm daily.</p>	<p>Head of Communities was requested to liaise with the Trussell Trust on this issue.</p> <p>The Head of Communities has advised that the Foodbank currently issues emergency vouchers if a client presents at St Leonard’s, Bootle or Lakeside Christian Centre, Southport.</p> <p>The distribution centres across south Sefton do not hold vouchers to issue, only the main Foodbank centres at St Leonard’s and Lakeside Christian Centre.</p> <p>Currently ELAS vouchers account for approximately 52% of the foodbank network clients.</p> <p>More than 120 other agencies across the private, voluntary and independent sectors also refer.</p> <p>The foodbanks can and often do issue Emergency Foodbank Vouchers if a member of the public presents at one of the foodbank distribution centres and is evidently in crisis or experiencing severe hardship.</p>

	The Local Authority continues to support the Foodbank Network financially with operational support costs and replenishing goods at times when donations and stock are low.
Wayne Leatherbarrow (Sefton Council, Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme) to give consideration to putting emergency funding into Citizens Advice Sefton.	Significant funding has been provided from the Local Authority over the last two years to the CAB in support of information, advice and guidance about welfare and debt issues. This year the Local Authority has directed support to the community using the Welfare Advice service, which has received a positive response from partner agencies such as the foodbank network, where Council Welfare Advisors have provided 'drop-in' surgeries to assist those vulnerable members of the local community experiencing severe hardship.

6.1.3 ST. LEONARD'S FOODBANK

Action	Response/Outcome
Council to consider seeking more investment from Government to support the Council and its partners to provide Welfare Advice at Food banks.	This issue was referred by Head of Communities to the Welfare Reform Reference Group for consideration. At the next Anti-Poverty/ Welfare Reform, Cabinet and partner reference groups the issue will be raised with group members and discussed.
Trussell Trust to issue emergency foodbank vouchers as they are open 9am – 5pm	Foodbank currently issues emergency vouchers if a client presents at St Leonard's or Lakeside Christian Centre at short notice. The Distribution centres across south Sefton do not hold vouchers to issue, only the main Foodbank centres at St Leonard's and the Lakeside Christian Centre. Currently ELAS vouchers account for

	<p>approximately 52% of the foodbank network clients.</p> <p>More than 120 other agencies across the private, voluntary and independent sectors also refer.</p> <p>The foodbanks can and often do issue Emergency Foodbank Vouchers if a member of the public presents at one of the foodbank distribution centres and is evidently in crisis or experiencing severe hardship.</p> <p>The Local Authority continues to support the Foodbank Network financially with operational support costs and replenishing goods at times when donations and stock are low.</p>
--	--

6.1.4 SEFTON COUNCIL CARE LEAVERS' CORPORATE PARENTING SERVICE

Action	Response/Outcome
Wayne Leatherbarrow (Sefton Council, Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme) arrange for personal advisors in Care Leavers team to have direct access to ELAS staff	This has been actioned and the Care Leavers' team has direct access to the ELAS Administrators.
Diane Turner (Benefits Manager, arvato) to arrange for the Revenues/Benefits service to look into the feasibility of having a system flag to alert if a claimant was a care leaver – also DWP to be asked if feasible on their systems.	Diane Turner indicated that this is feasible. arvato work closely with Karen Gray from the Care Leavers' team to try to ensure that appropriate support is provided to care leavers. This includes providing support with Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and liaising with Karen Gray when a care leaver starts to claim Universal Credit. Mark Barry (Revenues Manager) to put in place a process to identify care leavers and alert their respective leaving care personal advisors allowing the opportunity for them to intervene at an earlier stage and, hopefully, avoid formal recovery

	processes for Council Tax.
--	----------------------------

6.1.5 SEFTON CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU

Action	Response/Outcome
Wayne Leatherbarrow (Sefton Council, Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme) to direct customers to Sefton Citizens Advice Bureau for debt/budgeting advice in order to reduce multiple claims and assist customers with budgeting skills etc.	The Local Authority actively promotes and markets Sefton CAB for debt/budgeting and to assist with budgeting skills.

6.1.6 SEFTON COUNCIL BENEFITS SERVICE

Action	Response/Outcome
Diane Turner (Benefits Manager, arvato) to liaise with Jayne Vincent (Sefton Council, Public Engagement and Consultation) to seek improvements in ensuring the correct evidence was obtained from claimants as quickly as possible to avoid processing delays.	Diane Turner has liaised with Jayne Vincent and her colleague June McGill re: Easy Read. However, the Benefits Service is continually looking at ways in which it can obtain information from claimants as quickly as possible. Some examples include:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • direct access into DWP Customer Information System to check claimant records without the need for further evidence from the claimant, • introduction of Risk Based Verification to remove the need for unnecessary evidence, • direct liaison with Registered Social Landlords to obtain rent details, • use of "real-time" information from DWP and HMRC to update claim details without the need for further evidence from the claimant.
Diane Turner (Benefits Manager, arvato) to have forms/communications run past Adult Social Care 'Easy Read' consultant	arvato and the Sefton Council Partnership and Local Taxation Manager are currently looking into available options re: Easy Read, associated costs and how this could potentially be used by Sefton Council
Diane Turner (Benefits Manager,	This is standard practice. arvato work



arvato) to work with Sefton Council to improve claimant communications (i.e. letters, website, forms etc.)	with the Council when drafting any new claimant communications and will always try to incorporate any feedback and suggestions
Diane Turner (Benefits Manager, arvato) to consider use of summary letter to accompany Benefit Decision/Entitlement notices.	arvato will look into this further. There will very likely be costs associated for the development of summary letters and the ongoing production/postage of such letters. This will be discussed further with the Council.
Diane Turner (Benefits Manager, arvato) to liaise with DWP regarding delay issues and evidence required.	arvato continue to monitor any delays and liaise with DWP.

6.1.7 SEFTON COUNCIL ONE STOP SHOPS

Action	Response/Outcome
Mark Quillan (One Stop Shops Manager, arvato) to consider widening the scope of the Customer Survey to include customer feedback on all customer contact streams (e.g. telephone, email, website, self-serve, contact forms etc.)	Proposals for a customer experience/satisfaction survey, to include all contact streams, on the customer experience of claiming council administered benefits and financial support, to be submitted to the Public Engagement and Consultation Panel before 13th May 2016 with a view to bringing back to the panel in July 2016
Mark Quillan (One Stop Shops Manager, arvato) to arrange Contact Centre and One Stop Shop staff to signpost OVH tenants to availability of self-serve PC's at OVH offices, Bootle Village.	Implemented
Sefton Council - to feed information via the Working Group to make another approach to DWP to discuss issues/co-location feasibility etc.	CAB surgeries have been re-instated in One Stop Shops one day per week. Will follow the lead of Council re co-location initiatives

6.2 DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS JOB CENTRE PLUS

Minutes of the Working Group meeting held on 1 March 2016 can be viewed [here](#)

Action	Response/Outcome
DWP to provide the Council, subject to data protection issues, with information regarding:-	
the imposition of sanctions	It is the claimant's responsibility to meet



	the requirement of job search and this will be assessed on an individual basis
high level numbers of imposed sanctions	With regard to sharing information with the Council regarding the imposition of sanctions, after investigation we are unable to share data down to an individual level, even with the claimants' consent. High level data is available via the DWP Statistical tab on Gov.UK which allows the Local Authority to see data down to category level. Sefton Council have a very active Welfare Rights team who support individual cases and therefore may be able to provide some anecdotal information
the appeal process regarding Mandatory reconsiderations	For Jobseekers Allowance the claimant is informed of the process and when a doubt is raised to the decision maker, they are informed of the process at this point and also issued with a hardship leaflet/application to be completed if they are sanctioned. Once the claimant has been notified of the outcome and contacts the Jobcentre they will be provided with a verbal explanation, if not sufficient an email is sent to the Benefit Centre for a mandatory reconsideration, who will then contact the claimant direct. The following link provides details https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit/appeal-decision Verbal explanation, mandatory reconsideration, and then appeal. Claimants are not given a leaflet regarding Hardship, they are told verbally.
how claimants receive support and advocacy	If a claimant needs additional support due to ill health/disability or vulnerability they will be supported at the Jobcentre. The staff at the Jobcentre will also signpost customers to other third party organisations to gain support.
clarification on the advisory process of referring claimants to CAB	The Work Coach will signpost to CAB
an update on progress with the co-location of services	Tentative talks have taken place but no formal actions have been progressed or are planned to do so at this time.
actions required by the DWP of the	Regular communication with regards to



Council	supporting our claimants, including debt/budgeting support
how they look to provide claimants with alternative payment arrangements (i.e. making Housing Benefit payments direct to the landlord rather than the tenant)	Universal Credit Work Coaches had a one day training course on Alternative Payment Arrangements and Personal budgeting Support. At all new claims they ask the claimant if they need any support with budgeting advice, if they are able to cope with monthly payments and if they are able to support themselves until their first payment is due. Following the answers they decide on the options available. If the offer is refused the claimant is informed that they can change their mind at any time
which money advice agencies they are working with given that Government recently announced closure of money advice centres	Venus provide debt advice via multi organisation funding in Sefton (Jo Hughes)
a copy of the Universal Credit notification/award letter and other information detailing the processes adopted by the JCP	A copy of the letter has been provided and can be viewed here
DWP to arrange:-	
up-skilling of One Stop Shop staff on Universal Credit and sanctions	DWP happy to support Job shadowing activities. DWP extremely keen to build on and strengthen existing relationships, and in order to do this would like to invite Sefton to meet with DWP to discuss how this can be taken forward. DWP would welcome the opportunity to provide some up-skilling sessions for the LA staff to support them to both understand DWP business and in turn help them support Sefton residents and DWP feel that their staff would benefit from understanding the business from the LA delivery side
One Stop Shop and Jobcentre Plus staff becoming more familiar with each other's work	
Both Sefton and DWP working on a joint agenda to support Sefton residents and DWP feel that by working more closely we can do this.	
Dates/ availability to be coordinated and a convenient date and time to get together to be arranged by DWP	
Council to provide assistance with:-	
Personal Budgeting Support	The Council has this in place and is



	ongoing
Signposting to debt management support	The Council has this in place and is ongoing

6.3 ONE VISION HOUSING

Minutes of the Working Group meeting held on 22 March 2016 can be viewed [here](#)

Action	Response/Outcome
Neil Kenwright (One Vision Housing Income Manager) to provide the Council with the OVH protocol for dealing with rent arrears.	This has been provided to the Council. The court process can be viewed:- https://www.justice.gov.uk/courts/procedure-rules/civil/protocol/pre-action-protocol-for-possession-claims-by-social-landlords
Neil Kenwright (One Vision Housing Income Manager) - OVH be requested to consider the introduction of free Wi-Fi in their high rise and sheltered accommodation; to remove the cost of such services from tenant's budgets and in so doing improve their digital inclusion prospects.	The OVH Digital working group has been asked to consider the free high-rise wi-fi provision and will report back to the Working Group with the findings.
Sefton Council to put in place arrangements at Bootle One Stop Shop and at Bootle Library, to signpost OVH tenants to the ICT facilities at the OVH Customer Access office, Coral Drive, Bootle Village which is under-utilised at present.	This work has been undertaken as part of the Council's digital inclusion initiatives.
Sefton Council is currently undertaking work on digital inclusion across the Borough and consideration to be given to working with OVH sheltered housing schemes that had P.C.s to support tenants to improve their ICT skills.	This action is being considered as part of the Council's digital inclusion initiatives.

7. VISIT TO CUSTOMER CONTACT/CALL CENTRE ST PETER'S HOUSE BOOTLE

Contact Centre visit 29th September 2015

8. VISITS TO BOOTLE AND SOUTHPORT ONE STOP SHOPS

Bootle OSS visit 12 November 2015
Southport OSS visit 4 February 2016



9. VISIT TO WIGAN LIFE CENTRE

The Working Group, on 29 February 2016, undertook a visit to the Wigan Life Centre, the purpose of which was to look at the nature and extent of the following being delivered at the front line at the Centre:-

- Benefits advice and Support (Housing Benefit, Council Tax Support)
- Other Local Welfare Support (e.g. discretionary funding such as Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments, Council Tax support/hardship etc.).
- Welfare Rights/Benefit maximisation/Debt advice etc.
- Self-Serve initiatives
- Blue badge process;
- Digital Strategy.

And to also understand how/when the following was being delivered by partner organisations from the Centre:-

- Co-location with partners (Citizen’s Advice Bureau, Job Centre Plus, Credit Union, Department of Work and Pensions etc. also other agencies such as Age UK, Healthwatch, Carers UK)
- Customer Portal (“My Account”)
- Job search
- Foodbanks
- Housing/homelessness advice

The Working Group received a presentation from officers from Wigan MBC; and following the presentation the Working Group was given a tour of the Wigan Life Centre.

Action	Response/Outcome
Processes for dealing with claims at first point of contact	Not yet provided despite follow up
Any training notes	Not yet provided despite follow up
Digital strategy for 2015 – 2020	http://wigan.gov.uk/Council/Strategies-Plans-and-Policies/Digital-strategy.aspx
Copy of digital champions programme	Not yet provided despite follow up
Registrars – process to deal at front line	Not yet provided despite follow up
Parking registration – process to share	Not yet provided despite follow up
Key stakeholders – undertaken a review for contact centres. Would	Not yet provided despite follow up



review documents be possible to share	
Customer satisfaction survey – questionnaire.	Not yet provided despite follow up
Crisis Team – (previous social fund with DWP). Officer mentioned she would share process and questionnaire that front line staff ask customer to find out cause of problem.	Not yet provided despite follow up
Schools admissions / free school meals – process for front line service	Not yet provided despite follow up
Blue Badge process	Not yet provided despite follow up

10. BACKGROUND READING

The Working Group also considered, as background information, reports regarding the co-location of services at Charnwood Borough Council, Breckland District Council and Shropshire Council together with an article, providing examples of the co-location of services. A copy of the articles can be found [here](#)

11. CASE STUDIES

The main findings from the case studies are as follows:-

- One Stop Shop and Call Centre advisors were able to deal with a wide range of issues and offered flexibility of approach, especially where customers were facing multiple debt problems. The advisors were seen to deal very well with customers who appeared anxious when initially contacting the Council with problems. The advisors were able to put customers at ease and bring out information that would support solutions.
- The Council's Welfare Rights Team, the arvato Benefits Take Up officer and the OVH Welfare Rights team demonstrated a high level of professionalism, expertise and knowledge when advocating for their clients.
- There is anecdotal evidence that the termination or suspension of benefits by the DWP is leading to hardship for our customers. In turn, this is creating additional work for the Council and its elected representatives in responding to enquiries from both customers and their landlords about rent/Council Tax arrears and placing additional pressures for the Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme and other local discretionary hardship schemes, increased footfall at Foodbanks and CAB and other voluntary and community organisations
- Vulnerability issues are not always evident until a Councillor's intervention.

- Prior to MP's intervention it had been difficult to establish the full facts about the claimant's circumstances
- Processing delays were causing hardship
- Progress chasing necessary as customers not being informed about progress of claim
- Letters not containing enough information leading to failure demand
- Some letters are hard to understand and contain complex information not in an easy read, plain English format
- Benefit overpayment recovery letters are complex and confusing to customers
- Letters do not provide debt recovery options/advice and process which can be undertaken (e.g. appointment service)
- Numerous letters are often sent at once or issued over several days following adjustments to benefit entitlement which lead to confusion for the customer
- Customers being asked to supply unnecessary information when already held or obtainable from other sources/services area or simply not required
- Customer's individual circumstances not always taken into account. For example, where debt involved customers resorting to use of loan sharks
- Customers presenting at Foodbanks for emergency vouchers
- Information about customer's circumstances not always shared across service areas.
- Straightforward enquires not always dealt with at first point of contact
- Enquiries not always dealt with generically.



12. SUMMARY OF WORKING GROUP FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

	Objective	Findings	Recommendations	Responsible Officer	Due Date
1.	To improve access to consistent and high quality information	Some letters are hard to understand.	Make changes to the back of the benefit entitlement letters to capture recommendations.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
		Various benefit overpayment recovery letters are complex and confusing to customers.	Review letters to meet the needs of more service users, particularly those with learning difficulties or other impairments.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
		Letters do not provide debt recovery options/advice and process which can be undertaken (e.g. appointment service)	Use bespoke summary letters to accompany decision notices where there are complex or numerous calculations created, particularly overpayment letters.	Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
		Numerous letters are often sent at once or issued over several days following adjustments to benefit entitlement which lead to confusion for customer.	Improve the content of all letters with Easy Read.	Consultation, Engagement and Performance Officer Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
			Easy Read needs to become embedded as a way of routine working in the Council, and training to be rolled out across	Consultation, Engagement and Performance Officer	December 2016

		the Council		
		Accessible Information Standard awareness, training etc. to be communicated across the Council	Consultation, Engagement and Performance Officer Head of Strategic Support	December 2016
		Service user forum to be established to include representative(s) with learning or sensory impairment to help Council quality check information being sent to service users.	Consultation, Engagement and Performance Officer	December 2016
	Website not always user friendly to those with impairments.	Review website to address the wider needs of some of our service users to include 'Browse Aloud'.	Head of Strategic Support Consultation, Engagement and Performance Officer Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
	Some customers are unable to access One Stop Shops or use a telephone.	Promote self –serve/web chat etc. at all contact opportunities. Current web chat pilot to be extended.	Head of Strategic Support Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
		Utilise libraries and other Council and partner	Head of Customer Services & Benefits	December 2016



		facilities for self-serve and raise awareness of same.	(arvato)	
	Communication not always in customer's preferred format	Identify customer's preferred method and format of communication.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
		Analysis and awareness across Council	Head of Strategic Support	December 2016
	Customers failing to provide sufficient information, resulting in repeated visits and delays.	<p>Identify where failures are occurring across all service areas and why.</p> <p>Input measures to address.</p> <p>Provide clear instructions/information to customers.</p> <p>Offer an appointment service and inform all information required for decision making.</p> <p>Make telephone call to customer to clarify what the issues are and to explain what is required</p>	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	December 2016



			to complete the claim and follow up with appointment.		
		Customers being asked to supply unnecessary information when already held or obtainable from other sources/services area or simply not required.	<p>Improve knowledge of staff</p> <p>Identify where failures are occurring and why.</p> <p>Provide clear instructions/information to customers.</p> <p>Make appointments and inform all information required for decision making.</p> <p>Education services/Blue Badges – require joining up of information gathering – can be addressed at One Stop Shop. Will require review of process.</p>	<p>Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)</p> <p>Head of Strategic Support</p>	<p>December 2016</p> <p>December 2016</p>
	Objective	Findings	Recommendations	Responsible Officer	Due Date
2.	To improve customer satisfaction with access to our services.	Customer survey only captures feedback from customers attending the One Stop Shops in	To consider widening the customer survey to all contact streams.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	September 2016



		Southport and Bootle.		Consultation, Engagement and Performance Officer	
			Attach survey to web chat, letters, receipts, e-forms and other communication methods to encourage customers to identify where there have been any gaps in service provision, for example why they could not find out the information they were looking for, or whether our response fully met requirements etc.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato) Consultation, Engagement and Performance Officer	December 2016
			Use feedback from survey to enhance existing and develop new digital capabilities.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato) Consultation, Engagement and Performance Officer	December 2016
			Assemble a customer panel to assist with shaping the service.	Consultation, Engagement and Performance Officer	December 2016
		Customers escalating matters to elected representatives or other advocacy services.	Identify where failures are occurring and why.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
		Delays in processing	Refund requests; interim	Head of Customer	December 2016



		causing hardship	<p>payments; payment on account; ELAS to be considered whilst claimant awaiting a decision.</p> <p>Council Tax Reduction Scheme to be put in payment if only the rent information is outstanding.</p> <p>Require a process for officers to obtain underlying cause e.g. benefit delays, work coach support required.</p> <p>Customer should receive advice or escalation.</p>	Services & Benefits (arvato)	
		Full facts about claimant's circumstances are not always identified until intervention by Councillor or MP.	Flags to be put on systems for customers with additional needs, where known, such as visual impairment or vulnerability so that our communication methods can be adapted to meet their specific needs.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
		Customer's individual	A more flexible, holistic	Head of Customer	December 2016



		circumstances not always taken into account. For example, where debt involved customers resorting to use of loan sharks.	approach to be taken where customer's circumstances are considered exceptional and fall outside the scope of normal procedures.	Services & Benefits (arvato) Head of Revenues (arvato)	
	Objective	Findings	Recommendations	Responsible Officer	Due Date
3.	To increase the resolution of customers' needs with one visit or call	Number of visits and other communications required to resolve.	Offer to visit, appointments, more use of telephone calls to customers rather than writing to them. Require holistic, generic view of customer and services to be more joined up with flexibility depending upon issues. Need escalation processes in place. Key experienced staff to be located in front office.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato) Head of Revenues (arvato)	December 2016
		Customers presenting at Foodbanks for emergency vouchers	To liaise with Trussell Trust to issue emergency foodbank vouchers	Head of Communities	December 2016
		Information about	Require holistic, generic	Head of Customer	December 2016

		customer's circumstances not always shared across service areas.	view of customer and services to be more joined up with flexibility depending upon issues. Need escalation processes in place.	Services & Benefits (arvato)	
		Straightforward enquires not always dealt with at first point of contact	Measure the % of enquiries dealt with at first point of contact. Knowledge of front line staff to be improved. Key experienced staff to be located in front office.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
		Enquiries not always dealt with generically.	Knowledge of staff to be improved in order to resolve more complex issues.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
		Customer advisors spending time scanning and preparing receipts and query letters rather than processing information.	Review process to enable administration work to be undertaken by less experienced staff and lead to reduced waiting times and enable decision making.	Head of Customer Services & Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
	Objective	Findings	Recommendations	Responsible Officer	Due Date
4.	To simplify access to services by	Enquiries not always dealt with at first point of contact	Co-location opportunities (e.g. DWP, CAB, ELAS,	Head of Strategic Support Head of Customer	December 2016



streamlining the whole process from first contact to resolution thereby reducing the need for multiple contacts.		Education support, Blue Badge) to be identified at One Stop Shops.	Services and Benefits (arvato) (CAB surgeries have been re-instated at OSS)	
	Education, Blue Badge, ELAS process handed off to back office. Education services enquiries are being dealt with at other site (Bootle Town Hall) resulting in customers attending at a different location.	Review processes to streamline services, remove duplication and to avoid repeat visits. Enable more decision making and processing to be done at the front office. Experienced assessors to be located at front line to support/mentor advisors.	Head of Strategic Support Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
	Recovery of overpayment for housing benefit and council tax arrears not joined up and different approaches from service areas. Customers with multiple debts are anxious and may resort to loan sharks to pay off Council debts.	Joined up approach to dealing with corporate debt, taking the customers overall financial means into account and making affordable and sustainable repayments.	Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato) Head of Revenues (arvato)	December 2016
	DWP delays leading to	Liaise with DWP over	Head of Customer	December 2016



		hardship for customers.	delays and evidence required	Services and Benefits (arvato)	
	Objective	Findings	Recommendations	Responsible Officer	Due Date
5.	To reduce failure demand by ensuring robust processes and accountability between front line hubs and service areas, and clear ownership of cross service enquiries	Customers being given insufficient or incorrect advice and information by advisors.	Front line process to be reviewed in order to resolve at first point of contact. Monitoring and evaluation required.	Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
One Council approach not always adopted.		One Council awareness training to be put in place for front line staff.	Head of Strategic Support Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016	
Customer advisors not always picking up other information that may affect claimant's entitlement or liability.		Knowledge of front line staff to be improved.	Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016	
Customers not always being signposted to other partners, such as welfare advice when more assistance is clearly required		Awareness training.	CAB/Welfare Rights Managers	December 2016	
Vulnerability, impairment, language difficulties not identified/recorded and full		Front line staff to identify and record information, where known, which will	Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016	



		<p>facts about claimant's circumstances not always known until intervention by Councillor, Member of Parliament, Social Worker, CAB or Welfare Rights advisor/other advocate.</p>	<p>assist in providing any additional support with communications. Including debt recovery enforcement/ DWP support.</p> <p>Care Leavers – process to be put in place to identify care leavers and alert their respective leaving care personal advisors to allow for earlier intervention and support with ELAS, benefits or revenues matters to avoid matters being escalated.</p> <p>Care Leavers – consider locating member of staff is One Stop Shops to speak to customers face to face.</p> <p>Care leavers – personal advisors in Care Leavers' team to have direct access to ELAS staff.</p>	Head of Revenues (arvato)	
		Working relationship	Any issues identified to	Income Manager OVH	December 2016



	between OVH and Sefton Council.	<p>be resolved through service level agreement and protocol that is in place between Council and OVH and reviewed annually, or as required.</p> <p>Key staff in OVH to maintain link to Benefits Service systems and act quickly on any delays.</p> <p>Member of staff from Sefton Council's Benefits Service to continue to be located in OVH offices.</p> <p>OVH to ensure that links/referrals to Sefton CAB debt advice and other partner services such as foodbanks, ELAS are fully utilised.</p>	Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	
	Foodbanks – welfare advice and support requirements	Council to consider seeking more investment from Government to support Council and its partners to provide welfare advice at Food Banks.	Executive Director -Sefton Council (Charlotte Bailey)	December 2016



		Some households are increasingly reliant on financial assistance and support from the Council and its partners to meet their everyday needs.	Service areas and partners to undertake and share root cause analysis to determine what is causing demand and how mitigating action can be put in place. Promote/build up resilience on both a personal and community level and empower people to take ownership and help themselves more. Work more strategically with partners, using a multi-agency, intelligence led approach, to better understand how financial support and benefits are being delivered to households across the Borough.	Partner Organisations (OVH, DWP, CAB, Foodbanks, Sefton@work Head of Strategic Support Head of Communities Other Service Heads	December 2016 December 2016
	Objective	Findings	Recommendations	Responsible Officer	Due Date
6.	To increase access to self- service information and automatic	Digital is not always the customer's first choice when accessing our services.	To form part of the Councils digital inclusion initiatives.	Executive Director - Sefton Council (Charlotte Bailey) Head of Strategic Support	December 2016

transactions where appropriate.		'Digital by default' to be promoted at every opportunity.	All Service Heads	December 2016
		Self-service mentors and champions to be sited at all self-serve locations.	Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
		OVH to identify opportunities for digital inclusion for its tenants.	OVH	December 2016
		OVH to allow access to its tenants for self-serve at the OVH office in Bootle Village, Coral Drive Bootle.	OVH	December 2016
		Bootle OSS/Bootle library to promote access to additional self-service facilities for OVH tenants at the OVH office in Bootle Village Coral Drive Bootle.	Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato) Head of Communities	December 2016
		Free Wi- fi locations across Sefton to be identified and promoted.	OVH Head of Strategic Support	December 2016
	Some services are not yet available on-line.	Service areas to review back office work to identify what can be done on-line, to include	All Service Heads	December 2016



		Adult and Children's Financial Assessments, Blue Badges and Education services.		
	Customers not routinely being advised about on line forms or where they can go to find out more information on the website.	All services to promote/signpost to self-serve.	All Service Heads	December 2016
	Website is not always user friendly to some service users, particularly those with impairments.	Website and links to be reviewed to ensure that they are active and fit for purpose and to meet the needs of more service users, particularly those with learning difficulties or other impairments.	Head of Strategic Support	December 2016
	Barriers to digital inclusion identified.	Testing on Web chat/website with People First to identify Improvements, for those with impairments. Scale up efforts to engage with a broad customer base to identify needs of users and where digital initiatives, training and further	Consultation, Engagement and Performance Officer Other Service heads OVH	December 2016



			opportunities can be realised.		
		Range of web based activities is limited.	Web chat to be rolled out across all transactional service areas. Customer Portal opportunities to be identified and assessed.	Head of Strategic Support Executive Director – Sefton Council (Charlotte Bailey)	December 2016
		Customers are sending emails rather than submitting a self-serve form which is creating double handling.	Reduce the number of emails being received.	All Service Heads Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
			Increase number of self-serve forms which go directly into back office processing systems.	All Service Heads Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
			Measure success rate and speed of processing of customers making requests through self-serve as opposed to email.	All Service Heads Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016



	Objective	Findings	Recommendations	Responsible Officer	Due Date
7.	To reduce costs through eliminating duplication.	Customer transactions/applications being double handled or handed off to back office service areas for processing (e.g. blue badges/free school meals/ education financial support services/ adult social care/ELAS/warmer homes grants etc.)	Identify processes that can be integrated in order to streamline processes and reduce administration costs for the Council. In turn this will lead to achieving efficiencies/reducing costs for the Council.	All Service Heads Head of Schools and Families Head of Strategic Support Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016
		Customers facing administrative burdens in being asked to supply evidence and other information which can be obtained from other sources	Education services/Blue Badges – require joining up of information gathering – can be addressed at One Stop Shop. Will require review of process.	Head of Schools and Families Head of Regulation and Compliance	December 2016
		Service areas and partners are not sharing information about customers sufficiently.	Service areas and partners to undertake and share root cause analysis to determine what is causing demand and how mitigating action can be put in place.	All Service Heads	December 2016
		Information not being challenged at front line. For example, not picking	Front line staff to take more ownership of enquiries.	Head of Customer Services and Benefits (arvato)	December 2016



		up changes in income levels when the customer is in front of them e.g. pay shown on bank statements not being queried but just handed off to back office without asking the customer for more details.			
		Universal Credit customers having to attend at both DWP and Council offices for support with the UC claim and Council administered benefits.	Co-location with DWP opportunities need to be further explored and developed in Sefton.	Executive Director - Sefton Council (Charlotte Bailey)	December 2016
		DWP unable to provide more information to the Council about the reasons for claims being suspended, sanctioned and stopped, even with the claimants consent. For example, if someone is moving from ESA to JSA their income may well remain the same and they will still need to maintain support to continue to meet	Regular communication between the Council and DWP to continue and to include monitoring and reporting of debt and budgeting support being offered to claimants. DWP to provide claimants with signposting to debt advice via multi organisations funding in	DWP Partnership & Local Taxation Manager	December 2016



		<p>their housing and living costs whilst their claim is being reviewed.</p> <p>DWP only able to provide Council with high level data.</p>	Sefton.		
--	--	---	---------	--	--



13. VISION

The Customer Experience of Claiming Council Administered Benefits and Financial Support Working Group identified that customers would ideally like to see Sefton Council's administered benefits and financial support services delivered in a way that ensures it:-

- Continues to engage with customers who contact the Council to identify where improvements can be made, if there are any barriers and how technology can be used to better support them in terms of accessibility and availability
- Learns from feedback, surveys, comments and complaints
- Achieves better outcomes for the customer
- Provides clear, accurate and timely explanations (whether written, delivered electronically or spoken)
- Minimises the administrative burden on customers, in particular when completing forms for financial assistance
- Removes the need to supply further evidence from the customer by using information readily obtainable from local and central government information systems, registered social landlords, real time information from HMRC etc.
- Reduces the need for double handling of enquiries
- Meets the needs of our most vulnerable customers, in particular care leavers, low income working families, the elderly, those with mental health issues and the homeless and destitute
- Aims to resolve the majority of straightforward benefits service transactions and enquiries at the first point of contact
- Recognises that every contact counts, at any point of contact
- Identifies where additional support, including emergency support, may be made available or facilitated by the Council without the need for multiple visits/claims (for example Council Tax support, Housing Benefit, Universal Credit, Education Transport Funding; Free School Meals, Emergency Limited Assistance (foodbank vouchers, essential goods for infants/children, emergency travel and utility top ups), Discretionary Housing Payments, Discretionary Council Tax Support, Council Tax payment plans, Benefit overpayment repayment plans, Electoral Registration, Blue Badges, Warmer Homes grants, Disabled Facilities grants etc.)
- Identifies customers who may need additional support and signposting to our other voluntary and community organisations that are able to offer support, including welfare and debt advisory services such as Sefton CAB (Money Advice); Foodbanks (Food provision and Welfare Advice), OVH (Housing) etc.
- Supports and encourages more of our customers to self-serve in order to continue to provide a responsive and effective service given the public sector budgetary constraints



- Recognises that many of our customers are increasingly accessing our services on line, but some will prefer to contact us face to face or by telephone
- Ensures that debt advice and other welfare support skills of front line staff continue to be developed and be updated in partnership with Sefton CAB and other voluntary and community organisations
- Adapts and copes with the changes in benefits (e.g. Universal Credit) and the extra responsibilities that it places on both the Council and its partners to meet genuine need and maintain basic safety nets
- Continues to undertake root cause analysis where patterns emerge in order to reduce repeated requests and direct customers to CAB for money advice, budgeting skills, further support etc.

14. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS

In producing this report on Customer Experience of Claiming Council Administered Benefits and Financial Support, acknowledgements and thanks are attributed to the following individuals for their time and input:-

- Key Witnesses - arvato – Mark Quillan and Diane Turner; Department for Work and Pensions – Margaret Denton, Alan Murphy and Linda Usher; One Vision Housing – Neil Kenwright; Sefton Citizens' Advice Bureau – Grant Bernard; Sefton Council – Karen Gray, Wayne Leatherbarrow and Jayne Vincent; and St. Leonard's Foodbank – Debbie Shelley
- Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council – Georgina Bentley, Tina Docherty, Jo Makin, Alison McKenzie-Folan, Lesley O'Halloran and Sam Tierney
- Bootle and Southport One Stop Shops and St. Peter's House Contact/Call Centre – Kurt Goldman, Mark Quillan and their staff for facilitating the visits.
- Lead Officers to the Review - Angela Ellis (Sefton Council) and Christine Finnigan (Sefton Council)

Thanks must also go to the Members of the Working Group who have worked hard and dedicated a great deal of time to this review, namely:-



Councillor Dave Robinson (Lead Member)



Councillor Kevin Cluskey





**Councillor Tony
Dawson**



**Councillor Sue
McGuire**



Councillor Rob Owens

For further Information please contact:-

Paul Fraser

Senior Democratic Services Officer

Telephone: 0151 934 2068

E-Mail: paul.fraser@sefton.gov.uk

Sefton Council 

Overview
& Scrutiny

