



The Future Delivery of
Social Security in
Scotland

January 2016

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Response

Homeless Action Scotland is the national membership body for organisations and individuals tackling homelessness in Scotland. We are grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Welfare Reform Committee on the future delivery of Social Security in Scotland. We have restricted our comments to our specialist areas of knowledge.

Homeless Action Scotland has a long standing interest in the welfare system and Homelessness and in recent years have worked with the DWP to ensure homelessness and the needs of people who are homeless is taken into consideration when deciding on changes, and rolling out these as they happen.

DWP or New System

Homeless Action Scotland is supportive of the system in general to stay with the DWP. However, we agree that Housing Benefit should be devolved to Scotland to enable systems to sit in line with our own legislation.

Homeless Action can't see any benefit in taking on the costs and burden required to implement a new Scottish based system, that is likely to be created around that being worked on by the DWP. Any benefits system needs complexities, and it would be naïve to think that it could be person centred without offering and allowing for complexities.

We are in agreement that the stigma around those who are in receipt of benefits is problematic and needs planning and work for this to change. However, this would be more powerful to be UK wide, as it will take a drive that includes a shift in general media, and don't see it as a direct link to the actual systems used. This does not however mean that a campaign that is Scotland driven would not be a useful route towards changing the 'benefit scroungers' thoughts, misunderstanding and taglines.

Direct Payments to Landlords

Homeless Action Scotland is keen to ensure empowerment for claimants and for the decisions for who receive payments to sit with the claimant. We back the decision to pay UC directly to claimants as the default position. The payment options should be discussed, enabling a decision to be made with clear understanding of the options and expectations from all parties involved.

We would however recommend that Emergency Accommodation, Temporary Accommodation, Supported Accommodation, Refuges and Scatter flats with support, receive the payment directly to the Landlords. We have a number of very different supported accommodation options from the rest of the UK, and are currently at risk of losing the Housing benefit costs needed to retain them. These accommodation types are used when people are at their most vulnerable and often chaotic,

it doesn't benefit either the claimant or the landlord for this to sit under the same umbrella as a tenancy.

In addition to this, Homeless Action Scotland believes that there should be no waiting period (for any reason, including processing times) applied to these types of accommodation; the Housing Benefit should cover the costs from the time a claimant arrives to when they leave. There are numerous cases across the country where people will only remain in an accommodation place for a few days, this should not put financial pressure on the organisation running the accommodation. Equally, by short periods not being covered by Housing Benefit there may be people who are referred to an accommodation place, but have arrears from a previous stay through no fault of their own. This is likely to result in them avoiding using the accommodation, or there being problems with them being able to access the accommodation at all.

With emergency accommodation, the very nature of this is that it is for a very short stay until something more permanent is available (usually the following day, or on a Monday after a weekend). Organisations should not be penalised for agreeing to be part of an emergency accommodation provision.

More than 1 Payment per Household

Homeless Action Scotland believes that under no circumstances should there be one payment per household. If claimants choose to pool money together within a household, that is a matter for them to decide. Domestic abuse, gambling, addictions and problems with debts may have some allowances within the exemptions to how the new systems will run, but the reality of these being implemented by the DWP is that the majority of the cases will be missed, since many people will be reluctant to declare these matters. This is not a disparagement of the workers within the DWP, but of the nature of the issues, and the ability for these to be hidden and disguised.

Bedroom Tax & Discretionary Housing Payment

Homeless Action Scotland is in agreement that Bedroom Tax should be abolished, and Discretionary Housing Payment should be allowed to be a fund to help those in need, as it did prior to Bedroom tax. We would also urge there to be a stop on the thought process that DHP can fill all gaps that there is no policy or provision for. We would welcome efforts made to look at where DHP is needed and applied and where policies can be improved to prevent the need for such a 'one size fits all' pot of money.

Devolution of the Work Programme

Homeless Action Scotland is in agreement that it would be beneficial to claimants in Scotland for the Work Programme to be devolved. It would allow a system to have a greater understanding of the economic circumstances, difficulties and opportunities within an area, enabling the outcomes to be based upon the locality and options. It would also prevent difficulties arising from a lack of



understanding around geographical and transport difficulties: something our members have spoken of. However, we do not believe that employability should sit with Local Authorities. It is important that a person's housing security is not linked to their employment security; to avoid any potential conflict of interest. As a result, it would make sense for the employment functions and landlord function to be kept separate.

There is already the knowledge within existing employment organisations across the country, and this knowledge should be utilised.

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