

The First 105 Questions

The first 105 questions are grouped under the following seven headings:

1. Policy
2. Legislation
3. Finance
4. Delivery
5. Operational
6. Information Technology
7. Fraud and Error

1. Policy

- 1.1 What exactly is the Coalition Government policy on assistance with housing costs?
- 1.2 Was it always Conservative policy to abolish housing benefit?
- 1.3 Has a comprehensive decision been made on the respective roles of the local authority and the DWP/HMRC in relation to housing costs?
- 1.4 Will any role be mandatory?
- 1.5 Will there be a full equality impact assessment on the inclusion of housing costs in the Universal Credit?
- 1.6 Has a Risk Assessment been undertaken on the introduction of Universal Credit?
- 1.7 Is there any flexibility in the policy approach?
- 1.8 How do the proposed administrative arrangements meet the localism policy?
- 1.9 What is the policy on Universal Credit in Northern Ireland?
- 1.10 Has an impact analysis been undertaken on the extent to which the Universal Credit will damage rented private sector provision?
- 1.11 Was the inclusion of housing costs in the Universal Credit driven by the rising cost of housing benefit rather than efficiency and simplicity?
- 1.12 Why couldn't the rising cost of housing benefit be remedied by the control of rents in the private sector?

- 1.13 Was a detailed study undertaken of the relative performance of LA fraud teams, DWP teams and the HMRC before the decision was made to create one service?
- 1.14 Were Ministers made aware of the poor performance of DWP overpayment recovery in comparison to LA performance?
- 1.15 Were Ministers made aware of the poor performance of HMRC overpayment recovery in comparison to LA performance?
- 1.16 Is a Public Relations strategy in place for the Universal Credit?
- 1.17 If the answer is yes, can it be made public?

2. Legislation

- 2.1 Will the existing legislation on housing benefit and council tax benefit be repealed or will it be saved?
- 2.2 If the answer is repealed, would it not be sensible to save the provisions as a contingency measure?
- 2.3 What is the Parliamentary timetable in the Commons and the Lords?
- 2.4 The Bill seems to be deficient in certain areas, so are the Government prepared to insert new clauses including more enabling powers?
- 2.5 Why are there no enabling powers to allow subsidies to be paid to local authorities?
- 2.6 When will the draft regulations be available?
- 2.7 Will the Data Protection Act be amended to facilitate effective data sharing?
- 2.8 When will the Social Security Advisory Committee be consulted on the Universal Credit proposals?

3. Delivery

- 3.1 Can the overall Business Case for the delivery model be made publicly available?
- 3.2 Can the full Project Plan for Universal Credit be made publicly available?
- 3.3 What channels are going to be used to deliver the front line service?
- 3.4 Has an impact analysis of the delivery model been undertaken?

- 3.5 Will LA tenants accounts be credited with the housing benefit element of Universal Credit?
- 3.6 What will be the role of local authorities in the delivery of Universal Credit?
- 3.7 How will the new council tax benefit/relief/rebate be paid, as a credit to council tax accounts or as a cash payment?
- 3.8 What will be the data protocols between the DWP and LAs?
- 3.9 Will there be an independent performance monitoring system for the Universal Credit?
- 3.10 What will be the role of the Third Sector in the delivery of Universal Credit?
- 3.11 Who will deal with customer facing services for older people?
- 3.12 Where will the public customer access points be for “e” channels?
- 3.13 How will the DWP deal with the 9.2m people who have never accessed the internet?
- 3.14 Who will validate private sector tenancy information?
- 3.15 What will be the payment vehicle for Universal Credit?
- 3.16 If the answer is “electronically” by BACS, how is the Government going to facilitate the opening of bank accounts for claimants and potential claimants?
- 3.17 Will local authorities still be on the Government secure network after full implementation of Universal Credit?
- 3.18 If LA’s are not going to be allowed to assess entitlement will they be able to act as contractors for the service?
- 3.19 Will the Third Sector be able to act as contractors for the service?
- 3.20 How will accountability for performance be measured and monitored?
- 3.21 Is there a Programme Board for the project?
- 3.22 If there is a Programme Board, does it have any independent members?
- 3.23 How does the “Tell Us Once” project fit into the delivery model for Universal Credit?

4. Operational

- 4.1 What is the assessment unit for the Universal Credit?
- 4.2 How will non dependants be treated in the Universal Credit?
- 4.3 How will sub-tenants and lodgers be treated for Universal Credit?
- 4.4 What will happen to tenancies currently excluded from LHA?
- 4.5 What will happen to the supporting people fund, what, if any, mechanisms will prevent previously ineligible service charges seeping back into the housing element within Universal Credit?
- 4.6 How assured will DWP be that tenants are resident or liable to pay rent?
- 4.7 Many tenants do not have a written tenancy drawn up by an independent letting agent. It is easy to buy a standard agreement form in any stationers or over the internet. LA's have invested considerable resources in carrying out residency checks to ensure HB goes to legitimate tenants, will DWP adopt a similar strategy?
- 4.8 What powers will local authorities be given to recover residual overpayments after 2017?
- 4.9 Will the proposed power to 'fast track' attachments to earnings be given to local authorities?
- 4.10 Lord Freud mentioned in his video at the recent IRRV Benefit Conference the administration of the Social Fund. What role will local authorities play in this?
- 4.11 What measures will the government put in place to ensure claimants do not end up in substandard accommodation just because it is cheap and all they can afford?
- 4.12 Should the benefit entitlement be linked to good quality housing and accommodation that meets minimum standards of health and safety?
- 4.13 Will private tenants in cheap accommodation be protected by a "HIP style" pack on insulation and heating to ensure they are not spending every penny they have on metered heating?
- 4.14 What will happen to those claimants who currently do not receive any other benefit apart from HB/CTB?
- 4.15 How will a large single payment of Universal Credit help the most vulnerable with budgeting? Currently HB is paid either direct to the landlord or the claimant. When paid to the claimant it is easily

identifiable and separate from the other payments and so helps budgeting for those who find figures or money difficult to deal with?

- 4.16 What operational contingency plans do the DWP and HMRC have in place?
- 4.17 What investment in the private sector will the government be making to create job opportunities in each locality?
- 4.18 How will the “Welfare to Work” programme link into Universal Credit?
- 4.19 What investment in Universal Credit training will the government be making?
 - For its own staff?
 - For local authorities?
 - For the Third Sector?
 - For Adult Services?
 - For Social Services?
 - For other support services?

5. Finance

- 5.1 Why are there no saving powers in the Bill concerning finance?
- 5.2 When will we begin to see housing benefit subsidy being withdrawn?
- 5.3 When will we begin to see council tax benefit subsidy being withdrawn?
- 5.4 Will the DWP or the Treasury meet any consequential costs as a result of the change in legislation?
- 5.5 Why are there no enabling powers in the Bill to meet the costs of local authorities if they have a role in the new procedures?
- 5.6 Will any re-imbursement be 100% of LA costs incurred during the transition?
- 5.7 What are the funding arrangements for the introduction of the new fraud service?
- 5.8 Can the funding plans for Universal Credit delivery be made available?
- 5.9 Will the DWP finance redundancy and redeployment costs of staff affected by the transfer of powers?
- 5.10 Will the DWP finance any consequential staffing costs?
- 5.11 Will the DWP compensate local authorities for any contractual severance costs?

- 5.12 What will the pension arrangements be for transferred staff?
- 5.13 Will the DWP finance the pension costs for LA staff that opt for early retirement?
- 5.14 Will the DWP finance the set up costs for the new LA Fraud teams?
- 5.15 What are the subsidy arrangements for the new council tax benefit/relief/rebate?
- 5.16 Which Government department will fund the new council tax benefit/relief/rebate?

6. Information Technology

- 6.1 How long does the DWP expect local authorities to support legacy systems?
- 6.2 Why weren't LA software suppliers given the opportunity to tender for Universal Credit systems or the active PAYE system?
- 6.3 How were European procurement rules satisfied?
- 6.4 What are the contingency arrangements for delays or failure in the delivery of Universal Credit software?
- 6.5 What historic information will be needed for the transitional scheme?
- 6.6 Will LAs be reimbursed the cost of holding this information?
- 6.7 Will there be an interface with LA housing and council tax systems?
- 6.8 Will there be a need for LAs to support system development for any limited housing benefit role?
- 6.9 Will there be a need for LAs to have an interface to the Universal Credit systems?
- 6.10 What incentive is there for LA Software suppliers to continue support for a system that may die?
- 6.11 Will LA Software suppliers be compensated for the balance of their contracts by the DWP?
- 6.12 Who will fund the development of the Council Tax Benefit system?

7. Fraud and Error

- 7.1 What is the actual programme for the introduction of the new service?
- 7.2 What will be the geographic location of the new teams?
- 7.3 What is the structure of the recruitment programme for former local government staff to the new fraud service?
- 7.4 Will there be an independent performance audit of the new service?
- 7.5 What will the data demands of the new service on LAs?
- 7.6 Will there be any link with residue LA fraud services?
- 7.7 Who will investigate Council Tax Benefit Fraud under the proposed arrangements?
- 7.8 Will any services provided to LAs by the new service be free?
- 7.9 Will there be any specific powers to prosecute Council Tax Benefit Fraud?
- 7.10 How will the proposed service prioritise their work?