

Employment Support for Londoners affected by the benefit cap

London's offer and a protocol for working together

The London Benefit Cap Employment Taskforce



Department for
Communities and
Local Government



Introduction

During 2013, the government will set a cap on the total amount of benefits that each household in England can receive. The cap is set at £500 per week for couples and lone parents and £350 per week for single adults.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) estimates that 27,000 households in London will be affected by the cap, around half of all affected households nationally.

Households will be exempt from the benefits cap if anyone in that household is eligible for Working Tax Credit; that is, they are working for at least 16 hours a week, or up for 24 hours a week for a couple household.

Finding employment will mean households can avoid the benefit cap. A key challenge is developing co-ordinated support from a range of different agencies operating local, regional and national programmes, that is responsive enough to meet the needs of individual households, but does not result in multiple approaches or interventions – all within a tight timescale. The benefit cap started in four London boroughs (Bromley, Croydon, Enfield and Haringey) on 15 April 2013 and will roll-out nationally during 2013.

All the main agencies involved need to set up effective mechanisms for joint working and a joint offer that makes the most of existing resources for employment support. This will vary across London, reflecting different communities, support structures and levels of resources across the capital.

This document sets out:

- our joint ambitions for helping those affected by the benefit cap to find a job
- how London boroughs and DWP/Jobcentreplus (JCP) will work together and with others to provide effective employment support for those affected by the benefit cap
- what the 'offer' is from the main agencies that will provide employment support for affected households across London.

It includes examples of where the main agencies are working together well at a local level, and innovative approaches to providing employment support to people who are likely to have been out of work for long periods of time.

The aim is to assist service providers across the capital to deliver effective employment support, by establishing a clear offer around services available from each of the main agencies, and to help achieve a consistency of offer across London and better co-ordination of services between agencies.

Developing joint ambitions

All partners need to be clear about what they are trying to achieve and the outcomes they are working towards. These ambitions will vary across different parts of London but are based on common principles set out below.

Given the importance of helping individuals affected by the benefit cap to find a job, and the scale of the impact in the capital, London boroughs, JCP, DWP and Work Programme providers will jointly:

- establish collaborative partnership arrangements to ensure there is a cohesive employment and housing support offer that appropriately prioritises benefit cap claimants
- contact and explain the implications and impact of the benefit cap to all those affected by it and co-ordinate this activity locally
- agree any targeting of employment support locally; identifying which provider is best placed to provide the relevant employment support
- define what success looks like for employment support to those affected by the benefit cap at the local authority level - for example, agreeing that x per cent of those affected by the cap move into employment and become exempt from the cap by July 2013
- agree an action plan to achieve success, with a clear contribution from all partners; identifying clear outcomes for this work and any gaps in provision - this plan will ensure that all people indicating that they require employment support will receive it
- track progress towards local ambitions and outcomes for getting residents into work.

Enfield benefit cap taskforce strategy

There are more than 2,000 households in Enfield that will be affected by the benefit cap. Enfield council and DWP have created a co-located joint taskforce to join up the work of local agencies. A steering group meets monthly to drive the direction and strategy of the taskforce.

The taskforce focuses predominantly on giving specialist employment advice and support to those customers who are hardest hit, but will co-ordinate support from across the council and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) if the individual has non-employment barriers, such as housing or debt. The focus of the work is on:

- prioritising households that will be affected by more than £100 and live in private rented accommodation by giving them specialist one-to-one support
- customers that are referred from Jobcentres who either have significant non-employment related barriers; or with whom the Jobcentre has been unable to engage and engagement outside the Jobcentre is more suitable; and
- holding drop-in sessions around the borough aimed at certain community groups, targeted primarily at Income Support and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) customers.

The taskforce co-ordinates efforts by checking that customers referred by the council are receiving appropriate employment support from the local Jobcentre and co-ordinating an awareness campaign across the borough, producing leaflets, using the media and via customer and community representation groups. The taskforce is tracking all the cases they deal with in terms of engagement, progress and outcomes centrally through one database. They are also updating both JCP and council systems.

How will we work together?

There will be different delivery models across London to providing employment support to those affected by the benefit cap. We need a flexible approach to joint working from all involved. However, there are some key characteristics and behaviours that are essential to making this work well on the ground, whatever the actual delivery model. These are:

- **a willingness to share and pool resources** – for example, providing staffing; aligning funding; jointly commissioning provision; co-ordinating communications and publicity to those claimants affected by the benefit cap
- **a case conferencing approach** – agreeing the best course of action for individuals and who is best placed to deliver this
- **providing up-to-date information** – this is particularly important when we are working with vulnerable households whose circumstances may change. The key statutory agencies, such as the London boroughs and DWP/JCP, need to inform partners of any change in circumstances for households in a timely manner
- **transparency around progress and performance** – to share management and other information on progress towards achieving local outcomes and progressing claimants towards a job, wherever possible.

Lewisham Universal Credit pilot

Lewisham council has developed an approach for working with vulnerable residents that integrates preparation for the benefit cap with wider welfare reforms. It is part of DWP's national local authority-led pilot programme. A team has been set up comprising officers from the council's housing benefits and housing needs teams and Jobcentreplus. They provide integrated support to 724 residents affected by the benefit cap across housing, employment, digital and financial spheres, to focus on:

- budgeting and managing monthly payments
- sustaining tenancies in the social and private rented sector
- transacting with government services online
- accessing employment and work-focused training.

There are four high level steps in the process:

1. A letter is sent to the customer explaining the key welfare changes and providing them with an estimate of the financial loss from the benefit cap. The letter is designed to elicit engagement in the support process.
2. The claimant is contacted for a triage assessment over the 'phone, which focuses on skills and experience in each of the areas above. The results of the assessment determine whether a support appointment is required.
3. A face-to-face appointment is conducted, initially taking the person through an individual level calculation, focusing on the financial impact of the benefit cap and returning to work after the cap. The results from this bespoke calculator help to build the case for change and lead officers into the support segment of the appointment. This covers each of the four support areas in turn, identifying referral routes with a strong focus on work as the solution to the benefit cap.
4. An individualised support plan is created with warm referrals to key agencies who will be responsible for providing on-going support tailored to the individual needs identified.

Data sharing

It is crucial to effectively join-up services so that agencies can jointly track the progress of different interventions, particularly if they are referring individuals to different services and agencies. However, we need to do this in line with the Data Protection Act and guidelines set out by the Information Commissioner.

Information on affected households

DWP has provided a number of scans to both local authorities¹ and JCP district offices² on those claimants that would be affected by the cap. This data can be shared internally within councils and JCP has cross-checked with list of existing service users, but not externally with other partners.

Scans have been sent to both parties at the following intervals: April 2012; July 2012; September 2012; January 2013; March 2013.

Irrespective of the frequency of future DWP scans, JCP in London will provide progress updates on a monthly basis.

DWP issued a one-off scan to Work Programme providers in June 2012. This highlighted current Work Programme customers affected by the benefit cap. This scan will not be repeated. From now on DWP identifies individuals affected by the benefit cap at the point of referral to the Work Programme by annotating the individual's action plan or referral document.

DWP has published Benefit Cap Management Information (MI) externally during March 2013 that included: numbers into work, numbers registered on JCP administrative data (LMS) as engaged in employment support, number of home visits completed etc. In the future this information could be available by each JCP office and provide the basis for borough level data. Future data releases are under discussion within DWP.

JCP and DWP will look to use administrative data on the benefit cap (that can inform progress and service development), rather than official data that has too long a time-lag to inform progress and shape employment support to households affected by the benefit cap.

Data flows between boroughs, DWP and other partners should be clear, consistent and comprehensive.

Tracking and monitoring progress

DWP and JCP advocate exchange of information through close partnership working at delivery level, such as joint task forces and co-location, and through case conferencing, made permissible through individual signed consent.

The following legislation allows for exchange of information in this way:

Section 13 of the Social Security (Claims & Information) Regulations 1999 allows DWP to supply employment and training information (for example, whether someone is participating in a training course) to a local authority for use by the local authority in "...connection with the provision (pursuant to arrangements made by the SoS) of advice, support and assistance which that individual may need in order to acquire or enhance their skills and qualifications with a view to improving their prospects of finding and retaining employment."

This also allows a local authority to provide employment and training information to DWP to ensure that there is no overlap of support that DWP is providing or planning.

1. Contains the following fields: National Insurance Number/Title/First name/Surname/Address/Correspondence address/Tel number/Number of children/Amount of potential cap/Local Housing Allowance case payable at maximum rent? (Yes/No)/Local authority code/Type of property/Number of bedrooms in current property/Previously issued a direct mail indicator
2. Contains the following fields: National Insurance Number/Title/First name/Surname/Address/Correspondence address/Telephone number/Lone parent? (Yes/No)/Benefit type - ie IS,JSA,ESA,Other/JCP district/Local Authority/Jobcentre office - ie number and name/Fallout category/Direct mail required? (Yes/No)/Appointee title/Appointee first name/Appointee surname/Appointee address/Appointee telephone number/Household identifier/ Partners un-encrypted National Insurance Number

Current regulations (Section 131 of the Welfare Reform Act 2012) were amended on **1 April 2013** to extend the scope of data sharing in relation to Welfare Services. Three changes allow the following data sharing on individuals:

- data sharing between local authorities and their third party partners where they deliver the Troubled Families Programme
- data sharing with local authorities for the purpose of evaluation and monitoring of the programme
- changing the reference from 'the' Troubled Families Programme to 'a' Troubled Families programme, to enable data sharing to continue beyond the life of the programme when it ends in 2015.

However, these changes still do not allow providers delivering the ESF Troubled Families Programme, such as Reed, to share their performance management data with local authorities and relevant partners.

Currently, Work Programme providers cannot share their management information with local authorities, as this data has to be cleared and issued following Official Statistics regulations.

Integrating Work Programme providers and Reed as part of local taskforces and working groups on the benefit cap should enable some exchange of anecdotal information, sharing collective information of progress of those affected by the benefit cap and the type of support they are receiving on these programmes.

What is the offer in London?

London borough offer

London boroughs are well placed to take a leading role in developing support for benefit cap households, as community leaders, providers of housing and administrators of housing benefit (through which the cap will be administered initially). London boroughs will:

- set up and support a local taskforce/working group to develop and oversee a local package of employment support, alongside housing advice, financial support and other relevant support
- work closely with partners to agree ways of contacting households about the benefit cap and support available
- provide a designated lead contact for benefit work within the borough
- integrate any local employment support available as part of the local offer to households
- contribute to action plans for each vulnerable individual affected by the cap
- be clear on their priorities for using the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) locally with partners
- share data on progress of individuals referred to any borough run or commissioned employment support (with consent).

This is a core offer. London boroughs may provide additional support depending on both local service provision, the volume of claimants affected locally and individuals' barriers to getting a job.

Brent's welfare reform team

Brent council has established a welfare reform team that includes a JCP outreach worker and council staff from the housing and revenues and benefits teams. All residents affected by the cap and living in temporary accommodation are being visited at their homes by a team member and being advised on their options. Where a claimant expresses a desire to work, they are referred to JCP. The team is currently monitoring whether these people subsequently take up this offer.

The team is currently:

- Exploring whether to establish additional provision for people on income support using the JCP Flexible Support Fund that is tailored to more vulnerable households.
- Establishing a process whereby those claimants not going onto JCP are supported by Brent's new Navigator team. The Navigators will work with vulnerable households, helping them to access services and adopting a case management approach. The desired outcome for each household is that at least one member gets a job and stays in it.

JCP/DWP offer

JCP's ambition in London is to see the benefit cap implemented in full with no significant adverse reaction from the public or key stakeholders. All JCP advisers are active around the benefit cap, including visiting officers when affected customers are not responding, and compliance officers, working with borough counterparts, where there are discrepancies in claim details. JCP/DWP in London will:

- work in partnership on borough level task force/working groups to coordinate activity and maximise resources
- run a direct mail campaign supported by a national helpline, signposting claimants to jobcentres for employment support and London boroughs for housing support
- run an outbound call campaign supported by visits for vulnerable customers to ensure that all benefit cap claimants are aware of the implications of the cap and offered appropriate support - this will be co-ordinated with local partners where possible
- take part in joint presentations to people impacted by the benefit cap and help to organise group sessions
- provide resource for additional Jobcentre Adviser interventions, including two-week and four-week intensive work preparation courses for individuals affected by the benefit cap
- open up employment support to all benefit cap claimants, delivered through, the Jobcentre offer (including Flexible Support Fund), the Work Programme and Work Choice provision
- provide access to financial support for individuals through JCP advisers, using Flexible Support Fund
- work in partnership in outreach sites, for example local authority premises, children centres, community centres, neighbourhood and housing offices and within Jobcentres, such as hosting local authority employment advisers on site, alongside other providers, subject to spatial constraints
- work in partnership to identify and address any gaps in provision locally, including considering the use of Flexible Support Fund.

This is a core offer. Options for more tailored, local support should be discussed with JCP office or partnership managers. A list key JCP contacts in London is available at the end of this document.

Haringey Hub

Haringey council and DWP staff are working as one Haringey team, co-located within the local authority. In the Hub, claimants can access money saving advice, employment, benefits and housing support, as well as advice on childcare and skills. JCP's visiting team is also based there. The Hub team agrees the joint desired outcome for each resident. The visiting team is prioritising its visits and working closely with the Troubled Families borough team.

The team is currently exploring if the Citizens Advice Bureau can join the Hub to enhance the support offer. The Hub team has clear performance objectives to support affected individuals into jobs. Senior managers are monitoring the results of the Hub weekly at a joint steering group to decide whether and where further resource is needed.

Work Programme offer

It is estimated that around 3,000 people affected by the cap will already be receiving support via the Work Programme in London. JCP London has requested that Work Programme providers identify those affected by the benefit cap so that urgent action can be taken to refer them to additional support, where required and to prioritise individuals affected by the benefit cap within their own provision. Alongside the support offer to any Work Programme participants, as a minimum Work Programme providers will:

- provide Work Programme representation on and participate in local taskforces/working groups developing and implementing employment support for households affected by the cap
- provide access to the additional JCP two-week and four-week intensive work preparation courses for individu-

als affected by the benefit cap, via referrals to JCP and subject to JCP acceptance

- provide access to the primes own on-going specialist support around debt and budgeting, where appropriate
- offer post-employment support lasting for up to six months for those who find work
- the full Work Programme offer is available to benefit cap customers after three months unemployment, although if they have an underlying alternative reason (such as an ex offender on release from prison) this could be earlier.

ESF Troubled Families offer

ESF Families with Multiple Problems links to the DCLG Troubled Families agenda. DCLG's aim is to work with 120,000 of the most troubled families, delivered through local authorities. A referral to the ESF Families provision is part of the package of support available to the most troubled families.

The aim of the programme is to support the family and move them closer to ,or into, work. It is delivered by Reed in Partnership across London. The provision is aimed at families where:

- at least one person in the household is claiming a working age benefit
- there is a history of inter-generational worklessness with no positive role model for children
- there are a number of barriers to work .

Where a customer is participating in the Work Programme they are not eligible for the Families Programme. However, other adult members of their family can participate in the programme.

Local authorities are the primary route for referrals, although other organisations can identify and refer customers. JCP is also supporting the programme by signposting JSA customers who meet eligibility criteria.

Customers who engage with the Families provision work towards the achievement of at least three progress measures. These include parenting classes, anger management, debt management, housing difficulties, drug/alcohol dependency, lack of basic skills, ESOL needs etc.

Housing associations offer

Housing associations are important partners in implementing and dealing with welfare reform. They are not only landlords to Londoners affected by the benefit cap and other welfare reforms; a number provide their own employment support schemes for their tenants. Some can provide job opportunities from within their own workforce. Housing associations across London vary in size and provide housing to a range of different communities. Consequently, the proportion of their tenants affected by the benefit cap varies as well. Many housing associations are providing employment support to their residents affected by welfare reforms. As with London boroughs, this support can also include:

- advice on housing options and support to move home where appropriate
- financial advice and support – budgeting, managing debts
- support for digital inclusion in preparation for the introduction of Universal Credit.

The housing association offer could include:

- housing association representation on, and participation in, local taskforces/working groups developing and implementing support for households affected by the benefit cap, where appropriate
- exchanging information with boroughs on housing association tenant households affected by the benefit cap, including information on support provided to them and progress made
- providing access for households affected by the benefit cap to their own employment support schemes and any other relevant schemes, such as housing and financial support, where available and appropriate; or referring households to appropriate local employment support schemes.

Key contacts for London Jobcentre Plus Districts

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