

APPENDIX 7

DWP Information Paper Homelessness

Current DWP strategies during rollout of Welfare reform changes:

DWP is supporting the Local Authority establish the Local Support Services Framework to enhance the effective mapping of available provision within Southampton including digital inclusion, financial/debt management, and triage.

DWP works collaboratively in Southampton actively participating in Connect, the Welfare Reform Group, anti poverty meetings, Southampton Skills Development Zone and with a range of other Partnership organisations to maximise opportunities for homeless claimants.

DWP is developing models of cross organisational working e.g. working with Homeless Link in a forthcoming event to facilitate direct contact between frontline homelessness support workers and JCP frontline coaches to engender greater understanding and more collaborative working.

DWP is undertaking Claimant Commitment presentations to frontline support workers to enable them to support homeless clients to meet conditionality rules, thereby reducing the use of sanctions. There will be greater focus on diagnosing individual needs and providing an appropriate level of support.

DWP is strengthening the relationship between Voluntary and Community Sector key-workers and Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches generally through input to Claimant Commitment to consider how any homeless claimant's situation affects the steps that are reasonable for them to take to find work.

DWP believes we can do more to help tackle the challenging circumstances faced by some homeless claimants, particularly those who have experienced rough-sleeping. Consequently we will be introducing changes that give our Work Coaches the scope to treat some homeless claimants as available for and actively seeking work for a temporary period while they focus on finding accommodation. Allowing these homeless claimants time to focus on finding sustainable living accommodation is an appropriate and reasonable step towards the stability that will better enable them to find work in the future. We expect to implement this change later in the year following the introduction of amended legislation.

Support provided by Jobcentre Work Coaches:

The role of a Jobcentre Work Coach is to provide advice and help related to the receipt of the correct benefits, jobs, training and to help the jobseeker into work by breaking the cycle of no job, no home: no home, no job.

Jobcentre Work Coaches familiarise themselves with details of their Local Authority housing team and the process for signposting appropriate claimants to them for assistance.

Within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) a homeless person is defined as any individual a Jobcentre Work Coach identifies as disadvantaged by the lack of accommodation or where the claimant perceives that their lack of permanent accommodation is a barrier to employment or training. The Person With out Accommodation (PWA) marker is set on our computer systems for these claimants so homeless claimants can be identified and support targeted.

Whilst homeless people may have some common problems each person is treated as an individual case. The difficulties which the individual faces will vary depending on their housing circumstances and any other personal problems they may have, for example, drug and alcohol misuse, a background in offending, behavioural problems, mental health issues etc.

People sleeping rough and those in insecure accommodation face severe barriers to employment. They can spend much of their time concentrating on survival so searching for a job can be a problem.

When a claimant with one or more of these barriers to work is identified by a Jobcentre Work Coach they are referred to available appropriate provision.

Work Coaches identify appropriate provision that focuses on the needs of ex-offenders/offenders, homeless and drug/alcohol misusers in Southampton and consider the best option for the individual. Get Britain Working measures as well as specialist providers provide support to help claimants prepare for, and find, work.

Jobcentre Work Coaches are not equipped to counsel homeless people or take on the role of a Social Worker. However, having an insight into some of the problems homeless people face might assist with building rapport, showing understanding/empathy and result in the claimant's self disclosure or the identification of an individual's circumstances and barriers to work.

Because their circumstances are compounded by other problems, homeless people are instantly at a disadvantage in the labour market.

Rough sleepers may find it difficult to look clean and presentable. This can discourage potential employers and may also deter jobseekers from applying for jobs.

Homeless people could also well be suffering from one or more of the following:

- Cold
- Hunger
- Depression
- Poor diet
- Ill health
- Loneliness
- Frustration
- Embarrassment at their predicament
- A feeling of isolation
- Stress, and
- Lack of sleep.

The lack of security, privacy and a place to go are likely to have a serious effect on self esteem, morale and motivation.

A homeless person's priorities will be:

- Finding a place to sleep
- Keeping warm, and
- Getting a hot meal.

Addresses for temporary bed and breakfast accommodation may be well known to Jobcentre Work Coaches and may help in identifying a homeless person. Hostel addresses are checked through the Homeless Link database

Once their homeless status has been identified, any advice offered by a Jobcentre Work Coach to a claimant will depend on what the individual and their Work Coach considers to be a barrier to work and the specific factors affecting their job search.

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CURRENT GUIDANCE FOR DWP WORK COACHES

This guidance is used when constructing a Claimant Commitment for a homeless person in terms of what they are required to do to look for work. There is some easement currently available under the domestic emergency guidance which I have also included.

There are proposed changes to legislation, that will give DWP Work Coaches the scope to treat some homeless claimants as available for and actively seeking work for a temporary period while they focus on finding accommodation.

This would go beyond the scope of the current easement under the domestic emergency guidance below.

Claimants with no living accommodation:

If a claimant has no living accommodation, or is living in temporary accommodation, it may be difficult for them to be contacted by anyone offering employment or help in obtaining employment. They may also need to spend much of their time searching for accommodation.

220. Take both these factors into account when considering what steps it is reasonable for a claimant without accommodation to take in a week. The JSAg/CC will need to be varied once accommodation is found.

221. A claimant who is newly homeless may benefit from an easement from the conditionality requirements under the domestic emergency provision in order to find accommodation. It is less likely that a long term or habitually homeless claimant will be able to benefit from the domestic emergency easement as for them, being without anywhere to live may not necessarily be classed as a domestic emergency. However, each case should be considered on its own merits.

222. If the claimant does not wish to avail themselves of the domestic emergency provision or it is not appropriate, they must still be available for and actively seeking employment. Being homeless may limit the actions a claimant can take but they could still search for work.

223. However, the fact that they will be seeking accommodation as well as seeking work should be taken into account. Depending on the individual circumstances of each claimant, it may be reasonable to allow priority to be given to their search for a home over their search for a job at least at the start of their claim or period of homelessness.

Domestic Emergency

60. Claimants can be treated as available for employment for up to a week at a time, for a maximum of 4 times in a year. The periods can run consecutively if appropriate

61. For some claimants, becoming homeless could be classed as a domestic emergency and consideration should be given to extending a conditionality easement in these circumstances.