

**Open Letter
To All Interested Parties**

**David Sillifant-Chair
Jane Royle-Vice Chair
c/o Inclusion Cornwall
County Hall
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18 October 2017

Dear Colleagues

I am writing to you at the behest of the Steering Group of Inclusion Cornwall and extended partners, who discussed the impact of Universal Credit(UC) in Cornwall on Friday 13th October 2017. The organisations listed below support the content of this letter.

We understand and welcome the objectives of UC bringing together 6 benefits:-

1. Simplifying the system
2. Better off in work
3. Easier to move in and out of work
4. Advantages of in work payments

In addition the group welcomed the development of the Work Coach role being able to spend more time with the customer and progression for the individual through the claimant commitment. The group welcomed the role of the vulnerable customer leads and the growing community role of the Job Centre.

The issues identified amongst partners focused on **system problems** causing anxiety and pushing people into debt, although it was accepted that many will already be in debt the system could make this worse. Current issues for Cornwall include:-

1. Delayed Payments for new Claims – 42 day wait
2. Delayed Payments for change in circumstances
3. Rent Arrears (RSL's say 80% of arrears due to UC)
4. Cut in work allowance
5. Other debts such as Utility were increasing amongst customers
6. Claimants complain that universal credit is bafflingly, complex, unreliable, and difficult to manage, particularly if you are without internet access or working variable hours/ short term jobs
7. 20% of Cornwall not on line – customers require better access to IT
8. Resources available may be limited – getting a clear message out to all is essential.
9. Short term advancement can cause greater debt and is unlikely to cover need
10. In work deductions are causing customers problems as people move in and out of work
11. Customers should not have to rely on crisis and care who would not be able to cover costs
12. If sanctioned a customer cannot pay rent

Suggested actions for partners

1. Support JCP with promoting their stakeholder events
2. Agreement to work across organisations to support customers
3. Welcome the work being carried out by Cornwall Council and JCP but accept it needs to go further.

In light of the mounting evidence of the problems caused by long delays in benefit payments - long-term debt, rent arrears and evictions, and the resulting impact on individual and family relationships, anxiety and depression - we urge partners across Cornwall to work together on two levels:-

1. At the local level making use of foodbanks, clothes banks, church group and often very local opportunities. The Inclusion Cornwall Hub will ensure information is available and partners can add to this resource.
2. Make a clear statement that Cornwall questions a system that is pushing people into greater hardship which results in a greater cost to the customer and to services who have to pick up the costs of additional support.

Key Proposals

1. Develop the idea of a **revolving fund** (possibly from Crowdfunding) to ensure people are not disadvantaged by a system. Develop a way in which Cornwall can support those most at risk from the roll out of UC and UC system.
2. Support partners to understand the link between UC and economic inclusive growth. Our ESA customers want to work and need to part of Cornwall's sustainable economic future. No one should be left behind.
3. The public at large should know about the issues facing our customers and be given accurate information they can trust.

There is support available in Cornwall but this should not be used without question. We wish to see greater joint working to ensure no one in Cornwall suffers as a result of the system.

Yours sincerely



David Sillifant
Chair
Inclusion Cornwall

"Our young parents at WILD are increasingly anxious about universal credit. I can now help give them more information and instruct staff too. I'll get in touch with JCP too and book on to their key worker training. I'm also doing some work with our young parents around dispelling myths we see in the media and where to trust information from as there has been a stark increase in incorrect reporting about the impact UC is having and extreme situations being broadcast as the norm."

WILD Young Parents Project

Addaction
Citizens Advice Cornwall
CN4C
Coastline Housing
Cornwall Housing
Cornwall Community Development Ltd
Cornwall Residential Landlords Association
disAbility Cornwall & Isles of Scilly
Inclusion Cornwall
Menopause Self-care
Portheden Crisis Project
United Response
WILD Young Parents Project