

## Tenant-Led Scrutiny Report Number 3



### Executive Summary



### An investigation in to the management of rent arrears of those newly transferring to Universal Credit

This scrutiny exercise was produced by the Tenant-led Scrutiny Pool known as SIFT (Scrutiny, Involvement For Tenants) supported by an Independent Tenant Advisor.

The second topic chosen by SIFT to scrutinise was “How does the Income Recovery Team manage the rent arrears of tenants newly

transferring to Universal Credit?” In order to ensure the scrutiny explores current practice the timeframe for the investigation was set to only consider new Universal Credit claims from May until November 2017.

The purpose of the exercise was to:

- Explore what services are provided and how they are provided
- Examine what range of support is provided to tenants to enable them to reduce their rent arrears
- Recommend, where appropriate, changes to service provision.

### Methods used to Scrutinise the Service

The methods used on this scrutiny included:

- Briefings by service managers
- Desktop review of relevant policies, procedures, complaints and performance information
- Assessment of relevant complaints
- Mystery Shopping exercise
- Staff Focus Group
- Staff shadowing.

The main findings included:

- Some Universal Credit claimants are not contacted by YHN for an initial interview within the first five weeks of their claim
- Some claimants felt pressurised by YHN to pay rent when they had not yet received their first Universal Credit payment
- YHN Housing Hub staff are helpful and supportive when asked face-to-face for advice about Universal Credit
- YHN Housing Hubs generally do not display Universal Credit advice leaflets or advice about how to access, for example food bank vouchers
- There are not enough fit for purpose computers available for use by claimants and staff in the Housing Hubs
- The arrears letters sent out by the Income Recovery Team to Universal Credit claimants are the same as those sent to tenants who are not claiming

SIFT's main recommendations are:

- The Income Recovery Officer should contact new claimants within seven days of them making a claim
- The rent arrears letters to UC claimants within the first five weeks of a claim should be reworded in recognition of the UC claim
- Paper advice leaflets for UC claimants should be developed, including one on how to use their Journal
- Advice leaflets should be available in Housing Hubs and offered at a claimants first interview
- More up to date computers should be provided in the Housing Hubs for claimants and staff
- The computers the Income Recovery Officers use should be fit for purpose and have relevant software
- Phone chargers should be available in the Housing Hubs

- YHN should not take a rent payment from a claimant's account by Direct Debit before the due date.

**The full report details the findings and recommendations of this scrutiny exercise, which took place during January, February and March 2018. The report can be accessed by contacting [Ashleigh.Fullwood@sift-newcastle.org](mailto:Ashleigh.Fullwood@sift-newcastle.org) or calling 07707 013 417.**