

Universal Credit

Getting Ready for Universal Credit (UC)

Is UC in your area yet?

Universal Credit is the new benefit administered by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), for working age people on a low income or unemployed. Residents in **Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Hartfield, Swale, Medway & Folkestone** are already in the universal credit full service area. However, from this month July 2018, some new benefit claimants and some people who are on benefits now in **Canterbury, Colchester & Dartford** but whose circumstances change, may have to claim Universal Credit.

UC will be rolled out in the following areas soon:

- Wandsworth Borough (September 2018)
- Hart District Council & Bexley/Sidcup (October 2018)
- Tonbridge (November 2018)
- Camden Borough, Dacorum & Milton Keynes (December 2018)

Universal Credit is different from any benefits or tax credits you may currently receive, and you must be ready to manage your claim online. The DWP, various councils and other organisations are ready to help residents understand and prepare for the changes.

Universal Credit replaces these six benefits:

- Child Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- Income-Based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income-Related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)

What is the difference between UC and your current benefits?

- It needs to be claimed online
- It's paid directly to you and not your landlord
- It's paid monthly, and the housing element is paid in arrears
- It's paid into your bank, building society or similar, such as a Credit Union account

How will Universal Credit affect your rent?

- If you currently receive Housing Benefit, or have your Housing Benefit directly paid to us, your entitlement will stop 2 weeks after the date you claim Universal Credit
- There is at least a five-week delay between applying for Universal Credit and getting your first payment, so it is important to start thinking about what you need to do now
- You will be responsible for paying your rent directly to us (**but you can ask your housing element to come directly to us**)
- If you are worried about coping with universal credit, paying your rent, or you are falling into arrears, contact your Income Recovery Officer/Housing Officer, or local advice agencies for help and support.

PLEASE NOTE: You must claim council tax reduction directly from the council because universal credit will not include an amount for council tax

Who can claim Universal Credit?

- You must be over 18 but under pension credit age
- If between 16-17 you can still claim, if you meet the relevant conditions
- If you are above pension credit age you won't be affected by Universal Credit
- If you already claim benefits, they will carry on as usual, the DWP will contact you to advise when Universal Credit will affect you

PLEASE NOTE: If you have more than 2 children, even if universal credit comes into your area, you cannot claim universal credit until later next year.

What you can do to prepare for Universal Credit?

1. Get a bank account

Universal Credit will be paid into a bank, building society or credit union account that lets you make automated payments. It would be useful to set up Direct Debit or Standing Orders to help prioritise your rent or other payments

2. Get an email address and get online

Most people will need to manage their Universal Credit claim online, and you will need an email address to claim. To get online, ask at your local Jobcentre Plus office, CAB or Credit Union who have all received funding to assist UC claimants to get online. You can also take a free basic course on using the internet <https://www.learnmyway.com/>

3. Improve your computer skills

You can learn how to use a computer free contact your local library, the council, other advice agencies and by visiting: <https://www.gov.uk/ukonline-centre-internet-access-computer-training>

4. Budget your monthly payments

You will need to pay your rent, council tax and any other living costs every month. UC is paid monthly so if you are used to budgeting weekly or fortnightly, you will need to manage your money across a whole month. Your Work Coach at Jobcentre Plus can help you get independent advice around budgeting. **The Money Advice Service can also help and have various tools you can use to budget.** <https://www.moneyadviceservice.org.uk/en/tools/budget-planner/budget/edit/income>

5. Speak to our Welfare Benefit Advisor Maureen so she can help you

Email: Maureen.bello@cds.coop

Call: 0203 096 7741