

ADVICE NI POLICY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2019



Welcome to the annual digest of the Advice NI policy eNewsletters '... think ...'.

IMPORTANT: In order to receive '...think...' you must click [this link](#).

This has been the first year for '... think ...', and we have received very encouraging feedback. We aim to continue keeping Advice NI members and supporters updated with Welfare Reform and Social Policy developments.

We are also keen to illustrate how Advice NI, and the sector as a whole, is challenging the status quo to protect the most vulnerable in society. This is because the changes in the benefit landscape arguably most impact on the disabled and impoverished (whether in or out of work).

Please email us at policy@adviceni.net to discuss any policy matters, content, feedback or comments.

We'd be happy to share ideas on areas to focus on, content suggestions and other ways of getting involved.

Best regards,
The Policy Team.

REFLECTION

Recent changes in legislation have had a punitive effect on benefits claimants, exacerbating the cycle of poverty and need.

It is frustrating that we do not have a functioning Assembly, Minister or scrutiny Committee to oversee, guide and mitigate these important changes.

The Department for Communities is responsible for delivering social security in NI; it is also responsible for tackling poverty and heading up on poverty. There is a growing concern about a disconnect in accountability in terms of its current actions and current path:

For example:

- PIP - our advisers are raising issues on a daily basis, in particular regarding the PIP assessment, the role of PIP decision makers and fundamentally the place of the claimant within the process;
- UC - the fiasco surrounding cake for staff when UC claimants are waiting for at least 5 weeks for a first payment. They are going hungry, going to foodbanks and falling into rent arrears;
- Welfare Reform Mitigations - we are facing a March 2020 cliff edge (for example 34,000 claimants affected by the bedroom tax both in and out of work getting help to the tune of £22million per year) and we have a Department failing to plan to ensure the necessary systems and arrangements are in place to continue the mitigations beyond 2020 or even failing to acknowledge that there is an issue;

The Department needs to re-focus and stand up for people relying on its services.

1ST YEAR OF '...THINK...'

As this has been the first year of '...think...', you can find below links to all six issues.

May edition:

<https://www.adviceni.net/blog/advice-ni-policy-newsletter-may-2018>

June edition:

<https://www.adviceni.net/blog/advice-ni-policy-newsletter-june-2018>

July edition:

<https://www.adviceni.net/blog/advice-ni-policy-newsletter-july-2018>

September edition:

<https://www.adviceni.net/blog/advice-ni-policy-newsletter-september-2018>

October edition:

<https://www.adviceni.net/blog/advice-ni-policy-newsletter-october-2018>

December edition:

<https://www.adviceni.net/blog/advice-ni-policy-newsletter-december-2018>

HIGHLIGHTS

Proposals on Universal Credit: How to make it better' July 2018

https://www.adviceni.net/sites/default/files/publications/making_uc_better.pdf

A guide to help avoid sanctions

https://www.adviceni.net/sites/default/files/downloads/sanctions_guide_2018.pdf

Welfare Reform: Mitigations on a Cliff Edge

<https://www.adviceni.net/blog/mitigations-%E2%80%98cliff-edge%E2%80%99>

Northern Ireland 'faces cliff edge' if welfare help ends

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-46411402>

View Magazine: Stories from the Front Line

<http://viewdigital.org/2018/07/31/latest-issue-of-view-stories-from-the-frontline/>

'End of Mission' Statement by United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23881&LangID=E>

Second Annual Report published on the Welfare Supplementary Payments

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/dfc-annual-report-welfare-supplementary-payments-2017-2018.pdf>

Latest biannual report produced on households which have lost bedroom tax mitigation

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/communities/dfc-sssc-welfare-supplementary-payments-apr18-sept18.pdf>

POLICY UPDATES

Kevin Higgins, Head of Policy has been seeking clarification on new and existing matters. Below is a list of the matters which he feels are most prevalent at this time. If you have any further comments or feedback please contact Kevin on policy@adviceni.net.

PIP (Capita Complaints)

Advice NI sought clarification regarding the Capita complaints process:

DfC: The process (including contact details) for making a complaint about Capita in NI;

- By email – a customer can email complaintsNI@capita-pip.co.uk with their concerns. It is worth noting this email address will not accept attachments to the email. If there is an attachment the email will be rejected in its entirety.
- By telephone – a customer can call the NI Enquiry Centre on 0808 1788 116. The Enquiry Centre is then able to pass the call through to the Customer Relations Team
- By Post – a customer can post a complaint letter directly to Capita as follows;
Capita PIP Complaints
PO Box 392

Darlington
DL1 9UJ

A reconsideration or preparation of an appeal submission will be put on hold pending a complaint response.

Universal Credit: Log-In

Advice NI queried the process when a UC claimant forgets their log-in details.

DfC: If a claimant has forgotten their login details to their Universal Credit (UC) account, they will need to contact the Service Centre (0800 012 1331) to arrange an appointment at their local office and have their Personal Security Number (PSN) reissued. Claimants can go online and update their username and password if they have forgotten them.

Advice NI sought clarification regarding the Universal Credit complaints process:

The Universal Credit complaints procedure can be found at the link below.

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/dfc-complaints-procedure>

The official process for lodging a complaint about a Universal Credit related issue:

Customer Service Team
Causeway Exchange
1 - 7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG
Telephone: 028 9051 5100
Email: customerservice.unit@communities-ni.gov.uk