
Third Sector Leeds
Third Sector Goes Local – West North West
23 April 2018

1. Introduction and background

In January 2018 TSL ran a thematic workshop examining the rollout of Universal Credit in Leeds from October 2018 specifically focusing on what the third sector needs to help support their clients manage the change. The workshop was also seen as the ideal platform to introduce GDPR to organisations and to highlight some of the key changes from May 2018. As a next step, members of the TSL Leadership Group agreed to continue this discussion at a local level through TSL Goes Local.

2. Presentation 1 – Rollout of Universal Credit

Following an open welcome by Mark Law, Third Sector Locality Representative for West North West the event received two presentations, the first from Diane Gill, Financial Inclusion Team, Leeds City Council and Nick Morgan, Chapeltown Citizens Advice. Both spoke about the wide range of work that their respective organisations have undertaken to prepare for Universal Credit full service rollout, highlighting some of the challenges other areas had dealt with and changes that have been made as a result of lobbying from Citizens Advice nationally.

3. Group discussion and key findings

Following the presentation, attendees were split into small groups and asked to consider a number of questions looking at how their organisations can help to reduce the negative impact of Universal Credit and what help they need to be able to do this. From the discussions a number of key findings emerged which can be summarised as follows:

Information to help clients

Attendees felt that they are well placed to help prepare clients for the introduction of Universal Credit. However, in order to do this they need relevant and useful information that they can use to signpost people to. Knowledge of Universal Credit was seen as essential for staff and volunteers in the sector who support clients that will be affected. Participants felt that case studies would be useful to help them when dealing with different scenarios. Some organisations wanted to know how people can change their claim so that the Housing Benefit is paid directly to the landlord rather than to the client, as it was felt many people would struggle with this. A number of organisations were willing to start to display information about Universal Credit for people accessing their services. One suggestion was that groups / organisations in Leeds could link in with local coffee shops to agree access to space to meet clients / use Wi-Fi within a more relaxed environment.

Potential impact on individuals, families and communities

Attendees expressed concerns about issues that families may face as a result of Universal Credit. One significant change from October is that payments will be made to one person in a relationship. One of the main concerns was that this could negatively impact on people experiencing domestic abuse and financial abuse. There is an option to have the claim split it was felt that some partners may not have the confidence to suggest this, fearing it could lead to further abuse. Attendees felt that there may be an increase in the number of people accessing foodbanks; evidence suggests that in some areas of the UK there has been an increase of 50% following full rollout. The rollout coincides with Harvest Festival and there may be opportunities for faith communities to support the foodbanks. People raised concerns around the length of time it will take for Universal Credit claims to be processed. Attendees were concerned about the intergenerational unfairness in that pensioners will not be impacted by Universal Credit.

The impact of Universal Credit being ‘digital by default’

Appendix 2

As all claims for Universal Credit are made online and generate an 'online journal' which needs to be managed on an ongoing basis, attendees raised concerns for some of the people they work with, particularly those with more chaotic lifestyles. Could the sector enable practical access to computers, e.g. tablets that can be taken into homes by a support worker? Many participants noted that providing this kind of ongoing support to clients may detract / distract from the primary service their organisation is providing, however it was acknowledged that worry and stress caused to individuals could impact on people's mental health and wellbeing. Some organisations expressed concern that the lack of face to face contact could lead to increased social isolation.

Increasing pressure on sector staff

Although attendees recognised the role they can play in supporting their clients with the introduction of Universal Credit they also felt it could become an additional part of their role. Recognising that they are not specialist advice workers reinforced the need for simple relevant information to be made available in the coming months; this could help them to prepare their clients for the changes. It was acknowledged that some workers already have to deal with benefit issues for clients before they can start to support clients with other aspects of their lives.

Recommendations

- For TSL to start to regularly share information with the sector around the rollout of Universal Credit using the Doing Good Leeds website and e-bulletin.
- For TSL to work with Chapeltown Citizens Advice to create a series of case studies/scenarios to help organisations understand some of the issues linked to Universal Credit.
- For TSL to work with Chapeltown Citizens Advice to design a system through which feedback from the third sector on the implications of Universal Credit for individuals and families can be captured to assist with ongoing campaigning and lobbying.
- For TSL to develop a list of advice services that can be shared with organisations to assist with signposting.
- For TSL to work with statutory partners including Leeds Safeguarding Children's Partnership to understand and address the potential impact of Universal Credit on children and families.

4. Presentation 2 – GDPR

Attendees then received a presentation from Richard Warrington, Voluntary Action Leeds who gave an overview of the key changes from May 2018, highlighting critical areas small organisations need to be aware of when preparing for compliance, as well as information training and sources of support.

5. Group discussion and key findings

Following the presentation, attendees were split into small groups and asked to consider a number of questions looking at how GDPR changes are already impacting on organisations/groups and what further support the third sector needs. From the discussions a number of key findings emerged which can be summarised as follows:

Information and why we need it

Organisations are taking the introduction of GDPR as an opportunity to review the personal data they currently hold and to ask themselves "why do I need this information?". Organisations are already talking to their clients and explaining why they need their information, what happens to the data they hold on an individual and how they will keep this data safe.

Appendix 2

Understanding GDPR

Organisations need to ensure that they have a consistent approach to capturing personal data across their different projects; it was felt that this should be a priority across organisations and that staff could provide support to the Chief Officers who are currently leading this area of work.

Dealing with consent

A number of attendees raised questions about when consent is required and the different types of consent outlined in the new regulations. There were particular questions about how the regulations apply to taking photographs at their events.

People felt this was an area where they would like further clarification (inc.ref to where we have published response)

Support for the sector

Some smaller organisations felt that it would be useful to have access to an FAQ document that highlights the key changes that they could refer to, suggestions included information on apps/webpages hosted outside of European Union boundaries that comply with GDPR. Attendees would like a place where they can access information about GDPR as well as being able to leave questions that need a response. Case Studies could also be used to help organisations with understanding how the new regulations apply in practice using different scenarios.

Recommendations

- For VAL to gather queries from the sector, research the answers and share solutions with the wider sector via Doing Good Leeds website.
- For VAL to produce case studies that can be shared with organisations highlighting some of the common issues they may face in complying with the new regulations and how these can be resolved.
- For VAL to produce an FAQ document detailing the key changes and useful information / sources of support.
- For VAL to publicise their new GDPR Basics course widely within the sector once launched and make available to groups and organisations with an income less than £20,000 for free through a training bursary.