

Improving the Welsh benefits system

A report of what has been done so far



How to use this document



This is an Easy Read version of: [Streamlining Welsh benefits: route map phase 1 progress report.](#)



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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Where the document says **we**, this means **Streamlining Welsh Benefits Steering Group**. For more information contact:

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About this report



In 2024 the [Welsh Benefit Charter](#) was launched. This is a guide to how benefits in Wales should be run.

The goal was to:



- make sure people get the right benefits



- and would only give their information once for these benefits in any of Wales local councils.



A group was set up called the **Streamlining Welsh Benefits Steering Group**.



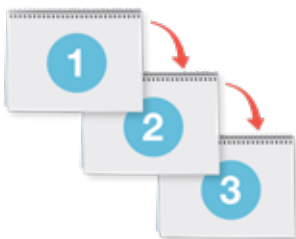
The aim was to make sure the Welsh Benefits Charter was carried out.



Every local council in Wales had a member of staff to carry out the work. They all worked together to guide the Steering Group.



A plan was published in 2025. It was called **Streamlining Welsh Benefits Phase 1 route map.**



This showed what steps need to be taken to improve the benefits system.



It looked at 3 benefits:

- **Council Tax Reduction Scheme** – this is the benefit that supports people with council tax.
- **Free School Meals** and
- **Schools Essentials Grant.**



This is a report made by the Steering Group.



The report is about:

- What has been achieved.
- And what needs to be done.

What was found



A lot of work took place as part of Phase 1.



We found out how different the benefits process is, depending on where you live in Wales.



The 22 councils in Wales all work differently. This means it is hard to make changes quickly across Wales.



But we found out that it could be made easier to apply for benefits.



A lot of the time councils already hold a lot of information about someone.



When a lot of information is collected about a person or topic it is called data.



If data was shared better, people would not need to repeat themselves.



It could help someone claim a benefit before applying for it.



The person may need to give more information before they receive benefits. And decisions would need to be signed off by the council. But it would make the process easier.



The person applying would need to give a lot less information than before. But it may also depend on the council itself and their staffing or budgets.

This is what we think should happen:

Solution 1:



All local councils should make agreements to share important information. This should help show who could get a benefit before they even apply.

Solution 2:



A single online application form could be used for the 3 benefits used in Phase 1.



Local councils may then need to ask for some extra information. But it will stop repeating a lot of work.



All local councils should think about using the single shared application form.

Solution 3:



We found that some people struggle to get the benefits they should.



The process can be hard to understand. It can also be difficult to get support.



Local councils should give more support to people to access benefits. Not just manage benefits.

Solution 4:



We found that the benefits rules can be very difficult to understand.



Some changes could be made to benefit laws to make this easier.



Some of the laws and policies should be made simpler.

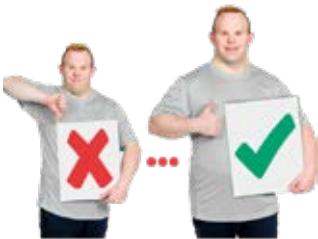
Solution 5:



Another issue was how people are supported. Also, how information is given to people and collected.



This is also called accessibility. It is about how easy it is for people to use and understand something. No matter what their needs or background are.



The benefits process and accessibility need to be improved. It needs to be simpler for everyone.

Solution 6:



It is not clear how much extra money it would cost if more people did take up benefits.



Councils have already said they do not have enough money or staff.



Local councils need to work out the costs if everyone took up the benefits they should have.



A lot of progress has been made with the work done so far.



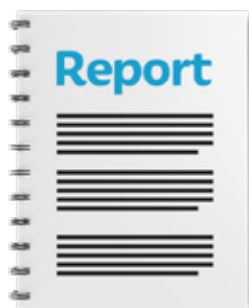
But there is a lot more to do to make the benefits system simpler.



Welsh Government and local councils need to keep working on this and making changes.



If these changes are not made people are going to keep losing out.



The report will now show more detail about the work of the group. And what needs to happen next.

A simpler benefits system

Phase 1 goals:



- Look into the work councils must do to process benefits and make it simpler.



- Look into laws and policies about who can claim these benefits. Look to improve things.



- Find ways to deliver the 3 benefits better.



Last year the Welsh Government agreed to give a grant to help councils deliver Phase 1.



The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) has looked in more detail at the issues since then.



It showed what needs to be done to help them improve.



We looked into the policies and laws behind the 3 benefits in Phase 1. They also looked at the eligibility criteria. These are the **rules you must meet to get benefits**.



There are issues with eligibility criteria and laws. Changing these can take a long time. But there are other ways to make things easier.



Councils could use the information that is shared with them for people who claim Universal Credit.



Universal Credit is a UK Government welfare benefit. The information that people provide to claim Universal Credit can also be used to check if someone could claim Council Tax Reduction too.



Nearly all the local councils are now doing this.



A lot of the time people have to fill out lots of application forms for benefits. They repeat their information.



Also, these forms are often not easy to read and understand.



We worked with the Centre for Digital Public Services to change this.



They made a single online form. It can be used for all 3 benefits used in Phase 1.



From testing it out they found it makes applying much easier for people.



It does not solve all issues. Some people have problems doing things online. But face-to-face support could help with this.



Testing of this new form showed it also saved lots of time. Less questions were asked and simple language was used.



People said it was clearer and easier to use.



Torfaen council tested it out. They found it faster and easier.



Some tools have been made to help councils use the new form.



Because all councils are different, they are at different stages with this work. It is not going as fast as we hoped.

Welsh Benefits System for everyone

Phase 1 goals:



- Carry out research to see what barriers some groups of people face with benefits.



- Find people to be involved with this work.



- Make a plan to update staff and others about the work we are doing.



- Check how accessible forms and other information is.



Some groups of people find it hard to access benefits.



The system works for some people and not for others. Some people find it is not accessible.



Benefits are there to help people in difficult situations. People often need them at very hard times in their lives.



Research was done on how to improve the application process. Many of these have been carried out as part of Phase 1.



Accessibility still needs to improve. Councils need to work on this urgently.



The Welsh Local Government Association did a survey with staff. It found some issues such as people getting confused with the system.



Other research shows how councils deal with queries differently.



Research also shows issues with staff pressure, demand, technology and other things.



We made sure councils update people working in local government about their work.



A lot of work is needed. This will vary between all councils.

Putting people first

Phase 1 goals:



- Making sure application forms and other information is accessible.



- Check how flexible the system is.



It is important for us to check people's experience of the benefits system.



Many people do receive these benefits. But many miss out who should receive them.



Research shows people find the forms difficult and long. It can put people off applying.



People are also confused about types of benefits and if they could apply.



To solve some of these issues people need a simpler single form. Also, information should be shared so people can stop repeating themselves.



Again, research has shown how differently council's work. And what information they collect from people.



A lot of work may be needed in some councils to set up the new form. This is because of all the work needed to set up the new technology.



This needs to be looked at to help make things easier.



We do think it is possible to make the system more person-centred. This means the person is put first.

A clearer Welsh Benefits System

Phase 1 goals:



- Look into information asked and repeated.



- Look into issues about sharing information.



- Make a guide about sharing information.



- Share the best ways to work and what we have learnt.



- Make a clear plan to promote Welsh benefits.

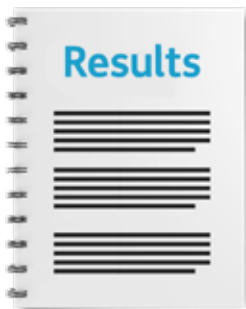


Department for Work & Pensions

People give their information directly to the council.
Or they agree for the Department of Work and
Pensions to share information they have.



We had to find out what councils needed to know
for a benefits claim. And what they can access
through information already there.



The results were different across the local councils.



Most councils use information from Universal Credit
for Council Tax Reduction. Universal Credit is run
by the Department for Work and Pensions. This is
separate from the council.



Welsh Government did some work with councils to
find people who might be missing out on benefits.



Sometimes council may need extra information than what they already have.



And councils need to make sure they are following laws about sharing information.



We found that councils have access to lots of information already.



This can be used to help stop people repeating information.

A Welsh Benefits System that works for the future

Phase 1 goals:



- Look at training and skills staff need.



- Make a report about the information councils and the Welsh Government collect.



- Show how the Phase 1 benefits work.



- Find a way to check how well things work.



- Give information about other useful services.



Our main goal has been to improve things. Now and for the future.



We found that councils could learn from each other. There could be guides for topics like sharing information and other things.



We have set up ways of working to make it easier. But have not yet looked at how we will check this in the long term.



Local councils must carry out the work, with support from the Welsh Government.



They need to look at how well the changes are working. The most important thing is how many more people are claiming benefits.



We think councils need to make use of other advice services too.



We believe people should get the benefits they are due. But also know councils are under a lot of pressure and do not have enough money.



We do not know how much more money will be needed.



Councils may need to make changes to how they work. For example, their computer and online services.



Local councils and Welsh Government must work together to check if these changes are possible.