

# Benefit Sanctions and Homelessness

A report by the North East Homelessness Think Tank

July 2015

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The North East Homelessness Think Tank (NEHTT) aims to influence policies affecting homeless client groups, through research, campaigning and other collaborative activities.

We would like to thank The Northern Rock Foundation for funding this research which grew out of the 'One Year On; Welfare Reform in the North East and its Impacts on Single Homelessness' research, also funded by the Foundation.

Our thanks go to the author of the report Jamie Harding, Northumbria University, our team of researchers Catriona Hugman and Adele Irving, Northumbria University, Phillip Edwards, Institute for Local Governance, University of Durham and Sheila Spencer, Housing Consultant, David Billbrough, Studio 7 who produced the video and the Project Lead, Sharon Brown, Youth Homeless NE.

We would also like thank colleagues from local authorities, housing organisations, the voluntary and community sector and homeless people themselves for their contribution to this research.



# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	4
<b>Executive Summary</b>	5
<b>National Policy Background</b>	7
Reasons for Sanctions Decisions	7
Reviews of the Sanctions System	9
Differences between Offices	10
Vulnerable and Homeless People	11
<b>Previous Studies Examining Benefit Sanctions</b>	12
<b>The Current Research</b>	18
Extent and Nature of Need	18
The Claimant Commitment	24
Understanding the Benefits System	26
Impact of Sanctions	28
Prevention and Response to Sanctions	29
Communication	31
Specialist Officers	34
Consistency of approach	34
Improving Communication	35
<b>Recommendations</b>	38
The Government – in principle	38
The Government, DWP and JCP – in Practice	38
Agencies supporting homeless people	39
<b>Bibliography</b>	40

# INTRODUCTION

---

The election of a Conservative government in May 2015, with a commitment to cutting welfare benefits for people of working age, has heightened concerns over the process by which people are sanctioned (i.e. have their benefits reduced or stopped completely) because they are judged not to have taken steps consistent with seeking work. The North East Homelessness Think Tank undertook the research discussed in this report because it was particularly concerned about the relationship between benefit sanctions and homelessness.

In addition to outlining the policy position, and highlighting previous research about the impact of sanctions, the report discusses the findings from stakeholder interviews and a survey of organisations working with homeless people in the North East of England. The report highlights the manner in which sanctions can aggravate the difficulties of people who are homeless and makes recommendations for the steps that could be taken by the government, Jobcentre Plus and agencies working with homeless people to improve the situation.

A service users' perspective is incorporated into an accompanying video which is available at <http://youthhomelessnortheast.org.uk/nehtt/sanctions-is-there-another-way/benefit-sanctions-service-user-videos/>. We are very grateful to the Northern Rock Foundation for funding this research and to everyone who gave up their time to provide their views.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## National Policy / Previous Studies

1. There has been an increase in the number of people receiving benefit sanctions in recent years. In April 2009 nationally 30,789 sanctions were applied to Jobseekers, but this number had risen to 77,056 by the same month in 2013. The level of sanctions is now falling, but this may simply reflect a fall in unemployment. Early in 2015 the Work and Pensions Select Committees heard evidence that the current sanctions policy does not communicate that benefit sanctions should be a last resort.
2. The need to significantly improve communication between support services, the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), frontline staff and their clients in order to meet vulnerable people's needs was identified by the Work and Pensions Committee.
3. There is a "double whammy" for young homeless men aged 18-24 as they are most likely to be sanctioned and also face significant barriers to compliance due to their chaotic lifestyles.
4. There is a notable variation between the sanctioning practices of different Jobcentre Plus (JCP) offices, suggesting that who is being sanctioned is likely to be influenced more by local policy implementation than by claimant behaviours.

## The Research and the North East of England

5. The evidence of wide variations in the percentage of sanctions between JCP offices was confirmed by analysis undertaken in the North East.
6. An online survey was undertaken of organisations working with homeless people in the North East; 45 responses were received. This data was supplemented by nine stakeholder interviews.

## Extent and Nature of Need

7. A majority of organisations who answered the relevant survey questions believed that the number of sanctions imposed on their service users had increased in each of the last three years.
8. The largest group of sanctioned service users was reported to be the 16-24 year old age group. 18-24 year olds were more likely to have been sanctioned than 16-17 year olds, although this seems likely to be a reflection of eligibility for benefits. Interview data suggested that there were a number of ways in which being sanctioned could lead the housing situation of a young person to deteriorate and become less secure.

## The Nature of Sanctions

9. 85% of reported sanctions were for two weeks or four weeks.
10. The most common reasons for sanctions being applied were that service users had failed to attend a JCP interview or to follow a jobseeker's direction.
11. Survey respondents identified a large number of factors that created difficulties in complying with benefit conditions among homeless service users, most frequently mental health problems, lack of understanding of conditionality requirements, lack of motivation, poor time keeping and problems of addiction.
12. Survey respondents tended to think that 'some' or 'few' of the sanctions applied to homeless service users were fair and just. Reasons for believing sanctions to be unfair included service user's vulnerability, their instability and their chaotic lifestyles. Examples were provided of cases where sanctions appeared to have been applied very unfairly.

## The Claimant Commitment

13. Homeless service users were considered likely to sign claimant commitments that they could not keep. The reasons for this were communication difficulties, chaotic and unstable lifestyles and power imbalances.
14. Although there were examples of successes in negotiating appropriate claimant commitments with the service user and JCP, this process was hindered by reluctance on behalf of some JCP staff to involve a third party and service users being unwilling to share their commitment.

## Understanding the Benefits System

15. Service users were judged unlikely to have a good understanding of any part of the benefit system or of the 'easement' available to homeless people.
16. There were also limitations to the understanding of benefit sanctions within survey respondents' own organisations, with the majority of respondents also being unaware of the 'easement'.

## Impact of Sanctions

17. Food poverty and anxiety/depression were thought to be the most frequent impacts of sanctions and service users were overwhelmingly felt to be less likely to engage with the benefits/job search system as a result of being sanctioned. Going to foodbanks was identified as a more likely response to being sanctioned than applying for a hardship loan. Interview data suggested that disengagement with the benefit system could have particularly negative consequences for homeless people and/or those with addictions, undoing much positive work that had been undertaken by agencies.
18. The majority of survey respondents reported that sanctions had had a 'very significant' impact on their organisation in terms of losing income, increasing rent/service charge arrears and experiencing more difficulty in moving people on.

## Prevention and Response to Sanctions

19. The large majority of organisations surveyed said that they sought to help service users to avoid being sanctioned by communicating directly with JCP / DWP, providing benefits advice and assisting service users to attend appointments. Some organisations reported substantial success in preventing benefit sanctions from being implemented or reversing decisions.
20. Providing food parcels, emotional support, signposting to other agencies and advocacy were the most common actions taken on behalf of those who had been sanctioned.

## Communication

21. The positive response of the government to the Oakley Review of sanctions, and the good intentions of policy makers in the DWP, appeared to have had inconsistent impacts among JCP staff.
22. There was a consensus that service users were most likely to become aware of a sanction when trying to withdraw money from a bank or cash account, despite DWP policy that claimants should be contacted for their 'side of the story' before applying sanctions.
23. JCP staff were largely considered to have a 'poor' or 'very poor' understanding of the needs of homeless people. A minority of respondents felt that the working relationship with JCP had become closer in the previous year. However, interview data provided some positive examples of joint working and liaison with JCP, where agencies were prepared to be persistent in working at this.
24. Survey respondents suggested a number of measures that could improve the relationship between the benefit system, service users and the homeless sector, or make it easier for homeless service users to comply with benefit requirements. Popular choices were pre-sanctions warnings, more individual support, JCP staff having a greater understanding of needs and a better attitude to homeless service users, support workers being able to represent service users (and being included in communication where the service user agreed to this) and a wider choice of locations for homeless service users to report to.
25. It appeared that having named JCP staff who could be contacted by, or on behalf, of service users was the single factor that was judged most likely to improve communication and relationships.
26. Some specialist posts had been created in JCP offices for young people, those with addictions or homeless people. In some cases, these posts appeared to have had a very positive impact on services.

## NATIONAL POLICY BACKGROUND

In April 2012 the government amended previous legislation on benefit sanctions, with these amendments coming into effect from 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2012 for claimants of Job Seekers Allowance (JSA); from 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2012 changes were implemented for claimants of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

For JSA claimants who breach the conditionality of their benefits there are now three levels of sanction that can be applied by the decision maker. These are explained below:

**Low:** This level of sanction removes the payment of JSA for a fixed length of up to 13 weeks for breaching job seeking requirements (DWP, 2013). Nationally the figures indicate that the most common two reasons for sanctions at this level are failure to take part in a Work Programme without what is deemed a 'good reason' and failure to attend an appointment with an adviser without a 'good reason' (DWP, 2015).

**Intermediate:** This level removes the payment for a person's failure to be available for work. This level of sanction results in disentitlement and a loss of benefits for four weeks. For subsequent sanctions at this level disentitlement is again applied but with a 13 week loss of benefits (DWP, 2013). Intermediate sanctions have been imposed for those deemed to be not actively seeking work and not being available for work (DWP, 2015).

**High:** This is the most severe sanction, which is applied for a claimant's failure to comply with the most important requirements of job seeking (DWP, 2013). Statistics collected by the DWP on sanctioning show that the three reasons most cited for the application of this type of sanction are: voluntarily leaving a job without good reason, refusal of a claimant to apply for a job or accept a job offer (for a position identified by their work coach) and failure to participate in a mandatory Work Programme (DWP, 2015).

The focus of this review is the increased conditionality of the benefits system, the sanctions regime and its impact on vulnerable people. It should be remembered that sanctions are only a part of the recent changes to the overall welfare system in the UK; other elements include Local Housing Allowance, the Discretionary Housing Fund and the 'under-occupancy charge' more commonly known as 'bedroom tax'. There are also sanctions for Lone Parent Income Support (LPIS).

### Reasons for Sanctions Decisions

From the introduction of the new JSA sanctions regime on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2012 to the end of 2014, a total of 1.66 million decisions were made to apply a sanction and there were also 1.93 million decisions that resulted in no reduction / withdrawal of JSA. Of the cases that were reviewed, in 221,000 sanctions were withdrawn, which represents 53 per cent of cases reviewed, 13 per cent of cases where a sanction was applied and 6 per cent of cases where a decision was taken. Where a sanction is reviewed, there is mandatory reconsideration by another decision maker within DWP and, if they uphold the original decision, the case can be taken to a tribunal.

The reasons for applying different types of sanctions from 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2012 to the end of 2014 are shown in the tables below:

### Decisions to Close JSA Claims

Reason	Number / per cent
Not actively seeking employment	557,583 (96%)
Not being available for work	22,838 (4%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>580,418</b>

### Decisions to Apply 'High Level' Sanctions (13-156 weeks)

Reason	Number / per cent
Left employment voluntarily without good reason	57,724 (40%)
Refusal or failure to apply for, or accept if offered, a job which an employment officer has informed him/her is vacant or about to become vacant without good reason	41,353 (29%)
Losing employment through misconduct	21,830 (15%)
Failure to participate in mandatory work activity without good reason	21,588 (15%)
Neglect to avail themselves of a reasonable opportunity of employment without good reason	212
<b>Total</b>	<b>142,711</b>

### Decisions to Apply 'Low Level' Sanctions (up to 13 weeks)

Reason	Number / per cent
Failure to participate in a scheme for assisting people to obtain employment without good reason – Work Programme	452,011 (48%)
Failure to attend or failure to participate in an adviser interview without good reason	385,488 (41%)
Refusal or failure to comply with a Jobseeker's Direction without good reason	55,176 (6%)
Failure to participate in a scheme for assisting people to obtain employment without good reason – skills conditionality	36,168 (4%)
Failure to participate in a scheme for assisting people to obtain employment without good reason – other scheme	6,768 (1%)
Failure to participate in a scheme for assisting people to obtain employment without good reason – work experience	1,975
Failure to attend a place on a training scheme or employment programme without good reason	619
Failure to participate in supervised job search	377
Voluntarily leaving a place on a training scheme or employment programme without good reason	69
Losing through misconduct a place on a training scheme or employment programme	37
Neglect to avail themselves of a reasonable opportunity of a place on an employment scheme or a training programme without good reason	25
Refusal of a place on a training scheme or employment programme without good reason	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>938,728</b>

In 1,354 cases the level of sanction was not applicable or not recorded, making a total of 1,663,215 sanctions. The figures for Employment Support Allowance were much lower: in the same period, 60,000 decisions to apply a sanction were made. (Source: Department of Work and Pensions, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/jobseekers-allowance-and-employment-and-support-allowance-sanctions-decisions-made-to-december-2014>)

In April 2009 nationally 30,789 sanctions were applied to Jobseekers, in comparison to the same month in 2013 where there were 77,056 (DWP, 2015). The level of sanctions is now falling, but this may simply reflect a fall in unemployment.

## Reviews of the Sanctions System

The independent review of sanctions by Oakley (2014), which was commissioned by the government, highlighted weaknesses in communication, particularly for those living in temporary accommodation. It also found that there was a lack of information sharing between frontline Jobcentre Plus (JCP) staff and the decision makers, meaning that staff were unable to immediately answer a claimant's query about their sanction. Often people did not know they had been sanctioned until they tried to withdraw money from their bank account (Oakley, 2014). These findings are supported by other research into young and homeless people's experiences of welfare sanctions in England, as will be shown below.

In response to the concerns raised by the Oakley review the Work and Pensions Select Committee heard three sessions of oral evidence relating to welfare sanctions. Much of the discussion focused on clarifying the current system and identifying the practical constraints and realities of administering the new sanction regime. There were questions asked about the evidence base for punitive sanctions, the misapplication of policies, inconsistencies and significant variations of adverse decisions made between JCP offices (Work and Pensions Committee, 2015a, b, c).

The Select Committees heard evidence of the impact upon vulnerable groups and families with children; much of this was anecdotal but highlighted the way in which 'good reason' was differentially interpreted. It was suggested that policy guidelines for decision making staff did not communicate that sanctions should be a last resort (Work and Pensions Committee, 2015a).

The committee highlighted the findings of the Oakley review about weaknesses in communication and that claimants were often unaware of their sanction, or why they had been sanctioned, until they tried to withdraw cash (Work and Pensions Committee, 2015c). The clarity of letters sent to people was poor and, where a sanction had been applied, did not explicitly state the reason for this or how to appeal the decision. For vulnerable clients a period of time with no access to cash could lead to material deprivation and food poverty. Many claimants giving evidence to the inquiry stated that their experiences of JCP was that they were not proactive in telling their clients that they could apply to the hardship fund for financial assistance (Work and Pensions Committee, 2015a).

Some elements of the Government's response to the Oakley review are considered in the recommendations section at the end of this report. On one specific point, the Oakley review highlighted the problem of Housing Benefit stopping when a sanction is issued and recommended that this should be addressed. In response the Government made two commitments:

1. To ensure correspondence was sent to the local authority to advise that Housing Benefit should continue
2. To develop an IT solution by autumn 2014

Discussions are ongoing between DWP and Homeless Link on this issue.

The conditionality of the current regime is meant to act as a deterrent for job-seekers not fulfilling their Claimant Commitment; the idea is to nudge them into engaging with their JCP advisers to get into work. Evidence presented by Professor Peter Dwyer to the Work and Pensions Committee questioned whether the current regime was really effective for people with complex needs because previous research had found that: *"Where there were conditions applied and sanctions and sticks were used, people just walked away. They literally disengaged. What made the difference for people changing their behaviour was where support workers, usually an individual or a service, went to them and went the extra mile, without saying, "In order to get this, you must do that". People who are excluded like that have often had that all their lives, and that is what forces them away."* (Work and Pensions Committee, 2015 b)

In explicit relation to people experiencing homelessness the committee focused on the potential benefits of the personalised approach and the need for clear, timely communication. Some instances of good practice were highlighted in the delivering of support for vulnerable groups with mental health, substance misuse, learning difficulties and homelessness issues (see also Fitzpatrick et al., 2015): a joined-up approach between agencies - facilitated by effective communication - could assuage some of the different priorities between people in these groups and JCP staff (Work and Pensions Committee, 2015a).

## Differences Between Offices

Analysis of monthly data on the percentage of claimants in all JCP offices in the North East who received an adverse decision over a 13 month period showed a wide range of performance both across the region and even within offices. The highest monthly percentage of adverse decisions was over 15% and the lowest less than 2% (the national average for September 2014 was 6-7%). There were some offices that had a consistently high figure. There will undoubtedly be local conditions that explain some variation but the disparities are so great that it is reasonable to question whether claimants are receiving the same treatment in each area of the region. The figures for September 2014 (the latest month to be subjected to analysis) are shown below:

Office	Percentage of Adverse Decisions in September 2014
Seaham	15.13
Chester le Street	11.98
Killingworth	10.35
Stanley	10.33
Loftus	10.22
Darlington	9.59
Newton Aycliffe	9.30
Whitley Bay	9.15
Newcastle on Tyne East	9.08
Alnwick	8.98
Berwick	8.45
Middlesbrough Central 1	8.29
Wallsend	8.27
Durham	8.13
Blyth	7.75
Bedlington	7.75
Consett	7.62
Jarrow	7.57
North Shields	7.36
Newcastle on Tyne West	7.36
South Shields Chapter Row	7.20
Ashington	7.19

Cramlington	7.14
Peterlee	7.09
Eston	7.08
Sunderland	6.70
Hartlepool B	6.66
Middlesbrough	6.64
Spennymoor	6.38
Guisborough	5.95
Houghton le Spring	5.75
Morpeth	5.74
Billingham	5.59
Felling	5.56
Thornaby	5.53
Gateshead 1	5.34
Washington	5.32
Hexham	5.28
Newcastle on Tyne City	4.97
Blaydon on Tyne	4.89
Southwick	4.77
Stockton 3	4.72
Redcar ESJ	4.54
Crook	4.30
Bishop Auckland	3.65

It is hard to see, looking at this data set, how decisions are being made consistently, and therefore fairly, across all offices in the region. This in turn begs the question as to how performance by benefit officers is monitored or controlled.

## Vulnerable and Homeless People

Research has indicated that people who are vulnerable are far more likely to receive sanctions (see A High Cost to Pay, 2013 – discussed further below). The High Cost to Pay report identified 2010 as the year in which benefit sanctions began to rise significantly; it associated this with the introduction of missing an appointment as a reason for sanctioning.

In response to evidence that homeless people are being unduly affected by welfare conditionality the government has introduced new easement measures for people experiencing homelessness. The criteria of this easement is open to local interpretation but suggests that homeless JSA claimants can be relieved of the expectation to seek employment for up to 4 weeks (a figure which can be extended on discretionary basis) while they focus on seeking secure accommodation, at which point they should be ready to seek work. This is a welcome change to policy implementation that recognises the barriers facing people who are homeless (see <http://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/news/2014/jun/30/welcome-change-to-help-homeless-people-seeking-work>).

## PREVIOUS STUDIES EXAMINING BENEFIT SANCTIONS

The report now discusses the specifics of research that has examined why sanctions have been applied, the impact on those who are vulnerable and the services that support them. The term 'vulnerable' here replies specifically to those who are homeless, those with mental health or learning difficulties, those with substance misuse issues and those who are under the age of 25; these are often commonly intersecting groups. Caution needs to be applied to the generalizability of the primary research findings, as they were usually based on small sample sizes. Most of the reports were written before the introduction of the 'easement' for homeless people referred to above.

### **'Welfare Sanctions and Conditionality in the UK' Watts et al for Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Sept, 2014)**

This research drew on international evidence of the efficacy and impact of welfare conditionality. In respect of the revised sanction legislation and its effects the authors identified the disproportionate number of young people under the age of 25 being sanctioned in comparison with JSA claimants generally.

#### **Why Sanctioned**

Reviewing previous research, the authors explained how Peters and Joyce had suggested that the disproportionate levels of sanctioning is a reflection of young people's more relaxed attitude towards compliance with the system because of their family support and security. However, counter-arguments centre on how compliance may be made more difficult by young people's chaotic lifestyles, or indirect discrimination within the system.

#### **Impact on People**

Although evidence from Europe suggests that sanctions in the short term lead to increased employment rates, long term impacts have been found to be negative on a person's ability to "sustain employment and incomes over time" (pg.7). The authors describe the material hardship faced by those who are sanctioned and their subsequent dependence on foodbanks; ultimately, they say, this has had a negative impact on people's physical and mental health. Although the system assesses compliant behaviours, Watts et al. draw on evidence that demonstrates that sanctions can lead to distrustful or hostile relationships between service users and staff.

### **'Punishing Poverty' CAB Manchester (Oct 2013)**

This research focuses on the experiences of the service users of the Citizens Advice Bureau nationally; the sample was made up of 376 people, with the majority being JSA claimants (60.3%). 33.2% were claiming ESA, 8.3 were Income support claimants and 0.6% were receiving universal credit when sanctioned.

#### **Why Sanctioned**

The most frequently cited reason for a welfare sanction was the result of a decision maker deciding a claimant had not done enough to look for work (28.9%). 18% of sanctions were for a missed appointment at a Jobcentre. According to this report only a very small proportion were sanctioned for losing their job due to 'misbehaviour' (1%), not attending a job interview (1.5%), or leaving a job without good reason (2.6%). Almost one quarter of respondents were unclear of the reason for receiving a sanction (22.7%).

#### **Impact of Sanctions**

The financial implication of losing the personal allowance from benefits meant that three quarters of respondents said they had no income for the duration of their sanction period; only 13% had had a hardship payment and 15% reported that they had other benefits to assist them financially.

The report highlights that financial difficulties had repercussions in the long term as over 80.1% of respondents had fallen into debt as a result of a sanction; this could be a result of not being able to pay bills, being overdrawn at the bank and taking out loans (legal and illegal forms) to assist with living costs. Only 4.3% did not do anything different to cope with their change in financial status, 70.9% cut down on food and 49.1% cut down on heating their home during the period of sanctions.

The financial strain was only one part of the consequences of a sanction for those surveyed. A number highlighted how the financial instability led them to consider the possibility that they could end up homeless as a result of rent arrears. A number commented on the negative impact on their mental and physical health. The former often manifested itself through increased anxiety and suicidal feelings, with several respondents saying that they had made attempts on their own lives; sanctions were often found to exacerbate existing mental health difficulties.

### **‘Benefit Sanctions and homelessness: a scoping report’ Beatty, C., Foden, M, McCarthy, L. and Reeve, K. (March, 2015)**

Here the researchers comment on the difficulty of statistical analysis of national figures of homeless people who have been sanctioned (as this data is not recorded) and they demonstrate that this is problematic because the evidence base is missing key data about a vulnerable population. This report states that both age (being aged 18-24) and gender (being male) are factors that affect the likelihood of sanctioning. They call this the “double whammy” that those who are homeless may face – not only are they more likely to be sanctioned due to their gender and age profile but they are “more likely to experience barriers to complying” to their claimant commitments (pg. v).

#### **Why Sanctioned**

Although there is a geographical disparity in the levels of sanctioning that was identified from DWP (2015) statistics, the authors’ exploratory correlations were unable to link this to local areas of unemployment and homeless populations. Instead, they suggest that geographical disparities are “influenced more by local implementation, than the behaviours and actions of claimants” (pg. 26). This report presented three types of barriers to homeless JSA and ESA claimants’ ability to meet the conditionality required of them (pg. 28-30):

- The lack of clarity in communication, information and navigation of the system to appeal, or disclose circumstances that might have affected their ability to perform.
- Missed appointments due to ill health and appointments with health services.
- Lack of necessary documentation, as this can be difficult for homeless people to keep safe and organise.

#### **Impact of Sanctions**

The withdrawal of the personal allowance element of benefits is highlighted as being particularly difficult for those already experiencing hardship in other areas of their lives, including homelessness, as it can have a cumulative impact with other difficulties. The payment of the personal allowance and other benefits are described as a vital lifeline for those experiencing homelessness, as it can assist them in finding more suitable accommodation.

Altogether seven key areas of impact on homeless people were identified: food poverty, family/relationship tensions, survival crime, anxiety and health issues, disengagement and loss of trust in the system and fuel poverty.

This work considers the impact of sanctions on levels of homelessness and suggests, by drawing on previous research (including reports by Homeless Link and YMCA which are also reviewed here), that sanctions may increase the likelihood of homelessness as those sanctioned are unable to pay additional service charges, or have to reduce the monetary contribution they can make. Further dangers of homelessness arise from the automatic suspension of Housing Benefit, which the claimant must then re-claim. This undermines people’s ability to maintain secure accommodation as it can lead to the accrual of rent and/or service charge arrears.

## **'A High Cost to Pay' Homeless Link 2013**

This report highlights the disparity between the number of sanctions applied nationally to JSA claimant and those in the Homeless Link survey. One in three homeless young people on JSA had been sanctioned and one in five people who were homeless and claiming ESA had been sanctioned. However, the sample was small and unrepresentative. This report identifies the groups who are most likely to be sanctioned as homeless people who have substance misuse and/or mental health problems, young people claiming JSA and those with language difficulties.

### **Why Sanctioned**

Within the sample the largest proportion of sanctions (45%) were received for failing to take part in a the Work Programme, 28% of JSA claimants were sanctioned because they didn't attend an interview with an adviser, 9% had sanctions imposed as a result of refusing employment/training scheme, and 9% of sanctions were received for a claimant's voluntary unemployment (pg. 12).

Reasons for missed interviews included ill health or hospital appointments; some practical difficulties associated with the effectiveness of postal services and access for homeless people; and the danger that some homeless clients with complex needs "may not understand, miss, or misplace advice letters and so not comply" (pg. 13). This raises questions of the application of what is deemed to be a 'good reason' and the clarity of decision makers' and advisers' communication with their clients.

### **Impact on People:**

Again, this report emphasises the financial hardship caused by loss of benefits for personal allowance and the consequential rent or service charge arrears, food poverty and increased personal debt.

The impact on people's mental health was also highlighted as problematic as sanctions led to increased anxiety exacerbating existing mental health issues (p.14). Very few respondents thought that sanctions were motivating homeless people to find work or engage better with employment services.

### **What Impact for Organisations?**

Over 79% of organisations reported knock on financial implications for themselves as a result of one of their clients being sanctioned. This was linked to the way in which the sanctions operate. Once a claimant is sanctioned they have a 'change in circumstances' and need to reapply for their housing benefit. Many organisations often charge their clients for accommodation services, housing benefit does not cover this, and claimants who lose their benefit payment are unable to pay for this part of their rent. Rent and/or service charge arrears could lead to more evictions or notices to quit. This report found that, for a large proportion of organisations, their income stream had been disrupted by their clients being sanctioned.

There was also a reported increase in support staff's workloads as a result of having to support clients through their conversations with JCP to avoid sanctions, or through the appeal process inter alia.

## **'Evidence from the frontline: How policy changes are affecting people experiencing multiple needs' Drinkwater et al (No Date)**

### **Impact of Welfare Reform**

Five main areas of concern are highlighted by the authors. First is their finding that, amongst those organisations surveyed, the majority reported a negative impact on their clients' mental health and wellbeing. A number of reported a perceived rise in the risk of suicide amongst their service users as a result of welfare reform. 88% perceived an overall negative affect of welfare reform on their clients' wellbeing and 86% reported a negative impact on mental health.

Secondly, responses from organisations indicate that over half (55%) perceived a negative impact on their clients with multiple needs. Changes to the welfare system did not help them towards employment but instead put them under financial and personal strain, particularly with regard to limiting their access to appropriate housing (82%) and nutrition (73%).

The third consequence of welfare reform highlighted by this report that is less examined in other reports is the way in which the reforms are in some cases leading to re-offending as a response to the stress. Welfare reforms are place vulnerable women at further risk as they turn to survival crime or sex work, or face forced dependency on an abusive partner after being sanctioned.

Fourth, the majority of services (79%) reported that benefit sanctions were found to be affecting over half of their organisations' clients; the sanctions were viewed as having the biggest negative effect of all welfare reforms introduced. Lastly, services reported that the cuts to legal aid were affecting over half of their clients.

#### **Impact on Commissioning Services:**

Supporting people funding is no longer ring fenced and has been made a part of the local authority's overall budget, therefore allowing for greater local autonomy. A negative impact on the commissioning of services for people with multiple needs was reported by 71% of services who answered this question (pg. 16).

The introduction of Police Commissioners and local Health and Wellbeing Boards were seen by organisations to have a mostly neutral impact, although some highlighted that these are so new it was difficult to assess at the point of survey. One area of concern was the move of the substance misuse budget to a local authority's public health budget and the negative impact of this.

#### **Homeless Monitor England 2015, Fitzpatrick et al (2015) for Crisis.**

In terms of benefit sanctions, this report presents data demonstrating the steady increase of referrals to decision makers to consider for sanction, and the increasing number of people receiving sanctions over the last 13 years. The report argues that most of those surveyed (77%) perceived one impact of the new welfare regime as an increase in homelessness as a result of sanctions. There has been a reported softening of the criteria expected of JSA claimants who are in a 'situation of domestic emergency' (Spurr, 2014). However Fitzpatrick et al.'s research found that in practice, this easement had not been observed by practitioners in the field (2015).

#### **Impact on People**

There was a particular concern highlighted by local authorities, whose respondents reported that it was often young single people who were most at risk of homelessness as a result of sanctions. This was blamed on the IT system that is used to communicate between local authorities and the DWP, where a sanction leads to a 'change in circumstance' that suspends the payment of Housing Benefit.

#### **Impact on Organisations**

As elsewhere this report found that a number of organisations have seen their workload increase, as they need to support their clients with sanctions - either coping with or challenging an adverse decision. In some areas this was reported to be as high as a 50% workload increase.

#### **Community Link Policy Briefing (Jan 2014)**

This briefing indicates that services are seeing a significant increase in caseload of their staff, as they have to support clients with sanctioning processes. If a client is not yet in crisis staff will support them through the process of appealing a sanction and offer relevant advice e.g. debt management. For those clients presenting as already in crisis from the conditionality of welfare benefits, community link workers offer informal support such as sign posting them to foodbanks. The report highlights that a large proportion of those sanctioned and support staff are often unaware of hardship or crisis payments that they can apply for.

The case study in this briefing highlights the cumulative multiple deprivation that can be experienced by those who are sanctioned and how the inability to afford basic necessities leads to the accumulation of debt to survive. This contributes to social isolation due to service users being unable to afford mobile phone credit and travel costs. Together, these factors have a negative effect on mental health in the form of anxiety over having no control over the whole process. This case study also identified the way in which JCP staff advised the claimant that there was little use in applying for a hardship payment as they “probably wouldn’t get it” (pg. 3).

### **Support For Single Homeless People In England, Annual Review 2014, Homeless Link**

Sanctions are only a small part of this report’s remit. It notes that, amongst the services that responded to the survey, many reported noticing an increased number of their clients experiencing poverty and destitution.

This report reiterated the findings of previous studies in relation to the organisational impact of welfare conditionality. In particular, there were reported increased evictions due to service charge/rent arrears. Another concern for organisations was related to changes in the housing market, consequently it has not been as easy to move clients onto more permanent accommodation.

### **‘Cheshire Hunger’ Spencer, A., Ogden, C. & Battarbee, L. (2015)**

This research focused on local use of foodbanks. It found that, in the Cheshire area, the provision of food parcels to those identified as homeless has risen from 4.41% in 2013 to 5.84% in the second half of 2014. In 11% of these cases, sanctions were identified as causal to the need for food assistance. Here “The main reasons given for sanctioning were missed appointments (5%), insufficient search activity (3%), non-attendance at a medical assessment (2%) and non-compliance with work-related activity (1%)” (pg. 22).

The report describes how “the abrupt loss of income that results is likely to destabilise household finances for a greater period than the duration of the sanction itself”, demonstrating the negative cumulative affect sanctions can have on people’s financial situation, and possibly their mental health (pg. 22).

### **‘Signed on and Sanctioned: An insight into vulnerable young adults perspective on benefit sanctions’ YMCA (2014)**

This report looks at the opinions and experiences of young people who receive JSA sanctions. Overall two main areas of welfare delivery are singled out as part of the reason for young people being disproportionately sanctioned: communication and policies and procedures.

In many cases the vulnerability of young people and their circumstances are not taken into account, and this can affect a person’s ability to meet the conditions of welfare, and lead to sanctions being applied. Currently claimants who are homeless or in temporary accommodation are subject to the same conditions as other JSA claimants, this does not reflect their personal circumstance where the priority may be to find stable accommodation. The process of appealing a sanction was challenging, with only 19% of young people finding the process clear and easy to understand. The report recommended that adaptations to policies and procedures should reflect the need for flexibility to adapt to individual needs.

#### **Impact**

The report highlights material deprivation as a direct result of sanctions amongst the sample group, with the majority of young people sanctioned (86%) having to go without essential items. 84% reported having to cut back or go without food, 81% failing to pay or reducing payment of housing costs, and 75% cutting back or going without toiletries. The report also commented on the negative impact sanctions can have on a young people’s physical and emotional wellbeing (pg. 6).

Overall, a theme runs throughout of young people's sense that they are being unfairly treated and the report pointed out that their experiences might only "act to further demotivate and marginalise those vulnerable young people" (pg. 8). 73% of staff at the YMCA believed that the sanction regime was unfair, similarly 77% of those surveyed thought sanctions were administered unfairly (pp.8-9). In line with other reports, the YMCA found that the case loads of staff were increasing as a result of having to spend time supporting young people to stay in benefits.

### **'Food for Thought', YMCA (2014)**

This report identifies the new sanctions regime as the "main reason behind the growth in the numbers of young people in food poverty" (pg.3). The report highlights the need for better communication between JCP advisers and young people in regard to explaining how to avoid sanctions, the reasons for sanctions, the practical support and advice available about their rights, and the Local Welfare Assistance and Hardship Payment schemes.

### **'Processed and Punished' YMCA (2014)**

This research brought to the fore concerns with the new conditionality, the future movement to monthly welfare payments and the need for IT access to claim benefits and apply for jobs. The key issue amongst young people who were included in the YMCA's study was the move towards monthly payments, which was identified as creating difficulties due to their current budgeting skills. Delivering the housing benefit element of universal credit directly to young people to then pay their landlord was also commented on by young people – they felt that they might not be able to make the best decision to pay their rent immediately, thus there is a self-identified risk of homelessness.

## THE CURRENT RESEARCH

The current study examined the relationship between benefit sanctions and homelessness/housing need in the North East of England using an online survey, the link to which was distributed to organisations through a snowball sampling method, beginning with the contacts of the North East Homelessness Think Tank (NEHTT). In total, representatives of 45 agencies responded to the survey, although not all respondents answered every question.

The quantitative data was supplemented by qualitative interviews with nine stakeholders: one from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), four from housing organisations and four from organisations whose role includes providing advice and support to people on low incomes. The views of service users were collected through another element of the research – a series of workshops where the output was a video, the link to which appears in the introduction. However, the recommendations included at the end of the report are consistent with the views expressed by service users in the workshops.

In the discussion of the findings that follows, 'respondents' refers to survey respondents; analysis taken from interview data is identified specifically as such.

### Extent and Nature of Need

Organisations taking part in the survey were asked how many of the service users that they had supported had been homeless between 1<sup>st</sup> February and 30<sup>th</sup> April 2015; answers ranged from one to 404 with the median figure being 16. The very large majority of these sanctions were from JSA rather than ESA.

Respondents were asked whether the number of homeless service users who were sanctioned had increased, decreased or stayed the same in each of the three years since the new regime was introduced in October 2012. The answers are shown below:

#### Year 1

Trends in sanctioned homeless service users	No. of respondents
Increased	26
Stayed the same	6
Decreased	0
Don't know	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>

#### Year 2

Trends in sanctioned homeless service users	No. of respondents
Increased	28
Stayed the same	3
Decreased	0
Don't know	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>

#### Year 3 to Date

Trends in sanctioned homeless service users	No. of respondents
Increased	32
Stayed the same	2
Decreased	1
Don't know	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>

Of the 40 respondents who answered questions across all three years, a majority (21) said that the number of sanctioned homeless service users had increased in every year.

Respondents were asked which of a number of categories of service users were most likely to be sanctioned (they could choose a maximum of three options). The frequency with which different options were chosen is shown below:

Category of service user	Number
Young people aged 18-24	33
People with mental health problems	26
People with complex needs	24
People with addictions	22
Rough sleepers	12
Young people aged 16-17	10
People with learning difficulties	9
Other*	1

\*The respondent who chose 'other' specified: *"Young people moving into the area for the first time. Young people being released from incarceration who have no fixed address and no advocacy to negotiate between legal monitoring services and the benefits agency."*

Respondents were asked to identify the age categories that homeless service users who had been sanctioned fell into. The total numbers across all agencies in each age category are shown below:

Age categories of sanctioned homeless service users	Number across all agencies	Percentage
16-24	214	59%
25-44	137	38%
45-60	13	4%
60+	1	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>100%</b>

There were no agencies that reported having service users in the 16-24 age category, but not the 25-44 age category, suggesting that the above results were not simply a result of respondents being from specialist youth agencies. The data suggests that young people are particularly likely to be sanctioned.

The impact of sanctions on young people's housing situation was discussed by a number of interview respondents. One suggested that young people may be threatened with homelessness as low income parents are unable to keep them without a contribution to the family budget. Two respondents gave examples where young people in shared accommodation were asked to leave by sharers because they had been sanctioned and could no longer meet their part of household costs. Another interview respondent pointed out the difficulty when young people have multiple debts and large number of payments coming directly out of their benefits, all of which have to be re-negotiated when there is a benefit sanction. They suggested that young people who are sanctioned typically survive by using foodbanks and borrowing money from family and friends, which then puts a strain on relationships when the money needed to be repaid.

One interview respondent suggested that people might go back to live with their family as a result of being sanctioned but that any benefits would be short lived: “ ... the original reason why they separated tends to come back, which is to do with drug taking or the parent being abusive or violent or something like that. So it doesn’t address the problem, it’s just desperation.”

## The Nature of Sanctions

Respondents were asked about the length of sanctions of homeless service users; the total numbers across all agencies are shown in the table below:

Length of sanctions for homeless service users	Number across all agencies	Percentage
2 weeks	78	41%
4 weeks	84	44%
13 weeks	21	11%
26 weeks	7	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>100%</b>

So longer sanctions were relatively uncommon; in 85% of cases they were for 2-4 weeks.

Respondents were asked to identify up to three most common reasons for service users being sanctioned in the period between 1<sup>st</sup> February and 30<sup>th</sup> April 2015; the frequency with which different reasons were identified are shown below:

Reason for sanctions	Number
Failed to attend a JCP interview	34
Failed to follow a jobseeker’s direction	24
Failed to attend or gave up a place on a training scheme	12
Failed to apply for a job	9
Failed to take up mandatory work activity	7
Left a job voluntarily or through misconduct	1

One respondent noted at this point that the number of people sanctioned did not reflect the actual work conducted via homeless sector workers as sanctions were usually stopped before implementation due to the high level of advocacy work undertaken with JCP. Another reported that there had been a number of suspensions of benefit but no sanctions - benefit has been reinstated on each occasion following appeals submitted by staff.

Respondents were asked to choose a maximum of three reasons for homeless people finding difficulty in complying with benefit conditionality requirements. The options chosen are shown below:

Reasons for difficulty in complying with benefit conditionality requirements	Number
Mental health problems	33
Lack of understanding of conditionality requirements	30
Lack of motivation	29
Poor time keeping	28
Problems of addiction	27
Inability to access computers	19
Literacy problems	19
Lack of IT skills	16

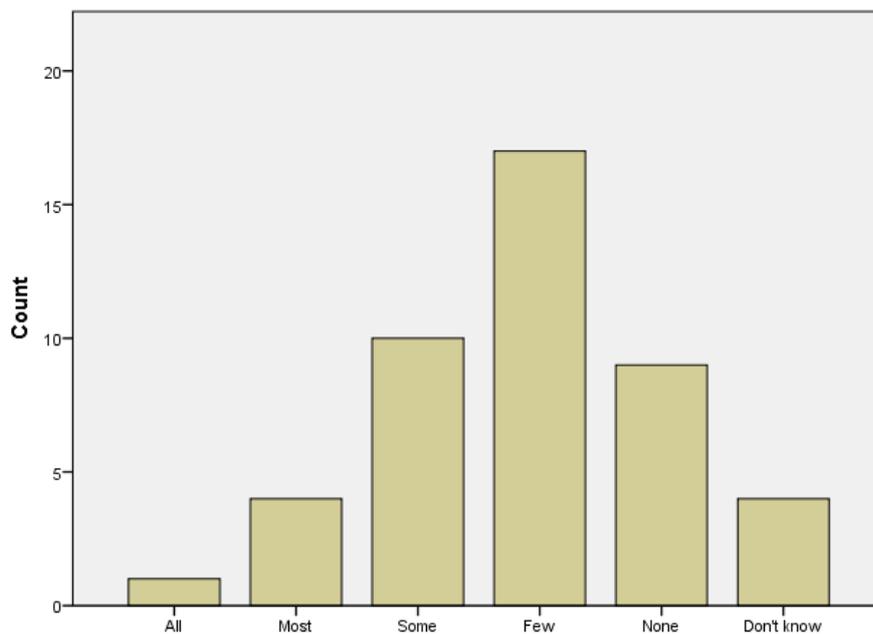
Inability to travel to work/training/JCP	16
Learning difficulties / special educational needs	14
Transience	13
Relationship problems	11
Poor physical health	10
Appointment clashes	7
Other*	3

\*Other reasons given by respondents were:

- Complex and chaotic lives; lethargy; lack of understanding of the need to comply.
- Mistrust of the system and a general unwillingness to engage with certain members of the Job Centre team due to perceived attitude problems. Need for JCP to hold regular satellite clinics at alternative venues to build more trust with this estranged client group.
- No money for bus fares; our clients have an hour's walk to the nearest job centre.

The high number of respondents selecting a lack of understanding of conditionality requirements points to issues around communication which are discussed further later.

Respondents were asked how many of the sanctions applied to homeless service users between 1<sup>st</sup> February and 30<sup>th</sup> April they felt to be fair and just, with the following responses:



**What proportion of the sanctions applied to homeless service users between 1<sup>st</sup> February and 31<sup>st</sup> April 2015 do you consider to be fair and just?**

Given the above responses it is unsurprising that, when asked to elaborate, most respondents focused on the reasons for unfair rather than fair decisions (some paraphrasing has been used here):

#### Reasons for fair decisions

- Some sanctions are due to bad decisions by service users
- Some people have been sanctioned more than once so know what the consequences are
- Most service users have time to attend Jobcentre interviews but not the motivation and feel that they do not need to comply with the timescales

#### Mixed / ambiguous responses on reasons for decisions

- One person repeatedly failed to attend but all the others were unfair
- Justified in some cases but unjustified when service user had taken two week training course to gain recognised qualification
- Some homeless service users are able to comply with requirements but others are not
- Some choose to attend other meetings rather than sign on

#### Reasons for unfair decisions

- Many service users have applied for jobs but have not had consistent advice about completing the diary
- Transient service user did not receive appointment letter
- Addictions and mental health problems prevent service user understanding letter
- Client refused to return to placement where she had been told to do tasks that aggravated back pain
- Difficult for service users to get to Jobcentre without any money
- Benefit officers do not take into account vulnerability of service users; most sanctions are lifted when challenged
- Benefit conditions are difficult for people to keep if they are in stable circumstances, so far more difficult for people who are homeless. Jobcentre staff can be unsympathetic to the point of being rude and aggressive.
- Leaving people with no money does not help anyone
- Advisers do not take into account the chaotic lifestyles of people who are homeless
- One homeless service user had not been aware she could apply for a 'homelessness easement' and this was not taken into account
- Sanctions often seem to be the result of a breakdown in communication between Work Programme providers and JCP
- Service user sent on training scheme and also had to sign on on the same day. Sanction was imposed even though it was a JCP mistake.
- Late for appointment but only marginally late

#### The examples of unfair practice were added to by examples given in the course of the stakeholder interviews:

- A service user was on their way to Work Programme activity but stopped because they saw that someone was advertising a job and was offered an interview on the spot. This made them five minutes late for their Work Programme activity, for which they were sanctioned.
- A diabetic service user was sanctioned and so could not keep up her electricity key meter payments, meaning that she could not keep her medication in her fridge. A friend had to keep the medication in their fridge.
- A diabetic service user was sanctioned and forced to use the foodbank, although they did not have the food that was suitable for her condition.
- Service users being sanctioned because they cannot remember their password for universal job match and so cannot demonstrate to JCP staff that they have been actively seeking work.
- A service user was sanctioned when JCP did not believe that he had not received a letter, even though his mail was being passed on by a supported housing project.

- Cases where people were sanctioned for being five minutes late for Work Programme activity.
- A service user was expected to work, despite being incontinent.
- A service user was put onto a Work Programme that they had no hope of fulfilling due to their schizophrenia and substance misuse problems; they failed to attend and were sanctioned
- A service user was asked to give an explanation as to why they could not go to an appointment in West Yorkshire when they lived in Newcastle
- A service user received a letter and a text with different appointment dates on, one the day after the other. They spoke to the same adviser on each day, who said there was no need to record the second appointment. They were then sanctioned for missing the second appointment.
- A service user was sanctioned for failing to fulfil a commitment in order to attend a relative's funeral.

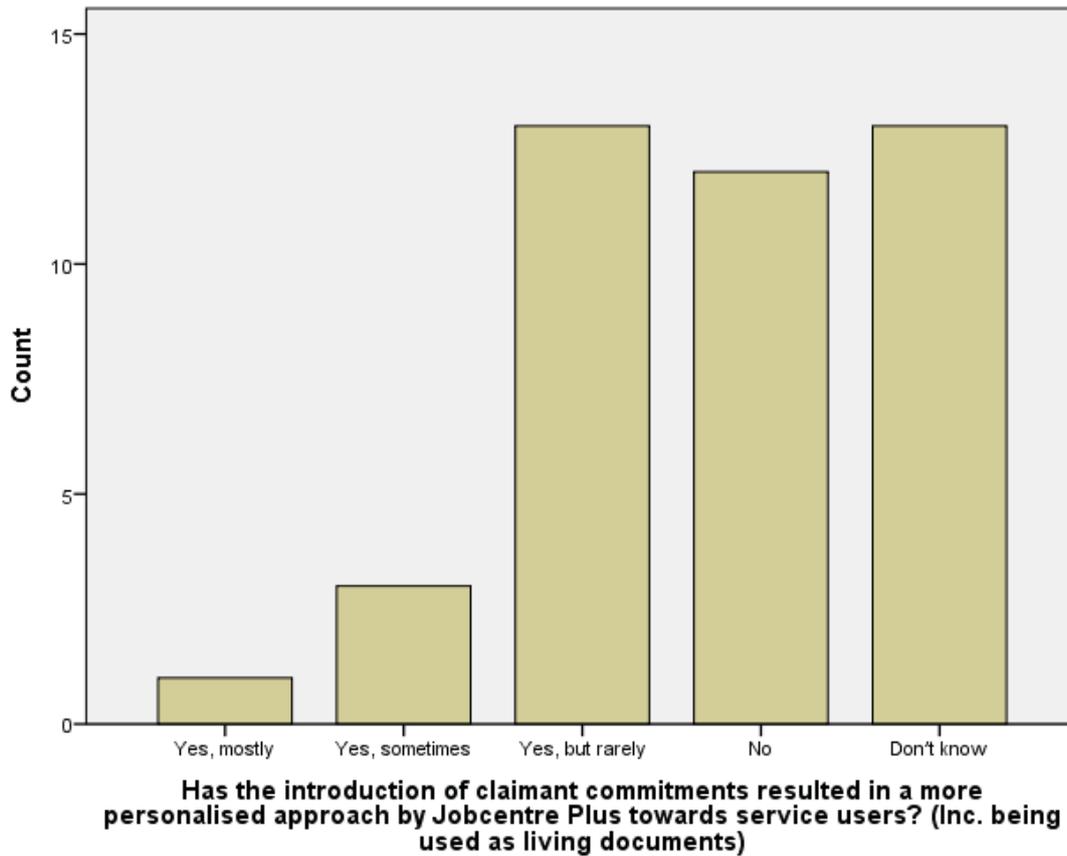
One interview respondent provided a more mixed view, saying: *"... we know our clients fairly well, we know the ones who just think 'Ah I'll not bother' and they get sanctioned – well, I'm sorry, but that's their responsibility and they're more than capable of getting there. But there's also other people who have got addictions and if they have to have a drink, they have to have a drink otherwise it can be a really big risk to their health ..."*

However, another commented on the unfairness of the system for people who were homeless and/or had addictions: *"... they are still in the throes of addiction if you know what I mean, so the chaos more than anything else has led to the sanction, like the sleeping rough ... so they don't get the correspondence."*

However, this respondent added that, if someone was in recovery, the structured nature of the claimant commitment could be positive for them. Another interview respondent expressed the view that *'sanctions are just a punishment'*.

## The Claimant Commitment

The claimant commitment, which was rolled out through JCP from October 2013, was intended to create a more personalised approach to the support and monitoring of claimants in their job search activities. However, respondents did not tend to think that it had achieved this objective:



(The 'yes always' option was not chosen by any respondents).

As the table below shows, all respondents who gave a definite response felt that there were service users who signed claimant commitments that they could not reasonably fulfil:

Proportion of service users who cannot fulfil commitments	No. of respondents
All	2
Most	28
Some	10
Few	2
None	0
Don't know	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>

Respondents were asked the reasons for service users signing commitments that they could not fulfil. These are listed below under sub-headings:

### Communication difficulties

- Poor explanations from JCP/DWP, combined with comprehension difficulties
- Poor quality explanations
- No proper assessment of vulnerability if service users do not confirm that they are homeless or in financial difficulty
- Lack of communication skills means service users are unaware of their responsibilities
- Service users do not understand the commitment
- Service users do not understand and will not challenge unreasonable actions that are suggested
- Service users do not understand and struggle to retain information
- Lack of understanding

### Lifestyles of service users

- Chaotic lifestyle of service users and their lack of trust in the system, would be better to have satellite clinics at places that service users trust
- Instability in housing and moving around
- Service users do not have funds or equipment to look for work and are at high risk of theft of personal items

### Power imbalances

- Fear of being sanctioned
- Service users unaware that claimant commitment can be varied; sign quickly in order to get out of Job Centre
- Service users sign whatever they need to in order to get benefits
- Service users pressurised into signing agreement that is inappropriate for those who are homeless
- Most service users will sign anything they are asked to in order to get benefits
- Service users will sign anything to get benefits; working is not financially viable due to cost of supported housing
- Disempowering system makes people feel submissive; they will sign anything they are asked to
- Service users believe they will not receive any benefit if they do not sign up to whatever is asked; even smallest requirements are difficult to keep to due to transient and chaotic lives with complex needs and addictions
- To get payments as soon as possible

Difficulties with fulfilling the claimant commitment were not limited to homeless people; one interview respondent noted that: *‘One of the stories that you hear often from clients is that they’ve applied for the same job five times ... they may be expected to apply for 30 jobs a week.’*

Another interview respondent acknowledged improvements in services from JCP since the Oakley report but suggested that: *“There’s probably still not enough preventative action in terms of identifying people who really ought to have restrictions to their claimant commitment.”*

There were specific difficulties identified for people with addiction problems. A supported housing provider identified that commitments made by their service users were often unrealistic: *“They’re supposed to do 35 hours a week job search. For someone that’s got a drug addiction, 35 hours a week? It’s like holding down a job.”*

Another similarly expressed concerns that it was unrealistic to assume that somebody who was in recovery and doing a limited amount of voluntary work was ready for full time employment.

One interview respondent, who has been able to attend meetings where the claimant commitment was discussed,

expressed the advantages very simply: *“... if we thought something was not right we would challenge it there and then. So it would be changed almost straight away if it wasn't fitting right to how it was going to work properly for the young person.”*

However, such an approach is only possible when permitted by JCP and the service user themselves. In answer to a question as to what proportion of service users shared their claimant commitment with them, respondents gave the following answers

Proportion of service users sharing claimant commitment	No. of respondents
All	0
Most	8
Some	16
Few	16
None	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>

This factor alone clearly limits the extent to which workers are able to offer support over the commitment.

## Understanding the Benefits System

Respondents were asked to estimate how well homeless service users understood different elements of the benefits system with the following responses:

Element of benefits system	Number saying very good or good level of understanding	Number saying poor or very poor level of understanding	Number saying don't know
The claimant commitment	9	34	2
How to avoid being sanctioned	9	35	1
The appeals process	5	39	1
Continuing to claim Housing Benefit when sanctioned	7	37	1
Hardship payments	13	31	1
Universal Credit	0	41	4

The importance of service users being aware of reasons for applying sanctions was illustrated by two interview respondents who both used the phrase that homeless people needed to have the reasons for sanctions 'drilled into them'.

A question as to what proportion of homeless service users were aware of the benefit easement available to 'newly homeless people' elicited the following responses:

Proportion of service users aware of the benefit easement	No. of respondents
All	0
Most	2
Some	5
Few	14
None	19
Don't know	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>

Following questions about the perceived level of understanding of service users, respondents were then asked how far staff of their own organisations were aware of different elements of the benefit system with the following responses:

Element of benefits system	Number saying excellent understanding	Number saying very good or good understanding	Number saying poor or very poor understanding
The claimant commitment	5	30	10
How to avoid being sanctioned	4	31	10
The appeals process	4	28	13
Continuing to claim Housing Benefit when sanctioned	10	28	7
Hardship payments	7	32	6
Universal Credit	2	25	18

One interview respondent noted a particularly important reason for support agencies to gain knowledge of the appeals process and encourage service users to use it: a failure to appeal an unjust sanction may lead to a person experiencing a longer period without benefit if they are sanctioned again at a later stage. However, another highlighted the dangers of someone with an addiction problem suddenly receiving a large amount of back-paid benefit in a lump sum.

12 respondents said that they were aware of the easement available for newly homeless people, 32 that they were not and one did not answer: a point that is returned to in the recommendations below. Given this low level of awareness, it is perhaps unsurprising that 40 respondents said that they were not aware of the easement having any effect. Of those who identified effects, two said that it had reduced the number of service users being sanctioned; two that it had helped service users to overcome housing difficulties more, one that JCP / Work Programme staff were working more flexibly and two that it had increased communication between JCP and homelessness services.

## Impact of Sanctions

In answer to a question about the most common impacts of benefit sanctions for service users, respondents chose the following options:

Most common impacts	Number
Food poverty	38
Anxiety / depression	38
Rent arrears	30
Falling behind on personal service charges	26
Survival crime	22
Evictions	21
Fuel poverty	16
Social isolation	15
Physical ill health	14
Sex work	10
Other*	4

\*Other responses were:

- All of the effects listed
- Increasing mental health concerns
- Increased use of cannabis pills and other substances to get through sanction period leading to further problems such as debt and ill health
- More mistrust and disengagement from the system

Respondents were also asked to identify up to three of the most common pro-active responses of homeless service users to having their benefits sanctioned. The answers are shown in the table below:

Pro-active response	Number
Going to foodbanks	37
Seeking advice from support workers	34
Applying for a hardship loan	24
Relying on friends /family	20
Seeking loans	8
Relying on other benefits	7
Seeking advice from CAB / advice agencies	7
Other*	6

\*Other responses were:

- Clients have access to Fairshare food as our organisation subscribes to the project
- Sticking with their mates and looking out for each other
- Turning to crime and begging
- Begging (two respondents said this)
- Borrowing off each other, friends, family and loan sharks

Six respondents said that sanctioning typically had a positive effect on homeless service users' motivation to engage with the benefit system to avoid further sanctions, but 36 said that it had a negative effect and two that it had no effect. One respondent said that sanctioning typically had a positive effect on homeless service users' motivation to gain employment; 27 said that it had a negative effect and 15 that it had no effect.

30 respondents said that they were aware of homeless service users disengaging with the benefit system altogether as a result of sanctions and 15 that they were not aware of this.

Interview respondent highlighted specific dangers of disengagement among young people and those with addictions respectively: *"... when they get sanctioned they start saying they're not going to even bother going back. It knocks their motivation completely because they think they're getting sanctioned for nothing."*  
*".. they get sanctioned, it seems to me the first thing they do is go back to people that they've known and areas that they've known and that sometimes can get them back on that treadmill of being involved in the drugs and everything else again."*

Another made a specific link between sanctions and rough sleeping: *"... when you're rough sleeping you've got to sign on every day you see, and they weren't prepared to go through that, they'd rather have stayed on the streets to beg."*

One interview respondent gave the example of two men who decided that they would no longer engage with the benefit system, because they felt certain they would be sanctioned, and so would live by begging instead, which could raise as much as £50 per day. They also identified an alternative negative impact: *"People become dependent on food banks; they will walk across the 16 foodbanks in Newcastle and they'll go round, they get people to get food parcels for them, they swap vouchers so they can go to different foodbanks because you can't go to the same one ..."*

They suggested that it then required huge amounts of support to get a service user moving in the right direction again. There was a similar discussion by another interview respondent of the difficulties caused by limits to the number of vouchers that a client could receive at foodbanks; they reported that people could become dependent on the People's Kitchen for an extended period of time. They suggested that people in this position were unlikely to be eating a balanced diet and would often borrow money from other people in their supported accommodation, beg or shoplift.

## Prevention and Response to Sanctions

Respondents were asked to identify the actions that their organisation took to help service users to avoid being sanctioned; the following options were selected:

Actions to help service users avoid being sanctioned	Number of respondents
Communicating directly with JCP / DWP	41
Benefits advice	39
Assisting service users to attend appointments	34
Monitoring service users' appointments at JCP	28
Information sharing protocol in place with JCP	14
Other*	5

\*Other answers given were:

- Attendance with some clients to help explain circumstances, although some JCP staff are very reluctant to engage with a third person
- JCP will not talk to support workers unless the client is present at time of discussion, even though the written and power to act forms have been implemented
- Motivation
- Most service users receive ESA; if they are suspended for missing appointments, they claim JSA until their appeal is heard and can sometimes obtain short term advances of JSA
- Make and maintain contact with the Benefit Social Justice Team

For service users who had had their benefits sanctioned, respondents were asked to identify all the actions that they took to support them. The most commonly chosen options focused on both physical and broader needs:

Actions to support service users who have been sanctioned	Number
Food parcels	39
Emotional support	38
Signposting to other organisations	36
Advocacy	33
Provision of personal items	17
Financial support / payment cards	6
Other*	4

\*Other responses were:

- Financial support will be assessed per client and given in the form of a loan. No interest and no pressure to pay back until payments are up and running again.
- Maintain accommodation until sanctions lifted and start a repayment plan for arrears.
- We also challenge sanctions mainly on the grounds of vulnerability.
- Clients can be helped with food and toiletries in the short term.

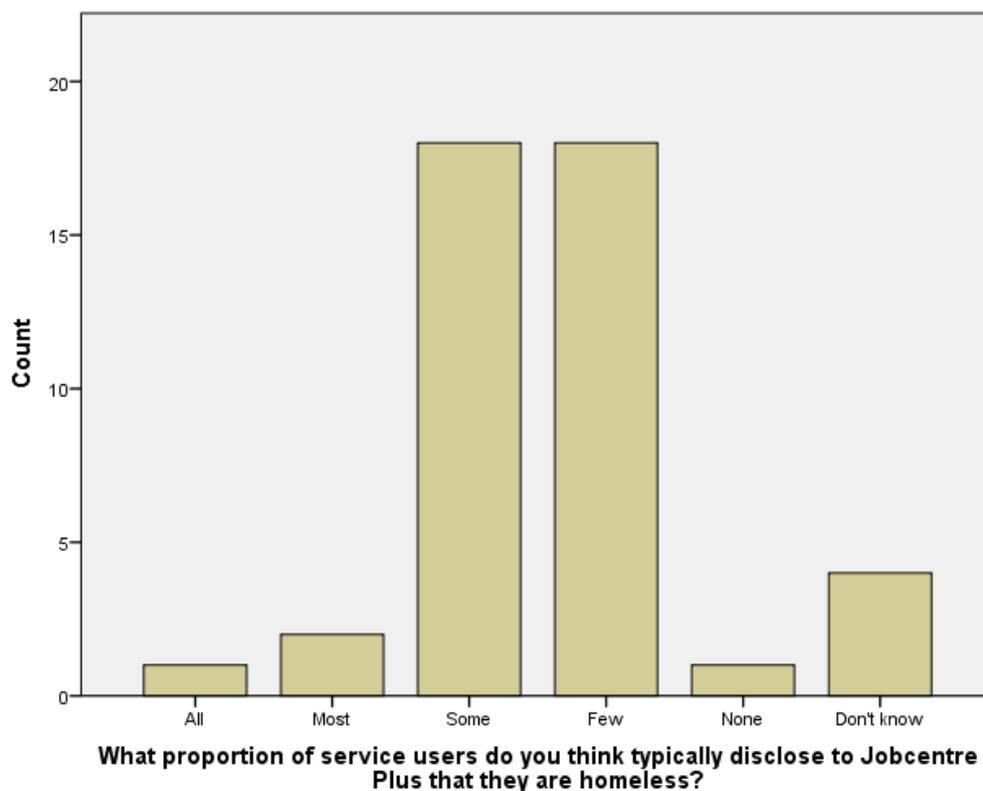
Respondents were asked how significant the impact of different possible effects of benefit sanctions was for their organisation. Unsurprisingly perhaps, rent arrears was the area where a very significant impact was most likely to be felt:

Effect	Very significant	Significant	Of little significance	No significance at all
Loss of income (HB, service charges)	26	14	3	2
More demand for services	17	24	1	0
More difficulty moving people on	24	16	4	0
More time spent liaising with DWP/Job Centre Plus and/or supporting appeals	18	24	1	0
Accrual of rent/service charge arrears	28	13	2	2
Being forced to make evictions	15	11	8	9

One interview respondent (not from a homelessness agency) confirmed that there was a supported housing project that people had been evicted from for failing to pay their service charge after being sanctioned. Another interview respondent discussed the difficulties caused for supported housing organisations when they did not realise that a client had been sanctioned until rent arrears began to accrue. Service users with high rent arrears could often not be moved on, even when an explanation for the arrears was provided to a potential landlord.

## Communication

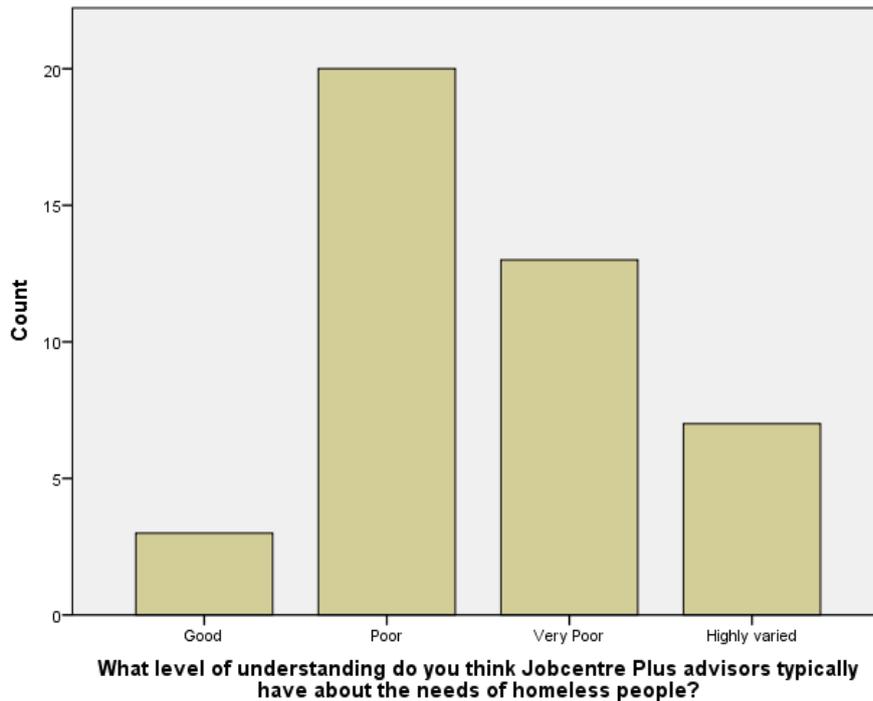
Perhaps the clearest finding of the research, and one that has been referred to in a number of previous sections, was the difficulties in communication between service users, JCP and homelessness agencies. Respondents were asked what proportion of homeless claimants disclosed to the Job Centre that they were homeless, with the following responses:



There appeared to be similar difficulties with information passing in the opposite direction. Respondents were asked whether they were aware of homeless service users being given accessible information and additional targeted support by JCP to help them comply with the system and secure employment with the following responses:

Homeless service users receive additional support	No. of respondents
Yes, always	0
Yes, sometimes	5
Yes, but rarely	21
No	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>

In view of recent policy developments and recommendations discussed earlier, respondents were asked what level of understanding that they thought that JCP advisers had of the needs of homeless people; the responses were largely negative:



(the 'excellent' and 'very good' options were not chosen by any respondent) This response was given despite a range of information that is available to JCP staff on vulnerability, as described by the DWP respondent.

Respondents were asked the point at which homeless service users were most commonly aware that they had been sanctioned and gave the following responses:

Point of becoming aware of sanction	No. of respondents
When trying to withdraw money from a bank or cash account	34
After receiving a letter from DWP	5
At an adviser interview	2
Accumulation of rent/service charge arrears	1
After receiving a phone call from JCP	1
Don't know / no answer	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>

Further points made in relation to this question were:

- Clients may not receive letters due to the nature of their address
- Clients do not have access to telephones or, if they do, cannot keep them charged

Although this finding is consistent with that of Oakley and others in relation to all benefit claimants, it was emphasised by the respondent from the DWP that this should not be the case: "...they [claimants] should always be given an opportunity to present a version of why they've got into that particular situation."

Respondents were asked to choose up to three of a series of measures that could make it easier for homeless people to comply with the benefits system. Although a range of responses were given, the emphasis placed on good communication is clear:

Action to make it easier for homeless people to comply with the benefits system	Number
Pre-sanctions warning	32
Seeing the same person each time you go to JCP	30
Clearer/more accessible information at JCP on easements, pathways and hardship payments	24
Not feeling threatened by sanctions	21
More intensive employment advice and support	16
Non-financial sanctions	16
Better understanding of the benefits system	14
Availability of more accessible information sources	13
A more credible benefit reduction	10

The need for more and clearer information about hardship payments was emphasised by one interview respondent who suggested that young people who were sanctioned were often not told about the option to apply for these payments. Respondents were asked what a more personalised approach for homeless service users engaging with the benefit system would look like; the answers are paraphrased below, arranged under themes (many responses covered several themes – in these cases, the comment is placed under the heading that represents the first comment of the respondent):

### Individual support

- One to one meetings at a neutral place
- One to one support (or course) in the first month to ensure that claimants understand all that is expected of them
- Service users being able to deal with the same JCP worker throughout, who will have training around issues facing homeless people and develop a supportive relationship
- More time for JCP staff to engage with clients and develop understanding
- One to one named adviser and opportunity to communicate electronically from supported accommodation
- Continuity with same member of staff. The offer of bus fare to get service users to attend. Have local places where service users can access when difficult to attend due to cash flow issues.
- Daily appointments at the same time each day with the same person, more understanding around situations. Referring to social justice teams, and generally being more understanding. I once took a homeless guy into our JCP office; he had been rough sleeping for weeks and had no access to shower facilities. He was conscious of how he looked and smelled, and JCP staff were spraying perfume around our heads while he was trying to do his job searches. He realised that it was meant for him, was embarrassed and left, meaning he was sanctioned further.
- We now have a named homelessness benefit adviser and we find their personalised approach has a positive effect on claimants (the only response to this question that highlighted existing good practice)
- Greater understanding of needs
- An understanding that complex needs mean that people move around and do not receive letters, also that the cost of supported housing means that working is not viable
- Taking account of the vulnerability of service users and allowing representation at meetings
- Having specialised team so service user works with one person who understands complex needs and does not cancel appointments if one minute late
- Flexibility for signing on time. It is difficult to get somewhere for a specific time if you have a chaotic lifestyle. Also consider holding a drop in session at a venue in which homeless people regularly congregate, i.e. People's Kitchen or Ron Eager House. This would lessen the chance of failure to attend an appointment.
- Better attitude of staff

- Caring, sensitive, non-judgmental staff offering proactive support to address barriers to employment. No targets for reducing the number of claimants.
- Less stigmatising attitude of staff to those with addiction problems; longer appointments
- Empowering service users and making them feel valued
- Constructive, personalised approach with experienced staff who are not following a script. Constructive job search rather than just sending off CVs. Acknowledging that it is not realistic for everyone to do 37 hours job search per week.
- More supportive, non-judgmental JCP staff who can signpost people to relevant support
- Service users feeling valued so they are not afraid to ask questions and being encouraged to look for work that it is possible for them to do
- Representation of support workers
- Communication between local JCP offices; advisers speaking to support workers and letting them know of appointment times
- Being able to take support workers with them to have a greater understanding and advocacy there
- Better choice of locations
- Satellite clinics with empathetic staff
- Having the opportunity to report to post offices or village halls as changing offices when sofa surfing causes major difficulties

## Specialist Officers

With regard to the positive comment above, the respondent from the DWP acknowledged that specialism within JCP offices was desirable but suggested that the extent to which this could happen depended on factors such as the size of the office. The practical difficulties were illustrated further by another respondent who said that there was a person who was the point of contact for those with drug or alcohol issues *'but they've never materialised in my world.'*

Where other interview respondents had encountered JCP staff with specialist roles, there were mixed views of their effectiveness. One commented that a member of JCP staff who focused on alcohol and drug related issues had too many cases to deal with and so could not respond effectively to service users. However, another respondent was full of praise for specialist addiction workers noting with regret that *'they can't be there on the end of the phone 24/7 for us and our clients.'*

Another respondent took a very positive view of a member of staff who specialised in dealing with young people: *"He's a saviour for us because we can talk directly to him because sometimes we can't get anywhere and the young person can't get anywhere when they're asking about sanctions, why they're not being paid. So we can talk directly to this link and he's resolved lots of issues for us, lots and lots."*

## Consistency of Approach

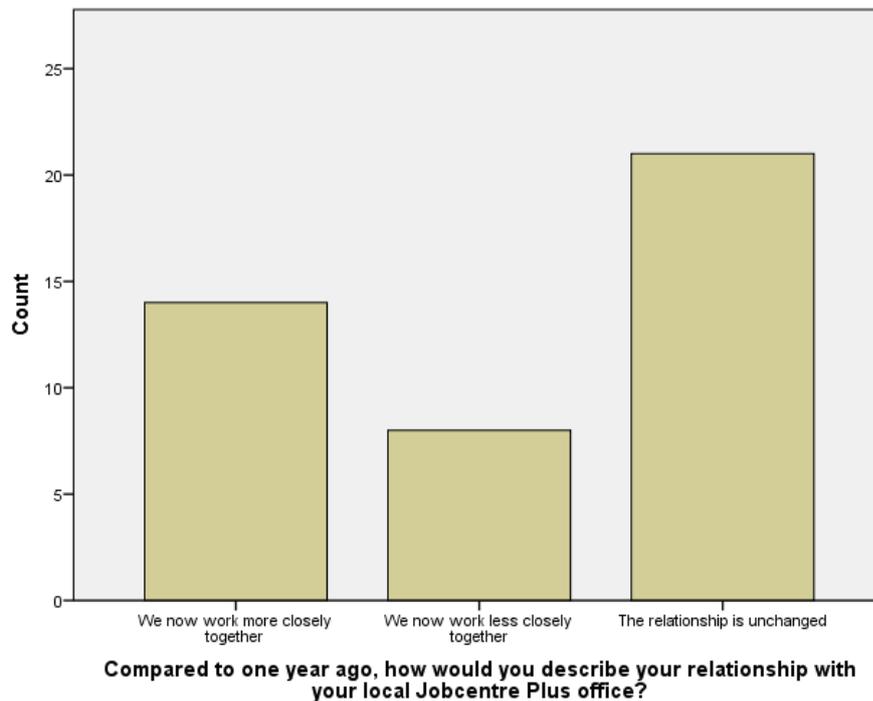
The concerns expressed above about the attitude of some JCP staff stood in sharp contrast to the government's response to the Oakley review and to the wish of the respondent from the DWP to *"move towards a true personalisation agenda so that we do have a clear understanding of that individual and their life and times and what sort of issues need to be addressed ..."*

This wish for staff to adopt a more personalised approach was reported by the DWP respondent to be supported through training, performance reviews and staff reporting procedures. This respondent also emphasised the training and advice that is repeatedly given to staff to ensure that claimants have understood the information that is provided to them. However, one interview respondent noted the very varied types of response that service users received from staff at JCP: *"ranging from sort of hostile to just bored and disinterested through to actually being sort of helpful and open to taking people's circumstances into account ..."*

Another interview respondent suggested that there was a more uniform, but low, level of service: *“They don’t actually give any good advice in most circumstances, which is unfortunate. So the client is left confused.”*

## Improving Communication

Respondents were asked, compared to one year ago, how they would describe their relationship with their local JCP office. There were a limited number of positive responses, as is shown in the chart below:



One interview respondent had been able to conduct dialogue with the DWP locally about the implementation of the Oakley review but acknowledged that it had been a long process: *“... they now have somebody in post who does that kind of thing and we’re talking to them but it’s taken us about a year to get to that point, really.”* They also acknowledged the benefits of persistence in their relationship with DWP: *“we’ve got individual contacts with telephone numbers and fax numbers for all departments in the DWP so if we needed to get in touch with somebody, we could do and they’ll generally accept implied consent.”*

Another interview respondent suggested that communication with the DWP could help to bridge the gap that sometimes existed between the intentions of policy makers and the work of front line staff: *“... what we’ve been doing with the DWP is to tell them what is happening so make sure your front-line people explain to people what these claimant commitments mean ...”*

However, there were also negative comments about attempts to work more closely with DWP, with one respondent describing them as ‘a law unto themselves.’ The time taken to respond to queries was identified as a difficulty by another respondent: *“you make a phone call, you get the call back within three hours, theoretically and that’s just not a great system when you’re trying to deal with someone urgently and have a discussion.”*

The final question of the survey was an open one, asking how communication between JCP, the homelessness sector and service users could be improved. Again, the comments are paraphrased and arranged thematically (under the first theme identified, if responses cover several):

### **Named contacts**

- Having names and being able to speak directly to advisers
- Having a named person to speak to
- A named contact
- To be able to speak to a named person in JCP, greater ease of setting up appointments, third party representation, politeness on the part of JCP staff, liaising with a service user's support worker if they are threatened with sanctions, support workers being able to explain to JCP staff how the work they are doing with service users supports the claimant commitment
- More named homelessness advisers
- Named advisers

### **Better attitude of staff**

- Better customer service and consent form for support worker to be copied in to appointment communications
- Some staff have been helpful in the past, some obstructive. Call centre has now replaced direct phone link. Homeless people are 'easy targets' for sanctions.
- Representation of support workers
- Third party communication
- Third party communication and named contacts in Jobcentres
- Acknowledging support workers' knowledge of clients and holding workshops within hostels
- JCP to accept signed consent to share information
- JCP to accept consent to share information and not to talk down to service users
- Liaising with homelessness services at first threat of sanctions
- Better choice of location
- One to one drop ins at projects
- Outreach service
- Used to have a drop in which was beneficial
- Better inter-agency communication
- Homeless sector staff speaking at JCP team meetings
- Quicker access to staff
- Better working relationships
- By phone or email
- JCP answering correspondence
- More information sharing with support networks
- Open and honest relationships

### **Other**

- Positive pathways out of homelessness
- More awareness of the needs of homeless people by the government rather than labelling them as 'shirkers' who cheat the system
- Social justice teams being more effective in warning individuals threatened with sanctions

One interview respondent noted that they had a good relationship with a named contact, but it had taken some time for that link to be established. Another said that they had a very good relationship but that their named contact was to have responsibility for another geographical area added to their work, which was likely to reduce the amount of contact that they could have.

One piece of good practice that was noted in an interview was regular meetings between JCP staff and a range of agencies: *"... it means that staff are more aware of how to avoid sanctions in the first place and I think that also has meant that there's a bit more understanding at the JCP as well." Training in the area of sanctions was identified as being advantageous because "it gives them [staff] a little bit more knowledge about how to deal with sanctions and rather than dealing with them after they've happened, the point is to ... avoid them in the first place, so I think they are putting more pressure on .... the people they work with, to make sure they definitely make the appointment or ring up ..."*

So the position with regard to seeking to improve communication with DWP and JCP was a mixed one but there was some evidence to suggest that this could be a fruitful way for agencies working with homeless people to use their time.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## The Government – in principle

With a further £12 billion of cuts to benefits planned, and benefits to pensioners specifically excluded, it may seem futile to make any recommendation that might mean benefit continuing to be paid to any claimant who could be denied it. Nonetheless the evidence of this research suggests that the government should:

1. End the divisive language and false distinction between the people who receive benefits and those who pay for them from their taxes and acknowledge that homeless people may have complex needs that prevent them from seeking work. In practice, one measure such as a change of approach would be to extend the benefit easement so that more homeless people can take more time to resolve their housing situation.
2. Consider whether the sanctions system is genuinely being viewed in terms of providing incentives for claimants to take steps to find work or whether political rhetoric is implying that it is a method of punishing vulnerable people for failing to be sufficiently sorry for having to claim benefits.
3. Ensure that benefit sanctions are proportionate to the action that triggers them; in particular, that marginal lateness for appointments does not cause severe financial hardship and that no one is sanctioned for an administrative error or for waiting in a queue as their appointment time passes.

## The Government, DWP and JCP – in Practice

The government, in its response to Oakley's review of sanctions (DWP, 2014), agreed with the majority of the recommendations. Most relevant to this research were the acceptance of the need for a greater role for advocates for clients 'with communication support needs', a role for advocates in agreeing the claimant commitment with vulnerable groups, examining how vulnerable groups who are sanctioned should be identified and helped to claim hardship payments and/or linked to other support services, improved communication with clients before benefit is stopped and a specified timescale within which appeals against sanctions decisions should be taken. Building on the acceptance of these good practice principles, it is recommended that the government should direct all JCP offices to take the following steps. In the absence of such a direction, the steps should be taken voluntarily by JCP offices:

1. Ensure that there are trained, named specialist homelessness advisers in every JCP office.
2. Train all staff about the specific needs of people who are homeless or in insecure housing and/or invite homeless sector staff to attend team meetings.
3. Allow third party advisers to attend appointments with clients who are homeless or in insecure housing situations. Encourage third party advisers to be present at discussions of the claimant commitment.
4. Accept, and put into action, consents given by people who are homeless or in insecure housing situations for communication to be made via third parties, particularly in relation to decisions to stop or reduce benefits.
5. Recognise that people who are homeless or in insecure housing may have practical or psychological difficulties in attending JCP offices and arrange for contact at alternative venues.
6. Determine appeals against sanctions within the shortest possible timescale in the case of people who are homeless or in insecure housing.
7. Use the discretionary powers available to extend the homelessness easement in acknowledgement that the complex needs of homeless people may take considerably more than four weeks to resolve.

## Agencies supporting homeless people

It is recognised that seeking to change policy and public opinion in relation to the principles above is a huge task, as was demonstrated by the recent general election campaign and result. Nonetheless, failure to consistently challenge the portrayal of homeless people and others receiving means tested benefit as undeserving will mean that such a portrayal remains widely accepted and electorally popular. More practice based recommendations are that agencies should seek to take advantage of the government's apparently benign response to the Oakley review, the 'easement' available for homeless people and the concern evident from the interview with the member of the staff of the DWP, by taking the following steps:

1. Lobby JCP staff to implement the above good practice points, particularly in relation to third party representation, using the evidence presented by the Oakley review and the government's response to it.
2. Set up meetings with relevant JCP staff in relation to the above recommendations wherever possible.
3. Ensure that staff, and service users who are homeless or in insecure housing, are aware of the easement regulations.
4. More generally, ensure that everything possible is done to inform service users of the conditions of receiving benefits.
5. Encourage and support service users to appeal against benefit sanctions and to apply for hardship loans.
6. Undertake training on the prevention of benefit sanctions.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Beatty, C., Foden, M, McCarthy, L. and Reeve, K. (2015) *Benefit Sanctions and homelessness: a scoping report*. London: Crisis. Available at: [http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Sanctions%20Report%202015\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Sanctions%20Report%202015_FINAL.pdf). Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015.

CAB Manchester (2013) *Punishing Poverty: A review of benefit sanctions and their impact on clients and claimants*. Available at: <https://onedrive.live.com/view.aspx?resid=CB5ED957FE0B849F1350&app=WordPdf&authkey=!AJTbB-gzwsSCayQ>. Accessed 28<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

Community Link (2014) *Policy Briefing No. 1*. January 2014 Available at <http://www.community-links.org/uploads/editor/file/Policy%20Briefing%201%20Sanctions%20Feb2014.PDF>. Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

Drinkwater, N., Graham, J., Kempster, A. and Thomas, S. (No Date) *Evidence from the frontline: How policy changes are affecting people experiencing multiple needs*. Available at: <http://meam.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/EvidenceFromTheFrontline.pdf>. Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2015. Making Every Adult Matter.

Department for Work and Pensions (2013) *Jobseeker's Allowance: overview of revised sanctions regime*. Available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/238839/jsa-overview-of-revised-sanctions-regime.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/238839/jsa-overview-of-revised-sanctions-regime.pdf). Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

Department for Work and Pensions (2014) Government's response to the Independent review of the operation of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions validated by the Jobseekers Act 2013. Available at [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/332137/jsa-sanctions-independent-review-government-response.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/332137/jsa-sanctions-independent-review-government-response.pdf). Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

Department for Work and Pensions (2015) *Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance sanctions: decisions made to September 2014*. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/jobseekers-allowance-and-employment-and-support-allowance-sanctions-decisions-made-to-september-2014>. Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015.

Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S. and Watts, B. (2015) *The Homelessness monitor: England 2015*. London: Crisis.

Homeless Link (2013) *A High Cost to Pay: The Impact of Benefit Sanctions on Homeless People*. Available at: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/A%20High%20Cost%20to%20Pay%20Sept%202013.pdf>

Homeless Link (2014) *Support for Single Homeless People in England. Annual Review 2014*. London: Homeless Link.

Oakley, M. (2014) *Independent review of the operation of Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions validated by the Jobseekers Act 2013*. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

Spencer, A., Ogden, C. & Battarbee, L. (2015) *#CheshireHunger*. Available at: [http://westcheshire.foodbank.org.uk/resources/documents/Cheshire\\_Hunger\\_March\\_2015\\_Full\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://westcheshire.foodbank.org.uk/resources/documents/Cheshire_Hunger_March_2015_Full_Report_Final.pdf). Accessed 6<sup>th</sup> July 2015.

Spurr, H. (2014) 'Government eases sanctions for homeless people', *Inside Housing*, 8 July: <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/government-eases-sanctions-for-homeless-people/7004436>.

Watts, B., Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G. & Watkins, D. (2014) *Welfare conditionality and sanctions in the UK*. York: JRF.  
 Work and Pensions Committee (2015a). *Inquiry into Benefit Sanctions following the Oakley Review* 7<sup>th</sup> January 2015  
 HC/814. First Session Oral Evidence. Available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/work-and-pensions-committee/benefit-sanctions-policy-beyond-the-oakley-review/oral/17289.html>.  
 Accessed 2nd March 2015.

Work and Pensions Committee (2015b). *Inquiry into Benefit Sanctions following the Oakley Review*. 21st January 2015  
 HC/814 Second Session Oral Evidence. Available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/work-and-pensions-committee/benefit-sanctions-policy-beyond-the-oakley-review/oral/17722.html>.  
 Accessed 2nd March 2015.

Work and Pensions Committee (2015c). *Inquiry into Benefit Sanctions following the Oakley Review*. 4<sup>th</sup> February  
 Third Session Oral Evidence. Available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/work-and-pensions-committee/benefit-sanctions-policy-beyond-the-oakley-review/oral/17970.html>.  
 Accessed 2nd March 2015.

YMCA (2014) *Signed on and Sanctioned: An insight into vulnerable young adults' perspective on benefit sanctions*. Available  
 at: <http://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Signed-on-and-Sanctioned-v1.0.pdf>. Accessed 1st March 2015.  
 YMCA (2014) *Food for Thought*. Available at; <http://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Food-for-thought-Report.pdf>. Accessed 1st March 2015.

YMCA (2014) *Processed and Punished*. Available at: <http://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Processed-and-Punished-v1.0.pdf>. Accessed 1st March 2015.







**North East  
Homeless  
Think Tank**



**northern rock  
foundation**