



# Community Planning Aberdeen

<b>Progress Report</b>	Project End Report: 1.6 We are aiming to increase the uptake of unclaimed benefits across Aberdeen City by 10% to support people claim the benefits they're entitled to.
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<b>Date of Report</b>	22 September 2022
<b>Governance Group</b>	CPA Board – 30 November 2022

<b>Purpose of the Report</b>
This report presents the results of the LOIP Improvement Project Aim to increase the uptake of unclaimed benefits across Aberdeen City by 10% to support people claim the benefits they're entitled to and seeks approval to end project has the aim has been achieved.

<b>Summary of Key Information</b>
<p><b>1. BACKGROUND</b></p> <p>1.1 A new stretch outcome was introduced into the LOIP 'No one will suffer due to poverty by 2026' to communicate the Partnership's commitment to reduce inequalities in the city and to mitigate the causes of immediate and acute poverty through projects which will ensure all people across the city have access to food, fuel, shelter, and finance.</p> <p>1.2 The pandemic has pushed many people into poverty partly due to reduced income. This has not been evenly spread, with certain groups more likely to experience these negative effects, most often those who were already lowest paid and closest to poverty.</p> <p>1.3 Figures from the Scottish Household Survey showed an already high level of financial insecurity in Aberdeen City with 11.1% in 2019 reporting that they "Don't manage very well and have some financial difficulties" or "Are in deep financial trouble". This is compared to 8.8% in Scotland and an increase from 9% in 2018.</p> <p>1.4 Ensuring that household income is maximised through the uptake of unclaimed benefits is a key aspect to supporting households to come out of poverty and improve their financial security. There continues to be barriers which can mean people do not claim benefits they are entitled to. These include the stigma of</p>

claiming, people being unaware of what they are entitled to, onerous applications processes, and those living in rural Scotland facing geographical barriers. This project sought to implement changes to mitigate these barriers.

## **2. IMPROVEMENT PROJECT AIM**

- 2.1 Against this background, on 20 April 2022 the CPA Board approved the [project charter](#) for the initiation of an improvement project which aimed to increase the uptake of unclaimed benefits across Aberdeen City by 10% to support people claim the benefits they're entitled to.
- 2.2 Ensuring that household income is maximised through the uptake of unclaimed benefits is a key aspect to supporting households to come out of poverty and improve their financial security. There continues to be barriers which can mean people do not claim the benefits they are entitled to. These include the stigma of claiming, people being unaware of what they are entitled to, onerous applications processes, and those living in rural Scotland facing geographical barriers.
- 2.3 There is a lack of accurate data on estimating eligibility and take-up, meaning the full extent of the problem is not known. The Government figures released in February 2020 based on DWP/HMRC data from 2017/2018 show an estimated £16 billion of benefits go unclaimed in the UK.

## **3. WHAT CHANGES DID WE MAKE?**

- 3.1 Several changes were tested throughout the project and are listed below.

### **1. Online benefit calculator**

An online benefit calculator was purchased to enable individuals to identify the benefits they are entitled to, through a 24/7 accessible digital tool. The online calculator aimed to:

- Help our residents understand their entitlements with our own branded benefits calculator
- Designed to be self-service freeing up staff resources though with the option of an adviser led assistance for those more vulnerable.
- Hundreds of help pages available to assist individuals to understand their own entitlement
- Signpost users on where and how to claim
- Management Reports will show how many people have accessed the tool along with the additional benefits identified.

However, having the tool, was only part of the answer, people need to be aware of it and actively using it for it to increase the uptake. The tool was highlighted through working with communities, newsletters, and social media campaigns to increase awareness of the tool.

## 2. Families Benefit Booklet

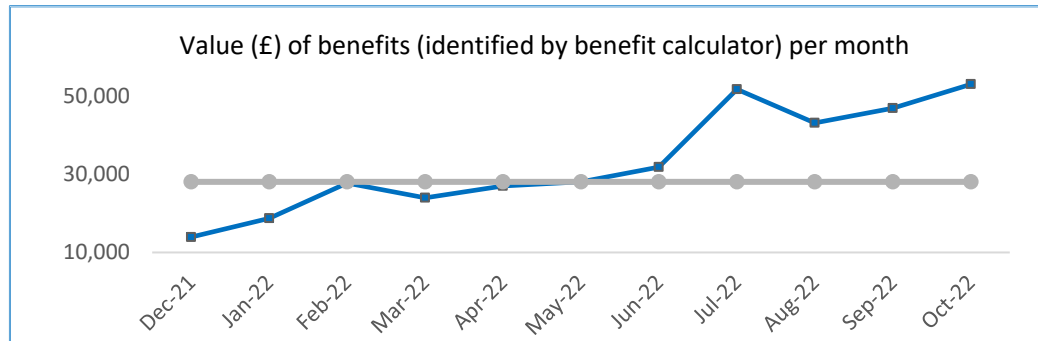
A booklet was created pulling together all benefits available for families to increase uptake in child aged benefits. The booklet targeted families and provided guidance on how to claim. This was sent out via Educations Group call messaging system along with promoting this via each School's social media pages and added to the Councils Website.

## 3. Targeted benefit take-up campaign

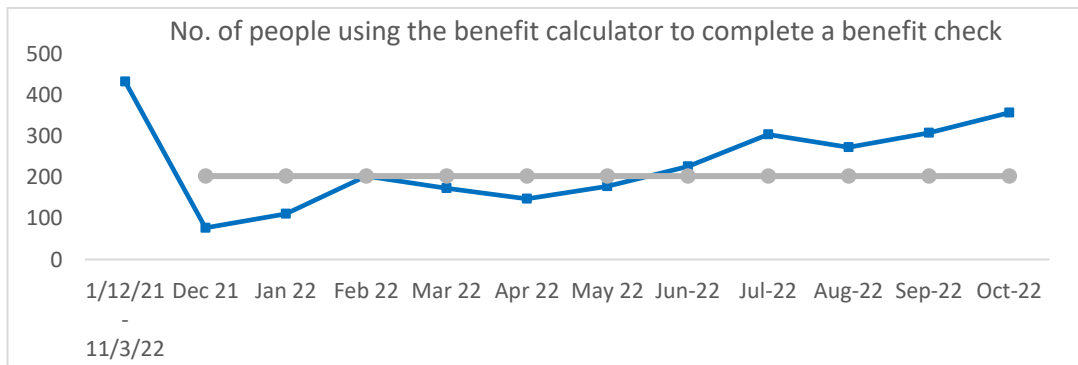
Identifying existing data from ACC sources that could be used to support identify people eligible for certain benefits to enable direct communication/auto award to be undertaken to test if this increased uptake. For testing, project used existing data from Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction data, to manually check those that would have an entitlement to Pension Credits. All households identified were then contacted by the Financial Inclusion Team.

## 4 HAVE OUR CHANGES RESULTED IN IMPROVEMENT?

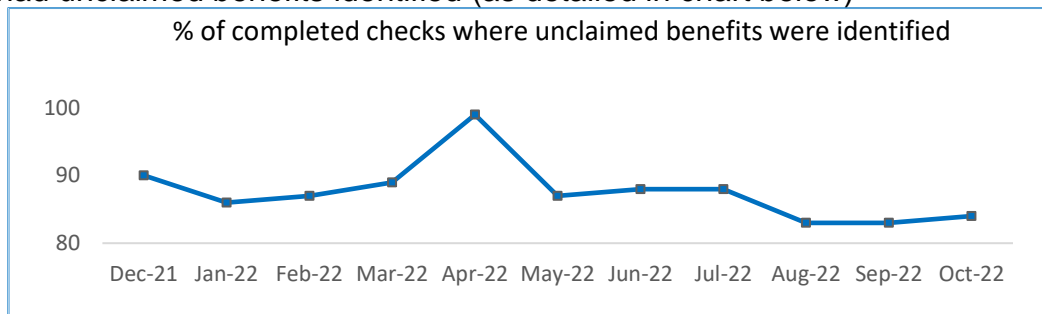
- 4.1 The project has surpassed its aim of a 10% increase with an 81% increase in uptake of unclaimed benefits on average per week between 12 March 2022 to 31 October 2022 compared with 1 December 2021 to 11 March 2022 through the online benefit calculator. This data shows improvement which has been sustained over time.



- 4.2 The chart below details the number of people completing the calculator per month. Showing that since 1 December 2021, 2,357 people have completed the benefit calculator, with 1,901 people having unclaimed benefits identified, to a total value of £282,452.53 p/w as of end of September 2022.



- 4.3 On average 88% of people completing the calculator since December 2021 have had unclaimed benefits identified (as detailed in chart below)



#### Targeted Benefit Campaign Using Data to Identify Eligible Households

4.4 Using Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction data from 10 February 2022, we identified 410 household who qualified for Pension Credits, who should be entitled to £172,218.42 weekly/ £895,357.84 annually. All have been contacted directly by letter. People contacted have feedback that without the contact they wouldn't have been aware of entitlement and wouldn't have made the claim. This system is now built in with eligible households now contacted as business as usual.

4.5 When doing targeted benefit take up campaigns, we initially called households, however many would not engage as concerned that it was a scam. From this learning, the team adapted the test and now write to the household first instead of calling them to prevent any concerns about being a scam. This letter provides the household with the information on how to claim the benefit they're entitled to as well as where to access support to complete the claim.

#### Benefit Promotional Campaign

4.6 From the pension credit target take up campaign held in June, from 1 social media post on 1 June, this resulted in 1 week, 28 people complete the check, resulting in £79,569.32 new financial gains for 22 households, compared with 29 people completing the pension credit check in the whole of May. This shows that the direct social media campaign for specific benefit showed improvement.

#### Families Support Booklet

4.7 The families support booklet was issued to all school age families in March 2022. The evaluation data shows the really positive impact of the booklet with 90% of people who responded to the support for families booklet found it useful and 25% went on to submit a claim. Feedback also reported that families wanted the information provided on a regular basis and not as a one off and that it needed to be easy to access on an ongoing basis.

## 5 HOW WILL WE SUSTAIN THESE IMPROVEMENTS?

5.1 The data shows that the improvement has been sustained each month as of October 2022. To ensure this continues to be sustained the changes tested have been adopted as business as usual and will continue as they have proved successful in maximising the income of household in Aberdeen. The multi-agency project team will continue to meet ensuring that existing changes continue, and further changes identified.

- 5.2 For the benefit calculator, it is recognised that further opportunities to raise awareness of the calculator and enabling people to access and complete the calculator individually, but also where support is required to complete this with partner organisations, family, friends etc providing support. In line with this, a Community Planning Aberdeen campaign as proposed by the Board on 23 September 2023 is being arranged and will promote the calculator across all partners, local press, community groups, etc.
- 5.3 As detailed in section 7 below, given the confidence in the changes, the project will now scale up the changes tested to other benefits and target audiences at appropriate times via direct communication, auto award where possible and also through social media, newsletters, community groups etc. A dashboard is being developed using the Free School Meals/School Clothing Grant data to help identify those eligible for Education Maintenance Allowance and not claiming to allow a targeted benefit uptake to increase numbers.
- 5.4 Reflecting on the feedback from the families booklet, the team have developed a communication plan to ensure that at various points throughout the year families are communicated with in relation to available benefits. Also, from the learning from the targeted communication using available data, the team will use available data to target Educational Benefits that ACC administer with a view to auto award where possible.

## **6 HOW WILL WE MONITOR THESE IMPROVEMENTS?**

- 6.1 Benefit take up data is reported on monthly basis, and should it be agreed to end the project is ended; the data recorded will continue to be reported to the Anti-Poverty Group/Senior Management Team reporting, as well as reported on the Improvement Programme Dashboard to ensure that performance continues. Scale up improvements will be reported via the improvement programme dashboard.

## **7 OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCALE UP AND SPREAD**

- 7.1 The project focused on specific benefits. The project recognised the potential for the changes tested as part of this project to be scaled up for testing with a broader range of benefits. The effectiveness of each of the change ideas as shown by the outcomes achieved through our initial testing with specific benefits, it is clear that there are further opportunities to scale these changes up and apply them to further benefits.
- 7.2 To progress this, the team will work with partners to develop information sharing protocols where required, to share data required to be able to identify and make direct contact, and where possible, auto award, for other benefits. For example, we have submitted a re-use application to DWP to be able to use UC, Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction data to identify unclaimed benefits on a larger scale. The outcomes and the impact of the changes tested to date will also be shared with partners who are also awarding benefits in order to make direct communication or auto award where possible. The next benefits to use this data process to auto award will be Educational Benefits.

- 7.3 The learning from this project may also be of interest to other Outcome Improvement Groups, in particular projects 1.2 and 1.5. The ethos of good information sharing; joined up working; will likely resound across all improvement groups, particularly in light of the cost-of-living crisis and the circumstances facing many households and importance of maximising income. From the successful tests from this project.
- 7.4 Benefit calculator will be used to complete the financial assessment of people presenting as homeless as per improvement aim 1.5.

### Recommendations for Action

It is recommended that the CPA Board:

- i) Agree that testing is concluded and that this Improvement Project is brought to an end on the basis that the project aim has been achieved and the changes tested will continue with business as usual and the Anti-poverty group will continue to monitor data.
- ii) Note that the dataset for the overall aim will continue to be reported via the Improvement Programme dashboard to ensure progress is monitored.
- iii) Note that the project team will continue to scale up and spread the change ideas as described in section 7 with a view that a further increase in the uptake of unclaimed benefits is achieved and reported via the Improvement programme dashboard as per recommendation (ii).
- iv) Note that a CPA benefit uptake campaign will start in November 2022 to further raise awareness of the online benefit calculator, as well as all available benefits.

### Opportunities and Risks

Scaling up to other benefits - individuals may not engage with the information and applying for the benefits identified in same way the benefits tested. A potential risk is access to real time data on overall unclaimed benefits in Aberdeen City and to evidence impact of the changes tested.

### Consultation

Anti-Poverty Outcome Improvement Group  
CPA Management Group

### Background Papers

The following papers were used in the preparation of this report.

- LOIP
- Project Charter – Unclaimed Benefits

### Contact details:

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