

Universal Credit - Common Problems with Identified Solutions

In all likelihood, a Universal Credit (UC) claim will be processed correctly. However, there are a number of common queries / issues which may occur during the claim process and when UC is paid. The scenarios detailed below identify the potential issues and gives guidance on how to deal with them / advise the customer further.

Potential Issue	Please follow the steps below in numerical order:
<p>1 Customer was not informed by Job Centre Plus (JC+) that they could claim an advance payment of UC</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure customer is referred back to the Job Centre Plus for UC advance. 2. Once this has been exhausted / if out of time, contact the Community Support team (0808 1789278) for consideration of additional support regarding utility bills and / or food. 3. Consider Discretionary Housing Payment for help with shortfall in rent – refer customer to Housing Benefit team in the Customer Centre, Corporation Road. 4. Contact Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), who may be able to support discussions with Landlord and utility services.
<p>2 Customer reports difficulty paying their rent and also their gas and electricity during the five to six weeks waiting for their first UC payment</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure customer is referred back to JC+ for UC advance (see point 1 above). 2. Once this has been exhausted, contact Community Support team (0808 178 9278) for consideration of additional support regarding utility bills. 3. Consider Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) for help with shortfall in rent - refer customer to Housing Benefit team in the Customer Centre, Corporation Road. 4. Contact CAB, who may be able to support discussions with landlord and utility services.
<p>3 Customer reports difficulty affording enough food during the five to six weeks waiting for their first UC payments</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure customer is referred back to JC+ for UC advance (see point 1 above). 2. Once this has been exhausted, contact Community Support team for consideration of additional support regarding food - i.e. referring for food bank parcels. 3. Consider contacting Children’s Services if they are a family as the Council has a duty of care for Children. 4. Contact CAB, who may be able to support discussions with landlord and utility services. 5. Customer may be eligible for CAB Budgeting advice and consider food initiatives specific to Middlesbrough. CAB will also look at free school meal entitlement.
<p>4 Customer reports it difficult to adjust to being paid monthly in arrears – budgeting monthly presents a difficulty for them</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ensure customer confirms this to either JC+ or a trusted partner (presently the Housing Benefit office) straight away. A referral process can be initiated for budgeting support from Middlesbrough Council. 2. The claimant could request an Alternative Payment Arrangement (i.e fortnightly payments) through contacting their work coach at JC+. 3. Consider Community Support application for crisis support in the short term (dependent on situation). 4. Refer to CAB for Budgeting Advice. 5. Refer to CAB for debt advice.
<p>5 Customer experiences extra delay beyond the standard five to six week wait for their first UC payment</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Escalate query to Middlesbrough Council Lead Officers so that they can refer it to the JC+. 2. Crisis / emergency payment can be considered through Community Support Scheme / Children’s Services (Referral details are included below). 3. Refer to CAB for further support.

Potential Issue	Please follow the steps below in numerical order:
<p>6 Customer is eligible for UC but has not claimed Council Tax Reduction (CTR)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complete self-serve form on behalf of the customer (if trained to do so) or 2. Refer the customer to the Customer Centre to complete a form (with support if required), or 3. Refer the customer to on-line self-serve form so that they can complete themselves. <p>Ensure the customer does not delay in completing the form as the date of claim may affect their entitlement.</p> <p>CTR Form location www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/benefitclaim</p>
<p>7 Customer finds it difficult using / finding a computer</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Refer to the Council's leaflet containing details of digital access across the borough. 2. Refer to Middlesbrough Council's website for location of any digital support available. 3. Ensure the customer informs their work coach that they are experiencing difficulties.
<p>8 Customer is unable to remember their unique password to access their on line account</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Refer customer to JC+ Helpline to query their claim and advise of the problem (free phone number and phones available in Job Centres if required). 2. Contact their work coach as a priority to let them know of the situation in case the customer is sanctioned for not carrying out required tasks. 3. Consider a referral to the Community Support crisis line if customer is not going to be paid their normal UC.
<p>9 Customer is asked to provide the same evidence more than once</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask customer to contact JC+ to speak with Work Coach to discuss the evidence requirement. 2. Escalate query to Middlesbrough Council's Lead Officers so that they can refer it to the JC+ as a priority. Middlesbrough Council will keep details of claims to discuss during monthly meeting with JC+. 3. Refer to CAB who may take up the case as a complaint to JC+ / support for appeal.
<p>10 Customer with caring responsibilities / long term health condition / disability have not had this taken into account with their claimant commitment</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Refer customer to CAB who will seek advice / work with JC+ to set up a case conference system.

Please pass all details of the scenarios detailed above direct to Middlesbrough Council's Lead Officers (Martin Barker / Mark Symmonds) at the Customer Centre via:

Email: Martin_Barker@middlesbrough.gov.uk **Tel:** 01642 726252 - Middlesbrough Council Client Unit

Email: Mark.Symmonds@kier.co.uk **Tel:** 07789 744528 - Universal Credit Lead Officer

Further contacts for advice and support:

Citizens Advice Bureau: 9 Linthorpe Road, Middlesbrough TS1 1RE

Advice line: 0344 499 4110

Email: advice@middlesbroughcab.org.uk

Children's Service: (01642) 726004 followed by Option 3

Community Support Team: 0808 178 9278 (Freephone number)

UC Helpline: 0800 328 9344 (Monday - Friday, 8am - 6pm)

