

# 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><b>1</b> 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"> <li>1. Ensure customer is referred back to the Job Centre Plus for UC advance.</li> <li>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.</li> <li>3. Consider Discretionary Housing Payment for help with shortfall in rent – refer customer to Housing Benefit team in the Customer Centre, Corporation Road.</li> <li>4. Contact Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), who may be able to support discussions with Landlord and utility services.</li> </ol>
<p><b>2</b> 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"> <li>1. Ensure customer is referred back to JC+ for UC advance (see point 1 above).</li> <li>2. Once this has been exhausted, contact Community Support team (0808 178 9278) for consideration of additional support regarding utility bills.</li> <li>3. Consider Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) for help with shortfall in rent - refer customer to Housing Benefit team in the Customer Centre, Corporation Road.</li> <li>4. Contact CAB, who may be able to support discussions with landlord and utility services.</li> </ol>
<p><b>3</b> 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"> <li>1. Ensure customer is referred back to JC+ for UC advance (see point 1 above).</li> <li>2. Once this has been exhausted, contact Community Support team for consideration of additional support regarding food - i.e. referring for food bank parcels.</li> <li>3. Consider contacting Children’s Services if they are a family as the Council has a duty of care for Children.</li> <li>4. Contact CAB, who may be able to support discussions with landlord and utility services.</li> <li>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.</li> </ol>
<p><b>4</b> 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"> <li>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.</li> <li>2. The claimant could request an Alternative Payment Arrangement (i.e fortnightly payments) through contacting their work coach at JC+.</li> <li>3. Consider Community Support application for crisis support in the short term (dependent on situation).</li> <li>4. Refer to CAB for Budgeting Advice.</li> <li>5. Refer to CAB for debt advice.</li> </ol>
<p><b>5</b> Customer experiences extra delay beyond the standard five to six week wait for their first UC payment</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Escalate query to Middlesbrough Council Lead Officers so that they can refer it to the JC+.</li> <li>2. Crisis / emergency payment can be considered through Community Support Scheme / Children’s Services (Referral details are included below).</li> <li>3. Refer to CAB for further support.</li> </ol>

Potential Issue	Please follow the steps below in numerical order:
<p><b>6</b> Customer is eligible for UC but has not claimed Council Tax Reduction (CTR)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Complete self-serve form on behalf of the customer (if trained to do so) or</li> <li>2. Refer the customer to the Customer Centre to complete a form (with support if required), or</li> <li>3. Refer the customer to on-line self-serve form so that they can complete themselves.</li> </ol> <p><b>Ensure the customer does not delay in completing the form as the date of claim may affect their entitlement.</b></p> <p>CTR Form location  <a href="http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/benefitclaim">www.middlesbrough.gov.uk/benefitclaim</a></p>
<p><b>7</b> Customer finds it difficult using / finding a computer</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Refer to the Council's leaflet containing details of digital access across the borough.</li> <li>2. Refer to Middlesbrough Council's website for location of any digital support available.</li> <li>3. Ensure the customer informs their work coach that they are experiencing difficulties.</li> </ol>
<p><b>8</b> Customer is unable to remember their unique password to access their on line account</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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).</li> <li>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.</li> <li>3. Consider a referral to the Community Support crisis line if customer is not going to be paid their normal UC.</li> </ol>
<p><b>9</b> Customer is asked to provide the same evidence more than once</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask customer to contact JC+ to speak with Work Coach to discuss the evidence requirement.</li> <li>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+.</li> <li>3. Refer to CAB who may take up the case as a complaint to JC+ / support for appeal.</li> </ol>
<p><b>10</b> 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"> <li>1. Refer customer to CAB who will seek advice / work with JC+ to set up a case conference system.</li> </ol>

**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](mailto:Martin_Barker@middlesbrough.gov.uk) **Tel:** 01642 726252 - Middlesbrough Council Client Unit

**Email:** [Mark.Symmonds@kier.co.uk](mailto: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](mailto: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)

