

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the work being done at Leeds City Council (LCC) to improve Pension Credit take up in the city.

2. Summary

- 2.1 In 2023, there were an estimated 1200 individuals identified via Leeds Welfare & Benefit Service as potentially eligible for Pension Credit but not already claiming. The value of the potential awards being missed out on range from a few pounds to around £180 per week, not including the value of passported benefits. Most individuals also qualify for a 3-month award backdate.
- 2.2 Utilising data held by Leeds Welfare & Benefit Service, LCC have been able to identify Council Tax Support and/or Housing Benefit claimants in the city who meet age, income, benefits characteristics of pension credit but are not actively claiming. Using this data, potentially eligible pension credit claimants are being contacted and encouraged to make a claim.
- 2.3 As of 12 December 2024, at least 104 individuals have been awarded Pension Credit (with further claims pending) as a direct result of the project. The total benefit gain of these successful claims is approximately £500,000 per year. A significant number of individuals are entitled to awards of around £100 per week, with the largest successful award to date was worth £332.95 per week.
- 2.4 The take-up activity continues, responsive to other national campaigns and strategies to ensure we are continually targeting those missing out.

3. Background

3.1 What is Pension Credit?

Pension Credit is a DWP administered passporting benefit for people over state pension age. The basic rate of Pension Credit tops up the weekly income of eligible pension-age claimants to £218.15 per week for individuals and £332.95 for couples as standard. This figure is higher where someone is a carer, disabled (without a carer), or has children (exact figure dependent on individual circumstances)¹.

There is no capital limit for Pension Credit (though savings over £10000 can affect entitlement), and a specific element of the benefit called 'Savings Credit' is available for those with savings or income higher than the basic State Pension. Households may also still be eligible for Pension Credit if they have a disability, care for someone, have savings or housing costs. Full DWP overview of Pension Credit is available [HERE](#).

Pension Credit is a passporting benefit, which means in addition to the weekly financial award, claimants are also eligible for additional support including:

- Free TV License (over 75's)
- Healthcare costs including free NHS dental treatment, help with eyecare costs and hospital travel
- Winter Fuel Payment² (£200-£300)
- Warm Home Discount
- Cold Weather Payments (£25 when the temperature is 0°C or below, 7 days in a row)
- Housing benefit or help with mortgage interest, ground rent and service charges.
- Council Tax Support

3.2 Latest Data for Leeds

- 16% of the Leeds population is aged 65 and over, which is around 128,618 people (ONS MYE 2022)³
- As of May 2023, 120,605 older people were claiming State Pension
- Approximately 16% of older people aged 65 and over in Leeds are in poverty, equal to around 20,825 people⁴.

¹

Benefit Rates correct as of April 2024

² Please see 'Additional Information' section at the end of this briefing for further details

³ It should be noted that not everyone aged 65 to 67 will be eligible for state pension due to changes in state pension age.

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⁴ 16% of older people aged 65+ are estimated to be in poverty in the UK, meaning they have a weekly household income of £327 or less. As Leeds statistically mirrors the UK, based on the national rate it can be assumed that 20,825 pensioners in Leeds are affected by poverty. (DWP HBAI 2024)

- In Leeds, 14,800 claimants received Pension Credit (PC) in May 2024, with an average award of £77.37 per week.
- The average weekly award data in Leeds ranges from £63.05 in Temple Newsam, to £105.62 per week in Gipton and Harehills.
- The number of eligible claimants who are not claiming PC in Leeds is unknown. However, if we apply national based estimates to the latest Leeds data, it can be estimated that there are almost 8,000 eligible claimants who are not claiming PC in Leeds⁵. This would equate to £17m per year across the city going un-claimed, and an average award of £41 per week available to eligible non claiming households.

3.3 Reasons for not claiming Pension Credit

Pension Credit is historically underclaimed and although DWP regularly undertakes national communication campaigns (including [Pension Credit Awareness Week](#) and [Pension Credit Stakeholder Toolkits](#)) levels of uptake remain low.

The reasons why Pension Credit is underclaimed is largely based on anecdotal evidence, but it is widely accepted that many eligible individuals do not claim due to:

- Low overall public awareness of Pension Credit
- Assumptions or mistaken beliefs about eligibility i.e. those with savings or homeowners cannot claim
- Confusion about individual eligibility i.e. where existing income is higher than the standard Pension Credit rate but other benefit premiums would make the individual eligible
- Feelings of stigma or shame about claiming benefits or asking for help
- Cultural/values to 'make do', 'live within means', 'mustn't complain' or 'others are more deserving'
- Tangible barriers to making the claim – digital exclusion, support needs, language/translation requirements etc.
- Perception that the form/process will be too difficult or confusing
- Concern around potential impacts on other support – i.e. an increase in income may result in a reduction in financial support from the Council towards the cost of carers.
- Concerns around privacy, including unwillingness/suspicion around sharing personal and financial information

4. Leeds Pension Credit Working Group

4.1 Chaired by Leeds Older People's Forum, a Pension Credit working group was established in Leeds in 2021, with an overall aim of increasing the level of uptake in the city.

4.2 The number of older people living in deprivation is a key performance indicator for the age-friendly priority of the Best Council Plan. Ensuring people can maximise their income and know about all of the benefits they are eligible to claim and are encouraged and supported to do so contributes towards improving this indicator through reducing the number of older people living in income deprivation. Group attendees include Leeds Older People's Forum, Public Health, Leeds City Council (Welfare Rights, Welfare & Benefits, Housing Leeds and Financial Inclusion Team), Age UK, DWP, and Elected Members. As well as working together, attendees are tasked with considering opportunities within each organisation for improving Pension Credit uptake.

5. Leeds City Council Data-Matching Pilot

5.1 Using data held by Leeds Welfare & Benefit Service, LCC are able to identify Council Tax Support and/or Housing Benefit claimants in the city who meet age, income, benefits characteristics of pension credit but are not actively claiming.

5.2 In late 2021, the Pension Credit Working Group agreed a pilot project, writing to individuals identified via this process to encourage individual uptake. The overall response to the first letter was poor, but ultimately, the data matching exercise proved successful in accurately identifying a cohort of individuals not claiming but potentially eligible for Pension Credit. Additional interrogation of the data at the time identified some individuals were missing out on significant financial awards of up to £180 per week (in addition to any potential backdated lump sums and the passported benefits gains) and therefore it was determined that the project should be pursued under a revised approach outlined below.

Stage 1: Pension Credit Invitation Letter

Leeds Welfare & Benefit Service interrogate Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support data to produce a list of individuals potentially eligible for Pension Credit. The list is citywide and prioritised by predicted award value, ensuring those set to benefit the most financially from making an award are targeted first. The letter (revised from the first pilot based on multiagency feedback) highlights to the recipient that they have been identified as potentially eligible for Pension Credit and provides an overview of the benefits of claiming. Details of how to make a claim, DWP contact information, as well Leeds Age UK and Welfare Rights Unit are also included.

Stage 2: Follow up & Direct Support

Leeds Welfare & Benefit Service monitor each cohort for new claim registrations.

Where no claim has been registered after 6 weeks, individuals living in Housing Leeds properties are offered direct support to make a claim via the Housing Leeds – Housing Officer Income (HOI) Team. Contact includes all appropriate communication methods including face-to-face and home visits. As well as direct support to make a claim (and comprehensive benefit checks and other support for the individual where appropriate) the team also collect insight as to why no claim has been made previously.

5.3 2024 – Updates & Responsive changes

⁵ Briefing providing methodology for local estimates for unclaimed Pension Credit - [Leeds Pension Credit statistics.docx](#)

In 2024 LCC utilised links with Local Housing Association providers operating in the city, to ensure targeted support is available alongside the initial take up letter for Housing Association tenants.

- 5.4 In recognition of the significant numbers of individuals eligible for Pension Credit but not actively claiming (estimated to be 800,000 across the UK at the time), In July 2024, the Government announced an intention to work with local authorities to streamline the way councils assess eligibility for benefits including Pension Credit and Housing Benefit however no timescales for this work have been released. The Government also wrote to Local Authorities, requesting multiagency support for the national DWP 'Pension Credit Week of Action' in September 2024, aiming to 'help identify households not claiming the benefit, and encourage pensioners to apply by 21 December (maximum backdate period which includes entitlement to Winter Fuel Payment where the qualifying week is 16-22 September).
- 5.5 In November 2024, the DWP announced a national take-up campaign, writing to housing benefit recipients identified as having entitlement (but no active claim) to Pension Credit. 40,000 letters were issued on 30 October 2024, 40,000 letters on 4 November 2024 and 40,000 letters on 11 November 2024. In Leeds, approximately 1536 Housing Benefit claimants were contacted via this national campaign.
- 5.6 In order to increase the overall reach of both projects, the project focus locally has now shifted to contacting Council Tax Support (CTS) claimants – who will not be contacted via the national DWP campaign. It is anticipated that further letters will be sent via the national campaign in early 2025, and the local take-up project will continue to review and revise the approach, giving consideration to national campaigns as needed to ensure continued targeting of those most at risk of missing out, and who will not be contacted via other channels.
- 5.7 In addition to Council Tax Support claimants, benefit assessors continue to send take-up letters to potentially eligible claimants as part of standard reviews and individuals who have recently been awarded Attendance Allowance.

6. Outcomes

- 6.1 In 2023, there were an estimated 1200 individuals identified via Leeds Welfare & Benefit Service as potentially eligible for Pension Credit but not already claiming⁶.
- 6.2 Between November 2023 and November 2024, approximately 512 letters were sent via this campaign (including 261 letters to CTS claimants from October-November 2024).
- 6.3 As of 12/12/2024, at least 104 successful Pension Credit Claims have been made as a result of this project. This figure does not include pending claims and it is likely that there may also be further 'late' claims made from the early cohorts which have not been included. The financial value of the 104 confirmed new claims is as below:

Total weekly income gains	£9,041.47
Total monthly income gains	£39,179.70
Total annual income gains	£470,156.44

- 6.4 Whilst the project was specifically targeting those identified as missing out on the highest awards, the average award value was £92.12⁷
- 6.5 The maximum weekly award achieved is £332.95 - full rate entitlement for a couple.

7. Additional Findings

- 7.1 Some individuals appear to have a previously registered/old claim showing a nil award, despite now being identified as potentially eligible. The individual may have previously claimed pension credit but experienced a change of circumstances resulting in a nil award. As there is no automated review, if the individual 'requalifies', they must contact the DWP to inform them. The identification of this group suggests this may be how some are missing out on entitlement.
- 7.2 Of the 1200 potentially eligible individuals identified through the data matching pilot, approximately 600 are Housing Leeds tenants.
- 7.3 Most individuals successfully contacted by HOI Officers accept the offer of direct support. Those who did not include those that had already submitted a claim following receipt of the letter. Of the small number of claimants found to be not eligible, this has been largely due to recent changes of circumstance, i.e. moving to a care home.
- 7.4 Of the cohorts not receiving follow up/direct support, there have been differing response rates/claims made following receipt of the letter - a small number of new claims to date have been made by owner occupiers; however a significant number of housing association tenants quickly made a claim.
- 7.5 Many individuals wanted to check with their family/friends before proceeding with the claim. HOI Officers identified how informal support networks can reassure individuals, but in some cases have posed a barrier where they do not engage or perceive ineligibility.

⁶ This figure is an estimate as due to customer changes of circumstance, pending claims and delays with DWP processing, it is not possible to produce a more accurate overall figure.

⁷ The average award when targeting those set to receive the highest amounts was £92.12. This is likely to reduce over time as the project is now targeting all CTS only claimants – irrespective of the predicted award value (achievable as it is a smaller total cohort).

7.6 Case examples/feedback as identified by HOI Officers can be found in Appendix One.

8. Conclusion

- 8.1 The data matching exercise undertaken by Leeds City Council's Welfare & Benefits Team has accurately identified a cohort of approximately 1200 individuals not claiming, but potentially eligible for Pension Credit. The data and processing is limited to Leeds City Council Benefit Service Staff and is both time-consuming and requires specialist knowledge to undertake. Capacity to undertake this work (currently unfunded) from both Leeds Welfare & Benefit Service and Housing Leeds perspectives is extremely limited and as such, only a small number of cohorts can be contacted at any one time, working around existing workloads and tasks.
- 8.2 Despite the challenges, the project has proven worthwhile to undertake with significant gains as a direct result of this work - with at least 40 successful awards now in payment, often in the region of £100 per week. Delays in DWP claim processing times mean that the outcomes to date are conservative figures – with further claims pending. The weekly ongoing award is also in addition to lump sum backdates and additional passported benefits such as help with prescription and health costs, which are also of substantial value. Those being targeted currently are those identified as missing out on the largest amounts – ensuring those in greatest need are being prioritised across the city.
- 8.3 Alongside valuable support to claimants, the HOI team have provided insight as to why claims have not been made by individuals previously. Consistently, feedback suggests individuals are missing out due to an expectation that those with entitlement to pension credit are notified directly in some way (supported by the fact that claims are being made quickly in response to the letter sent through this project). In addition, feedback also suggests eligible claimants are often 'put off' by the publicised standard amounts associated with Pension Credit and do not check further into their individual eligibility i.e. where an individual's existing income is higher than the standard amount but they would still be eligible for an award through savings credit.
- 8.4 Many Housing Leeds tenants, contacted by the Housing Officer Income Team, have required support and reassurance to make the claim, and would have been highly unlikely to do so successfully without help. Ways of offering direct support to additional cohorts, could be explored as another way of expanding the success of the project, particularly through engagement with Housing Associations in the city. In addition, to further maximise take up, when dealing with claims for Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support, staff at Leeds Welfare & Benefit Service are sending take-up letters to pensioners identified as potentially eligible for pension credit, alongside other notifications where appropriate.
- 8.5 This work will continue as LCC capacity allows, Progress and findings will be fed back directly to the Leeds Pension Credit Working Group and more widely via financial inclusion networks. As well as directly increasing the number of pension credit claims through the cohorts identified by LCC Benefits and Welfare, it is hoped that the learning and insights from this project will enable greater understanding and inform wider pension credit uptake work (and related projects) in the city.

Case Examples and Feedback from Housing Leeds Officers

- *It took multiple attempts to make contact with 'A'. He does not speak English and disregards all letters he receives. Language barriers are definitely an issue we see regularly but even with an interpreter it was a struggle as he didn't initially seem to want to engage...That being said, he came to follow up appointments and we were ultimately able to register a claim which was successful. I feel he was embarrassed about accepting help at first. I wonder if he spoke to family/friends after the appointment which reassured him.*
- *'B' didn't understand her entitlement...There was a total lack of awareness as to what income she was, or should, be receiving and she kept reiterating that she made sure she was 'living within her means'. There were also wider support needs.*
- *The entitlement of state pension is more than under legacy benefits so although 'C' has been receiving less than she was entitled to, the move from legacy benefits to state pension (and subsequent removal of underoccupancy charge) meant there had been a small increase in her income, which led to her thinking she was getting everything.*
- *Often, people have never been told they are eligible and just assume that they would have been at some stage, by someone, if they did have any entitlement.*
- *The eligibility amounts are confusing for people. In some cases, even if they get Personal Independence Payment or Attendance Allowance, they get the severe disability premium but don't know it means they could be eligible because no one has ever told them.*
- *Even though its a simple form to complete, it can also be very easy for people to make a mistake. 'D' had full housing benefit and state pension. When she got the letter, she did an online benefit check straight away, but she said it showed she wasn't eligible... She had included Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support in her calculation as income in error and when I worked it out correctly, she was actually missing out on £105 per week – I had to do a lot to reassure her, we did the claim and she actually got the decision within the week.*
- *Some claims are turned around within the week, but others have been waiting months for a decision – we don't really know why.*
- *'Mr & Mrs E' are in their early 80s. They've been struggling on for years and just don't have the capacity to actively seek help or even think about their finances anymore. They were missing out on £78 a week.*
- *Separately to this project I have recently had a customer who wasn't claiming any Housing Benefit or Pension Credit at all...He just had a small amount of savings and attendance allowance and had been living off these - struggling to pay full rent...Noone had ever told him he might be eligible for help – after the claims were all sorted, he actually moved to an Extra Care Facility and now gets the support he really needs - without those claims he simply wouldn't have been able to afford the care costs. I got an update from him recently and he's happy now.*

Pension Credit Uptake Letter Template



[Recipients address]

Welfare & Benefits Service

PO Box 911

LEEDS

LS1 9WJ

Telephone:(0113) 222 4404

Email:lcc.benefits@leeds.gov.uk

Date:

Dear

We are writing to you as you might be eligible for Pension Credit

If you are in receipt of state pension, you could be eligible to get a top up to your weekly income by claiming Pension Credit.

The average pension credit claim in Leeds is almost £71.21 per week, with the exact amount depending on the money you already have.

You might be entitled to pension credit, even if you have savings, a private pension or own your home.

Claiming Pension Credit can also mean you can get extra help with the following;

- Help with your Dental Costs
- Help with your Council Tax Bill
- Help with your Rent
- Help with your Heating Costs e.g: Warm Home Discount
- Help with your TV Licence if you are over 75

If you are awarded Pension Credit you may also be entitled to Winter Fuel Payments.

www.leeds.gov.uk

General enquiries: 0113 222 4444



You can make a claim online, by phone or you can also request a paper claim form.
<https://apply-for-pension-credit.service.gov.uk/start>

Pension Credit claim line: 0800 99 1234

If you would like more information, need help to claim or would just like to talk to someone about claiming Pension Credit, you can contact any of the services below. These services are all completely free, impartial and confidential.

Welfare Rights at Leeds City Council

☎ 0113 3760452

✉ Welfare.rights@leeds.gov.uk

Age UK Leeds

☎ 0113 389 3000

✉ info@ageukleeds.org.uk

If you rent your property from Leeds City Council you may be contacted by your Housing Officer Income to see if you need assistance in making a claim.

Please note: It is important to make your claim as soon as possible, as it can only be backdated 3 months from the date the claim is made.

Kind regards
Welfare & Benefits Service
Leeds City Council

www.leeds.gov.uk

General enquiries: 0113 222 4444