



Not quite a week in the life of Moira Escreet, Welfare Rights Officer Hillhead Housing Association.

Tuesday 28th April

Since the beginning of April, Tuesdays have been the new Mondays for me. I have gone part-time in an attempt at a better work-life balance. I could have timed that better, but that bad forward planning is nothing compared to the full tank of petrol I purchased before lockdown and before the prices plummeted.

First thing Tuesday mornings are now spent responding to emails which have arrived in my absence. Today I've had the fortunate task of sending off an acceptance to the offer of grant funding from the Scottish Government's Supporting Communities Fund. This will allow us to provide some financial assistance to local people and local community groups who are dealing with the effects of the coronavirus crisis.

Much of the morning was then spent liaising with colleagues in Hillhead Housing Association and East Dunbartonshire Voluntary Action (EDVA), our partners in this

joint venture, to make practical plans for the distribution of the funds.

After this it was back to my more regular duties of helping tenants with benefit claims and problems. Working from home means this all has to be done via phone and emails which is more difficult than seeing people in the office or at their homes. Phoning the DWP helplines is never an easy task, but at the moment it is even more time-consuming given the large volume of claims they are dealing with. After this it is time to write up the case notes and record outcomes of the various issues of the day.

I end the day with another Covid 19 related issue - sorting out some possible applications to the 'Cash for Kids' charity for a small grant for some families who are suffering financially from the current crisis. Every little bit helps at the moment and we are doing our best to reach as many people in the local area as possible.

Wednesday 29th April

The first part of the morning was spent with more emails and phone calls, following up some cases to check the tenants are ok and to see if their problems were resolved. This leads on to further issues to be dealt with and, together with updating case notes, takes up a few hours before I then take part in a telephone meeting with EDVA about our grant. We have identified some local groups who are helping local people and could benefit from a small cash boost. We are supporting the local foodbank, who have seen a huge increase in demand, and also Women's Aid. Some time was spent establishing contact with these groups and others to discuss the way forward and it is surprising how fast the day marches on.

Thursday 30th April

The day starts again with some minor IT problems which slow me down. More emails arrive from colleagues and tenants and these lead to follow up actions. Same old stuff. Phone calls to the local council, this time about housing benefit but where problems are relatively easier to get resolved thanks to the good working relationship we have with the local council.

More talks about the grant funding and how we disseminate support, by way of vouchers,

Friday 1st May

I can't believe it's May. I've been home working since 17th March and it all still feels weird. I miss seeing my colleagues and the tenants in person. We have a team zoom meeting planned for the afternoon and so that is something to look forward to. This was a difficult day to get motivated for some reason. I think the crisis is taking its toll on everyone.

My day involved more of the same casework, including lodging appeals online and helping someone complete a first claim for UC. That

I later spend some time back on the famous Universal Credit (UC), advising people about new claims, how it works, when to expect payment and also helping them negotiate the online system and managing journals - not an easy task from my home. (In normal times, we would see them in the office and provide face to face practical help.) Every little task seems to take much longer and be more complicated than it needs to be.

A much welcomed tea-break is called for when I have some IT issues to contend with. Perhaps my laptop just needs a break too. On my return the system is rebooted and all is well again. I end this day with a bit of research, catching up on the copious amounts of information coming our way from various quarters.

to local people take place by email and by video calls with colleagues.

I follow up more client cases and fight an uphill battle to get through to DWP helplines, which I have recently realised are now closing at 3.30pm. The end of the day is spent trying to find out how I can buy some food vouchers from the local Lidl, only to eventually be told you can only get these in Northern Ireland! Back to the drawing board on this.

took over an hour to talk her through the whole process.

A walk with my dog at lunchtime helped lift my spirits before I then had to deal with a self-employed person who has no work and is falling through the cracks of all the schemes set up to support such people. My penultimate act was to submit that application to Cash for Kids and this was followed by that zoom meeting which was a real tonic at the end of another week on lockdown.