

From Research to Action;
Using the evidence base to support
delivery of the DWP Benefit Conditionality
& Sanctions partnership action plan in
Salford.

Catherine Connors
Salford City Council.

Salford City Partnership

Background to Salford's partnership work on benefit conditionality and sanctions

Task force created: chaired by CEO Salford CVS Alison Page included representatives from Salford Unemployed and Community Resource Centre, Salford Citizen's Advice Bureau, Salford City Council's Welfare Rights and Debt Advice Service, Housing Benefit and Skills and Work Commissioning Team.

Call for evidence to a range of Salford's agencies including; The Broughton Trust, National Probation Service, GP Lead for Mental Health on CCG, Supported Tenancies, Salford City College, Work Clubs, Social Landlords, Loaves and Fishes, Start, Salford Central Foodbank, Salford Foundation, Connexions, Salford Credit Union, Children's Services Early Intervention and Next Step services.

What did the task force set out to achieve?

- Raise awareness about the DWP's conditionality and sanctions regime in Salford;
- Understand how the regime impacts both residents *and* organisations;
- Explore whether the regime works for Salford residents – did it support residents to secure sustained employment?;
- Identify a set of recommendations to implement in the city to make Salford an area of “**best practice**”.

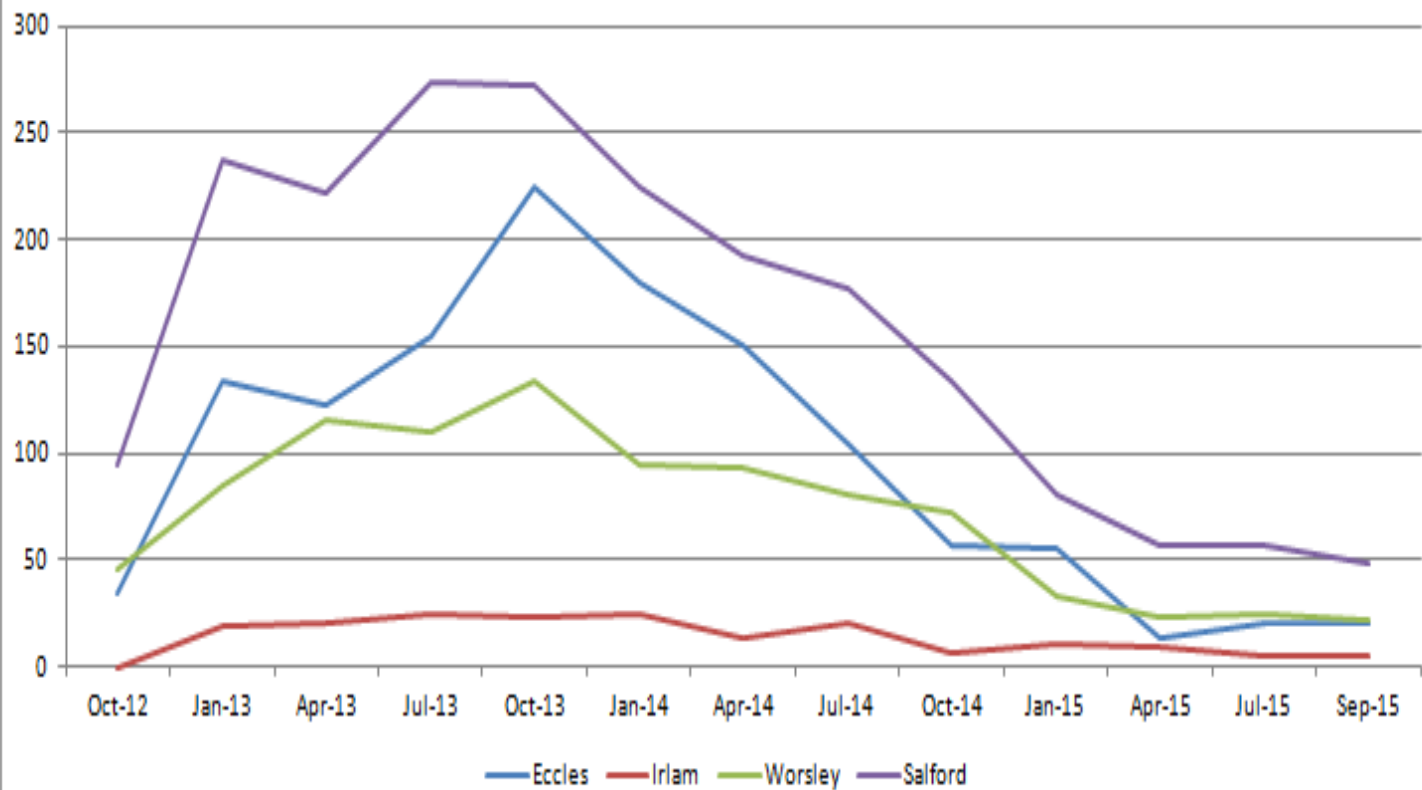


Sanctions in Salford

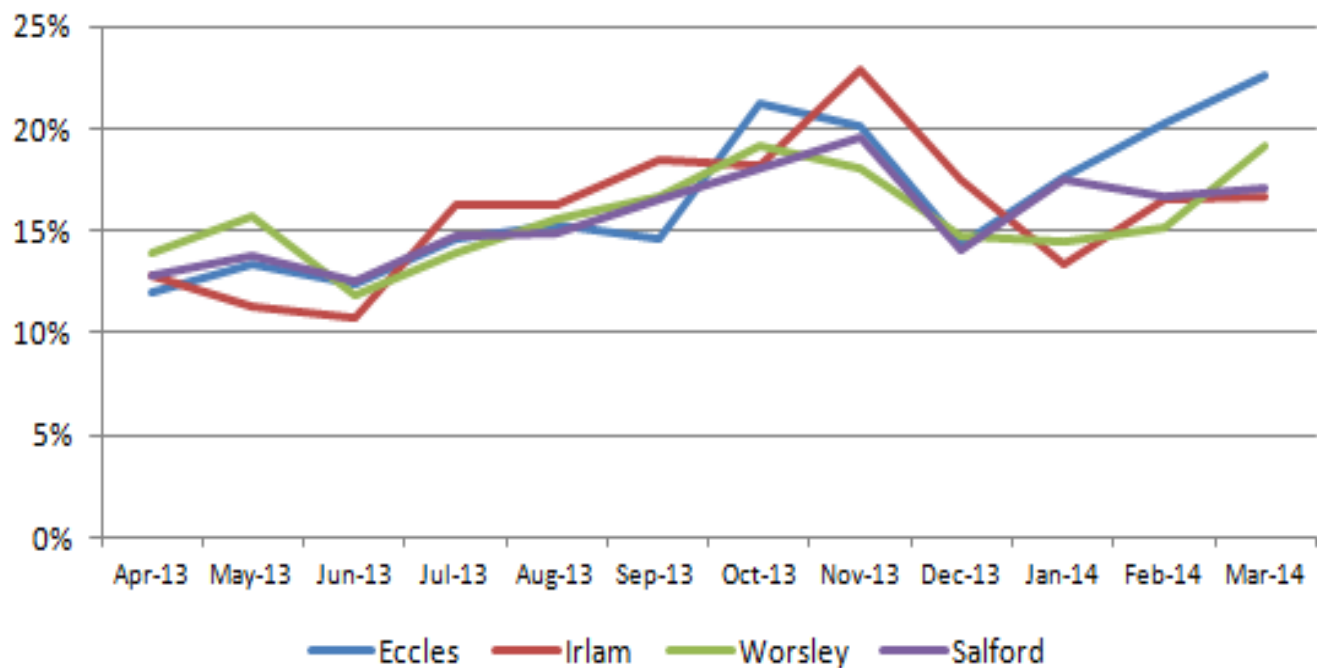
**What did the sanctions work
tell us?**

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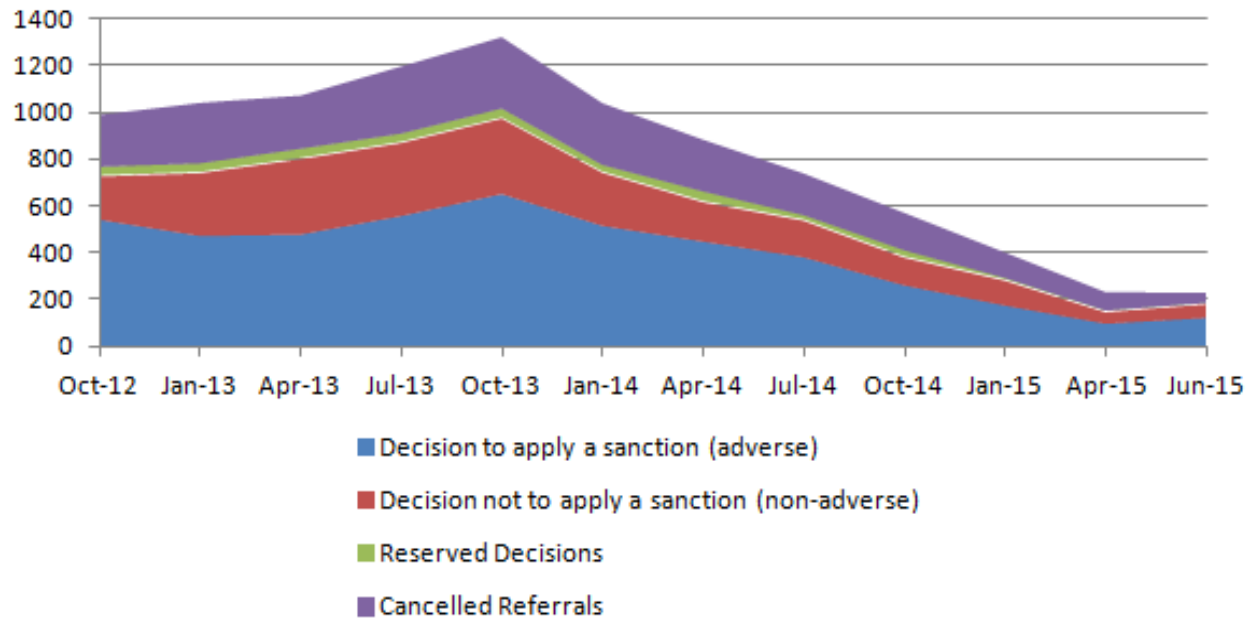
JSA: Decision to apply a sanction or claim disallowed (adverse) by JCP office



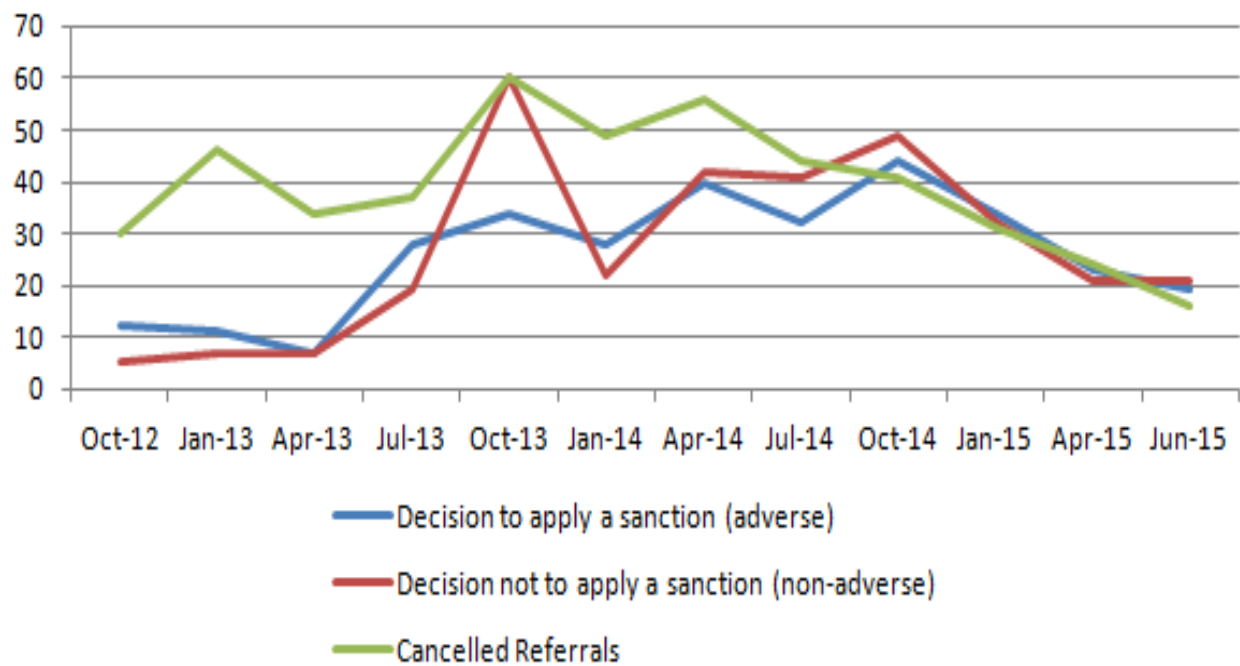
Salford: % of caseload subject to sanction (Apr 2013- Mar 2014)



JSA sanction decisions in Salford



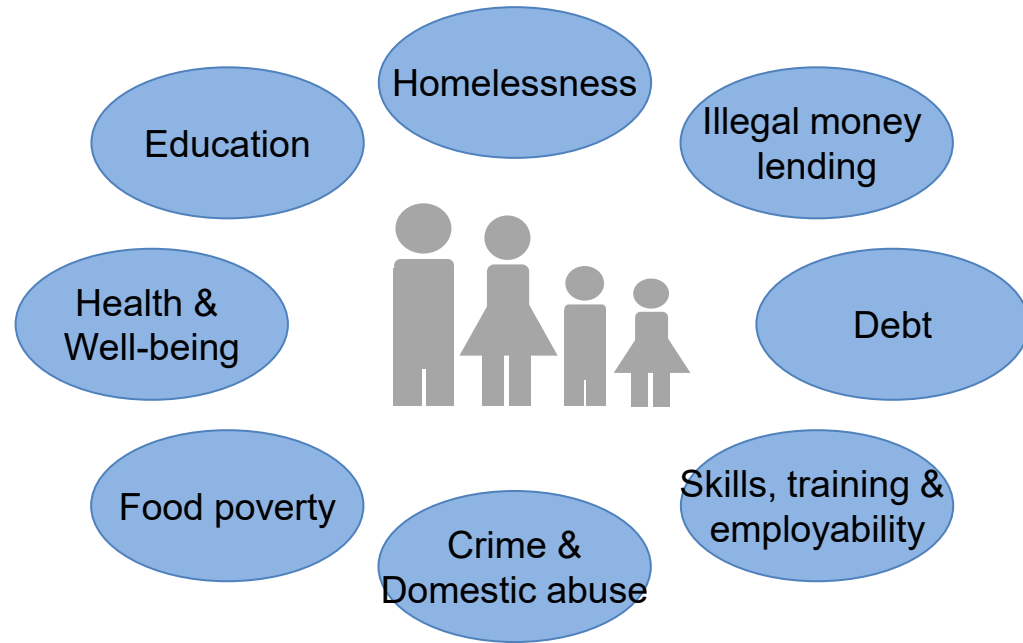
Salford: ESA sanction decisions



What are the impacts of the regime on Salford residents and local organisations?

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Impact on Salford residents, their families and the wider community.

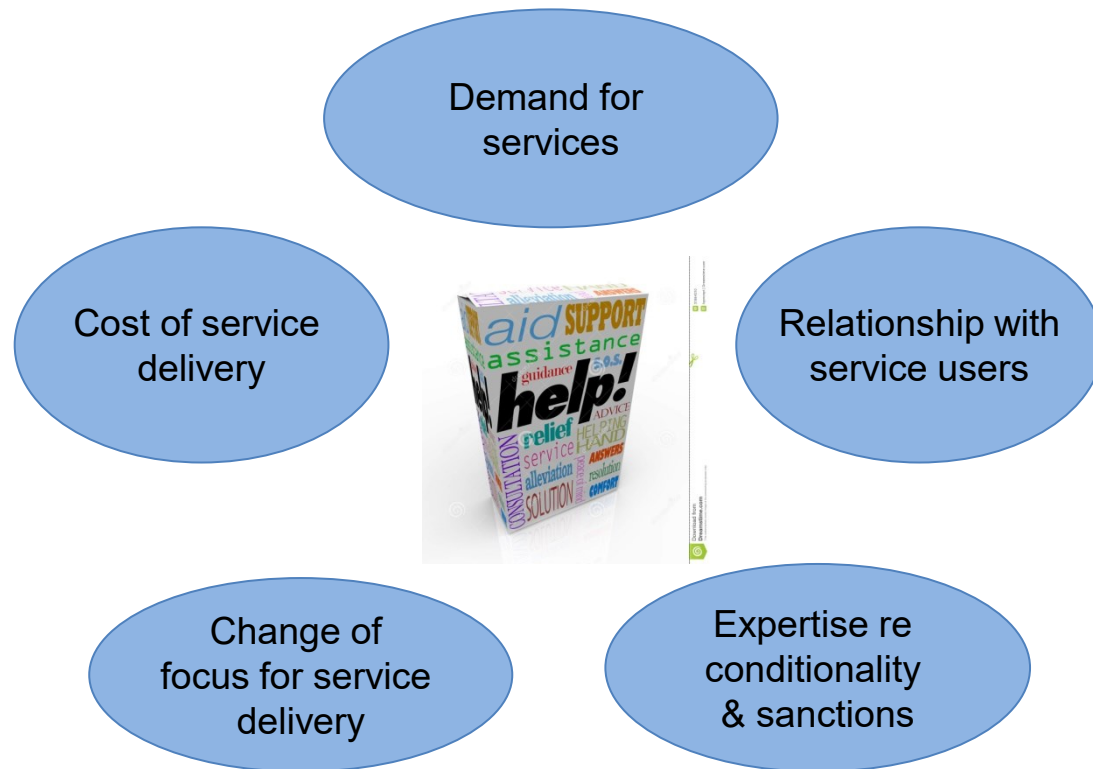


“Sanctions leave households already in crisis with little or no money for essential items; unable to pay household bills including rent and utilities (adding to debt), taking out costly loans (adding further to debt and cycle of loans), adding to family stress and ability to cope.

Other households have previously been coping financially but as a result of sanctions are now finding themselves in hardship or crisis and will now require additional costly support.”

Salford Assist.

Impact on Salford's agencies and services



‘Anecdotally we have seen increasing numbers of patients coming through over the last 2-3 years with mental health problems exacerbated by the changes to the benefit system.

For some people this has led to a deterioration in an existing mental health problem and for others, they have presented with a new onset mental health illness, usually depression/anxiety. This has obviously led to an increase in GP workload with significant numbers being referred on to our psychological therapy services.’

Dr Tom Tasker, Clinical Lead, Mental Health Salford CCG

Using the evidence base to deliver
an action plan – what have we
achieved?

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Salford City Mayor v IDS



Achievements

We demonstrated the human (and fiscal) cost of benefit sanctions leading to a number of key decisions at a political and strategic level announced by the City Mayor Paul Dennett;

- Additional investment secured to **“protect the safety net”** in Salford including Welfare Rights and Debt Advice Service, Salford Assist, Salford Credit Union as part of a strategic approach to tackling financial exclusion;
- Contributed to the development of the **Tackling Poverty Strategy** in Salford 2017 which includes a call for an independent inquiry into benefit sanctions;
- Creation of the **Anti Poverty Task Force** between the Council and University of Salford (SHUSU) to undertake research which ensures the lived experience of those experiencing poverty is central to policy making.

Achievements

We established a mandate to improve local practice:

- DWP in Salford implemented **safeguarding measures** to quality assure claimant commitments and defer referral for sanctions (focusing on ESA claimants).
- Initiated and supported joint work with Next Step service and DWP to set up a protocol to **protect care leavers** from sanctions. We are working to roll out approach to other vulnerable claimants.
- Developed awareness sessions delivered through the Welfare Rights Service for Salford's practitioners. These encourage **advocacy** to prevent sanctions and also to challenge unfavourable decisions.
- We meet DWP Operations Manager bi annually to review progress to ensure **local accountability**.

Further work

- We want to engage GMCA in this agenda – Work and Health Programme, Universal Credit
- Further local research particularly into the 18-25's and impact of the Health & Work Conversation
- Promote and expand the GM Strategic Casework Group using Equalities Act challenges.
- Salford's agencies, residents groups and politicians continue to work in collaboration to highlight the cumulative impact of Welfare Reform in Salford