



AGENDA ITEM: 6(k)

CABINET: 16 September 2014

Report of: Assistant Director Housing & Regeneration / Transformation Manager

Relevant Managing Director: Managing Director (Transformation)

Relevant Portfolio Holder: Councillor J Houlgrave

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SUBJECT: UNIVERSAL CREDIT DELIVERY PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Wards affected: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To set out details on the introduction of Universal Credit in West Lancashire and the supporting role that the Council can undertake in this process.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That delegated authority be granted to the Transformation Manager to enter into a Delivery Partnership Agreement, and any subsequent agreements, with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and other supporting third party organisations to support residents in West Lancashire who claim Universal Credit, including entering into all necessary documentation and obtaining all necessary consents.

2.2 That Call In is not appropriate for this item as this matter is one where urgent action is required because of the timescales involved.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The decision to enter into a Delivery Partnership Agreement with the DWP relates to the Government's Welfare Reform programme with a focus on Universal Credit.
- 3.2 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduces a number of changes which fundamentally move towards the introduction of a single UC for working age claimants which replaces and subsumes a number of previous benefit streams into one. UC will replace Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Housing Benefit.
- 3.3 For further detail on Welfare Reform and Universal Credit, reference can be made to the Members' Update that was circulated to Corporate & Environmental Overview & Scrutiny on 10 July 2014.
- 3.4 Universal Credit (UC) is the most significant element of the Government's Welfare Reform agenda. UC was rolled out across 4 'pathfinder' sites in the Northwest of England from April 2013, and the DWP have announced 2 further phases and it is currently expected that West Lancashire will be included from mid-September 2014. Currently only a very limited number of benefit categories have been transferred into UC and it is not expected that full implementation will be achieved before 2017. Consequently it is anticipated that the introduction of UC will initially only affect a limited number of benefit claimants.
- 3.5 The DWP commission each Local Authority (LA) to provide key services to support UC claimants through a Local Support Services Framework (LSSF). The detail of this is included in a Delivery Partnership Agreement (DPA), which outlines four key services:
- Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) – budgeting advice for UC claimants who have been identified as high risk of financial difficulties or a vulnerability.
 - Assisted Universal Credit claims – help with the on line claim where the claimant does not have internet access at home.
 - Council Tax Support (CTS) - processing of CTS claims for UC claimants.
 - Complex Housing Case Support - assistance where there is a query regarding the housing element of UC.
- 3.6 A DPA to deliver these services for the period 15.09.14 to 31.03.15 is being proposed. During this period there will be on-going assessment of the service provided and negotiations for further DPA funding for the following financial year. The DPA follows a standard format that the DWP is looking to agree with all authorities.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 Following notification of the roll out of UC the Council has engaged with the DWP to understand their expectations of the services provided under a DPA as follows:

- 4.2 PBS – as part of the claim process claimants are asked by the DWP to disclose if they have any financial issues that may affect their ability to manage monthly benefit payments. If they have, then the DWP may make a referral for PBS to the Council. It was felt that there was an existing level of expertise in dealing with customers with financial difficulties within the Council’s housing section and that this element of the service would be best delivered by this service area.
- 4.3 Assisted Internet Claims – all UC claims are processed online through the Gov.uk website. Where a customer does not have access to the internet to make the claim then they can be referred for an assisted claim – this can be simply providing them with access to a PC through to a fully assisted claim where they are personally guided through the claim process.

In order to provide a range of options 2 delivery methods are being proposed / developed (subject to the establishment of a suitable contract framework):

- The Lancashire County Council (LCC) Library service. LCC has a network of 5 libraries across the borough and many residents already use these facilities for internet access. The location of library’s in the rural areas of the borough mean that they are ideally placed to service resident’s needs.
 - Community Centres – there is a network of community centres across Skelmersdale that are able to provide access to the internet to make UC claims. Analysis of benefit claims across the borough shows that there is likely to be higher demand for local support in Skelmersdale, and that residents prefer to use community based facilities rather than those in the town centre. Engagement with the relevant Community Centres has been conducted by the Council’s Housing team and access to the internet has been agreed.
- 4.4 The processing of Council Tax Support for UC claimants and complex housing queries will be managed by BTLs as part of the existing Housing Benefit contract.
- 4.5 The Council’s Legal team have been consulted regarding the terms and conditions of the DPA and any issues highlighted have been addressed

5.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS/COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 5.1 There are no significant sustainability impacts associated with this report, and in particular no significant impact on crime and disorder. The report has no significant links with the Sustainable Community Strategy.

6.0 FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 As part of the DPA there are funding streams for each of the four key activities. The Council has worked with the DWP to agree projected volumes for each activity and what the costs of the services are expected to be. The DWP will fund all of the services provided in the DPA, and there will be monthly meetings where expenditure will be monitored.
- 6.2 Additionally there are arrangements for each service provider to supply details of the services they have delivered under the DPA. These will be processed by the

Council's finance service and a monthly invoice will be sent to the DWP that will cover the actual costs of the service provided.

- 6.3 The initial DPA will only last until March 2015, after which it is expected that the DWP will wish to put an updated agreement in place taking into account initial lessons learnt and a range of other factors. Any new agreements will be subjected to the standard due diligence checks e.g. legal and finance review, before they are accepted.

7.0 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The Council does not have to enter into this agreement with the DWP. However if it does not then it will make the transition to UC more difficult for benefit claimants and would be at odds with the approach adopted by other local authorities.
- 7.2 The agreement should not involve a high degree of risk for the Council as it will only last for 6 months and all costs incurred should be recoverable from the DWP

Background Documents

There are no background documents (as defined in Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) to this Article.

Equality Impact Assessment

A formal equality impact assessment is attached as an Appendix to this report, the results of which have been taken into account when undertaking the actions detailed within this article.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 2 - Minute of Landlord Services Committee held on 11 September 2014

Equality Impact Assessment - process for services, policies, projects and strategies

Appendix 1

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| 1. | <p>Using information that you have gathered from service monitoring, surveys, consultation, and other sources such as anecdotal information fed back by members of staff, in your opinion, could your service/policy/strategy/decision (including decisions to cut or change a service or policy) disadvantage, or have a potentially disproportionately negative effect on, any of the following groups of people: <i>People of different ages – including young and older people</i> <i>People with a disability;</i> <i>People of different races/ethnicities/ nationalities;</i> <i>Men; Women;</i> <i>People of different religions/beliefs;</i> <i>People of different sexual orientations;</i> <i>People who are or have identified as transgender;</i> <i>People who are married or in a civil partnership;</i> <i>Women who are pregnant or on maternity leave or men whose partners are pregnant or on maternity leave;</i> <i>People living in areas of deprivation or who are financially disadvantaged.</i></p> | <p>The recommendations of the report and the alternative options considered have a positive equality impact from entering into this agreement due to ease of access to services, as set out in paragraph 4.3.</p> |
| 2. | <p>What sources of information have you used to come to this decision?</p> | <p>Details of tenants affected by Welfare Reform.</p> |
| 3. | <p>How have you tried to involve people/groups in developing your service/policy/strategy or in making your decision (including decisions to cut or change a service or policy)?</p> | <p>Feedback from staff and customers involved in Welfare Reform and Universal Credit.</p> |
| 4. | <p>Could your service/policy/strategy or decision (including decisions to cut or change a service or policy) help or hamper our ability to meet our duties under the Equality Act 2010? Duties are to:- <i>Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;</i> <i>Advance equality of opportunity (removing or minimising disadvantage, meeting the needs of people);</i> <i>Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it.</i></p> | <p>This will help our ability to meet our duties under the Equality Act 2010.</p> |
| 5. | <p>What actions will you take to address any issues raised in your answers above</p> | <p>None, the affects will be positive.</p> |