

**RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL  
REPORT TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

DECISION

Agenda Item No 9

meeting date: 9 SEPTEMBER 2014  
title: UNIVERSAL CREDIT ROLL OUT  
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES  
principal author: MARK EDMONDSON

**1 PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To update members on the roll out of Universal Credit (UC) in the North West during 2014/15.
- 1.2 To seek authorisation for the Council to enter into a delivery partnership agreement with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to provide services to UC claimants.

**2 BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION**

- 2.1 UC is the Governments flagship welfare reform. Its aim is to merge all the current different benefits and tax credits etc. into one monthly payment that will make work pay.
- 2.2 UC has been piloted in several local authorities across the country during 2013/14 and the DWP has chosen the North West of England to expand the roll out in 2014/15.
- 2.3 We have been in discussions with DWP staff to provide key elements of the support that will be required for UC claimants.
- 2.4 The DWP have provided us with estimates of the number of cases that we are likely to deal with between 24 November 2014 and 31 March 2015. The initial roll out is very limited in its scope to include only single claimants without housing costs. However proposals are in place for this to be expanded to couples in late 2014 and early 2015.

**3 ROLL OUT OF THE SCHEME**

- 3.1 DWP have notified us that the go live date for UC claimants in Ribble Valley is 24 November 2014.
- 3.2 The DWP will:
  - provide reasonable support to the Council in the development and implementation of local service provision;
  - provide timely and relevant guidance and products to inform delivery of local service provision;
  - provide timely data to support the Local Council Tax Support Scheme. Subject to the claimant's consent such information to include a breakdown of housing costs for each claimant.
- 3.3 The Councils responsibilities are:
  - ensure agreed local service provision is available from 24 November 2014;
  - comply with the Department's governance and evaluation processes which are notified to the Council in writing;

- monitor the impact and take appropriate actions to mitigate the impact on current business relating to administering the housing benefit provision as a result of the introduction of UC;
- inform the Department of any potential barriers to the delivery of local service provision;
- participate in discussions with the Department, pursuant to the Partnering Principles, that will further support the ambitions of the wider Department and Local Authorities in the delivery of the Local Support Services Framework (LSSF).

#### 3.4 The Council will undertake the following services and activities:

- Provide support to UC Service Centre staff around housing issues that may arise. This will be achieved through:
  - Identifying named points of contact for Universal Credit Service Centre staff
  - Providing expertise for complex housing issues
  - Responding to requests for information on UC claimants current housing benefit claim status within 2 working days
  - Complete and return the information requested by DWP within 5 working days of receipt of the request. A reminder will be issued after this time has lapsed but the non-return of the completed form may result in an incorrect Universal Credit award.
- Support for claimants to get on-line and stay on line. This will be achieved through:
  - Identifying PC/public internet sites across the Ribble Valley Borough
  - Identifying which of these locations will have trained staff present to provide 'supported access';
  - Publicising these services to residents of the Ribble Valley Borough;
  - Providing the necessary Management Information to support number of claimants assisted.
- Manual processing for Local Council Tax Support Scheme. This will be achieved through:
  - Providing the necessary resource to undertake this activity;
  - Agreement to data set that will be provided by the Department;
  - Manually inputting agreed data into the Council's systems;
  - Responding to the Department's queries around Local Council Tax Support Scheme;
  - Providing the necessary management information.
- Support for claimants with complex needs and in particular those who require personal budgeting support. This will be achieved through:
  - Processing personal budgeting support referrals from the Department including those claimants who have alternative payment arrangements;
  - Identifying the appropriate channel, frequency and provider to deliver personal budgeting support (may not be the Council) and referring the claimant to the right place within the set time frame – set at 2 weeks;
  - Providing (or arranging provision of) telephone or face to face Personal budgeting support and follow up action as appropriate;
  - Report the outcomes of Personal budgeting support provision against the agreed outcome measures; knowledge check, budgeting action plan;
  - Providing the necessary Management Information relating to personal budgeting support including the number of claimants assisted;

- Referring claimants to the Department who need personal budgeting support (but have been missed in the core process);
- Referring claimants to the Department who may need an alternative payment arrangement e.g. because of rent arrears or vulnerability.
- Work with Universal Credit Programme in preparing landlords'. This will be achieved through:
  - Hosting landlord forum for Universal Credit;
  - Working with landlords to help get claimants on-line
  - Signposting landlord queries to the Department for resolution;

Promoting the appropriate use of online channels within the Registered Social Landlord (RSL) community in the Ribble Valley Borough.

#### 4 FUNDING/STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 As this is a new burden on local authorities DWP have committed to providing funding to enable us to provide these services to 31 March 2015. However it is very likely that funding will continue during 2015/16 which should be confirmed shortly.
- 4.2 Funding will cover dealing with customers, training staff, processing additional work and providing advice and assistance to DWP relating to the Ribble Valley area, as well as project management and publicity costs.
- 4.3 DWP have estimated these costs as £38,512.86 for the period to 31 March 2015 and have committed to compensating us for any additional costs incurred should their estimates of numbers of cases be incorrect.
- 4.4 There will be some impact on staffing within the Benefits section, as a result of these changes, but my initial assessment is that the grant offered will cover any additional costs.
- 4.5 A separate report detailing the staffing implications will be brought to next Policy and Finance Committee on 28 October 2014.

#### 5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 5.1 Note the roll out of Universal Credit will commence in Ribble Valley on 24 November 2014.
- 5.2 Authorise the Council to enter into the Delivery Partnership Agreement with the DWP to provide services to UC claimants.

HEAD OF REVENUES AND BENEFITS

DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES

PF34-14/ME/AC  
26 August 2014