

Subject:	Universal Credit – Support mechanisms	Status:	For Publication
Report to:	Cabinet	Date:	17 th September 2014
Report of:	Head of Customer Services & I.C.T.	Portfolio Holder:	Customer Services, Legal and Licensing
Key Decision:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Forward Plan <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	General Exception <input type="checkbox"/>	Special Urgency <input type="checkbox"/>
Equality Impact Assessment:	Required:	No	Attached: No
Biodiversity Impact Assessment	Required:	No	Attached: No
Contact Officer:	Anita Hall	Telephone:	01706 252 587
Email:	anitahall@rossendalebc.gov.uk		

1.	RECOMMENDATION(S)
1.1	That members note the report.
1.2	To endorse the Council entering into a Delivery Partnership Agreement (DPA) in relation to Universal Credit (UC), with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and to grant delegated powers to the Director for business to make final contractual arrangements.
1.3	All future minor amendments to the DPA, with the DWP are delegated to the Head of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Customers, Legal and Licensing.

2. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 2.1 To advise Cabinet members as to the progress of the roll out of Universal Credit (UC) to Rossendale.
- 2.2 To advise members of the proposed Delivery Partnership Agreement (DPA)
- 2.3 To request that the Head of Finance in consultation with the portfolio holder for Customers, Legal and Licensing be granted delegated authority to authorise the DPA on behalf of the Council.

3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities:
- **Regenerating Rossendale:** This priority focuses on regeneration in its broadest sense, so it means supporting communities that get on well together, attracting sustainable investment, promoting Rossendale, as well as working as an enabler to promote the physical regeneration of Rossendale.
 - **Responsive Value for Money Services:** This priority is about the Council working collaboratively, being a provider, procurer and a commissioner of services that are efficient and that meet the needs of local people.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 All the issues raised and the recommendation(s) in this report involve risk considerations as set out below:

- The Council does not have to sign up to the DPA with the DWP. The DWP would then have to look for other partners in Rossendale. In reality we are best placed to help and assist our residents via our One Stop Shop and STAN.
- Back office resource needed to advise the DWP on complex Housing Benefit issues and tenancy confirmation.

- The DWP are to provide funding to Local Authorities for providing support to UC claimants and information to the DWP.
- To date, it is expected, that all Lancashire Authorities will enter into the DPA with the DWP.

5. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 5.1 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced UC. This new benefit for those of working age will replace a number of in and out of work benefits.
- 5.2 UC was first introduced in parts of Greater Manchester and Cheshire in April 2013 for the single unemployed without housing costs.
- 5.3 UC claimants are expected to make their claim on-line, although telephone and other support services are available if needed.
- 5.4 The DWP have, since the beginning of Summer 2014, expanded the roll out of UC across the North West of England.
- 5.5 UC will go live in Rossendale in Autumn 2014, initially, for the single unemployed without housing costs.
- 5.6 Since the start of summer of 2014 the DWP have started to take new claims for UC from couples and in autumn from families, in certain locations. Once safely tested the DWP will roll out to other locations. Currently there are 40 UC couple claims, nationally.
- 5.7 The DWP wish to work in partnership with Councils to ensure that there is a coordinated network of support provision available to assist vulnerable claimants to make and sustain their UC claim.
- 5.8 The DWP have met with Officers from Rossendale Borough Council and asked that the Council work in partnership with them by:
- Providing support for on-line access
 - Provide personal budgeting support for UC claimants referred by the DWP
 - Provide support to the DWP in relation to complex Housing Benefit cases and for confirmation of occupancy.
- 5.9 The DWP provided an overview of Universal Credit and its roll out, to elected members at a briefing session on Tuesday 9th September 2014, in the Council Chamber.
- 5.10 The DWP require the Council to sign up to a DPA initially until 31/03/2015.
- 5.11 The DWP has agreed to provide funding to Rossendale Borough Council to support the Delivery Partnership Agreement, based on volumetrics provided by the DWP.
- 5.12 The DWP have stated that they anticipate no more than the following numbers during the period of this DPA (October to March 2015):
 40 cases referred to Rossendale for personal budgeting and support.
 40 cases were the customers may need support to make their claim on line.
 159 Manual notifications to process, in relation to Council Tax Support and.
 358 Housing queries from colleagues at the DWP.
- 5.13 It should be noted that the UC pilot sites have stated that, the number of UC claimants is

currently quite small.

- 5.14 Both Preston and South Ribble Council's went live with UC on 14th July 2014. They have confirmed that to date Preston has had 1 UC claim and South Ribble 2.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

6. SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 6.1 Any requirement by the council to take on additional capacity will be funded by the DWP.

7. MONITORING OFFICER

- 7.1 No comments to add.

8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

- 8.1 The DWP undertook a Impact assessment with regard to the introduction of Universal Credit in November 2011 and pulled all the impact assessments together in December 2012.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/220152/eia-universal-credit-wr2011.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/welfare-reform-act-2012-impact-assessments>

The DWP recognised that the digital by default implementation of UC may have a negative impact on claimants without access to I.T. or with limited I.T. skills.

This delivery partnership aims to mitigate these impacts by providing access to claim on-line and, where needed, support to do so.

In addition UC is paid monthly in arrears. As part of the partnership agreement the Council will offer personal budgeting and support to claimants who have been identified by the DWP, to support them in managing their budgets.

9. CONCLUSION

- 9.1 Some of our residents may need help and assistance in order to make their claim for Universal Credit. By working in partnership with the DWP we are able to ensure that our residents are supported to make their claim for UC and received all the advice and support they require.

- 9.2 Based on the experience from the UC pilot sites and our Lancashire colleagues, who have gone live with UC, it is anticipated that the number of UC claims within Rossendale will, initially, be small.

Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Further information in relation to Universal Credit can be obtained from the ov.uk web site	https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit