

Report to: Housing Working Party

Date: 11 July 2018

Title: Universal Credit

Report of: Bill McCafferty

Ward(s): All

Purpose of report: Update on the roll out of the Full Universal Credit in Lewes

Officer recommendation(s): (1) Note the contents of the report

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1 Introduction

1.1 This report is an update on the roll-out of the Full Universal Credit Service in Lewes District.

2 Background

2.1 Universal Credit brings together six state benefits into one monthly payment for people of working age. Those benefits are:

- Housing Benefit
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Working Tax Credits
- Child Tax Credits

2.2 There are two versions of Universal credit. The Live Service, which has been in place for over two years nationwide, and was only for single claimants with no disabilities and no dependants and the Full Service which is being rolled out gradually and is available to most people of working age. The main exceptions at present being those who live in Supported or Temporary Accommodation and those with three or more children.

3 Full Universal Credit

- 3.1 The Full service has been in place in three small areas of Lewes District for several months, Saltdean, Falmer and Ditchling/Hassocks. It will go live across the whole of Lewes District on 26 September 2018.
- 3.2 The Full Service is the digital service which means that people have to claim, and manage their claim via a journal, online.
- 3.3 From 26 September the Council will no longer be able to take new claims for Housing Benefit, apart from the exceptions above, and, instead, people will have to claim Universal Credit.
- 3.4 In addition, certain changes in claimants' circumstances, for example starting work, will mean that they have to claim Universal Credit rather than claiming in-work Housing Benefit.
- 3.5 In order to claim UC residents will need a bank account, an email address and access to the internet.
- 3.6 People will receive a monthly payment of UC and will be responsible for managing their budget and paying their rent. This may be challenging for some residents.

4 Support for residents

- 4.1 The Council recognise that some residents will need support to make and manage their claim on-line, help in opening bank accounts and, in some cases, help to manage monthly payments.
- 4.2 The Council have contracted, using grant funding from the Department for Work and Pensions, with Lewes CAB to deliver Assisted Digital Support and Personal Budgeting Support for those who need to claim UC or who need help managing their budgets
- 4.3 In addition, the Council have awarded £30k to Brighton Housing Trust (BHT) who will recruit a benefits advisor to work 25 hours a week alongside the Homes First team to identify those people most in need of support to claim Universal Credit and will provide practical 1:1 support to customers through the whole claims process and to ensure they are able to maintain their claim in the longer term.
- 4.4 The service will be focused primarily on homeless people living in temporary accommodation, people at risk of homelessness, and council tenants who are claiming Universal Credit and struggling to pay their rent. The adviser will be co-located with the Council's Homes First staff but the service will be made available from a range of venues including and people's own homes and take account of the particular needs of people living in rural areas.

5 Impact on the Council

- 5.1 Experience from local authorities that have gone live with the Full service suggests there are four main areas of concern. They are:
- An increase in rent arrears
 - Delays in receiving payments of the Housing Element of UC where they have requested direct payments
 - An increase in customer contact
 - A large increase in workload for Council tax Support cases due the monthly re-assessment of UC
- 5.2 The Housing Benefit working age caseload will reduce over time as people naturally move to UC. In Eastbourne, where the Full service has been in place since October 2017, there has been a 17% reduction.
- 5.3 There are currently c4,240 working age HB claims. 1,000 being from Council Tenants with an annual HB cost of £5.5m, c440 from Registered Social Landlords with a cost of £6.0m and 2,800 from the Private Sector with a cost of £22m.
- 5.4 Eventually, there will be a managed migration of all working age HB claims to UC. This is due to start in 2019 and be completed by 2023. Although, as there have been 16 delays to UC deadlines, this end date may change.

6 Council actions

- 6.1 Building on the experience of Eastbourne going live with the Full Service plans are in place for the go-live date in Lewes. A project group has been established which will look at training for staff, awareness for members, communications with landlords in both the Private and Registered Social sector, Lewes Council tenants and the voluntary sector.
- 6.2 The Jobcentre Plus Relationship managers are delivering an Introduction to UC sessions to staff on 24 July and to RSLs and the Voluntary sector on 25 July.
- 6.3 We will write to all working age Lewes tenants prior to the go-live date to advise them of UC and the circumstances in which they will need to claim UC. We will also let them know where they can go for help and advice.
- 6.4 There will be regular meetings between Council and Jobcentre Plus managers to resolve any issues. We know from the Eastbourne experience that there will be issues, but the key to resolving them is a to have a good relationship with the Jobcentre Plus managers which, I'm pleased to say, we already have.
- 6.5 Regular, initially monthly, meetings will be held with the Voluntary Sector to discuss issues that arise.
- 6.6 JCP will be invited to present at the next private landlords forum. If they are unable to attend officers from the Council will present.

