

# **Universal Credit Leicester City Council**

## **Full Service Strategy 2017 - 2020**

**Strategy author: Caroline Jackson – Revenues & Customer Support Manager**

Contents

	Page
1. Background	3
2. Our vision	3
3. The role of the Council	4
4. Strategic Objectives	4
5. Identifying Key Areas	4
6. Document change control	7
7. Appendix A -	8

## **1. Background - What is Universal Credit?**

1.1 Universal Credit (UC) is a benefit which replaces six means-tested social security benefits and tax credits for working-age individuals and families. The roll out of Universal Credit (UC) started in 2013 and is intended to support people who are on a low income or out of work and make them better off in work than on benefits. Universal Credit should give support needed to prepare for work, move into work, or earn more. In return for this support, an applicant is responsible to find work or increase their earnings.

Universal Credit replaces:

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

1.2 Universal Credit is being introduced in stages; "Live service" is currently applied in Leicester and is available to single people. Full Service incorporating a digital application and claim management platform was rolled out in the city from 13<sup>th</sup> June 2018. New applicants will no longer claim Housing Benefit (HB) and some changes to households on the existing HB caseload will result in a transfer on to UC. This resulted in the HB caseload, currently administered by the Authority, diminishing by an estimated 500 claims.

1.3 The introduction of UC affected working age households only, but the changes introduced also impacted on arrangements with landlords to collect rent and increased the need for additional support arrangements.

1.4 We are now planning for mass 'managed' migration anticipated from November 2020 and concluding 2024. No details have been released by the DWP

## **2. Our Vision**

2.1 The national roll out of UC has been widely publicised. The original time table for its introduction was between October 2013 – 2017 however due to various issues and the "Test and Learn" method adopted by the DWP the original scheme has been amended during the implementation process and the timetable extended. The current date for the completion of full service roll out to working age applicants is 2024.

2.2 In Leicester we planned and identified the key risks for the city before the introduction of UC Full Service, in June 2018. We aimed to ensure measures were put in place to help mitigate the risks to try to prevent some of the negative impacts, as faced by claimants in other areas of the country, who have moved onto the new benefit.

### **3. The role of the Council**

- 3.1 Our role was to ensure the roll out of UC for the City was delivered in collaboration with the DWP Delivery Division and the UC Local Authority Liaison Team. The transfer of claims should be effective with minimum disruption to applicants, claims processing and outcomes.
- 3.2 Claim resilience for the UC claimant remains paramount. The claim and delivery model for UC has channel shifted to a digital platform. This required access to supporting technology and the associated computer skills.
- 3.3 There was growing concern and well documented evidence that some aspects of UC, specifically relating to delays in the first payment of UC is causing financial crisis for applicants and significantly impacting upon the security of household tenure, particularly affecting the social housing sector which is a concerning trend. Nationally this is starting to create major issues including increased presence at food banks, fuel crisis, increasingly high levels of rent arrears, debts and ultimately leading to a rise in homelessness and was by in large mitigated through the Governments budget in November 2018 and October 2018.
- 3.4 A list of our activity to plan for UC Full Service roll out is included in appendix A

### **4. Strategic Objectives**

- 4.1 There are a number of strategic objectives the council should achieve to ensure the managed migration is effectively planning and prepped for. These are:
  1. Operational Practices Updated
  2. Support and Guidance Identified & Access routes clear
  3. Partnership Working
  4. Recording /Monitoring/ inform reporting
  5. Impact Awareness

### **5. Identifying Key Areas of planning for managed migration**

- 5.1 It is vital we understand the implications and have the right solutions tried, tested and established by November 2020, which is the earliest date the DWP could ask us to migrate the remainder of the HB caseload across to UC; regardless of potential timetable changes to UC migration. Many of the requirements can be put in place giving us the opportunity to *test and learn* new processes/provisions to ensure they are effective and achieve the outcomes expected before claimant numbers increase dramatically under the planned managed migration.

5.2 To enable the Council to understand the impact of this change we will identify the risks and issues:

- Update the Corporate risk log of the risks that are identified as either an operational or DWP related issue. Accurate risk logs will ensure appropriate risks are recorded, resolutions or solutions are identified. Any lessons learnt from Full Service roll out will help to develop processes for migration. Risks should be raised at the appropriate level with the relevant organisations to seek a solution. Where major risks are identified working groups will be set up, with invites made to appropriate representatives, so that the issue can be fully explored, mitigating actions discussed, options agreed and then communicated to the wider group prior to being sign off through a pre-agreed route.

5.3 To record /monitor/inform the strategy we will

- Regularly model and map the current case load Housing Benefit and the Housing Stock to identify those claimants who are likely to remain on Housing Benefit. This will indicate the numbers of claimants likely to be affected by migration so that their characteristics can be identified and supported through the process. This will be particularly important for disabled and vulnerable households. Potential impacts can be measured, strategies developed around communication and support requirements.
- Identify criteria where known issues exist, such as tenure type, of those claimants likely to migrate so that appropriate engagement, communication and dialog is established with relevant stakeholders.

5.4 To ensure offer appropriate support, advice and guidance and identify clear access routes:

- Identify potential impacts upon rent and council tax collection and recovery, overpayment debt collection, review take up campaigns for the local Council Tax Support/Council Tax Discretionary Relief schemes and address as required to maximise charge payer's financial resilience enabling work to pay.
- Identify and map the provision of facilities in the city offering support to access free to use PC's, job clubs and work searches, to support those who can work to find employment.
- Communication – Information booklets, web guides etc. will be reviewed to ensure the correct message goes out; recognising that some claimants may encounter problems accessing digital services because of a lack of access to the internet and a range of difficulties, including reading and writing English. New or revised letters will be created to ensure they give supporting information to enable people to help themselves.
- Review the digital engagement offer and align if necessary with the Assisted Digital Support offer delivered under the national Citizens Advice solution to ensure residents and stakeholders are aware how to access.
- Review the Personal Budgeting engagement delivered under the national Citizens Advice solution to ensure residents and stakeholders are aware how to access.

5.5 To maintain collaborative partnership working we will:

- Maintain established liaison links with the key stakeholder groups, to share and discuss information & good practice to develop an understanding of issues & concerns to inform the communication strategy to ensure claimants are offered the correct guidance and support throughout the new process.
- 4.6 To ensure our operational practices are reflective of resources and demand we will: Continue to proactively review of internal administrative processes, including all discretionary policies, to ensure a holistic approach to supporting claimants accessing UC/CTS is taken. This will include clear guidance to define when awards would be supported, an automatic consideration of all discretionary awards administered within the service and an agreed referral route for vulnerable customers and those with complex needs to ensure they get access to the most appropriate support to enable them to manage their own situation in future, with less reliance on discretionary awards.

<b>Version control</b>				
<b>Change</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Edit by whom</b>	<b>Distribution</b>	<b>Comments</b>

Originator Karen Wenlock	08/05/2017	Revenues & Benefits Manager. Karen Wenlock	Head Revenues & Customer Support. Caroline Jackson	For comment
Revision	25/05/2017	Caroline Jackson	N/A	Returned to KW to include equality considerations.
Revision	11/08/17	Surinder Singh	Delivery, Comms and Political Governance	Equality considerations included KW
Annual revision	27/12/18	Head Revenues & Customer Support. Caroline Jackson	Revenues & Customer Support Housing Delivery, Comms and Political Governance	

**Appendix A:**

## **What we did to identify risks with Universal Credit Full Service planning.**

- Contacted other councils for advice & good practice
- Researched US outcomes, as reported nationally by the DWP, by our benching marking groups, and the Charter Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIFPA) and other professional associated bodies.
- Liaise with DWP locally to develop good links & support mechanisms for staff and customers
- Liaise with local support and advise services (through Social Welfare Advice Partnership) to collect and share information, discuss and agree good practice. (important if the organisation is a national service and able to share actual issues/experiences of their colleagues in UC areas)
- Liaised with Social and Private Landlords to identify issues and concerns and provide information to help address issues. Where a landlord has properties in UC areas (Especially Registered Social Landlord's) they were encouraged to share information and good practice with us so we could learn from their experiences.
- Reviewed Discretionary Award provisions to ensure that policy and procedures are updated to reflect the potential additional demands on funding expected to ensure the most vulnerable are supported whether in receipt of legacy welfare benefits, or UC.
- Captured a baseline position of key performance indicators both nationally and local to monitor the impact of UC upon the council and city residents