

<b>HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE</b>		
<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Universal Credit – Health &amp; safety update January 2018</b>	
<b>Key decision</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Item No 4</b>
<b>Ward</b>	<b>All</b>	
<b>Contributors</b>	<b>Customer Services</b>	
<b>Class</b>	<b>Part 1</b>	<b>Date 29 January 2018</b>

## **1. Purpose of the Report**

At the last meeting of this Committee on 30 October 2017, members asked for information on the Council's universal credit roll out as far as it has gone, and its implications from a Health and Safety point of view.

## **2. Recommendation**

Members are asked to note the report.

## **3. Introduction**

3.1 Universal Credit (UC) is a payment to help with both living and housing costs and replaces the main out-of work benefits - Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance and Working Tax Credit.

3.2 The key features of UC are:

- A single monthly payment (similar to a salary);
- Payment to only one person in household;
- First payment made 35 days after claim received.

3.3 The DWP has issued schedules of when each JC+ office in the country will go live for all new claimant types. The Lewisham JC+ is scheduled to take all new claimant types from July 2018. Existing cases will move onto UC at the point they have a significant change in their circumstances and any still remaining with the Council will all migrate to UC by 2022.

## **4. Caseload**

Lewisham's current caseload is 34,430 (Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction). Of the 34,430 there are 8,297 are from elderly claimants who will not be exposed to UC. The working age caseload that will be exposed to UC is 26,133.

## 5. Issues

5.1 There are a number of issues emerging from the staged national roll out of the new system which are set out below;

- Rent arrears increasing, largely due to the initial 6 week delay in making a payment and payment being made directly to the claimant, not the landlord. This will increase homelessness or reliance on emergency, temporary accommodation;
- Increased administration for the Authority. There is no access to UC information or processing centres and significant amounts of UC related information being received;
- Need for provision of support for residents migrating to UC.

5.2 In the recent budget, there were a number of references to these issues confirming that they are now being addressed by the government including the following;

**Abolishing waiting days, removing** the 7 day waiting period for new UC claimants and reducing the length of time they may wait for their initial payment;

**Increasing advances, UC claimants can get a 50%** advance of their first month's payment which is recovered over the next 6 months. From January 2018 they will be offered an advance of 100% of their initial payment which will be recoverable over the next 2 months;

**Support with housing costs.** Most vulnerable claimants will be in receipt of housing benefit, new claimants will receive a transitional payment – an extra 2 weeks housing benefit – when moving to UC and which will not be recovered from them;

**Alternative Payment Arrangements for Landlords,** all private-rented sector claimants will be offered the option of having their benefit paid to their landlord.

## 6. The Council's Approach to Supporting Residents

6.1 Lewisham has been and continues to work closely with Relationship managers within Jobcentre+ to jointly ensure a smooth transition to UC. The key areas being focused on are;

- Training – Preparing and delivering training to all staff and stakeholders across and beyond the Council;
- Developing a “trusted partner” on-line portal that will provide the Council with adequate access to UC information to enable them to deliver other services where UC information is needed eg means tested services including council tax reduction and adult social-care financial assessments and also access for front-line staff who may be required to provide UC support to migrating residents.

6.2 Ensuring a smooth transition to UC will certainly impact on the potential risks associated with such a significant change in resident's income and circumstances.

## **7. Health and safety**

7.1 The Council has delivered front-facing services for many years and is very much used to dealing with difficult and challenging customers. Robust arrangements already exist for dealing with face-to-face and telephone customers and has a good track record in managing these services with minimal incident. The arrangements include panic alarms at all desks and interview booths, CCTV, on-site security guards and staff trained in managing difficult and challenging customers.

7.2 All front-facing services are now delivered from the Laurence House reception area making the provision of secure services easier to deliver. In addition, any contact from customers in receipt of UC is likely to be seen as our providing positive support and is therefore less likely to escalate into an incident where our staff are exposed to risk.

## **8. Conclusion**

8.1 Migration to UC is a significant change for both residents and the Council. Failing to manage this correctly will have significant and long-term ramifications which may result in aggressive, challenging or violent behaviour against Council staff and partners. The changes proposed in (3) above alleviate some of the issues but the impact from the changes remains untested.

8.2 The Council will continue to work closely with the Jobcentre+ to try and ensure a smooth and efficient migration for those falling to UC and will also undertake some specific activities around communication and training as in (4) above that will negate any negative impact.

### **Background Papers**

None reported

For any further information on the content of this report please contact:

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