

Committee:	Executive	Agenda Item No.:	7
Date:	28/10/2013	Status	Open
Category	1. Decision within the functions of Executive 2. Part of the Budget and Policy Framework		
Subject:	Welfare Reform /Universal Credit Update		
Report by:	Assistant Director – Customer Services		
Other Officers Involved	Billing and Recovery Manager Benefits Manager		
Director	Director of Corporate Resources		
Relevant Portfolio Holder	Cllr Eion Watts, Leader of the Council		

RELEVANT CORPORATE AIMS

STRATEGIC ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
CUSTOMER FOCUSED SERVICES – Providing excellent customer focused services
SOCIAL INCLUSION – Promoting fairness, equality and lifelong learning.

TARGETS

ALL

VALUE FOR MONEY

The report updates members on the most recent government announcements with regards to the roll out of universal credit and presents for approval the monitoring form to be incorporated within the Council's Quarterly Performance Management framework

BACKGROUND

The Local Support Services Framework (LSSF) was published in March 2013 as a consultation document for Universal Credit implementation, and was to be finalised by central government in autumn 2013. The document sets out the context in which DWP and local authorities will deliver Universal Credit and the services to be provided. The approach taken by the government is to provide a holistic range of services to those out of work to return them to economic activity. Services to be made available to claimants include on line assistance and support, housing advice, debt and financial management and training and support to return those out of work to the labour market. The

proposals would transform those services currently provided by Revenues and Benefits from processing into more holistic support to the customer.

The LSSF also set out wider potential partnership considerations including:

- Partnerships arrangements
- Funding - payments by activity and outcomes
- Governance

Regular meetings have been held with DWP in order to understand the scope, parameters and expectations for the partnership working. The outcome of these discussions has been that there is still much to be decided by central government but that some of these decisions such as geographical partnerships remain with the local authority.

Preparation for these changes has been underway during the last year focussing on supporting residents and equipping staff to be able to respond to the changes. Work is being developed across four work streams themes by a range of services across the [Council](#) and with partner agencies;

- Health Wellbeing
- Digital Inclusion
- Debt and Financial Inclusion
- Employment Support

In July 2013 the authorities undertaking pilot activity regarding the LSSF were asked to request an extension to their initial project from October 2013 to March 2014. This was the first formal indication that the LSSF would be delayed.

Whilst it is the government's intention at this stage that Universal Credit processing will be undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions, this only covers working age customers. This still leaves the processing of benefits for Pensioners. It was understood that the intention was that these would be dealt with by The Pension Service, but it is unclear when this would occur. Significantly, the processing of Council Tax Support remains with the Local Authority, as will the processing of the claims for the housing costs for customers residing in supported accommodation, which are increasing year on year.

The Advice Agency Liaison meetings have continued to provide a constructive forum for policy consultation and information exchange. The improved understanding of the voluntary and community sector has led to the development of Customer Service scripts used to refer people to outside agencies for support in relation to food banks, debt, employment support and financial management.

Training has now been delivered to front line staff on personal budget coaching and conflict resolution and negotiation skills and training on mental ill health awareness is to commence in the autumn. Members have been briefed through the Member Development Day of the Budget Buddy programme and the Council is to support a pilot project within the District.

Benefits staff have undertaken proactive work to promote Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to ensure that those people who are eligible are receiving support. DHPs have increased both in terms of the number of applications and the number of approvals. Spend to date is £32,300 at 30.09.2013 out of total budget of £92,187. DHPs are administered in accordance with a Council policy and procedure adopted in March 2013. When adopted it was agreed that a review would be undertaken after 6 months to assess whether the policy was fit for purpose. The review has commenced through Improvement Scrutiny and Improvement Scrutiny will as part of the due process report recommendations to the Executive.

While elements of the Government's welfare reform agenda are clearly controversial it does need to be recognised that certain elements of the LSSF are likely to reflect long established policies of this Council. The Council has for example actively promoted for number of years, a scheme to help local residents get back into work. Locally these schemes have always been based upon providing positive incentives for people to move into employment and one of the key reasons for the Council's active engagement with the developing LSSF framework is to try to influence the scheme for the benefit of local residents.

As part of understanding the wider impact of welfare reform it is recognised that corporate monitoring needs to be undertaken to understand resource and policy implications. Appendix 1 is a monitoring form proposed in order to capture information required on a quarterly basis, which will allow members to see any trends developing. The form covers range of services including revenues and benefits, customer services and the partnership team.

3. ISSUES/OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

On 1st August 2013 DWP issued a further letter to local authorities stating that:

- The level of funding required to manage the full administration of Housing Benefit in 2014-2015 will be maintained
- There will continue to be the development of the partnership and funding model
- New opportunities for trialling the LSSF will be developed
- Aspects of the LSSF within UC pathfinder areas will be further tested

- An updated LSSF in October 2014 which will provide definitive baselines for local authorities to plan their services in 2015-2016 will be produced

IMPLICATIONS

Financial: More information will be available from the Government in October 2014 regarding the baseline budgets for the forthcoming year, which suggests that there will no further financial changes in relation UC until 2015/2016. Continuing to ensure that our most vulnerable residents receive the appropriate financial support and advice, through direct and indirect means remains a priority.

Legal: The Council is required to implement legislation through the Welfare Reform Act 1012 as it is rolled out across the country.

Human Resources: It is still anticipated there will be an impact on the structure of the Benefits Service and a new emphasis and role for Billing and Recovery. However, between now and the final transfer of working age claims to the DWP (by 2017) it is widely anticipated by the IRRV, that workload and demands on the Benefit Service will increase significantly over the next 3 to 5 years.

The service is experiencing higher workloads due to increased assessment work (20% increase on the work going into our document management system for the period April to Sept 13 from the same period last year), high levels of reconsideration requests and a significant increase on the work undertaken regarding Discretionary Housing Payments. It remains a difficult period for staff with much uncertainty as the details of the roll out of universal credit are unclear.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Executive note the advice from central government regarding the roll out of Welfare Reform and Universal Credit.
2. That Executive approves the form to be used corporately to monitor the impact of welfare reform.
3. That the form be incorporated within the Council's Quarterly Performance Management framework.
4. That Executive notes the wider activity undertaken on welfare reform and universal credit within the Contact Centres and Revenues and Benefits.

REASON FOR DECISION TO BE GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CONSTITUTION

To update members of the latest government announcements regarding roll out of Universal Credit and to note the Councils response to the changes already introduced.

To approve the corporate monitoring form, which is incorporated within the Council's Quarterly Performance Management framework, to assess the impact of the Welfare Reform Act

BDC Welfare Reform Monitoring Form
01st April 2013 to 30th June 2013 (1st Quarter)

1. Complaints					
		No. Of Complaints	%	Source	
1 Total number of stage 2 complaints received				Revenues and Benefits/Customer Services	
of which;	were for the Benefit Cap	0			
	were for Council Tax	0			
	were for bedroom tax	0			
	were from applicants/tenants regarding the revised CBL Allocations Policy	0			
of which;	a duty was accepted				
	were due to financial difficulties due to under occupation charges				
2. Benefits					
		Total	%	Source	
2a) Total number of households in receipt of Housing Benefit within the district		6057		Revenues and Benefits	
Of which;	are Council tenants; of working age	1450	23.9		
	of pension age	1757	29.0		
	are Housing Association/RSL tenants; of working age	458	7.56		
	of pension age	258	4.26		
	are Private Rented Sector tenants; of working age	1859	30.69		
	of pension age	275	4.54		
	are claimants in receipt of JSA (IB), Income Support, ESA (IR)	2629	43.40		
	are claimants in receipt of Guaranteed Pension Credit	1412	23.31		
2b) Total number of households in receipt of Council Tax Support		7999			
Of which;	are working age	4196	52.46		
	are pension age	3803	47.54		
3. Discretionary Housing Payments					
		Total	Amount £'s	%	Source
3a) Total number of Discretionary Housing Payment awards made		66	18596		Revenues and Benefits
Of which	Benefit cap	0	0	0	

were due to;	Under occupancy	41	10560	56.79	
	Local Housing Allowance restrictions	20	6274	33.74	
	Combination of reforms	0	0	0	
	Other reasons	5	1762	9.48	
		Total			
3b) Average length of award (in weeks)		18			
3c) Number of applications still to be determined at the end of the quarter		Data not available			
4. Council Tax					
		Total		%	Source
4a) Total number of reminders issued		8250			Revenues and Benefits
Of which;	were for cases in receipt of Council Tax Support	3365		41%	
4b) Total number of summons issued		2531			
Of which;	Were for cases in receipt of Council Tax Support	1156		46%	
4c) Total number of post liability action taken against those in receipt of Council Tax Support		1164			
Of which;	the number on arrangements	209		18%	
	the number on attachments of Benefit	64		5%	
5. Employment and Skills					
		Total Number		%	Source
5a) No. of referrals to FEI as a result of welfare reforms: *					CEPT
Of which are from;	Bolsover District Council				
	Jobcentre Plus				
	Other				
Of which	Clients receiving IAG and skills development				
	Clients moving into employment				
	Clients attending a work club				
6. Self-Employment					
6a) People seeking assistance to start a business as a result of welfare reforms *					CEPT
6b) No. of new businesses set up as a result of welfare reforms *					
7. Referrals					
7a) Number of Referrals to Support Agencies via CRM		2		8%	Contact Centres

7b) Number of enquiries related to Welfare Reform	25		
7c) Number of Credit Union Payments (loans and savings)	3		

* Data not yet available to CEPT, an update will be provided at the third reporting period