

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Subject: Universal Credit Update
Committee: Select Committee Review
Date: 27 February 2019
Cabinet Member: Cllr Penberthy (Cabinet Member for Housing and Co-operative Development)
CMT Member: Andy Ralphs (Strategic Director of Corporate and Customer Services)
Author: Emma Rose (Strategic Development Manager – Customer Services)
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Ref:
Key Decision: No
Part: I

Purpose of the report:

To provide Performance, Finance and Customer Focus Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on:

- the roll out of Universal Credit across Plymouth
- the actions recommended by the Select Committee Review on 14 March 2018

Corporate Plan:

Understanding the impact of Universal Credit on the city allows the Council to support the most financially vulnerable residents, contributes to our values of fairness and vision of being a caring organisation

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Including finance, human, IT and land:

Customers moving to Universal Credit may not be as likely to claim other support from the Council that they are entitled to e.g. Council Tax Support (CTS). If there are eligible UC customers not accessing CTS, the Council may be inaccurately predicting the amount of income due from council tax, which could place pressure on budgets.

If the Council does not take additional steps to help Universal Credit customers maximise the uptake of financial assistance that they are entitled to, they may be detrimentally affected and present in need of other Council Services which are more expensive to deliver.

Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management:

The impact on children is not entirely clear and the effects in Plymouth are being monitored. The Institute of Fiscal Studies concluded that single parents and two-earner couples are relatively likely to lose, and one-earner couples with children are relatively likely to gain. Among those currently receiving one of the benefits being replaced by UC, working single parents would be over £1,000 a year worse off on average if the long run UC system applied now, but one-earner couples with children would gain over £500 a year on average.

Equality and Diversity:

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? Yes

Yes, Universal Credit (UC) is a national benefit administered by DWP and the associated Equality Impact Assessment was published in 2011. That estimated that 2.8 million households would have a higher entitlement, 2 million a lower entitlement and 2.7 million would have no change in entitlement under UC.

Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:

The committee review the progress on recommendations made by Select Committee in 2018

Alternative options considered and rejected:

None

Published work / information:

Select Committee review 14 March 2018:

<https://modgov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1196&MId=7969&Ver=4>

Cabinet Response to Select Committee recommendations 14 August 2018:

<https://modgov/documents/s90472/Cabinet%20response%20to%20UC%20Select%20Committee%20v2%20FINAL.pdf>

[DWP Equality Impact Assessment](#)

[IFS Green Budget 2016](#)

[National Audit Office – Rolling Out Universal Credit 15 June 2018](#)

Background papers:

Title	Part I	Part II	Exemption Paragraph Number						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Sign off:

Fin	pl.18.19.222	Leg	lt/32111/1802	Mon Off		HR		Assets		IT		Strat Proc	
Originating SMT Member: Andy Ralphs													
Has the Cabinet Member(s) agreed the content of the report? Yes													

I Background

- 1.1 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced a range of measures to reform the way in which benefits are delivered including the introduction of Universal Credit (UC). 4 years on, the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 was established with further changes which aim to reward work and back aspiration, provide £12bn of national benefit savings and the government anticipates that by 2020, 8 out of 10 people will be better off.
- 1.2 By contrast a report published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK 2017/18 to 2021/22 predicts that inequality will rise between 2015/16 and 2021/22, as working age benefits are cut and real earnings growth boosts the income of higher income households. In addition, at the UK level, absolute poverty is projected to remain roughly unchanged between 2015/16 and 2021/22.
- 1.3 UC replaces six key benefits: Housing Benefit; Job Seekers Allowance; Employment and Support Allowance; Child Tax Credits, Working Tax Credits and Income Support. It is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- 1.4 UC is paid monthly in arrears; the initial assessment period is 5 weeks from the date of the claim. This is a significant difference to legacy benefits, which are paid fortnightly in arrears. Any UC to cover rent is included as the 'housing cost element' and included in the single payment made to the claimant each month. DWP's intention is for the majority of claimants to receive all of their UC payment rather than paying the housing cost element to landlords. However, landlords can apply for an alternative payment arrangement (APA) so that the UC housing cost element is paid directly to them. Historically, the vast majority of social housing tenants have chosen for their housing benefit to be paid to their landlord and since 2008, the majority of private sector tenants chose to have their housing benefit paid to them rather than their landlord.
- 1.5 UC claimants maintain a relationship with Job Centre Plus to direct in-work progression of both hours and wages. They are allocated a Work Coach who develops a claimant commitment with them based on their individual circumstances and ability to work. Failure to meet the commitments may result in sanctions.
- 1.6 UC is administered entirely by the DWP, local authorities have no involvement in the assessment process or management of ongoing claims. The DWP shares data with Local authorities relating to claimants who may previously have been in receipt of housing benefit for the purposes of ensuring there are no incorrect payments made.
- 1.7 Local authorities who sign up to the Universal Support agreement are responsible to providing assisted digital and personal budgeting support to UC claimants. This agreement was cancelled by DWP with effect from 31 March 2019 as a new Universal Support agreement has been negotiated nationally between DWP and Citizen's Advice (CA).

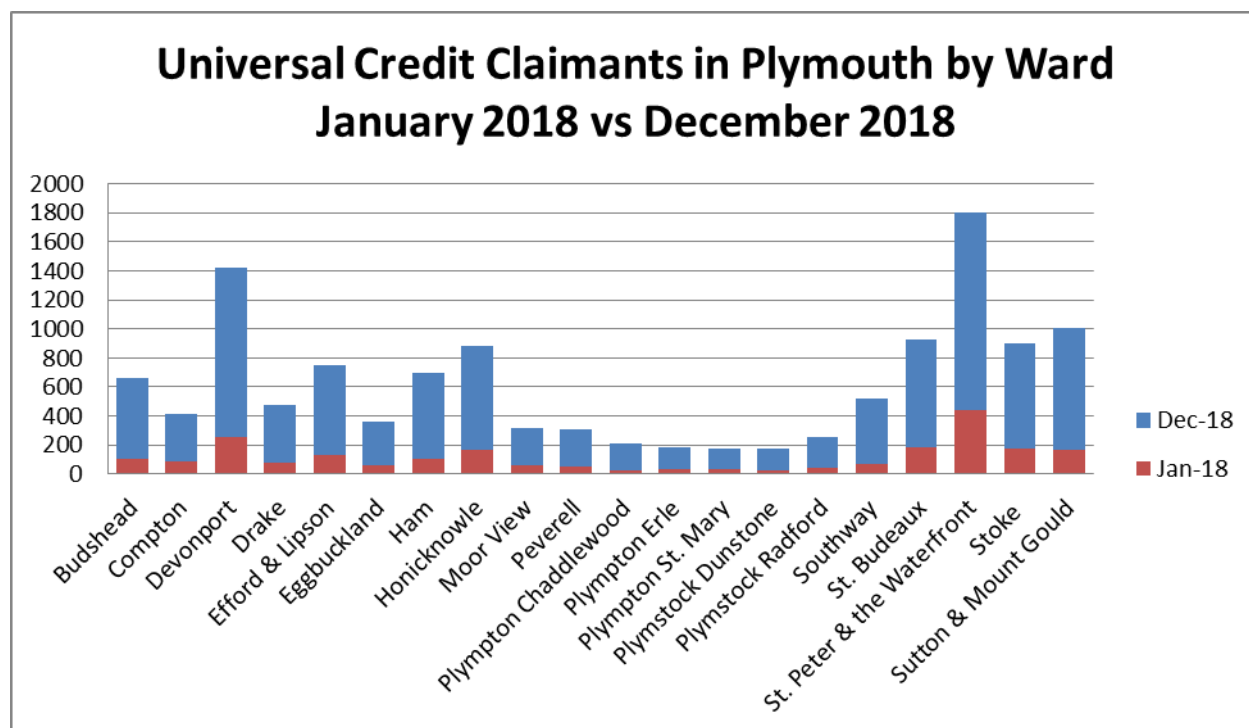
2 PLYMOUTH ROLL-OUT

- 2.1 UC (Live Service) began in Plymouth in January 2016 for new, single, JSA claimants. Figures for September 2016 were 1,679 claimants and 12 months later in September 2017 there were 1,783 claimants.
- 2.2 UC (Full Service) started in Plymouth on 11 October 2017. Full Service is available to all new, eligible claimants rather than solely for single customers without children as was the case with Live Service. UC (Full Service) was rolled out by postcode areas between October 2017 and January 2018. For the timetable see Appendix A. For a timetable of changes to UC since the select committee review and those planned into the future, see Appendix B.

Table I – Universal Credit Claimants in Plymouth by Ward January 2018 vs December 2018

Ward	Number of claimants		% Change
	Dec-18	Jan-18	
Budshead	558	101	452
Compton	324	89	264
Devonport	1164	254	358
Drake	402	77	422
Efford & Lipson	617	131	371
Eggbuckland	300	64	369
Ham	592	104	469
Honicknowle	716	168	326
Moor View	257	57	351
Peverell	258	51	406
Plympton Chaddlewood	183	25	632
Plympton Erle	152	35	334
Plympton St. Mary	140	37	278
Plymstock Dunstone	155	25	520
Plymstock Radford	214	40	435
Southway	446	71	528
St. Budeaux	745	184	305
St. Peter & the Waterfront	1359	441	208
Stoke	726	177	310
Sutton & Mount Gould	838	164	411
N/A	103	-	
Total	10253	2271	351

Chart I – UC claimants by ward



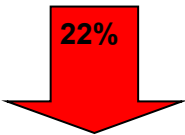
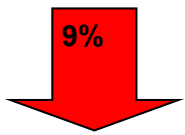
2.3 The total number of UC claimants seen at Plymouth Citizens Advice last year compared with this year were:

- 2017 - 246 out of a total of 9,370 = 2.6% of casework related to UC
- 2018 - 1,879 out of a total of 12,791 = 15% of casework related to UC

During the same period, the total number of UC claimants in the city increased from 2,271 to 10,253.

2.4 As eligibility criteria change for UC and existing housing benefit claimants change circumstances, the housing benefit caseload administered by the council on behalf of DWP falls. In addition, there is a fall in the number of customers in receipt of council tax support (CTS) which, in part, is due to the disconnect between UC and CTS. A decline in working age HB customers is expected as UC rolls out. There should not be the same decline in CTS caseload as many working age UC customers would be entitled to claim CTS. Nationally councils have seen a fall in CTS caseload as UC rolls out and Plymouth has not seen as much of a fall as some other areas. Some of the reason for the smaller drop in CTS caseload is due to the steps taken in partnership with DWP to encourage UC customers to apply and also the operational process implemented by the council to take a UC notification as an intent to claim CTS. The impact on HB and CTS caseload since the Select Committee review is summarised in table 2 below.

Table 2 – housing benefit and council tax support working age caseload, January 2018 vs January 2019

Scheme	Caseload (working age only)		
	January 2018	January 2019	trend
Housing Benefit	15,367	11,951	22% 
CTS	13,562 (of which 405 are UC claimants)	12,334 (of which 2,666 are UC claimants)	9% 

3 UNIVERSAL SUPPORT

3.1 Universal Support is provided to UC customers and consists of an assisted digital service (ADS) and a personal budgeting support (PBS) service. The library service provides ADS, with referrals made almost exclusively by Job Centre Plus staff. This service is for customers who are unable to make the online application themselves because they do not have the digital skills to navigate the process. PBS is delivered by Advice Plymouth, again with the majority of referrals made by Job Centre Plus staff. This service looks at the financial circumstances and how UC will impact that, then works with the customer to maximise their income and manage their budget better.

3.2 In the run up to 2017/18, DWP predicted that 5% of claimants would need support for their UC claim. PCC found that in practise, up to 15% of claimants needed support. DWP updated their predictions for 2018/19, took into account the increased demand and adjusted the funding offer accordingly. See table 1 below for 2017/18 and 2018/19 predictions and actuals. The variation between predicted and actual numbers is large in 2017/18 due to a change in the roll-out programme in Plymouth which was announced after the predictions for the number of claimants who would need support were published.

Table I - DWP Universal Support Predictions 2017/18 and 2018/19:

Service	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4		Total	
	17/18	18/19	17/18	18/19	17/18	18/19	17/18	18/19	17/18	18/19 (to Q3)
ADS (predicted)	47	160	51	202	375	220	371	207	844	582
ADS (actual)	5	161	3	142	81	133	77	-	166	436
PBS (predicted)	65	266	32	334	382	365	354	345	833	965
PBS (actual)	41	162	21	179	49	325	31	-	142	666

3.3 On 1 October 2018, DWP announced that a contract had been negotiated nationally with Citizen's Advice (CA) to deliver a new design of universal support. This took into account variations in the services provided by local authorities with the intention of providing a wraparound service, of consistent nature and quality across the country, delivered by an organisation seen by claimants as trusted and independent from DWP and local authorities. The contract for universal support between the council and DWP was cancelled with effect from 31 March 2019.

3.4 The council and DWP local team have been working with CA in Plymouth on a transition plan to support UC claimants. The specification for the new universal support service, now called 'Help to Claim', differs from the existing Universal Support Service in that it is focussed primarily on the first five weeks of the claimant journey and has no dedicated personal budgeting support element.

4 SELECT COMMITTEE REVIEW 14 MARCH 2018

A Select Committee heard evidence from a range of stakeholders about their experiences of Universal Credit in a meeting held on 14 March 2018. The committee agreed 10 recommendations, which were endorsed by Cabinet on 14 August 2018. These are listed below, along with a summary of progress on each recommendation.

4.1 Recommendation 1

Following proposed amendments to Universal Credit income thresholds, the committee understand that a significant number of children may be at risk of losing their free school meal entitlement; the committee therefore requests that Council officers review the potential impact of such a change on –

- families;
- young people and consequential impact on educational attainment;
- the Council's Joint Venture with CATERed;
- impact of the Pupil Premium and consequential impacts on the education system in

- Plymouth;
health indicators;

Update to Cabinet 14 August 2018

The Customer Services and Education Participation and Skills teams scoped a project to identify pupils who are likely to be entitled to free school meals but are not in receipt of them. Data matching within the Council's systems does not include information on Universal Credit customers. A formal request has been made to DWP to provide data on families who have children and are in receipt of Universal Credit. Once that information is received, we can estimate the impact of the amendments to the Universal Credit income thresholds.

The cross party advisory committee on child poverty has been requested to add the impact of Universal Credit as a work strand. Work is ongoing within the Public Health and Education, Participation and Skills teams to understand the impact of Universal Credit on health and educational attainment.

Update 1 February 2019

Information has not been received from DWP, however a streamlined process is under development which eliminates the need for paper forms to be completed and is anticipated to improve uptake. Trials are underway with three schools (Stoke Damerel CC, Pilgrim Primary, Marine Academy Secondary) with a view to rolling out the new process before the end of the academic year.

4.2 Recommendation 2

During the witness statements, the committee raised concerns regarding the quality of communication and data sharing between statutory and non-statutory agencies, landlords and the community and voluntary sector; the committee therefore recommends that statutory agencies work together to develop robust mechanisms, as follows -

- to share predictive data relating to Universal Credit claimants and households to enable better planning of resources;
- to better communicate information on Discretionary Housing Payments and the support available for Universal Credit claimants to social and private sector landlords and tenants;
- better improve communication between local authorities, Department of Work and Pensions, social and private landlords;

Update to Cabinet 14 August 2018

Work continues to strengthen the communication and lawful data sharing across all stakeholders. Regular forums include Universal Credit liaison meetings, Devon Money Advice Forum and the South West Landlord's Association. Training sessions have been rolled out for DWP work coaches to increase their knowledge and understanding of financial support available to customers, including discretionary housing payments and council tax support. The uptake of Discretionary Housing Payments this financial year to date has improved compared to the same period last year.

Challenges remain with obtaining predictive data from DWP relating to Universal Credit claimants in order to allow the Council and stakeholders to intelligently focus resources where they may be most needed. A number of formal requests have been made over several months for data relating to Plymouth residents, including families with children who might be eligible for free school meals,

carers, young people and the number of claimants in receipt of advances. None of the requests have been refused, but none of the information has been provided by DWP.

Update 1 February 2019

Partnership relationships continue to support improved communication and DHP management. Sharing predictive data continues to be challenging.

4.3 Recommendation 3

That the Group Leaders write to the Permanent Secretary seeking -

- implementation of default automatic direct payment for the housing element of Universal Credit to social and private landlords with an opt out;
- improve communications between Department for Work and Pensions and private landlords;
- to provide a mechanism for confirming entitlement to Universal Credit, at an earlier stage, in order to progress Discretionary Housing Payments applications when they are needed;

Update to Cabinet 14 August 2018

The DWP Partnership Manager is linked in with private sector landlords and a session with PCC and DWP is planned with the South West Landlord Association at their General Meeting on 17 October 2018. Officers have also confirmed with DWP the ability to use information from the Universal Credit Customer's online account once their identity has been confirmed and an advance payment agreed, as confirmation in order to progress a discretionary housing payment application. This occurs one week after the initial Universal Credit application is made. This is a significant step forward as previously the team had to wait until the assessment period, five weeks after the application is made. A letter will be drafted to the Permanent Secretary from our Group Leaders, copying in our Members of Parliament.

Update 1 February 2018

Letter drafted.

4.4 Recommendation 4

Request that the portfolio holder accelerates the work being undertaken between Plymouth City Council, Plymouth Community Homes, PATH and other landlords to use the Discretionary Housing Payments underspend this financial year.

Update to Cabinet 14 August 2018

This was actioned on the day of the select committee review meeting and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) were made wherever possible. As a result, an additional £40k was awarded to clear rent arrears, helping to bring the total DHP spend for 17/18 to £548k from an allocation of £725k.

Update 1 February 2018

No further action was required on this point, DHP management continues to improve and all funds are on track to be allocated this financial year.

4.5 Recommendation 5

Encourage local businesses to introduce a payroll deduction scheme in order to promote the Credit Union.

Update to Cabinet 14 August 2018

Pledge 9 supports and expands on this recommendation:

Many local businesses work hard for the good of Plymouth, going the extra mile to help meet the city's needs and working for inclusive growth. We will explore ways in which we can help businesses and social enterprises that go further than a standard corporate social responsibility programme to grow.

Work is underway, led by the Policy and Intelligence team, to look at options to implement the recommendation.

Update 1 February 2018

Work remains underway

4.6 Recommendation 6

Investigate the feasibility of restricting the location of money lending and rent-to-own companies within the city centre and deprived areas through planning controls.

Update to Cabinet 14 August 2018

The Development Team are looking into available options.

Update 1 February 2018

Options are under consideration

4.7 Recommendation 7

Investigate whether there is a secure storage area within the Council's estate that could be used by the Plymouth Food Bank.

Update to Cabinet 14 August 2018

The Land and Property team is looking into the options available.

Update 1 February 2018

Further requirements were obtained from Plymouth Food Bank

4.8 Recommendation 8

Properly fund Advice Plymouth in order to provide additional resources to cope with the increasing demand for complex case management and to seek financial contributions toward the service from partners.

Update to Cabinet 14 August 2018

The Advice and Information procurement process is underway and includes consideration of this recommendation.

Update 1 February 2018

Commissioning of this contract is due in 2019/20

4.9 Recommendation 9

Review the existing training provided by the Council and partner agency staff regarding signposting and support for Universal Credit customers and undertake refresher training where necessary

Update to Cabinet 14 August 2018

Further refresher training has been completed and shadowing opportunities identified. A training and update programme is ongoing as Universal Credit continues to roll out across the city.

Update 1 February 2018

The transition planning with CA is identifying new training and signposting requirements which will continue to inform ongoing training for our teams and partner organisations in order to best support UC customers.

4.10 Recommendation 10

Hold a further review to assess the impact of Universal Credit once the service has been live for 12 months (February 2019) and to receive quarterly updates to ensure that this issue is kept under review.

Update to Cabinet 14 August 2018

This has been accelerated given the additional information that has been published since the select committee review. A Scrutiny Select Committee has been scheduled in September.

Update 1 February 2018

Scrutiny date confirmed for 27 February 2019

APPENDIX A



UC Plymouth
Postcodes Roll Out D:

APPENDIX B



UC changes
timetable.docx