

Council 9 November, 2017

Universal Credit

Labour Group to move:

Council notes that:

- 1 Bath and North East Somerset is a Full Service area for the roll out of Universal Credit and has been since May 2016.
- 2 By 2020, it is expected that 7,500 people will be in receipt of Universal Credit in Bath and 7,000 in North East Somerset.
- 3 Between April and September 2017, Citizens Advice advised 274 different people with new problems concerning Universal Credit from every ward in Bath and North East Somerset.
- 4 People approaching Citizens Advice mainly had problems with the delays in receiving their first payment, inability to pay for essential items such as food and utilities before receiving their first payment, getting into rent arrears because of the initial delay or because the Department for Work and Pensions had not paid their landlord as arranged and using the digital service.
- 5 Citizens Advice has produced a report *Delivering on Universal Credit* which sets out some of the issues and makes recommendations including the need to pause the roll-out of Universal Credit until the problems with it have been addressed.

This Council believes that:

- 6 The aim of Universal Credit – to simplify the benefits system and to offer people the security and support they need to move into and progress in work - is right, but Universal Credit is already failing many people, forcing them into debt and leaving them without the means to make ends meet.
- 7 Some of these problems are the result of the flaws in the current design of Universal Credit whilst others are the result of problems with implementation, but Government needs to address all the issues with Universal Credit before the roll-out speeds up and many more people are affected.
- 8 The Government's decision to make the Universal Credit helpline free of charge is to be welcomed.
- 9 It is important that the new welfare benefits system is fair, works properly and does not disadvantage residents either now or in the future.

Council resolves therefore:

- 10 To call immediately on our two MPs to make urgent representations to Government to:
 - a) Halt the roll out of Universal Credit until the problems have been resolved;
 - b) Seek assurances from the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions that the lessons learnt from the experience of Universal Credit in Bath and North East Somerset will be used to amend both the design and the implementation of the scheme where necessary; and
 - c) Ensure that changes made as a result of addressing the problems with Universal Credit are implemented first in existing Full Service areas such as B&NES.