

Resources Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel

Universal Credit Pilot – Update

Background

Council Connect and the Benefit service have been at the forefront of implementing system thinking solutions for our customers, with very successful results.

The planned introduction of Universal Credits using digital by default solutions is seen as a threat to some of the learning and changes brought about in our face to face services.

Whilst in favour of the principles behind Universal Credits we have sought to influence the Department for Work & Pensions in its planned delivery of the new Benefit, particularly in relation to the most vulnerable claimants and those needing face to face support. This stance has been supported by Members of the Cabinet, this panel and our local MP's.

Local Authority Led Pilots

Earlier this year the DWP announced that it would consider bids from Local Authorities from England, Scotland and Wales to explore how local expertise can support residents under Universal Credit, setting examples for other Local Authorities.

We applied to be one of these pilots and our application was shortlisted by the LGA who worked with the DWP to assess the bids. The shortlisted bids have now been scrutinised by DWP and we have now been selected as a Pilot site.

Our Proposal includes:

- To create Universal Credit World for face to face service delivery in advance of the actual changes coming in to effect.
- Working closely with partners already in our One Stop Shop, supplemented by colleagues from Job Centre Plus.
- Providing detailed measures for customer end to end contacts, identifying where problems occur.
- Help people to claim online benefits where possible; understand what may be preventing people claiming on line; and put in place support for people where needed.
- Identify which customers will need additional Financial Support and put in place appropriate solutions.
- Address wider life events and support in finding work if required

The Pilot

We meet with DWP on the 17th September to clarify funding and start dates which we hope will be the beginning of November. With money to accommodate a member of Job Centre staff and project support.

Appendix 1: - Our Proposal

Appendix 2: - DWP Letter of Acceptance

Appendix 3: - DWP Press Release - <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/newsroom/press-releases/2012/aug-2012/dwp095-12.shtml>