

Universal Credit 2013 Focus Local Authority led pilots

Thank you for expressing an interest in submitting a proposal to be a pilot in preparation for universal credit implementation. Submissions will be considered by a panel of Local Government Association members and successful pilots will work closely with the UC Programme.

The application form allows you to provide the following information:

Part 1: Local authority details

Part 2: Summary of existing processes

Part 3: Summary of proposed pilot

Part 4: Key requirements

Part 5: Additional requirements – innovative and transformational characteristics

Part 6: Financial data – costs, benefits and non financial outputs.

Your completed application form should be returned by 18th May 2012

You can navigate through the application using the arrows at the bottom of each page. Use the back arrow if you wish to amend your response to an earlier question. If you stop before completing the application form, you can return to this page using the link supplied in the e-mail and you will have the option to continue from where you left off.

We advise that you save a copy of what you have written using the sample Word document available on the website, as you will not be able to print off a copy of your application at the end of this online form.

If you have any queries about the application, please contact LG Finance, policy by
Email: lgfinance@local.gov.uk

Part 1 - Local Authority details

Local authority details

Local authority name Bath & North East Somerset
Type of authority Unitary

Principal contact

Contact name Ian Savigar
Job title Divisional Director Customer Services
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Address line 1 Revenue & Benefit Services
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Address county Somerset
Postcode BA1 1WF

Secondary contact

contact name Elaine Riddle
Telephone no: 01225 396544

Please provide a brief demographic overview of your authority (eg population, rural/urban etc):

Please describe in not more than 3000 characters (the equivalent to approximately 250 words).

Bath & North East Somerset Council is a mixture of Rural and Urban populations. It was created in 1996 as part of local government reorganisation, combining the old Wansdyke District Council and Bath City Council. The overall population of Bath & North East Somerset is around 180,000 with approximately half of this number being located in the City area and the rest in surrounding Rural localities. We have 3 main population Centres; Bath ; Keynsham and Midsomer Norton. We have 76,748 Banded properties for Council Tax purposes; Bath is a University City and has a large transient population of students. We have 5,698 properties identified for National Non-Domestic Rating purposes Whilst the City of Bath is relatively affluent we have 5 neighbourhoods which are recognised as deprived areas and also a mixture of Rural wealth and poverty. We have 12,187 live Council Tax Benefit Cases and 10,591 live Housing Benefit Claims. Roughly 50% of our caseload are Pensioner claims; 30% fully passported working age claimants and 20% low paid working age. With a combined caseload of 13,960. There are 2400 jobseekers, 20,500 ESA/IB claimants and 14,500 Income Support claimants of whom 11,200 are lone parents The number of new JSA claims taken through Bath Jobcentre averages 450 per month. Between 40 – 50% of these are on line

Part 2: Summary of existing processes

In up to 250 words, please describe your existing processes for benefits delivery and customer handling that will be changed by the pilot.

In up to 250 words, please describe your existing processes for benefits delivery and customer handling that will be changed by the pilot.

Please describe in not more than 3000 characters (the equivalent to approximately 250 words).

We currently offer face to face council services through our One Stop Shops located within the three main population centres. Having adopted systems thinking methodology for delivering our Housing & Council Tax Benefit service and working with the DWP Performance development team we have modified our service to reduce waste and failure demand. In the absence of a fit for purpose online solution for Housing & Council Tax Benefits we have actually encouraged customers to use our face to face service, but at the

same time we have removed the need for complicated forms and do operate a mediated online solution. Our pilot will seek to take the learning from our systems thinking process and widen the solution to all Benefits to be included with Universal Credits. We will introduce face to face mediated support with applications for DWP Benefits where online claims exist – (such as Job Seekers Allowance & benefit calculations where they do not – such as Working and Child Tax Credits.) For those customers already within the Benefit system and those looking to get back into work we will offer 'better off' calculations. We will introduce customers to online Benefit gateways and help those who lack confidence and knowledge & identify those that need extra support and guidance. On identifying those with additional needs we will refer them to 3rd parties such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Housing Associations, Credit Unions and other local organisations offering assistance and support who will be onsite within our 'One Stop Shop's'. Through this process we will be empowering the customer to take ownership & responsibility of their own financial situation. Thus giving customers a 'one stop' benefit system more in line with what will be expected for Universal Credit. We will work alongside DWP colleagues to operate a triage solution, we will observe and record customer behaviour and we will case study and review cases in order to provide learning to encourage greater use of digital services in the future. Customers with HMRC queries are currently passed to onsite HMRC staff, this would change for Tax Credits to offer a more complete service. Similarly with Job Centre Plus customers, instead of initially referring them to the local Jobcentre as per our current procedures, we will seek to offer as much help as we can to access DWP benefits. Shared front office is a national programme and we are becoming a leading example.

In up to 250 words, please describe your existing performance measures/indicators for benefits delivery and customer handling that will be changed by the pilot.

In essence our HB & CTB customers set nominal demand for end to end awards. Over 60% of Customer visits result in what we call job done (claim processed completely) Average end to end times for new claims in April was 2 days We have measures in place to measure footfall with all our offices. (There are around 600 HB / CTB related enquiries in our offices per week) Although the number of new claimants requiring support is much less at around 15 - 20 per day... (we understand the likely number of Job Centre Customers requiring similar levels of support would be around 10 per day) We monitor new claims on a weekly basis, checking end to end times from date of first contact to completion. Statistics are recorded for number of customer & staff touches along with percentage completed there & then and also within 3 days. In April Staff touches amounted to 1.1 and Customer touches with the Service 1.2. From the start of our review in 2009 to now, our end to end time for a new claim has come down from an average of 39days to 2days for face to face claimants, most claims are now completed there and then with a customer service advisor. Measures are also in place to check for claims that may have taken over 50days including taking remedial action to prevent this happening again. A new measure would be put in place to monitor customers needs throughout the digital process, monitoring & identifying what assistance they require and what obstacles they found. Our aim would be to reduce both customer and staff member touches to 1 for all Benefits (one and done) We would monitor return visits and particularly capture where the end to end process has failed and why. We would measure the added value / life event scenarios by customer type Regular reviews with partners and customers to reveal qualitative data about the process and experience

In up to 250 words, please detail your experience of implementing major changes to tight timescales.

Working in HB & CTB we are extremely familiar with implementing major changes to tight timescales. Recent examples include: LHA (Local Housing Allowance) - we worked well with partners, Banks and providers and had a very good implementation process. Atlas is up and running without major issues TUO (Tell Us Once Bereavement and Birth) We were congratulated by the DWP implementation team on our handling and smooth installation of these procedures. On Fri the 18th May 2012 The Minister for Pensions Steve Webb MP will be opening our new One Stop Shop in Bath which has been a major project management exercise involving contractors, architects, consultants and partners. the project has been

delivered on time and within budget and the success is largely down to our team.

In up to 250 words, please give details of your current partnership relationship with DWP Jobcentre Plus and other delivery partners.

We have a very good network of Partners, many of whom are represented and work alongside us in our One Stop Shop(s). HMRC have had a permanent presence in our One Stop Shop in Bath for over a year and have actually seen an increase in demand over this time. The service complements our own Council services and is well liked by customers and staff. They do not handle Tax Credit enquiries and this would be an enhancement if they could. DWP Jobcentre Plus have worked with us on our systems thinking review and we have improved working relations over time, although we do not currently share any services. In preparation for this bid we have identified good potential for sharing resource in at least one of our One Stop Shops in order to enhance learning and encourage increased digital take up. We do have a Job centre kiosk in our Midsomer Norton Office. Other partners with whom we have very good relations are CAB, Somer Housing (our major RSL) Age UK; Connexions. all of these partners will have a permanent presence in our new One Stop Shop. In addition we will have ad-hoc attendance from organisations such as Bristol Credit Union, Sofa Project, Police, Fire and others.

Part 3. Summary of proposed pilot

Successful bids must fulfil the criteria outlined in the prospectus. This part of the application should include the main aims and objectives of your proposed pilot specifically completing each of the following questions.

Please describe in not more than 3000 characters (the equivalent to approximately 250 words).

Who will lead the work within your authority?

(please amend if necessary)

Contact name Ian Savigar
Job title Divisional Director Customer Services
Telephone 01225 477327
Email address ian_savigar@bathnes.gov.uk

Please state the proposed start and end dates of the pilot.

Start date July 2012
End date October 2013

In up to 250 words, please give details of the main aims of your pilot.

We aim to create Universal Credit World for face to face service delivery in advance of the actual changes coming in to effect, by providing access to all of the component parts in one place. We aim to understand peoples needs and capabilities for accessing these combined benefits via digital online channels. We aim to triage people seeking to access these benefits in order to enable customers / claimants to access Benefits in the most appropriate way. We aim to identify those customers who are likely to be in most need of financial support under the current and future systems in order to link them up with the right kind of advice and support. By providing a more complete benefit package we will ensure maximisation of take up of benefits which may otherwise be missed. In addition to out of work benefits knowledge we will also provide back to work assistance such as access to Job Centre & agency job vacancies, back to work calculations and sign posting to other in work

help and financial assistance. We aim to, through this, identify potential barriers customers may face accessing digital services both initially and on an ongoing basis. Highlighting these issues should make for a smoother transition to Universal Credit. We aim to address the life event issues that cause people to turn up for help in a more holistic / tell us once type solution. We aim to ensure the right partners are engaged in this pilot in order to ensure joined up service provision. We aim to work with partners to deliver training for customers who need additional help. We aim to review the end to end experience in order to improve the overall experience, to drive out waste and ensure a right first time approach.

In up to 250 words, please give details of the services/agencies that will be involved and their role within the pilot.

Customer Services, Revenue & Benefit Services - is our lead internal council service provider, responsible for ensuring resources are in place; co-ordinating the process; monitoring and performance. (basic Project Management) DWP - To provide resources to support the pilot, including knowledge and expertise around JSA / ESA and other DWP Benefits. Support to access online services. HMRC - To provide support and assistance for accessing Tax Credit applications and any associated issues. Citizens Advice - To provide impartial help/advice and support to customers and also learning for the pilot. Somer Housing - To provide assistance for potential homeless cases and also Housing related issues Bristol Credit Union - To provide Financial help. IT training provider (DWP have a contact for this) Age UK - any Pensioner related enquiries, which I anticipate are likely to grow as news of the Welfare Reforms increases. We would seek to encourage other partnership contact with NHS and Public Health bodies as well as a range of other Council Services including Housing to understand the future provision of Financial support and homeless issues.

In up to 250 words, please outline how many staff will be affected by the pilot

The pilot is expanding our current way of working & so will touch all our frontline resource. We currently have approximately 15 frontline staff who would be directly involved. Two members of HRMC are currently based within our existing service. A member of JCP frontline staff to provide assistance will be valuable and is a possibility subject to funding provision.

How many claimants will be affected by the pilot?

Average footfall is 600 per week across our offices, of this new claimants requiring support is likely to be around 20 per day

In up to 250 words, please describe how the pilot will manage stakeholders and communication

The pilot will be about making the most of existing facilities but pulling them all together in one place, this will not rely greatly on external stakeholders other than those who are already working together and have an existing framework in place for communication. We will need to work with Stakeholders in order to develop effective communications in relation to learning and performance monitoring and these can be arranged at the appropriate times. In advance of the Pilot starting we would seek to have a memorandum of agreement about the required commitments of each partner / stakeholder and an agreed working protocol. This would be treated as a project and appropriate project methodology applied including risk registers, action plans, milestones and reviews. The Council would take a lead role.

Part 4: Key requirements

Which of the following key requirements does your pilot intend to address

Write 'YES' next to those selected

Promoting the claimant's ability to access online services and reducing their need for mediated support. YES

Helping the claimant to prepare for and access work opportunities to promote financial independence YES

Delivering efficiencies such as rationalising estate, improving access, supporting data sharing and reducing administrative costs. YES

Minimising the risk and costs of abuse of the benefits system via fraud or error. YES

Making things simpler and easier to use to support claimants to secure and retain suitable accommodation. YES

In up to 250 words each please outline how you will meet the key requirements. Please also outline any risks that may affect delivery of the requirement and how you intend to mitigate the risks.

Please describe in not more than 3000 characters (the equivalent to approximately 250 words).

Promoting the claimant's ability to access online services and reducing their need for mediated support

Mediated Support is part of the way we already work but will be enhanced with JCP support, it will be reduced over time by teaching customers how to help themselves but also informing the development of Universal Credit by identifying areas of difficulty. Access and cooperation from key partners such as DWP and HMRC We will initially guide and support existing customers through the process of online benefit applications in order for them to gain confidence and knowledge to be able to manage their own financial needs in the future. We aim to identify IT needs and refer people to local free IT training where applicable. By offering access to all current benefits at one service point we can reduce customer confusion and duplication of information. Monitoring and reviewing the process will identify barriers to digital inclusion which can be removed as Universal Credit is further devised and implemented.

Helping the claimant to prepare for and access work opportunities to promote financial independence

Our face to face pilot will identify those customers most in need of financial support, by taking them step by step through their whole benefit entitlement we will be empowering them to take responsibility for their own financial affairs and preparing them for Universal Credit. We will also be providing assistance for those seeking work as well as those in work, introducing them to online job vacancies via the Job Centre and other job agencies. We will provide access to a wide range of self serve PC's and Public Telephones in order to access information about work opportunities. Working with JCP we will also be able to sign post people to job clubs and other support. Working with our own economic development team we will be able to provide a wider range of support and career advice. Connexions will also be present in our one stop shop and can provide further help. Our new One Stop shop also offers flexible space for out of hours training and recruitment drives by local employers.

Delivering efficiencies such as rationalising estate, improving access, supporting data sharing and reducing administrative costs

As a Local Authority we have recently undertaken measures to rationalise estate, this is part of an ongoing Systems Thinking Review. Improved access will come as the pilot progresses through education of customers & closer working with stakeholders. This will also encompass 'supporting data sharing' as we work alongside government partners such as JCP, HMRC and external partners such as aforementioned Credit Union, CAB, AgeUK. Some of our Partners have already managed to released property assets in order to share our accomodation and resources, e.g. CAB, Somer Housing, with others considering the possibility. We would envisage closer working with JCP, HMRC and completing calculations with customers at their initial point of contact would prevent the potential for overpayments and duplication, increasing customers awareness of not only their entitlement to benefits but also the responsibilities this brings. Again by reviewing the process from the outset &

monitoring its progress, we will be able to identify barriers to access which will in turn reduce admin costs. There are potential longer term benefits from shared working which could reduce the need for estate. We could also utilise other public facilities such as Libraries in a more effective way depending upon the learning. We will be sharing customer demand and customer profiling with our partners to better focus service delivery, something many of our partners have struggled with previously.

Minimising the risk and costs of abuse of the benefits system via fraud or error.

Recent experience of an improved Face to Face service has demonstrated to us that people are initially less likely to provide incorrect information when providing this directly as opposed to in the post. As mentioned previously by providing a more thorough benefit service we will be educating and empowering customers as to their entitlements which again should minimise the risk of potential fraud and error. By doing this jointly the information gathered will be consistent again preventing fraud and error.

Making things simpler and easier to use to support claimants to secure and retain suitable accommodation

Our current working practices, which have reduced claim processing times dramatically already do this. This will only be improved by providing a greater all in one joined up service with other partners. If we can help speed up the process across all agencies, it will reduce waste and help people to be confident in helping themselves then this will be a very valuable outcome. By offering this joined up solution we will ensure benefit take up is maximised and ease pressure on the most vulnerable.

Part 5 - Additional requirements - Innovative and transformational characteristics

In up to 250 words, please outline how the pilot will improve the simplicity for the claimant. Please also outline any risks that may affect delivery of this requirement and how you intend to mitigate the risks.

Please describe in not more than 3000 characters (the equivalent to approximately 250 words).

Reducing complexity for claimants and simplifying their experience of dealing with agencies, with the aim of reducing the need for mediated support

This has previously been covered. The whole aim of the pilot will be exactly this. We will be taking, wherever possible, the need for customers to initially have to face the barrage of different government agencies. We will be bringing these altogether in a similar vein to Universal Credit, which will ease the customer into the newer benefits to come.

Working with partners to deliver a joined up solution with local access and delivery, easy for service providers and claimants, particularly those who need additional help, to understand and navigate

Again this is the epitome of our pilot. As well as easing people into the Benefits system & holding their hand through the initial claim process, we will be there as a crutch for those who are unable to or are lacking confidence to access these systems on their own. By providing a trusted central and rural access within communities we will fill the void left by JCP / HMRC for the vulnerable within the community. Our new One Stop Shop is recognised as a great public space that does not feel like a government or council space and will put people at ease when dealing with difficult events in their life. We will have a huge range of partners available and it will truly be a Public space.

Part 6: Financial and planning data

The following section allows you to tell us: the forecast cost of the pilots, financial benefits and savings and non-financial benefits. Please use your best estimates if actual figures are not available.

Outline cost

	Year 2012/13	Year 2013/14	Total costs
Local authority costs			
Staff	35,000	20,000	55,000
Communications	1,000		1,000
Evaluation	5,000	5,000	10,000
Support costs	2,000	1,700	2,000
Other costs (please specify)			
Total local authority costs:	43000	26,700	69,700
Other organisations costs			
Staff	20,000	10,000	30,000
Communications			
Evaluation			
Support costs			
Other costs (please specify)	2,000	1,750	3,750
Total other organisation costs:	22,000	11,750	33,750

If necessary, please add any further information or clarification on costs, including any details on partner organisations.

Costs include the provision of DWP resource to support existing Council staff who can operate the Pilot. Additional costs also include Project resource and an element of accommodation costs. It should be noted that timescales for pulling this together are extremely tight and costs can only be a rough estimate at this stage.

Financial benefits

What is the forecast tangible financial benefit of the pilot activity?

	Year 2012/13	Year 2013/14	Total Savings
Local authority			
Other organisations			

If necessary, please add any further information or clarification on savings, including details on partner organisations:

I cannot identify tangible benefits but applying systems thinking and reducing waste in our own systems has delivered in excess of £200,000 savings in admin costs and significant reductions in overpayments, backdates appeals and subsidy loss, these savings can be replicated in other organisations such as DWP if the pilot is allowed to succeed and reduce waste and failure demand in the system. The potential rationalising of estate could also generate significant savings but would need to be an outcome of the Pilot! By bringing these contacts in to one place the LA or partner organisations should be able to realise staffing savings.

Non Financial benefits/outputs

Please describe the forecast non-financial benefits of the pilot activity? Examples of non-financial benefits include improving work outcomes, financial independence, on-line take-up etc.

Any change in an outcome described should where possible be quantified (for e.g. increases on-line take up by 1,000 claimants per month).

The purpose of this pilot would be to enable learning and best practice to be adopted in to the new Welfare Reforms and delivery of Universal Credits. Its success will enable the anticipated business case to come to fruition and in itself should not be viewed as a means to delivering short term financial benefits! We would aim to increase online take up for Job Centre Benefits, these are still to be negotiated. Learning from the pilot will enable improved take up of online solutions It will inform future designs and increase a tell us once approach to benefit customers and partners. (Typically reducing 7 customer touches in to 1) An efficient gateway process will ensure reduced demand on processing centres and contact centres and this should be measured as part of the process.

Please detail where pilot activity constrains or reduces the ability to achieve outcomes. These should be shown as negative non-financial benefits.

A lack of partner / stakeholder support will diminish the results of the pilot. Failure to address issues highlighted by the pilot will impact results, including the ability to contact and influence the end to end process. We appear to have very good working relations with Local Job Centre Plus to make this a success but their abilities to influence the whole process are limited and we will need support from Processing centres and other elements of DWP and HMRC.