

# COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

## 14 FEBRUARY 2019

### Universal Credit Full Programme Rollout in Carmarthenshire

#### Recommendations / key decisions required:

That the support provided by the Council is noted.

#### Reasons:

To provide information on the support being provided by the Council, working with other agencies, to support Carmarthenshire residents with the introduction of Universal Credit in Carmarthenshire from 12 December 2018.

Exec Board Decision Required YES

Council Decision Required NO

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER PORTFOLIO HOLDER:- Cllr Cefin Campbell, Cllr Linda Evans & Cllr David Jenkins

#### Directorate:

Chief Executives, Communities & Corporate Resources

#### Name of Head of Service:

Jonathan Morgan

Helen Pugh

#### Report Author:

Gwyneth Ayers & Rebecca Llewellyn

#### Designations:

Acting Head of Homes & Safer Communities

Head of Revenues & Financial Compliance

Corporate Policy & Partnership Manager

Performance, Governance and Policy Officer

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Universal Credit Full Programme Rollout in Carmarthenshire

With effect from 12<sup>th</sup> December 2018 Carmarthenshire will become a Full Service Area for Universal Credit. Anyone making a new claim for one of the effected legacy benefits will be required to claim Universal Credit

Universal Credit will replace:

- Housing Benefit
- Working Tax Credit
- Income related Employment & Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credit.
- Income Based Jobseekers Allowance

Following on from the budget in October 2018, a test and learn exercise will begin for managed migration in July 2019. Changes have been made in relation to the number of claims being migrated over to Universal Credit, now reduced to 10,000, as part of the test and learn process. Migration for existing claimants of the affected legacy benefits to Universal Credit will not now begin until after July 2020. The government has maintained that the full managed migration programme will still be completed by December 2023.

As yet, the Department of Works and Pension have not issued any information on how this will be carried out. It is likely to be based on benefit type and this will allow the Authority to identify who will be moved onto Universal Credit and when that change will happen.

For a number of years Carmarthenshire County Council have been working very closely with partners and stakeholders to ensure that we mitigate any potential negative impacts this change may have on some of our customers.

This short summary provides an overview of the key support currently offered and planned, as full service roll out is implemented. The report outlines the package of support and advice provided by Council Services to help those affected with a view of minimising the financial impact and to help, where appropriate, people back into employment. This includes:

- Support for Council Tenants;
- Support for Housing Benefit Claimants;
- From April 2019 the contract for Assisted Digital support and personal budgeting will transfer to the Citizens Advice Bureau.
- Support against Financial Exploitation through Trading Standards;
- Signposting to support through Yr Hwb'
- Support for Veterans.

DETAILED REPORT ATTACHED?

YES – UC Support

## IMPLICATIONS

I confirm that other than those implications which have been agreed with the appropriate Directors / Heads of Service and are referred to in detail below, there are no other implications associated with this report :

**Signed:** Jonathan Morgan, Acting Head of Homes & Safer Communities

Helen Pugh, Head of Revenues & Financial Compliance

Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities	Legal	Finance	ICT	Risk Management Issues	Staffing Implications	Physical Assets
<b>YES</b>	<b>NONE</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NONE</b>

### Policy, Crime & Disorder and Equalities

UC is a UK Government led programme introduced as part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012. The programme is being introduced in stages across Britain.

### Finance

It is expected that rent arrears will rise in the short to medium term based on the experience of other social housing landlords. We will however be offering tailored advice and support to our most vulnerable tenants in order to navigate them through the process.

Provision for bad debt for 2018/19 currently stands at £494K. While we expect the impact of Universal Credit may influence this, we do not envisage any increase in this provision for the next 12-18 months.

### ICT

The UC programme requires that applications are completed online. Assisted Digital Support is being provided through the Council's Libraries and Yr Hwb with access to necessary IT equipment and staff support for residents going through the application process.

### Risk Management Issues

3230 of our tenants currently claim Housing Benefit and they are likely to all transfer to U.C by 2023. Whilst it is expected that rent arrears will rise in the short to medium term based on the experience of other social housing landlords there are robust plans to mitigate the impact.

### **Staffing Implications**

We recently completed the re-alignment of the Homes and Safer Communities Division where we reviewed our capacity to provide additional support to those affected. As a part of that re-alignment we have created a dedicated Tenancy Support Team which will assist in providing the focus required.

Through additional funding provided by Welsh Government we have employed two new members of staff. In addition, new funding will provide three specialist welfare benefit and debt advisors via a 3<sup>rd</sup> sector partner.

## **CONSULTATIONS**

**I confirm that the appropriate consultations have taken in place and the outcomes are as detailed below**

Signed: Jonathan Morgan, Acting Head of Homes & Safer Communities

Helen Pugh, Head of Revenues & Financial Compliance

### **1. Scrutiny Committee**

Communities Scrutiny – 14<sup>th</sup> February 2018

### **2. Local Member(s)**

All members have been invited to take part in numerous seminars relating to UC rollout.

### **3. Community / Town Council**

The Council has supported circulation of information to all Carmarthenshire Town & Community Councils about the programme and officers from Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) attended the Liaison Forum on the 8 November 2018.

### **4. Relevant Partners**

On-going discussions with Department for Work & Pensions and third sector support services.

### **5. Staff Side Representatives and other Organisations**

N/A

### **Section 100D Local Government Act, 1972 – Access to Information**

**List of Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:**

**THERE ARE NONE**