

Summary - key service responses to Universal Credit Full Service

Citizens Advice Denbighshire

We deliver welfare rights advice across Denbighshire and are keenly aware of the impact Full Service will have on our service and customers. The role of CAD is to be the key access point for information, advice and support for claimants of UC. We have taken steps to mitigate the impact of UC, with close involvement of DCC and the establishment of a secure digital portal for referrals. We have appointed a dedicated UC adviser, training all our staff and 68 volunteers, to help with making and maintaining UC claims and offering digital access. We provide the personal budgeting service to UC claimants referred by the DWP to enable them to manage their financial situation during the UC assessment phase. We are co-locating our services in the JCP to deliver our service at the prime point for intervention, expanding our service delivery in co-production with the libraries using Skype. We have been involved in training DCC staff and the homelessness support team and have produced specific information leaflets to support UC claimants and DCC staff. We will work closely with CA nationally to inform about the impact of UC, this and our activity will minimise the impact on the people of Denbighshire.

Library Service / One Stop Shops

We anticipate an increase in people seeking digital access which could impact on the availability of PCs and the load on the Wifi signal. To mitigate, PCs can be booked in advance, the WiFi was boosted in 2017, and users will be advised to save their work often. We also anticipate a greater demand for assistance from staff to help with digital access by people with low digital skills and other barriers. DWP funding will help offset some additional staffing costs, and we are working with Working Denbighshire and CAD partners to provide support for eligible clients and training for library staff. Until the level of demand is clearer we will not know if staff capacity will be sufficient or the impact on the provision of other library and One Stop Shop services.

Revenues & Benefits

The Revenues and Benefits service delivers Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction and Free School Meals to Working Age customers. Customers will migrate from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit for help with their Housing Costs if they incur certain changes, for example, moving in or out of work. Council Tax Reduction will still be administered by the Local Authority, and customers must still apply directly to the Council for help with this. The amount of Universal Credit will determine the reduction applied to the Council Tax Charge. Customers should still apply to the Local Authority for Free School Meal entitlement. Currently, receipt of Universal Credit will mean a child would be eligible for Free School Meals, although this may change in future to an earned income threshold.

Mitigation Measures:

- Extensive staff training to ensure a smooth transition for customers moving from existing legacy benefits;
- Close working with Department for Work and Pensions to understand transition processes;
- Co-location with Jobcentre Plus, to ensure customers are supported at the earliest opportunity to make relevant applications for Council Tax Reduction, Discretionary Housing Payment and Free School Meals;
- Review of internal processes to avoid delays in processing times.

Homeless Prevention Team

For customers we anticipate potential increase in notices being served by landlords due to rent arrears, lack of income to support their households, stress due to limited ability to budget monthly. For the service we anticipate potential increase in homelessness applications and demand for services, increased demand for supported housing, increase spend on temporary accommodation and prevention budget. To mitigate all front line staff have attended UC awareness sessions, have access to CAD, Homelessness Prevention Navigator based at JCP Rhyl, close links back to the team to identify early cases that may require input to prevent homelessness. Work on a digital platform for online advice on the DCC website. Close working links with Housing Enforcement and landlords to support cases at risk of homelessness.

Housing

Income Projections inevitably see an increase in arrears due to tenants UC payments being in arrears, we also expect an increase in demand for support both digital and financial. In Housing we have already been managing new UC cases and getting used to DWP UC process to support customers through the process. Additional resources are required to provide customers with advice and support as well as increased payment transactions following direct housing costs and managing rent accounts in larger volumes due to direct payments to customers

Mitigation measures

- Financial Inclusion action plan
- Tenant Surgeries
- Roadshows
- Social Media campaigns
- Website information
- Animation
- Getting online events and support
- New IT system
- Developed a Customer Engagement Contract seen as good practice by Housing Quality Network
- New contact centre to manage increased transaction and workloads