

Universal Credit – Anticipated Impact & Strategy
2012 – 2017

Services Select Committee

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Introduction

Universal Credit is a new single payment benefit system for people who are out of work or on a low income.

Under Universal Credit a range of benefits and credits will be merged into a single payment to ensure that claimants are financially better off in work, thus improving work incentives and helping families to become more independent.

The new Universal Credit system also aims to:

- simplify the benefits system, thus making it easier to understand and more cost-effective to run,
- smooth the transitions into and out of work, thus reducing in-work poverty for those on low incomes; and
- cut back on fraud and error

Universal Credit will be launched in October 2013 for working aged people and will, in a phased approach, replace all new claims to the following working-age benefits with a single streamlined payment:-

- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Child Tax Credits
- Working Tax Credits
- Housing Benefit

Existing claims to any of the above benefits will be transferred to Universal Credit via a separate phased approach from 2014 to 2017.

The change to Universal Credit will have a major impact on residents, landlords, the Benefit Service and the Housing team of Sevenoaks District Council. The inclusion, for example, of housing costs within Universal Credit, will have direct operational consequences upon the Benefit Service at the same time as the service is implementing the new localised Council Tax Discount Scheme due to take effect from April 2013, pursuant to the Local Government Finance Bill.

The aim of this report is to provide Members with an introduction to Universal Credit and its likely impact upon Sevenoaks District Council. Recommendations aimed at assisting both the Council and residents to adapt to the new system are included.

Policy background and context

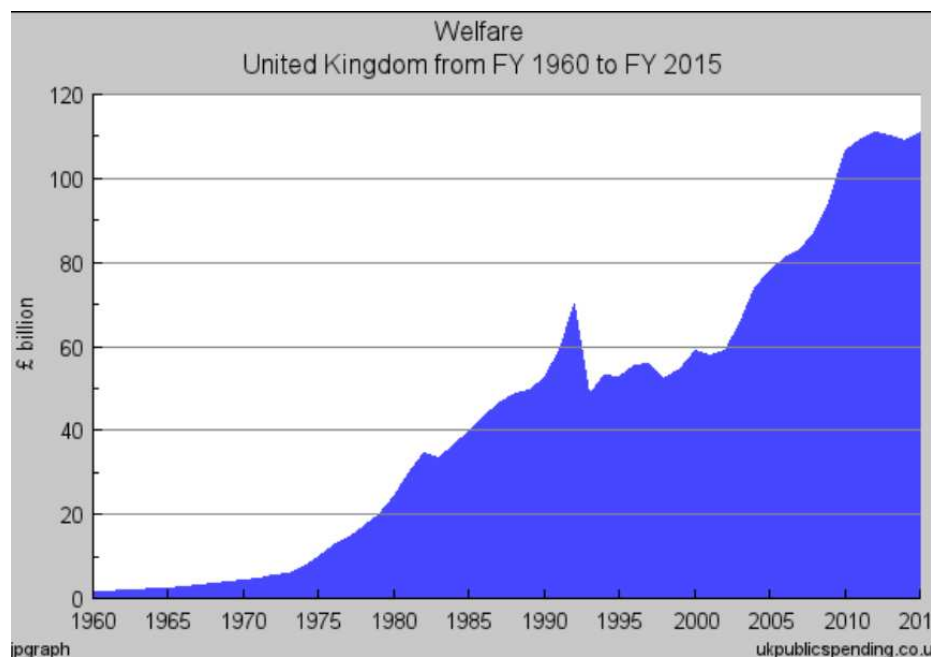
Dynamic Benefits report: towards welfare that works

Universal Credit is the Coalition Government's flagship welfare reform policy and was developed by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Rt Hon Ian Duncan-Smith MP, author of the radical Dynamic Benefits report. The Report asserts that the benefits system has unwittingly trapped generations into worklessness and benefits dependency since many claimants see no more than a few pence for every additional £1 earned due to commensurate reductions in Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit and Tax Credits – resulting in both the perception, and the reality, that work does not pay. The fundamental aim of Universal Credit, therefore, is to smooth the transition into work by reducing benefits at a consistent rate as earnings increase, thus improving work incentives. The policy became law on the 8th March when the Welfare Reform Act 2012 received Royal Assent.

Rising welfare spending

Welfare budgets (not including health and pensions) have also rocketed over the last half a century from one and a half billion pounds in cash terms (not adjusted for inflation) in 1960 to £115 billion, or 16% of total spending, in 2011.

Welfare Spending (excluding Health & Pensions) in cash terms (1960 - 2015) –

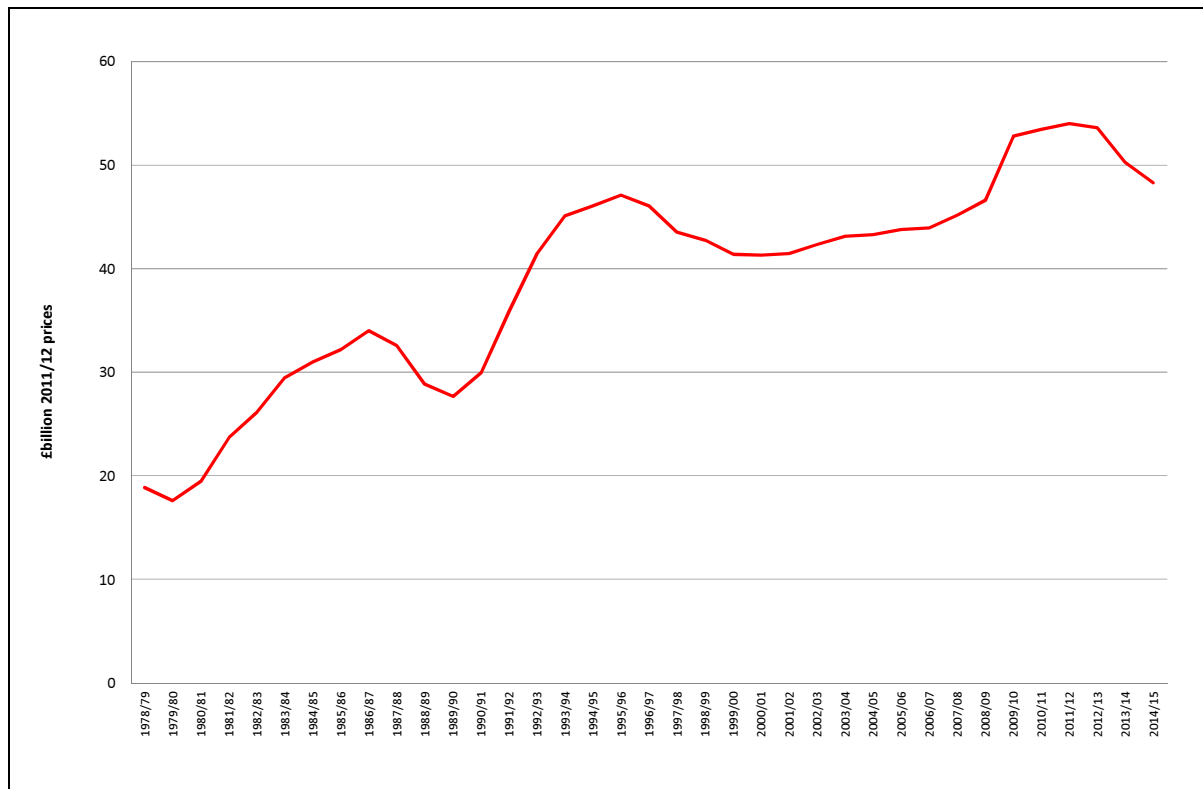


Source: <http://www.ukpublicspending.co.uk>

Housing Benefit alone has doubled over the last ten years from £11 billion (in cash terms) in 2000/01 to £21 billion in 2010/11, and without reform is set to increase still further to £25 billion in 2014/15.

Similarly, working age benefits (not including child benefit or tax credits) have more than doubled, even after inflation over the last 30 years, from just under £20 billion in 1978/79 to just under £50 billion - see overleaf.

Working Age Benefit expenditure in real terms (2011/12 prices)



Source: Treasury's PESA tables

In total the Government now spends in the region of £207 billion on benefits, pensions and tax credits, equivalent to 30% of total public expenditure in 2012-2013, the Coalition Government's view is that this level of expenditure is not sustainable, especially during the current economic climate.

Fairer

By imposing a cap on the total benefits that a *workless* household can receive and linking this to the average after tax *household* earnings the Coalition Government hopes to create a fairer benefits system.

Simpler

Three different Government organisations: local authorities, Jobcentre Plus and HM Revenue & Customs administer a myriad of over 30 different benefits, each with their own rules and criteria, many of which address the same underlying issue and entitlement. On occasions claimants will be providing exactly the same information to all 3 agencies in different formats, thereby increasing the possibility of fraud and over-payments – adding to the benefits overall.

Cheaper

By replacing the myriad of existing benefits with a single benefit and through the use of a new national IT programme using “real time” tax data linked to HMRC which can be accessed by claimants digitally in their own homes, the Coalition Government hopes to produce a modern, simplified welfare system which is easier to use, less prone to delays, error and fraud and, most importantly, cheaper to administer.

Summary of key changes under the Welfare Reform Act 2012

CHANGE	WHEN
Universal Credit will replace income-based Jobseekers Allowance, income-based Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credits, Working Tax Credits and Housing Benefit for working age claimants so that claimants receive one single combined payment.	OCTOBER 2013
Personal Independence Payment (PIP) will replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA).	OCTOBER 2013
Household Benefits Cap introduced	APRIL 2013
“Under occupation rules” introduced for social sector tenants limiting Housing Benefit paid to social tenants deemed to be under occupying their houses.	APRIL 2013
Changes in uprating of Local Housing Allowance for private tenants on Housing Benefit. (Future increases restricted to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) instead of the Retail Prices Index (RPI) which is usually higher.	In progress & continuing until APRIL 2013
Social Fund localisation to introduce new local assistance	APRIL 2013
Creation of a Single Fraud Investigation Service	Some point in 2013
Pension Credit amended to include help with eligible rent and dependent children	October 2014

All other benefits will continue as normal. Draft regulations needed to implement the key policies in the Act, including Universal Credit, were published on the 15th June 2012. These provide details governing rules of entitlement, how the award of Universal Credit is to be calculated, claimant responsibility, sanctions and hardships. Final regulations are expected to be laid before Parliament in the Autumn.

Key lines of enquiry

There is a high volume of change being introduced over a short period of time and, consequently, policy decisions leading to organisational change will need to be made in short order. Also some of the implementation work for the various different changes will overlap.

Against this background, the Universal Credit Scrutiny Board considered the following key lines of enquiry:

1. What is different about Universal Credit and how is it expected to work and what are its implications for local authorities and residents?
2. What are the key challenges for Sevenoaks District Council in adjusting to the new system of Universal Credit, especially during the transitional phase:
 - a. Key challenges
 - b. What departments/services will be affected?
 - c. What impact will the changes have on demand for the Council's services?
 - d. How can the current Benefit Service, including the staff currently operating in this area, best be protected given the uncertainty surrounding the service and its effect on staff numbers/morale?
3. What other organisations will also be affected?
4. How should Sevenoaks District Council best prepare for these changes?
 - a. What role, if any, should the Council play in supporting the implementation of Universal Credit?
 - b. What role, if any, should the Council play in helping other affected organisations prepare for the changes?
 - c. Should, and if so how, might the Council assist accessibility to the new service especially by those who have difficulty accessing computer based services or have no access to a computer?
5. What opportunities are there to lobby DWP/play a part in how the new system is implemented? (e.g. could or should Sevenoaks become a pilot Council for implementing the new scheme?)
6. Financial impact of Universal Credit upon Sevenoaks District Council
7. Risk analysis

What is different about Universal Credit and how is it expected to work, and what are its implications for local authorities and residents?

Summary of key differences between Universal Credit and the current welfare system:

- Under Universal Credit claimants will have only two organisations to deal with instead of three.
 - Universal Credit will be available to people who are in work and on a low income, as well as to those who are out of work.
 - Most people will apply online and manage their claim through an online account.
 - Claimants will receive just one monthly payment, paid into a bank account in arrears, in the same way as a monthly salary. This compares to the fortnightly payday of JSA/ESA and the 2 or 4 weekly payment of Housing Benefit.
 - The housing cost element of Universal Credit will be paid direct to the claimant as part of their monthly payment and NOT the landlord as is currently frequently the case, especially for social housing tenants.
 - Most claimants on low incomes will still be paid Universal Credit when they first start a new job or increase their part-time hours
- a. Currently anyone needing to claim benefits may need to claim benefits from the following four organisations:-

Benefit sought	Organisation
Housing Benefit	Sevenoaks District Council
Council Tax Benefit	
Jobseekers Allowance	Jobcentre Plus
Income Support	
Employment Support Allowance	
Working Tax Credits	HM Revenue & Customs
Child Tax Credits	
Child Benefit	
Disability Living Allowance	DWP
Pension Credit	

Post 2013 claimants will have just two organisations to deal with instead of three.

Benefit	Organisation
Universal Credit (including Housing costs)	DWP
Personal Independence Payment	
Pension Credit	
Council Tax “discount”	Sevenoaks District Council
Existing claims for Housing Benefit until caseload fully transits by 2017. Possible role supporting claimants who cannot make an online claim without assistance	

b. Who can claim Universal Credit?

Universal Credit replaces six existing benefits and so anyone of working age who is on a low income, pays rent, and would otherwise have claimed benefits, will be able to claim Universal Credit. Whether they qualify or not will depend on the usual factors i.e. their personal circumstances – income, capital, liability and residence using means-testing. Note that pensioners will claim a Housing Credit from the DWP as part of the Pension Credit process from October 2014.

c. How does someone apply for Universal Credit?

Claims for Universal Credit are expected to be made online direct to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) although assurances have been given by the Coalition Government that there will always be face-to-face or telephone support in place for those who don't have access to the internet or who are unable to use the internet.

d. How is Universal Credit going to be paid?

Payments (including the housing cost element) will be made on a monthly basis (not two or four weekly as at present), and in most cases will be paid direct to the tenant who will then be responsible for paying their own rent direct to their landlord. To date this has only been the case for private sector tenants, not social sector tenants who are now included. Taking responsibility for payment of essential items such as accommodation and being paid in the same way that working people are normally paid is seen to be an important aspect in helping claimants get back to work.

e. Can the housing element be separated and paid direct to a landlord?

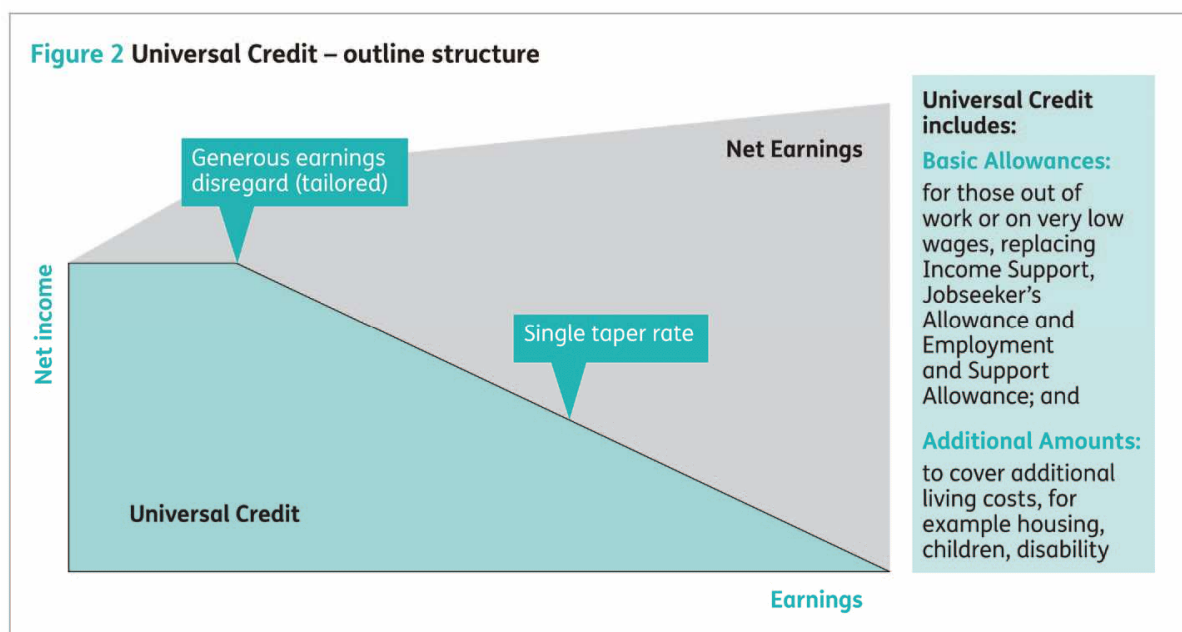
The choice of having the payment made direct to the landlord does not exist under Universal Credit, however, recently Lord Freud, the Welfare Reform Minister, announced that the Coalition Government would explore the implications of direct payments to tenants and may introduce:-

- Switch-back mechanisms by which the payment reverts to the Landlord if arrears build up;
- Provision of financial support and advice to tenants; and
- Exceptions, where payment should still go direct to the Landlord.

f. What happens if the Claimant finds a job?

One of the key features of the new system is that people will not automatically lose their benefits if they find a job. On the contrary, the new system has been designed so that there will be a gradual withdrawal of benefits when a job is taken up and also no need to sign off benefits to take up employment. The current “poverty trap” whereby several benefits are commonly withdrawn at the same time that a job is found should be ameliorated. In addition, it will also be a lot harder for individuals to claim that they would be worse off taking up a job.

The taper rate for withdrawal of all benefits payments is to be set at 65% of post-tax earnings and the amount the claimant may earn before benefit is withdrawn (the “earnings disregard”) in many cases is expected to be more generous than before as demonstrated by the following graph:-



Source: <http://www.disabilityalliance.org/f55.htm>

g. How is Universal Credit made up and administered?

The single payment of Universal Credit will have 4 components:

- A “standard allowance”
- Child allowances
- Housing costs (rent or mortgage interest)
- Allowances for other needs e.g. disability, childcare costs.

As already mentioned, it will be administered by a national IT programme using “real time” tax data to automatically calculate people’s entitlements and will be subject to an overall “cap” by reference to national average household post tax earnings.

h. When and how will Universal Credit be introduced?

April 2013 – launch of Universal Credit “pathfinders”

Starting in April 2013 four local authorities (Tameside, Oldham, Wigan and Warrington) will start the delivery of Universal Credit in the North-West. The findings of these “pathfinders” will be used to make sure any necessary changes are made to ensure the success of the national launch of Universal Credit in October 2013.

October 2013 – national launch of Universal Credit

Universal Credit will start to take new claims from unemployed people, i.e claims for Jobseekers Allowance, in October 2013, and initially this will only be in seven locations (not known yet) across Great Britain (plus obviously the Pathfinders in the North West will continue). If a claim for Housing Benefit is also made this will also be paid as part of the “Universal Credit”. For people in work this process will begin in April 2014.

All other new claims for Housing Benefit made by unemployed people are expected to transfer to Universal Credit from early 2014 and for people in work this process is expected to begin in April 2014.

Existing benefit claims even those including a new claim for Housing Benefit and Tax Credits (“the legacy caseload”) will continue to be processed by the Benefits Service and/or HMRC in the normal way as, and until, there is a change of circumstances at which point these claims will become claims for Universal Credit.

All other existing cases i.e those not subject to a change of circumstances, will be converted through a series of block transfers with the final transfers taking place in 2017.

From October 2014 all new claims for Pension Credit will include a claim for housing costs, although it is not currently expected that these will be made online.

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What are the key challenges for Sevenoaks District Council in adjusting to the new system of Universal Credit?

Key challenges

Having interviewed a number of witnesses from the charitable, social housing and voluntary sector as well as officers from the DWP, other Councils, SDC and Jobcentre Plus, we see the following key challenges with the introduction of Universal Credit:

- (1) The target for 80% of claims to be made online by October 2017.
- (2) Payment of Universal Credit monthly, not two or four weekly (Housing Benefit) or fortnightly (Jobseekers Allowance), as is currently the case.
- (3) Payment of Universal Credit (including housing costs) direct to claimants in social housing not to landlords, as occurs in the majority of cases at the moment.
- (4) The organisational impact of Universal Credit upon the Benefit Service both in October 2013 (working age claimants) and in October 2014 (pensioners) including:
 - (a) Re-training/maintaining suitable staffing levels and morale to facilitate the successful implementation of Universal Credit as well as the new localised Council Tax discount scheme.
 - (b) Analysing the Housing Benefit caseload so that the Benefits Service know well in advance those residents who are likely to be most affected by the changes and thus require additional support.
 - (c) Financial planning, including possible additional funding requirements
 - (d) Possible redundancy/IT decommissioning costs/re-deployment of staff post October 2013 and throughout the Housing Benefit tapering off period to 2017.
- (5) How to support vulnerable groups through the transition period and beyond including the Benefit Cap and its impact on LA finances/resources.

Universal Credit will impact upon the following departments within the Council

- (1) The Benefit Service (migration of existing benefits claims / decommissioning of Housing Benefits service / increased queries / face-to-face help for claimants)
- (2) The Housing Team (possible increased homelessness / queries)
- (3) The HERO Team (increased caseload)
- (4) The Contact Centre (increased queries)
- (5) The Investigation of Fraud Department (service re-organisation)

What impact will the changes have on demand for Council services

Demand for the Council's Housing Benefit Service will start to shrink from October 2013 to October 2017 as new working age claimants access Universal Credit online. The speed and extent of shrinkage will depend on how quickly the DWP transits the caseload, and how quickly claimants adapt to claiming online, and how adept the DWP telephone helpline staff are at guiding people through the online claim over the telephone.

Anecdotal evidence from a number of witnesses suggests that it is highly likely residents will prefer to direct their queries at existing Housing Benefits staff with whom they are familiar and have already built up a relationship.

Demands for help, advice and support, whether by telephone, post or in person, are highly likely to increase. Activity within the Benefit Service increased by 70% from April 2011 to March 2012 and it seems highly likely that a similar or increased level of activity will continue this year and next.

The other highly relevant factor is the extent to which Council's retain a residual role to provide face-to-face support to claimants unable to get online or operate a computer. Twelve councils are expected to pilot the delivery of Universal Credit from September 2012 until September 2013 (one month before Universal Credit is expected to start) with specific reference to the provision of face-to-face support, online support, help with budgeting and job searches, reducing fraud and error, and reducing homelessness. The precise identify of the 12 Councils is not yet known. As of last month the long list had been reduced to 15 but SDC is not one of them.

The DWP have stated that no decision will be taken on the future role or future funding of councils in delivering Universal Credit until after the pilots have finished.

Consequently, it is impossible to reach any firm conclusions regarding the demand for the Council's benefit services save for stating the obvious, namely, that the Benefit Service will cease in its current form at some point between October 2013 and October 2017 at the latest.

During the same period, however, demand for help and support with housing and indebtedness involving both the Housing, Hero and Contact centres, is likely to increase in response to other changes in welfare provision.

This can be seen more clearly from the following table which details the activities required together with the elements that are as yet 'unknowns'.

Activity	Date	Comments and unknowns	Work required prior to implementation
Benefit Cap	April 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initially administered by Benefit Services. Affected claims will be notified to Local Authorities by DWP. • Numbers of affected cases not yet known. • Full details of process not yet known. • Increase in enquiries expected from claimants and landlords. • Increase in claims for DHP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify all potential affected claims and work with social landlords to advise and assist claimants subject to data sharing protocols. • Staff training and awareness. • System changes.
Under Occupation	April 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of affected cases not yet known. • Increase in enquiries expected from claimants especially those who currently get 100% Housing Benefit. • Increased contact from landlords. • Increase in claims for DHP. • Potential increase in movement of claimants to more suitable accommodation – increased activity within caseload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify all potential affected claims and work with social landlords to advise and assist claimants subject to data sharing protocols. • To write to all claimants potentially affected. • Staff training and awareness. • System changes.
Council Tax Support Scheme	April 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will initially continue to run alongside Housing Benefit claims. • Future numbers of staff to administer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation until end of September 2013. • Changes to leaflets and forms • Provision of rules

Activity	Date	Comments and unknowns	Work required prior to implementation
		<p>scheme in isolation not yet known</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future changes in scheme may affect staffing and activity levels. • Initial and future funding for new scheme and impact on current Administration Grant unknown. • Activity may increase as this is seen as a discount not a benefit and will encourage take-up. • Appeals may increase 	<p>and procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of new appeals process. • Advising claimants of the changes where affected. • Staff training and awareness. • System changes.
Dealing with legacy Council Tax Benefit	From April 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long will Benefit Services be required to make retrospective changes to Council Tax Benefit claims? • Funding for this unknown. • This will also impact on subsidy claims, subsidy audit and appeals against legacy benefit and subsequent resource requirements. 	
Workload	On-going	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity levels within Benefit Services have risen by 70% since April 2011 and continue to be significant. • Future activity levels are unknown and will affect current/future resource levels. 	

Activity	Date	Comments and unknowns	Work required prior to implementation
Universal Credit	From October 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full transition plan for new and current Housing Benefit claims not known. • DWP requirement for Local Authorities to provide additional support for Universal Credit not known. This requirement and funding of same will affect future resource requirements. • Measures DWP will put in place to assist claimants not known and may affect future resources depending on Members wider decisions around support and community help they may wish to fund. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with DWP on numerous aspects including funding and impacts. • DWP pilots and pathfinders • Working with stakeholders.
Dealing with legacy Housing Benefit		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long will Benefit Services be required to make retrospective changes to Housing Benefit claims? • Funding for this unknown. • This will also impact on subsidy claims, subsidy audit and appeals against legacy benefit and subsequent resource requirements. 	

How can the current Benefit Service, including the staff currently operating in this area, best be protected given the uncertainty surrounding the service and its effect on staff numbers/morale?

The Universal Credit Scrutiny Board is strongly aware that the benefits staff are coping with an increased work load, as well as an uncertain future, and that this is an unsatisfactory situation.

Equally, Members will appreciate that it is unlikely to be possible to maintain current staff numbers post October 2013 in the face of a declining caseload and consequent Government administration grant reduction. Plainly, a number of benefits staff will still be required to administer the existing legacy caseload along with the new localised council tax discount scheme, and/or to assist residents who require help getting online, and/or to assist over the next year in the run up to the launch of Universal Credit as queries increase, and/or also probably during the first six months of the transfer taking place. In the longer term, however, the Benefit Service will need to reduce.

The best protection that can be given is for a management review to be carried out as soon as possible following the introduction of the other welfare changes in April 2013 to identify a) how many benefits staff will continue to be needed during the introduction of Universal Credit and in the first 6 months post October 2013, b) how many benefits assessors will be needed to administer the legacy Housing benefit caseload, and c) what other opportunities might exist for benefits staff within the Council as a whole. That said, it must be borne in mind that on the information currently available, once the legacy Housing Benefit fully transits to the DWP in October 2017, at the latest, the effect of the commensurate budget change on staffing levels suggest a reduction from around 25 full time equivalents to 14 full time equivalents.

What other organisations will also be affected by the change to Universal Credit?

Since the bulk of housing association income comes from rent, much of which is dependent on Housing Benefit, the changes to the way Housing Benefit is calculated and the change to a single benefit payment to include housing costs, will have a significant impact on social housing providers since it will significantly increase the risk of tenants defaulting and not paying their rent. West Kent / Moat Housing and other social housing associations are all likely to be affected.

The Scrutiny Board also heard evidence from representatives of MIND and CAB that they support a number of residents receiving out of work benefits, a good number of whom will require extra support to manage the change to claiming online.

Also AGE UK (when extended to Pension Credit), DWP / Jobcentre Plus and NHS mental health authorities will all be affected by the changes.

Financial Impact of Universal Credit on Sevenoaks District Council

It is clear that the change to Universal Credit will have a major impact on the Benefits Section and the effect of the change for our residents is also likely to affect other services within the Council.

Key Facts and Figures

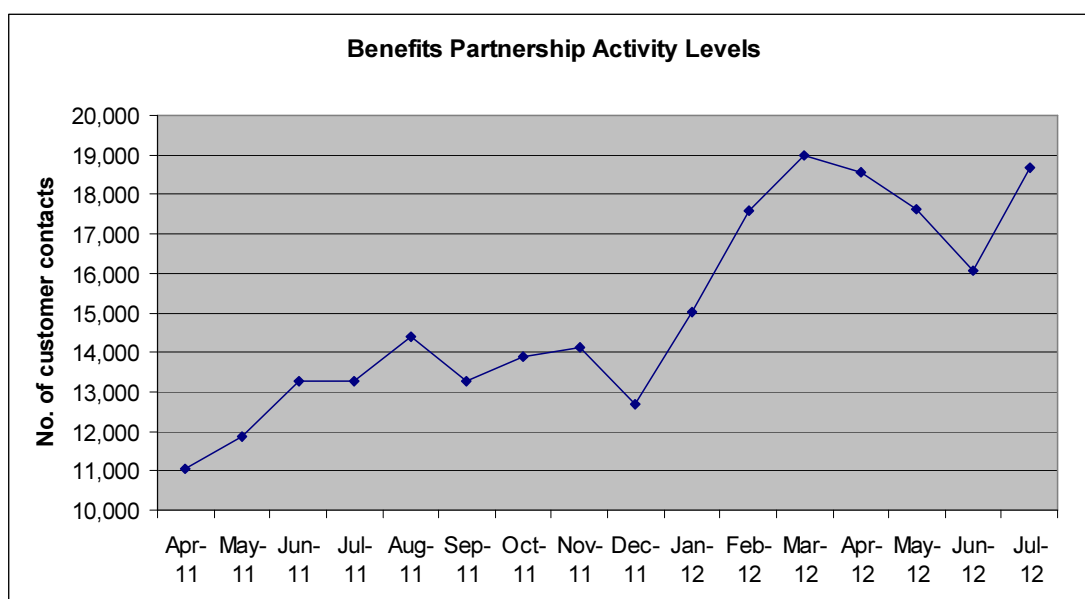
	Housing Benefit	Council Tax Benefit
Amount paid out	£26m	£7m
No. of claimants	5,387	6,619
Number of Benefits Service employees:		25.31 fte
% of Sevenoaks DC workforce:		6.77%
Cost of Benefits Service administration:		£828,000 (gross cost)
% of Sevenoaks DC budget:		2.80%

All figures are for Sevenoaks District Council only (unless specified) and future forecasts are for a full year at current prices assuming Universal Credit is being fully operated by the DWP (i.e. when the full transition to DWP in October 2017 is due to take place).

The effect of the phased implementation of Universal Credit between October 2013 and October 2017 would result in a reduced effect for these years depending on staffing requirements and actual levels of Government funding.

Other Impacts on the Benefits Service

Due to the economic climate the demands on the Benefits Section have significantly increased. The graph below shows that the number of customer contacts for the Benefits Partnership has increased by 70% since April 2011.



The Benefits Service at every authority has seen an increase in demand, together with an uncertain future for benefits professionals; this has resulted in a scarcity of benefits agency staff which are required to address the increased workload.

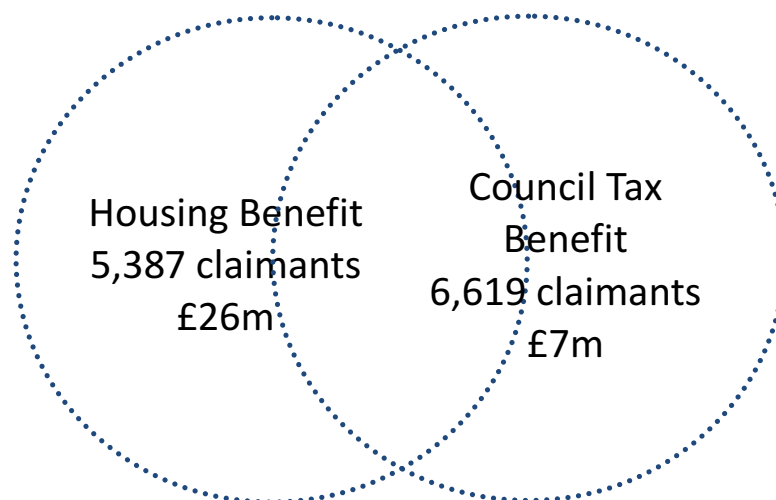
The implementation of a local council tax support scheme from 1 April 2013 to replace the council tax benefit scheme is another significant change to the work currently carried out by the Benefits Service. The other Welfare Benefit changes in April 2013 such as under occupation and the benefit cap will also have an effect.

Current Benefits Service

The Benefits Service at Sevenoaks District Council has a budgeted staffing level of 25 fte and the gross cost of the service is £828,000. £592,000 is received via the Benefits Administration Grant from Government; this amount also contributes towards the Fraud Service.

	£000
Gross cost	828
<i>Benefits Admin Grant</i>	(592)
Net Cost	236

There are currently 7,110 benefit claimants, 4,896 of whom claim both Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.



Total claimants = 7,110

Future Benefits Service

If no other changes to the service are made it could be assumed that with Housing Benefit becoming part of Universal Credit, the Benefit Service will reduce in size as follows:

	£000
Gross cost	456
Benefits Admin Grant	(326)
Net Cost	130

The effect of this budget change on staffing levels would be a reduction from 25fte to 14fte. These figures assume that Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are equally weighted in both the cost to process and the administration grant received.

This also assumes that any redundancy costs are funded by DWP.

Other Financial Impacts Resulting from Universal Credit

The Housing Service currently operates the successful HERO (Housing Energy Retraining Options) Project. This is an outreach holistic advice service and one of the areas covered is preventing homelessness. This is significantly funded by Moat, West Kent Housing and Social Services.

One scenario is that following the success of the HERO Project, two Benefits Assessors could be redeployed as Welfare Support Officers to work in a similar way but with an emphasis on helping residents access the Universal Credit system and provide debt advice etc. This could initially be run as a pilot, starting in 2014, to see where the demand lies and the level of support offered by other agencies.

If this approach was successful, it is unlikely that further additional external funding would be obtained as the housing associations are already funding their requirements and it is not possible to use planning gains money to fund council staff.

Council Tax – if residents are in receipt of Universal Credit rather than Housing Benefit they may be more likely to default resulting in a lower council tax collection rate. The majority of Housing Benefit claimants also claim Council Tax Benefit and will therefore be affected by the change to Council Tax Support. The effect on the collection rate has already been taken into account in the Council Tax Support calculations.

Redundancy costs of Benefits staff no longer required to be employed by the Council may be funded by DWP.

With fewer staff in the Benefits Partnership, many of the support service costs (e.g. Argyle Road Office) will not reduce and therefore have to be allocated over the remaining services of the council. Many of the support service teams have had major reductions in size in recent years and are now the smallest teams in Kent.

Other potential financial impacts include:

- DWP requirements and funding levels,
- Other Welfare Reform changes,
- IT decommissioning costs.

Financial Summary

Taking all of the above information into account and noting that the assumptions and estimates used could vary significantly, the effect of the change to Universal Credit for a full year could be as follows:

Financial Summary	Current Cost £000	Future Cost 2017 £000
Benefits Service		
Gross cost	828	456
Benefits Admin Grant	-592	-326
Net cost	236	130
Other Impacts		
Benefits Assessors (x2) re- deployed into Welfare Support Officers		66
Support Service costs still incurred		154
Council tax collection		0
TOTAL COST	236	350

This shows that there is likely to be an increased cost to the Council of £114,000 based on the assumptions detailed above. This would be reduced to £48,000 if we did not redeploy two Benefits Assessors as Welfare Support Officers however, this may result in increased costs elsewhere in the Council.

The increase would be reduced further if additional income was raised by renting out the office space that is currently occupied by the Benefits Service.

It would be beneficial to review the financial impacts in June 2013 when more detail will be available from the following:

- Universal Credit pilots,
- Transitional arrangements,
- Local Council Tax Support schemes will have started,
- The effects of other Welfare Reform changes on the Benefits Service.

How should Sevenoaks District Council prepare for these changes?

What role, if any, does the Council wish to play in supporting the implementation of Universal Credit?

Before considering what steps should be taken to prepare for the introduction of Universal Credit the Council needs to decide what role it wishes to play, if at all, given:

- Universal Credit is a national not a local policy.
- The long-term aim is for Universal Credit to be administered wholly by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), not local authorities.
- The Council has no **statutory** duty to assist or support the implementation of Universal Credit although a duty is owed to those who become unintentionally homeless.
- The DWP have repeatedly stated that there is no additional Government funding available for local authorities that wish to be proactive in this area.

(Consideration also needs to be given to the fact that the Benefit Service is a joint service with Dartford Borough Council and that any decision taken by this Council will also affect Dartford although the Scrutiny Board's understanding is that Dartford are very happy for Sevenoaks to be taking the lead in this area).

Against this background, the Scrutiny Board has considered three possible options in dealing with Universal Credit:

- 1) No involvement at all. The Council concentrates on administering only the new Council Tax Discount and other Housing related welfare changes, neither of which are included in the brief handed to this group;
- 2) Full involvement. The Council produces leaflets to raise resident awareness, up-skills contact centre staff to deal with telephone queries, and finally, up-skills benefit staff to deliver face-to-face/telephone support/deal with queries and offer budgeting advice etc to all residents needing help managing the transfer, funding all extra work from reserves.
- 3) Partial involvement. Full short-term operational involvement until the transition of new Housing Benefit claims to Universal Credit (during which time it is assumed that Grant funding will still be in place). After that the Council plays an important but much smaller role, concentrating primarily on responding to direct queries and sign-posting claimants towards local organisations and/or the DWP who will be able to help them to get online and/or claim Universal Credit.

Option One (No involvement at all)

This would be contrary to SDC's Core values since there are some 5,400 Housing Benefit claimants in Sevenoaks District alone whose housing needs and well-being are inextricably linked to the smooth running of the benefit system, some of whom will be among the most vulnerable in our community. Also, this may not be sensible financially since if UC impacts on the flow of rental payments to social and private landlords this may, in turn, increase the number of people that the Council has a statutory duty to provide with B&B accommodation. Taking steps, therefore to minimise the number of families descending into crisis is likely to save money and reduce pressure on the Council's Social and Discretionary Housing Funds.

Option Two (Full involvement)

This would be very difficult from a financial point of view as it would run counter to the Council's four year savings plan and also Central Government's approach. It would also threaten the success of the other welfare reforms (Council Tax discount scheme and Under Occupancy rules) by swallowing up valuable scarce resources. Without clear evidence of other funding streams, this is not a viable option.

Option Three (Partial involvement)

The Scrutiny board considers that option three provides the best balance between helping claimants that need help with the initial transfer to UC and the likely financial resources available to fund that help. It would also enable the benefits service to be restructured over a more realistic period of time, thus saving costs.

Process and scenario planning

Since there is unlikely to be much time between DWP finalising its arrangements and UC going "live", SDC needs to be ready to move straight away.

To the extent that it is possible, senior management need to consider for each of the three scenarios considered above:

- who needs to be retained and how that is going to be achieved in uncertain times;
- what opportunities there are for redeployment and retraining and who should be considered;
- how much space can be released and utilisation optimised to allow surplus space to be marketed to best effect;
- where are the peaks and troughs and how are they to be met; and
- what will the impact be on other departments;

It is important to ensure that if we can't do what we are recommending, or if the recommendations do not lead the way we expect, we are not caught by surprise and have a fall back position. We may find it all goes far more smoothly than expected in which we will not need much resource. Or it may be a continuing fiasco in which case we may find that we need more resource, not less. If we don't have the financial resources at present to finance our fall back position (which seems likely) and, in the event that, no further funding is forthcoming from central Government, then a further contingency plan is needed.

Conclusion

In the light of all the unknowns, in particular, the expected further reduction in Government Grant funding, coupled with the probable lack of any on-going role for local authorities, the Scrutiny Board strongly recommends adopting the following over-arching, Policy statement to shape, control and direct the introduction of Universal Credit:

Universal Credit Scrutiny Board Policy Recommendation:

SDC will continue to maintain capacity to respond to direct enquiries from the public regarding Benefits issues affected by the introduction of Universal Credit. It will prepare its staff to communicate and facilitate appropriate courses of action for benefits claimants and develop effective links with other agencies and organisations to ensure a consistency of service and support. SDC will be a centre for communication about all aspects of Universal Credit, using materials and channels developed by DWP but also producing its own local messages, specific to the District.

Dealing with the challenges

The expectation that Universal Credit will be digital by default

The DWP stance has changed significantly since the Scrutiny Board was formed and there is now a clear realisation that the original 80% online target by 2017 is wholly unrealistic. There is also an acceptance that some claimants may need on-going help to complete their online claim for Universal Credit.

Whether the DWP accepts that local authorities should deliver this deliver face-to-face support remains to be seen. Current information from the DWP suggests that this will be provided in the first instance on the telephone, but failing this “in a high street outlet”!

In the meantime, however, it is imperative to analyse the current benefit caseload in order to work out how many existing claimants are likely to need additional help making the change to claiming online so as to effectively allocate benefit resources over the next twelve month period and beyond.

It seems likely claimants will fall into 3 categories:

- Early adopters – will be online straight away,
- Late adopters – will need help but will move online within a reasonable time; and
- Complex claims (people or claims) – unlikely to ever move online

Universal Credit Scrutiny Board recommendations:

- Analyse the existing Housing Benefit caseload and attempt to identify how many claimants will fall into the second category thus needing short term help up to say April 2014 (after which Government funding is likely to be significantly cut-back), and how many might need longer term assistance, for which funding may well not be available.
- Make use of existing benefit surgeries in Edenbridge and Swanley to better understand the “gaps” in people’s IT/computer skills and/or access to a computer.
- Consider what new skills and/or resources will be needed within the Benefit Service over the next 12 to 18 months while funding is still in place to fulfil this role. How many staff will need to be re-trained and/or take on a different role?
- Consider whether it would be more cost effect to re-deploy/train a dedicated Universal Credit adviser to provide “a single point of contact” to help build capacity in people over the next key 18 months.

- Consider whether there are sufficient resources to provide short term face to face help immediately prior to and following October 2013, bearing in mind that Sevenoaks does not have access to a Jobcentre “Digital Champion” as there is no Jobcentre Plus in Sevenoaks.
- Consider sending either an Officer or a Councillor on the forthcoming Public Services training conference: **Digital by Default: Smarter Public Services**, 4th December 2012 to build understanding as to the challenges / pitfalls ahead.
- Continue to lobby the DWP to fund surgeries in Swanley, Edenbridge and Sevenoaks to assist people to get online bearing in mind that Sevenoaks District does not have a JCP therefore DWP should make provision for Sevenoaks residents. Note, however that there is a possibility of a Jobcentre Plus being opened in Swanley which although assisting Swanley residents would not assist those living in either Edenbridge or Sevenoaks, so would not be an adequate District wide solution.
- Consider partnership working. What role can Age Concern / Mind / CAB offer to support the provision of IT facilities/ help with filling in forms? What role can libraries offer? Could we through continued discussion with these organisations signpost relevant people to these organisations? A big workload is not so much of a demand if organisations take ‘sections’ of it. Consider planning an advertising campaign in conjunction with these organisations to prepare Claimants for “going digital” post October 2013?

Payment of Universal Credit direct to claimants, not landlords, and payment of Universal Credit monthly, not fortnightly or four weekly

The interviewees were unanimous in their concern about payment of Universal Credit direct to claimants and the need to help some tenants to cope with the responsibility of having to pay their rent direct to Landlords themselves and to develop the skills to manage their money on a monthly, not fortnightly, basis.

Universal Credit Scrutiny Board recommendations:

- Residents need to be warned well in advance about the change in payment method and the need to budget differently post October 2013. Letters should be written to all benefit claimants and sent out warning them of the changes 6 months and 3 months before the changes take effect.
- Continued use of on-going benefit surgeries to help people understand the need to budget and attain budget skills to enable people to make responsible choices.

- Include a Universal Credit key facts page on the Sevenoaks District Council website with a brief summary of the timetable of up-coming changes including links to other websites containing useful information e.g. the DWP website.
- Other local measures include writing an article for the next InShape magazine on the up-coming welfare changes and/or obtaining DWP flyers/leaflets for distribution at the front desk / CAB / leisure centre/doctors surgeries etc.
- Continue to use the Landlord forum and the Benefit forum as information exchanges to keep landlords up to speed and to share intelligence as to how to minimise social tenants getting into arrears (i.e synchronisation of the receipt of Universal Credit with the payment of rent so that both occur on the same day.)
- The Sevenoaks District Council housing department has also developed a system of tenant accreditation which has proved helpful in convincing landlords that a tenant is reliable. Consider whether this could be expanded to include budgeting skills/credit-worthiness.

The organisational impact of Universal Credit upon Sevenoaks District Council including maintaining staff morale/suitable staffing levels, financial planning including possible redundancy and IT decommissioning costs, especially during an extended transition period

This is a difficult area to tackle since the key issue is how to build resilience into the service with less staff in a period of acute policy uncertainty and where staff are having to deal with increased numbers of new claims and significantly increased levels of queries (post/telephone/visitors)?

Added to this is the challenge of having to keep the current service operating through current welfare changes due in April 2013 (including the implementation of the new Council Tax Discount Scheme) and through the introduction/migration of Universal Credit claims. Since the DWP are expecting us to maintain high levels of performance, provide good baseline data and not to have any real forms of backlog this will mean we need to ensure we can deal with the changes, redeployments etc while still processing existing claims.

Universal Scrutiny Board recommendations:

- Identify which staff could be re-deployed into the new face-to-face role and/or in administering the new local Council Tax Discount scheme.
- That the Universal Credit Scrutiny Board should meet again in June 2013 when firm details should be more readily available to assess the potential impacts on staff from October 2013.

- Identify what additional staff resources may be required and how they may be sourced to deal with any increased workload identified during the changeover. For example, officers are likely to be needed to fulfil the following 3 additional roles:-
 - Assist “late adopters”, those who need help but will get online in a reasonable length of time.
 - Deal with complex claims (people or claims) who are unlikely or unable to ever move online.
 - Provide a single point of contact for claimants with “gaps” in their understanding e.g. budget skills.
- As soon as information is available regarding future Government Grant funding identify cost implications - reduction in Government grant. However – how much more will it cost to train new assessors or use agency staff? Would it be more sensible for morale levels, customer service and stability to offer a ‘job guarantee’ until say Jan 2015? Depending on demand, could staff be retrained to fulfil other functions. This could mean staff will stay. Is this in the budget to do so?
- Liaise/work with the Housing department to develop contingency plans to cater for reduced availability of rented accommodation should private landlords withdraw from the market as a result of any uncertainty regarding payment of rent under Universal Credit.
- Liaise/work with the Housing department to assess the risk of higher demand for social housing from claimants being forced out of higher cost areas (e.g. London) following the introduction of the benefits cap.
- If following the introduction of the Benefit cap and the new rules on Under Occupation there is a significant related increase in those requiring emergency B&B accommodation give consideration to strengthening the HERO service.

The challenge of supporting vulnerable groups and high risk families with complex needs through the transition period and beyond

Undoubtedly some households will be faced with an uncontrollable amount of debt. A high level of liaison in the months running up to Universal Credit will be needed between the HERO service, the Housing team and Benefit Service.

Universal Credit Scrutiny Board recommendations:

- Identify an officer to take responsibility for compiling a list of “high risk” families who will need special help next April/October in adapting to the changes. Presumably any families now in B&B in Sevenoaks will be on this list. The HERO officer’s input will be needed here.
- Ensure a high level of liaison in the months running up to Universal Credit between the HERO project, the Housing team and Benefit Services. Consider scheduling a regular monthly meeting if one does not exist already.
- Consider employing another HERO / Debt Officer or increasing the grant to CAB Swanley/Sevenoaks and Edenbridge/Westerham to provide debt support? This will be based on the business case that if debt advice and help is not offered, it will have further cost implications for the LA.
- Meet with CAB Swanley/Sevenoaks and Edenbridge/Westerham to discuss and plot in detail how much debt advice / UC credit advice they can undertake?

What opportunities are there to lobby DWP/play a part in how the new system is implemented? (e.g. could or should Sevenoaks become a pilot Council for implementing the new scheme?)

The Scrutiny Board has discussed many of the issues contained within this Report with representatives of the DWP direct and the Head of the Benefits Service, Meryl Young, gave a presentation on Universal Credit and the challenges ahead at a District Council Network conference last March 2012, which attracted favourable feedback from the DWP representative present. A degree of lobbying has, therefore, already been done.

Early in 2012 the DWP asked for Local Authorities to volunteer to become Pilot Sites as part of the preparation process for Universal Credit. Whilst Sevenoaks were initially keen to be included, it was apparent when the requirements were received that it would not be in the best interests of the authority to put itself forward. This was because the pilots were directed to only provide initiatives for face-to-face contact, rather than the whole process, plus the DWP were not providing any real funding for this purpose.

It was further felt that Sevenoaks would gain more by conducting a mini pilot of it's own, for example, taking a small group of claimants and identifying and evaluating how they may best be helped by using a 'HERO ' type approach. However, due to the significant amount of work involved in setting up such a pilot, the short timescales available to put this into place and the resources needed to run, monitor and evaluate the pilot, it is not felt that a pilot is in the best interests of the authority at this time.

As a result of the work undertaken by the Universal Credit Scrutiny Board contacts have been made with Directors and Managers from the DWP, fellow pilot Councils and the Citizens Advice Bureau, all of whom have indicated their willingness to come and talk to Members, Officers, landlords, voluntary organisations and residents likely to be affected by the changes.

Universal Credit Scrutiny Board recommendation:

Resources permitting, consider organisation of a Universal Credit welfare summit in Sevenoaks prior to April 2013 to promote partnership working with other stakeholders, enable interested parties to obtain further information regarding the welfare changes, and to lobby the DWP directly for special provision for Sevenoaks given the lack of any Jobcentre Plus in the District.

Risks Analysis

Risks	Internal	External
Timescale and deadlines	Indications are that there may not be major timescale changes for the introduction but as dates come nearer, this may change. Typically, this leads to a “wait and see” approach which will add to costs. It will also increase the number of organisations asking for further delays.	Many benefits recipients may wait until the changes are effected to adapt their own budgets. "Delays in timescale may mean people affected by the changes will consider them of less importance and therefore may not take the need to adjust seriously."
Finance	Additional costs may not be borne by SDC although contingency planning should be conducted to ensure that there is flexibility to meet the demands of residents not met elsewhere, if that is the wish of the Council	Household budget of benefits recipients will need to be adapted. If adaptation is not accomplished outcomes could be adverse.
Physical Resources	Computer software changes will need to be implemented and operated effectively. This is likely to lead to potential disruptions.	Clients are unlikely to accept “please bear with us” explanations and will want to have their individual issues resolved as a priority
Human Resources	Significant changes to numbers and job descriptions will impose burdens on the HR department	Confidence in the competence of the client-facing council officers must be maintained, even if SDC’s role to be diminished over time
Capacity	Ability to direct and deal with enquiries effectively will naturally be affected during periods of change, thereby reducing overall case-load capacity across the organisation	
Demand		Uncertainty and change will naturally lead to a period of greater demand for clarification and support
Customer Relations Skills	SDC is in the process of embedding additional CRM skills across the organisation	Clients will need to know that they are valued and their issues are a priority, even when they are being

Risks	Internal	External
		referred to another agency. The handover process will need to be seamless
Communications/Education	Although Government plans and the timetable have been in the public domain for a while, not much clear guidance has been given as to how Councils should be preparing. The later this is delayed, the shorter the time to adapt, the greater the costs and the higher the risk of inefficiencies	The lead in to the changes needs to start as early as possible to give clients as much time to prepare as possible. The methods of communication and the costs must be planned carefully, and allow for feedback.
Interested Parties	Working with other agencies will need to adapt. Many will have their own problems and may find it difficult to resource interactions with the Council. This may lead to duplication.	Generally, the public prefer to have fewer points of contact rather than more.
Shared Services	Other councils will face different demographics and innovate different solutions. Unless there is some coordination with shared services councils, there may be the potential for duplication, misallocation of resources leading to higher costs	
Transitional Challenges	Without clearly defined goals and timeframes, proper project management principles cannot be applied effectively. This means there is a risk of inefficiencies and higher costs	

Many of the risks identified here and throughout this document can be ameliorated by the adoption of a clear Policy statement by the Council. A clear policy will act as a focal point, by requiring achievable goals and targets to be set, to ensure that confusion and inefficiency can be measurably and demonstrably kept to a minimum. As the project evolves and the effects of other changes to the welfare system are better understood, the Policy with regards to SDC's approach to the Universal Credit can be amended.

Action Plan

The overall aim of this Report is to raise awareness of the forthcoming Welfare Reforms and their likely impact on the Sevenoaks and Dartford Joint Benefits service so that appropriate steps can be taken in good time to ensure that the Council is able to continue to deliver quality Benefits services to those who still need and qualify for them, while at the same time assisting new claimants to move onto the new system of Universal Credit. Ensuring claimants and vulnerable groups are forewarned in good time of the possible effects of Universal Credit is an equally important aim. In the short-term, therefore, an increase in demand for the Council's Benefit services by those concerned and/or affected by the welfare reforms is assumed. The long-term goal, on the other hand, is to assist the Council to down-size the Benefits service to fit its new lesser Benefits role.

Other more general goals include:

- Raising resident awareness of the upcoming welfare reforms to avoid unnecessary financial hardship
- Reducing financial exclusion
- Assisting benefit claimants to claim the new "Universal Credit"
- Considering, in particular, those who are vulnerable and rely on the Council for support
- Encouraging effective partnership working
- Making the best use of local resources e.g. partnership working with local Housing Associations and other local voluntary organisations to raise awareness of the up-coming welfare reforms
- Reducing Housing Benefit budgets
- Encouraging innovative thinking to deliver the highest possible quality services for residents
- Providing value for money Benefits services for claimants and residents
- Encouraging more people back into paid employment

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT UNIVERSAL CREDIT SCRUTINY BOARD 2012 ACTION PLAN

No	Objective	Lead	By when	Expected outcome
1	<p><u>Policy Statement</u></p> <p>SDC will continue to maintain capacity to respond to direct enquiries from the public regarding benefits issues affected by the introduction of Universal Credit. It will prepare its staff to communicate and facilitate appropriate courses of action for Benefits claimants and develop effective links with other agencies and organisations to ensure a consistency of service and support. SDC will be a centre for communication about all aspect of Universal Credit, using materials and channels developed by DWP but also producing its own local messages, specific to the District.</p>	BM/GM	End Dec 2012	Better focus, clarity and control over the introduction of UC
2	<p><u>Partnership working</u></p> <p>Ensure that Dartford Borough Council are kept fully informed of UC strategy and given an opportunity to feed into all strategic decisions.</p> <p>Work with WKHA/Moat/CAB/JCP/Age Concern/Landlords Association and other appropriate stakeholders to explore opportunities to work together to assist residents to move onto UC, and in particular explore employing or sharing a new Welfare Support Officer.</p>	<p>BM</p> <p>BM</p>	<p>On-going</p> <p>On-going</p>	<p>Greater expertise/ smoother implementation of UC/Feedback</p> <p>Improved resident / benefit claimant awareness / smoother implementation of UC / better policy / increased resources</p>

No	Objective	Lead	By when	Expected outcome
	<p>Continued joint working between Finance/Benefits & Housing to ensure that effects of other welfare reforms e.g. Housing Benefit cap / under-occupation new rules / localisation of CT are taken into account in future development plans.</p> <p>Continue to liaise with DCN regarding the implementation of UC and explore mutual exchange policy with other LA's in Kent in due course.</p>	<p>BM/GM/ HoH</p> <p>BM</p>	<p>On-going</p> <p>On-going</p>	<p>Improved strategy response and improved policy/procedures in place</p> <p>As above</p>
3	<p><u>External resource capture</u></p> <p>Continue to monitor all information emanating from the DWP and other interested organisations to build up the best picture of what is likely to happen</p> <p>Monitor pilot schemes to assess level of additional resources needed for successful implementation of UC.</p>	<p>BM</p> <p>BM</p>	<p>On-going</p> <p>Post September 2013</p>	<p>Greater expertise enabling better planning for changes</p> <p>Get a better picture of the amount of face to face assistance needed. Better policies /better procedures in place</p>
4	<p><u>Internal data capture</u></p> <p>Analyse HB caseload. How many claimants will need:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) No assistance b) Short term assistance c) Long term assistance <p>to access UC on-line</p>	<p>BM</p>	<p>End December 2012</p>	<p>Greater expertise & resident awareness of upcoming welfare changes</p>

No	Objective	Lead	By when	Expected outcome
	<p>During routine surgeries in Edenbridge/Swanley/Sevenoaks undertake short informal surveys of Claimants to understand “gaps” in understanding e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Building self-belief b) Teaching relevant IT skills c) Budgeting / setting up standing orders to landlords <p>And those who may need assistance prior to next October to claim UC</p> <p>Gather information from other organisations to enable SDC to more effectively sign-post claimants.</p>	BM	<p>End December 2012</p> <p>End December 2012</p>	
5	<p><u>Preparation of benefits department for Universal Credit</u></p> <p>Having captured internal data consider creating a dedicated Universal Credit officer to provide “single point of contact” to build capacity and self-belief in people.</p> <p>Alternatively, consider up-skilling/re-training staff to take on a new role in order to help vulnerable claimants get on-line.</p> <p>Analyse how many benefits staff will need to be re-allocated to other departments post full transition to Universal Credit in October 2017, if not before.</p> <p>Establish what steps DWP will be taking nationally to publicise the welfare changes to tenants and claimants</p>	<p>BM</p> <p>BM</p> <p>BM</p> <p>BM</p>	<p>June 2013</p> <p>June 2013</p> <p>June 2013</p> <p>On-going</p>	<p>Fewer claimants long term requiring assistance / fewer telephone / post /visitor queries</p> <p>Most effective use of resources to deliver value for money services / Assist most vulnerable</p> <p>Better value for money for council tax payers</p> <p>Better policies / procedures</p>

No	Objective	Lead	By when	Expected outcome
6	<p><u>Preparing tenants and residents for UC</u></p> <p>Review, enhance and localise existing communication channels for disseminating information to claimants/tenants/residents about UC.</p> <p>Promote and support all efforts by Moat/WKHA/Housing to produce a generic leaflet dealing with UC.</p> <p>Promote and support all efforts by Moat/WKHA/Housing to identify tenants with specific needs and who will need help getting on-line, budgeting, opening a credit union account or bank account, setting up standing order to pay rent on monthly basis in line with receipt of UC.</p> <p>Promote and participate in local/national welfare forums aimed at easing burden of implementation.</p> <p>Resources permitting, consider organising Kent Welfare Reform Summit in Sevenoaks for all interested stake-holders and Members.</p> <p>Promote and participate in all voluntary sector initiatives aimed at raising awareness and delivering digital inclusion.</p> <p>Preparation of a Member briefing note for dissemination information to Parish Councils and inclusion in the Winter edition of InShape.</p>	BM	On-going	Reduced complaints / queries post October 2013
		BM	On-going	Improved awareness and reduce postage and other costs
		BM	On-going	More reach and raised awareness of vulnerable groups
		BM	On-going	Increase access / mutual exchanges
		BM	By March 2013	Improved policy/ increase access / mutual exchanges
		BM	On-going	Improved access
		BM	December 2012	More local reach and raised awareness

No	Objective	Lead	By when	Expected outcome
7	<p><u>Scenario planning across the whole Council as a result of UC/Welfare reforms</u></p> <p><u>For each of the three scenarios set out in the report:-</u></p> <p>Undertake a full financial review of the cost implications for the Benefits service and the Council as a whole of UC/Welfare Reforms in general.</p> <p>To the extent that it is possible, senior management need to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who needs to be retained and how that is going to be achieved in uncertain times; • what opportunities there are for redeployment and retraining and who should be considered; • how much space can be released and utilisation optimised to allow surplus space to be marketed to best effect; • where are the peaks and troughs and how are they to be met; • what will the impact be on other departments. 	<p>GM</p> <p>GM/BM</p>	<p>June 2013</p> <p>June 2013</p>	<p>Accurate information available to assess affordability of the service now and going forward. Identify scale of cuts required. Accurate information to identify any surplus staff</p>

No	Objective	Lead	By when	Expected outcome
8	<u>Policy development/implementation</u> If commensurate savings can be found elsewhere or alternative sources of funding (either internal or external) consider expanding HERO service to coincide with down-sizing of Benefits service.	BM/HM	Dec 2012	Decrease demand for emergency Housing and increase take up of jobs
	Alternatively consider developing a new Housing/HERO/Benefits hybrid officer to assist High Risk families pre and post the implementation of UC next October.	BM/HM/ HoH	Dec 2012	As above
9	<u>On-going monitoring/training</u> UC Scrutiny Board to meet again and review progress in June 2013 and first progress report to SSC in September 2013?		June 2013	Ensure progress is being made
	Officer/Member of Scrutiny Board to attend up-coming Inside Government conference on 4 th December on Digital by Default: Delivering Smarter Public Services.		Dec 2012	Increase expertise

Lead officer Key

BM = Benefits Manager

HM - Housing Manager

GM - Group Manager - Financial Services

HoH - Head of Housing / Communications