

SCRUTINY REVIEW INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID)

Review: Universal Credit

Scrutiny Committee: Policy & Performance Scrutiny Committee

Director leading the review: Ian Adams, Director of Financial Operations and Customer Services

Lead Officer: Annette Hobart

Overall aim:

- To review the roll out of Universal Credit in Islington, understand the impacts on residents and services, and ensure that measures are in place to address or mitigate any risks or challenges
- To facilitate an effective challenge to the government where appropriate

Objectives of the review:

- To gain a good understanding of Universal Credit Full Service (UC), how it works, and the main changes it introduces to the welfare system
- To assess the impact of UC on Islington residents, the council and other local services
- To ensure that effective support is in place for residents who will struggle to make and manage a claim for UC, particularly those with language or literacy needs, learning disabilities, mental health issues and those with complex needs
- To ensure that any risks to the council are being actively addressed and managed
- To identify any issues related to UC policy or processes, or impacts on residents and services, that cannot be resolved locally and require escalating to government
- To maximise the opportunities that UC provides around making it easier to move into work – and ensure that those claimants furthest from the labour market are able to benefit and receive tailored support
- To help improve the UC experience and application locally

Scope of the review:

- To look at policy and process around UC, including the claims and assessment processes, how payments are made, and the role of DWP work coaches at a local level around providing employment support
- To hear from elsewhere on the impacts of UC to date – on councils, housing providers, VCS – and what measures have been taken
- To look at early evidence of the impact of UC here in Islington since Full Service was introduced in June 2018, particularly in relation to:
 - Housing (council, housing associations and private landlords) – extent of rent arrears and risk of homelessness
 - Housing Benefit and Housing Income teams – day to day engagement with DWP around new claims
 - Advice – demand on IMAX, Advice partners, wider VCS
 - Crisis support e.g. through Resident Support Scheme, food banks and soup kitchens

- To review what's being done locally – through DWP, the Council, Advice providers and others – to support Islington residents moving to UC, assess how effective the support offer is, and any gaps in support or things that need to be done differently
- To identify issues or concerns related to UC that cannot be addressed locally or are of such importance that they require escalating or challenging at national level

Types of evidence:

The Committee will:

- Be briefed on the background to welfare reforms, particularly policy and process around UC, and receive written reports on impacts nationally and locally
- Hear witness evidence from DWP on how UC is rolling out nationally and locally, and what they are doing to support claimants
- Hear witness evidence from other local authorities and national organisations on the impact of UC
- Hear witness evidence from our own council services and partners on the early impacts of UC in Islington
- Speak to UC claimants of their experience of UC, and to service users (and their support services) whose circumstances may present challenges to claiming UC (e.g. people with LD, mental health issues, complex needs) – this could be via visits or focus groups

It is proposed that witness evidence is taken from:

- Local DWP representatives – Paula Heffernan and Ian Smith
- Robbie Rainbird, Head of Processing (including Housing Benefit)
- Representatives from other councils (e.g. Southwark or Croydon) where UC has already been rolled out
- Policy in Practice – a policy and analytics organisation specialising in the welfare system
- Adam Jenner – Head of Income Collection, Homes & Communities
- Representative from Peabody – social landlord in Islington and other London boroughs
- Representative from Landlords Forum – private sector landlords
- Advice partners: Islington Citizens' Advice, Islington Law Centre, Islington People's Rights
- UC claimants and service users / support services with complex needs

Potential Visits or focus groups – to be confirmed:

- Visit to Barnsbury or Finsbury Park jobcentres, and to new Digital Zone at 222
- Focus Group at Elfrida (learning disabilities)
- Focus group in jobcentre (UC claimants)
- Meeting with representatives from support services e.g. PAUSE, Single Homeless Project, IMAX, libraries

Written evidence will include:

- 'The Cumulative Impact of Welfare Reform in Islington': Policy in Practice research report (November 2016)

- Written evidence submitted to the Work and Pensions Committee - Universal Credit update inquiry by the Islington Debt Coalition and the Islington Resident Support Scheme (5 September 2017)
- Letter from Chief Executive LB Islington (on behalf of Chief Executives) to Neil Couling, Director of Universal Credit

Additional information:

In carrying out the review the committee will consider equalities implications and resident impacts identified by witnesses. The Executive is required to have due regard to these, and any other relevant implications, when responding to the review recommendations.

Witness Evidence Plan

Committee Meeting – Tuesday 4 September 2018

| Who / What | Area of focus – Introductory Information |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny Initiation Document | For the Committee to agree the aim, objectives and scope of the review. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ian Adams, Director of Financial Operations and Customer Service, lead officer for Welfare Reform | Introductory presentation setting out background and context to Welfare Reforms, including Universal Credit, and the Council's work to prepare for UC |

September

| Who / What | Area of focus – Background Information |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written Evidence | Written evidence will be circulated to members in September after the scope of the review has been agreed, including detailed research on the impact of Universal Credit in Islington undertaken by Policy in Practice |

Committee Meeting – Thursday 11 October 2018

| Who / What | Area of focus – evidence from elsewhere – impacts of UC |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative from Southwark or Croydon (amongst first areas to pilot UC Full Service) | Impacts on local authority – outline issues and impacts, and measures taken to support residents and minimise impacts on council |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative from Policy in Practice | Analytical research – in Islington and elsewhere – on the impacts of welfare reforms and UC in particular |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background Report | Impact of UC at national level – evidence and experiences of councils, landlords, charities |

| Committee Meeting – Thursday 13 December 2018 | |
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| Who / What | Area of focus – DWP and local support offer |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paula Heffernan / Ian Smith | Role of DWP, and partnership working Supporting people towards employment |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ian Adams / Robbie Rainbird | Council's support offer – including feedback on take up of offer and main issues raised |

| Scrutiny Visits – January – March 2019 | |
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| Who / What | Area of focus – The resident experience |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus group with UC claimants | Hearing from Islington residents who have already moved to UC |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talking to service users /support services for people | Visit to Elfrida, Centre, 404 or PAUSE project |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting with key support services | Bringing together representatives from in-house and commissioned support services to share impacts and concerns for their service users |

| Committee Meeting – Thursday 24 January 2019 | |
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| Who / What | Area of focus – Impacts in Islington - Housing |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adam Jenner | Impact on Housing: housing need, homelessness, council tenants, rent arrears |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representative from Peabody | Impact / experience of social landlords – in Islington and other boroughs |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representative from Landlords' Forum | Impact on private sector |

| Committee Meeting – Thursday 14 February 2019 | |
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| Who / What | Area of focus – Impacts in Islington – feedback from frontline services |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representatives from Islington Advice Partners | What's happening on the ground - demand for advice and emerging issues in Islington |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written report - UC update | Latest data and feedback – on UC claimants, take up of support, and emerging issues – to inform final report |

| Committee Meeting – Thursday 4 April 2019 | |
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| Who / What | Area of focus – Recommendations |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final Report | To agree the final report, summarising all of the evidence received, and explaining the reasons for the recommendations. The report will then be submitted to the Executive. |