

COMMITTEE REVIEW - WITNESS SESSION 3 UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND OTHER WELFARE BENEFIT CHANGES

Committee name	Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee
Officer reporting	Anisha Teji, Democratic Services Officer
Papers with report	Universal Credit: The Council's approach in its capacity as Landlord
Ward	All

HEADLINES

As part of the Committee's review into Universal Credit and other welfare benefit changes and how the Council can support residents through the transition to, and future successful management of, their Universal Credit (UC) claims, the following witnesses has been invited to present supporting information to the Committee:

- Giles Strachan – Uxbridge College Partnership Manager
- Heather Brown – Citizens Advice Bureau
- Nigel Gee – MIND

This will be the fourth witness session, focusing on voluntary sector partners.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Social Care, Housing and Public Health Policy Overview Committee notes and comments on the information presented as part of the witness session.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The agreed Terms of Reference for the review are set out below:

Terms of Reference

1. To understand the impact that the introduction of the full UC service has had in areas where it has been rolled out. To include the cumulative impact of the introduction of UC and other welfare benefit changes.
2. To understand the impact that UC, alongside other welfare benefit changes, is having and is expected to have on local residents in Hillingdon and on the income and costs of the Council, housing associations and other local organisations.
3. To examine how the Council services, housing associations and voluntary groups are supporting residents to transition to UC and manage their claims.

4. To make practical, prudent recommendations to Cabinet (and other bodies if applicable) from the Committee's findings to support residents transitioning to UC and to manage their claims.

Witness session 1

At the meeting on 26 September 2018, the Committee heard from Debby Weller, Policy and Strategy Manager (Housing) and had regard to her information report entitled 'Universal Credit: Understanding universal credit and the claimant journey'.

The Committee also heard from Inderpal Mudhar, a representative from the Department of Work and Pensions.

Witness session 2

At the meeting on 17 October 2018, the Committee heard from Ellen Salkeld, Income Manager at Catalyst and Stuart Coleman – Head of Housing Management at The Barnet Group.

Witness session 3

At the meeting on 28 November 2018, the Committee heard from Mr Rod Smith - Tenancy Management Team - Service Manager and Mr Mark Billings - Homelessness - Housing Manager. The Committee had regard to the two detailed reports provided by both witnesses.

Site Visit

On 5 December 2018, some Members visited the Job Centre Plus in Uxbridge to see in practice what the JCP offered claimants in terms of processing UC applications.

Members met with the Customer Lead Manager for Hayes and Uxbridge and the Partnership Manager for The Department of Work and Pensions. Members were provided with an in-depth explanation of the processes in places, current challenges, and how the JCP was working with partner organisations to support claimants making UC claims. Both JCP representatives highlighted that staff underwent regular training to deal with different claimants and how to best support them. Further, Members were advised that mental health training was compulsory for all staff. Members were also assured that vulnerable claimants were signposted to appropriate organisations if support was required.

Members observed the areas where claimants made applications and noted that the environment was quiet and welcoming. There were a number of members of staff available to assist applicants.

Overall, Members found the site visit to be useful, the DWP representatives to be receptive and open to discussions. Members considered that the site visit was good opportunity to engage with partners and see the process in practice.

Implications on related Council policies

While much of this topic is set nationally set, for any changes locally, the role of the Policy Overview Committees is to make recommendations on service changes and improvements to the Cabinet who are responsible for the Council's policy and direction.

How this report benefits Hillingdon residents

Policy Overview Committees directly engage residents and external partners in the work they do.

Financial Implications

These are primarily for residents claiming UC, as set out in the background papers.

Legal Implications

The primary legislation relating to Universal Credit is the Welfare Reform Act 2012, with further regulations following thereafter.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Scoping Report

Previous Committee papers on the review published on the Council's website.