

Agenda Item IMD30

NOTICE OF INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

| | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| ITEM NO. | IMD 2015-30 |
| TITLE | Approval of a Partnership Agreement with Department for Works and Pensions for the delivery of Universal Credit |
| DECISION TO BE MADE BY | Anthony Pollock, Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance |
| DATE AND TIME OF DECISION | Friday 11 September 2015 at 8.30am |
| VENUE | David Hicks Room, Council Offices, Shute End |
| REPORT TO BE PUBLISHED ON | Thursday 3 September 2015 |

**INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION
REFERENCE IMD: 2015-30**

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| TITLE | Approval of a Partnership Agreement with Department for Works and Pensions for the delivery of Universal Credit |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | Anthony Pollock, Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance |
| ON | Friday 11 September 2015 |
| TIME | 8.30am |
| WARD | All |
| STRATEGIC DIRECTOR | Graham Ebers, Finance and Resources |

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) are currently implementing the roll out of Universal Credit to all Job Centres. Universal Credit is a new “benefit” (renamed a credit) which combines payments of Job Seekers Allowance, Income Support, Employment & Support Allowance, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit into one monthly amount. The aim is to simplify the benefits system and improve work incentives.

The main change for customers will be receiving one monthly payment paid direct to them, so for some, money management will be new.

It is now known that the two Job Centres used by Wokingham residents being Reading and Bracknell, are due to go live with new claims for Job Seekers Allowance in the next tranche. These will be claims made by single claimants, without children and based on their income. Reading Job Centre goes live on 21st September and Bracknell on the 28th September.

The DWP are keen to involve Local Authorities in the rollout of, and be available to, offer support to customers in the delivery of Universal Credit (UC). The DWP have asked that all Local Authorities agree to a local Department Partnership Agreement (DPA) to enable the support to be delivered and ensure a suitable payment schedule is in place to carry out the activities detailed in the agreement.

The expected volume of customers needing support has been estimated by the DWP based on current activity. It has been estimated that we will receive approximately 65 claimant contacts that need LA support during the period 21st September 15 to 31st March 16.

Universal Credit is a central government scheme that will continue to roll out over the next 4 – 5 years, encompassing more claimant types such as couples and families. It would be in the best interest of Wokingham Borough Council residents, for the Council to provide support locally to help introduce these changes.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Economic Development and Finance approve the Departmental Partnership Agreement to be implemented from 21st September 2015.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) considers that it is in the best interests of the community to agree to the Department Partnership Agreement ensuring that support is available to residents to assist in the change-over to the new scheme.

The Department Partnership Agreement outlines the responsibilities of Wokingham Borough Council and includes:

- providing support to Universal Credit Service Centre staff (DWP) on housing cost issues
- supporting claimants to make an on-line claim to Universal Credit
- Manually processing Council Tax Reduction
- Personal Budgeting Support for customers who require help to manage their Universal Credit payments and budgets
- Working with Department for Works and Pensions to prepare landlords for the introduction of Universal Credit
- Providing management information to Department for Works and Pensions

Due to the low number of anticipated claimants (8) needing Personal Budgeting Support during the first six months, the benefits team will provide this. Appropriate training has already been delivered.

The Department for Works and Pensions are expecting no more than 10 claimants requiring on-line support, which again will be delivered by the benefits team.

Providing this support in-house will help to inform how best to provide these services going forward, particularly once Universal Credit gets rolled out to a wider customer base.

The Benefit and Customer Welfare Team are developing new procedures to cover the delivery of Universal Credit, ensuring that all staff are trained adequately, managing the Department Partnership Agreement and that proper processes are in place to gather the correct management information required by us and the department.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

| | How much will it Cost/ (Save) | Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall | Revenue or Capital? |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|---------------------|
| Current Financial Year (Year 1) | The Council will receive a maximum of £17,600 (including VAT) in government funding to cover the cost of implementation Current DPA and funding covers the period until 31 st March 2016 | Yes. A detailed meeting was held with DWP and relevant WBC officers on 7 th August to go over the financials | Revenue |
| Next Financial Year (Year 2) | The Council will renegotiate funding for 16/17 before a new partnership is put in place) | To be discussed at future meeting between DWP and WBC prior to end of financial year. | Revenue |
| Following Financial Year (Year 3) | Not yet known (17/18) | | |

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

A detailed consultation meeting was held on 7th August to determine the anticipated costs to the council of delivering the DPA. Finance officers and benefit practitioners, along with representation from DWP were present.

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services and priorities?)

Other services have been made aware of the changes UC could mean to them and their customers.

DWP held an awareness session at the council on 6th August where staff from Tenant Services, Housing Needs, Customer Welfare, Financial Assessments, Benefits, Council Tax and Recovery were all given the option to attend.

In agreeing to this DPA we are ensuring that in-house support and knowledge is not only available to our residents but to other service areas within the council.

| SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES | |
|--|--|
| Director – Finance and Resources | Head of Finance, relevant Service Manager and key staff, were all involved in discussions with DWP to agree funding. |
| Monitoring Officer | Consulted, no specific comments. |
| Leader of the Council | Cllr Baker fully supports the recommendations |

| List of Background Papers |
|----------------------------------|
| None |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Contact Nicky Thomas | Service Assessments |
| Telephone No 0118 974 6590 | Email nicky.thomas@wokingham.gov.uk |
| Date 11th August 2015 | Version No. 1 |

This page is intentionally left blank