

To: City Executive Board

Date: 17 March 2016

Report of: Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Universal Credit Delivery Partnership Agreement

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on the Universal Credit Delivery Partnership Agreement

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Craig Simmons

Executive lead member: Councillor Susan Brown, Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services

Recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the three recommendations set out in the body of this report.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee pre-scrutinised the Universal Credit Delivery Partnership Agreement decision at its meeting on 7 March 2016. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Susan Brown and Paul Wilding for presenting this item.

Summary of the discussion

2. The Committee sought reassurance that staffing posts and skills were being safeguarded so that ongoing support could be provided to benefits claimants. The Revenues & Benefits Programme Manager confirmed that while some staffing posts would be lost in future years due to Housing Benefit being subsumed into Universal Credit, the Council was actively seeking to safeguard jobs through the use of fixed term contracts, active redeployment and forward planning, and did not expect to lose any permanent members of staff. Current resources to support claimants during the Universal Credit application process were considered to be sufficient and the current cohort tended to be IT literate. There was an expectation that as Universal Credit is extended and rolled out

across the city, demand for this support would increase but the resources required to meet these needs were unknown at this stage.

Recommendation 1 - That appropriate workforce planning is conducted to ensure future demand for support can be met by the Council

3. In response to a question about the stability and accessibility of the online application system, the Committee heard that there was a mechanism in place for the Council to feedback concerns about problems encountered during the online application process to the Department for Work and Pensions. The Council was also talking to local libraries about the services on offer to support applicants, and computer appointments had been extended in order to support claimants completing online applications. It was noted that as Universal Credit is rolled out, people with less awareness and IT literacy would face difficulties and need extra support.

Recommendation 2 - That the City Council writes to the County Council encouraging them to maintain and promote library based IT access to support customers making Universal Credit applications

4. The Committee expressed particular concern that the timescales of the application process were such that it was inevitable that clients would accrue rent arrears, potentially leading to some facing eviction. The Committee was pleased to note that the Council was seeking to address this situation through discussions with Job Centre Plus about a pilot scheme on referrals and that the Council's own Housing service would be working with local housing associations on solutions to the problem.

Recommendation 3 - That the Council works with social landlords and other agencies to try and address the problem of rent arrears caused by the move to Universal Credit

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