

Council2nd November 2017**Agenda Item 40**

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Universal Credit Readiness and Response		
	Extract from the proceedings of the Neighbourhoods, Inclusion, Communities & Equalities Committee meeting held on the 9 October 2017		
Date of Meeting:	2 November 2017		
Report of:	Executive Lead for Strategy, Governance & Law		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Penny Jennings	Tel: 01273 291065
	E-mail:	penny.jennings@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE***Action Required of Council***

To receive the item referred from the Neighbourhoods, Inclusion, Communities & Equalities Committee for information.

Recommendation:

That the contents of the report be noted.

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

NEIGHBOURHOODS, INCLUSION, COMMUNITIES & EQUALITIES COMMITTEE

4.00pm 9 OCTOBER 2017

THE BRIDGE COMMUNITY CENTRE, LUCRAFT ROAD, BRIGHTON

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Daniel (Chair), Moonan (Deputy Chair), A Norman (Opposition Spokesperson), West (Group Spokesperson); Bewick, Cattell, Knight, K Norman, Peltzer Dunn and Simson

Invitees: Chief Superintendent Lisa Bell, Police Representative; Joanna Martindale; Hangleton & Knoll Project and Anusree Biswas Sasisharan, Brighton & Hove Ethnic Group

PART ONE

25. UNIVERSAL CREDIT READINESS AND RESPONSE

- 25.1 The Committee considered a report of The Executive Director, Finance and Resources and the Executive Director Neighbourhoods, Communities and Housing the purpose of which was to update the Committee on activities carried out across the Council's services in order to prepare for the Introduction of Universal Credit (UC). This report had been prepared in response to the Committees' request following the request that a further update report be provided in response to an earlier report which had been presented to it.
- 25.2 It was noted as had previously been explained that UC was a national policy change set in motion by Central Government which would fundamentally change the way in which benefits for working age people were claimed, administered and paid. UC would combine six existing benefits, Housing Benefit (which was currently administered by the council), Working and Child Tax Credits, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance and Income Support. This would be administered centrally by the Department for Works and Pensions and once fully rolled out more than an estimated 7 million households will be receiving UC across the country. This includes around 20,000 households in Brighton & Hove. An estimate of the distribution of these households by ward was set out in Appendix 2 to the report and a phased rollout would take place as set out in the report.
- 25.3 It was explained that the issues integral to UC related to a number of key areas where the council was already undertaking significant activity, i.e. provision of housing, employment and skills, apprenticeships, the Living Wage, development of the local economy and ensuring the voluntary and third sector was being supported to deal with

the implications of UC. There was a specific cross service programme in place to prepare the council as far as possible for UC which captured the actions of specific services and had identified cross-cutting measures and had sought to focus on key areas of cross-service preparation as set out in the report to include emergency financial support and advice.

- 25.4 The Chair, Councillor Daniel, welcomed the report noting the significant amount of work carried out by officers in seeking to ensure that the Council and its partner organisations, including the third sector were well prepared for UC and that the structures in place were as robust as they could be. The Committee concurred in that view commending the diligent work undertaken by officers in liaison in partnership with Job Centre Plus for example.
- 25.5 Councillor West stated also welcomed report, stating that UC could have a very far reaching impact within individual wards across the city. It was very important for all Councillors to be fully up to speed and to be kept fully informed of developments as rollout moved forward across the city, particularly in terms of the level of support provided for vulnerable cohorts. Councillor West queried why given the potential impact of these changes why the report had not been referred to Policy, Resources and Growth Committee. The Executive Director, Finance and Resources, David Kuenssberg, explained that the issues addressed within the report would go to that Committee as part of the wider budget process. Councillor West, requested that in view of the need for all Members to be kept informed that the report be referred to Full Council for information.
- 25.6 The Chair, Councillor Daniel, stated that she was very concerned by the impact delays in payment could have on some those who were poorest and most vulnerable in the city and the effect that could have in terms of them falling into debt, or being unable to feed their families. It was important that a pro-active and sensitive approach was adopted to those who were experiencing financial hardship through no fault of their own. Protection needed to be afforded to the Council's own tenants as far as it was practicable to do. It appeared likely that the situation faced by some of the Council's own tenants would be mirrored/worse for those in the private sector. Councillor Cattell concurred as did Councillor A Norman stated that all possible measures should be undertaken to offer the appropriate levels of guidance and support. The structures in place to encourage early intervention and signposting were considered to be critical.
- 25.7 Councillor Simson concurred, stating that whilst some community/third sector organisations were well developed and exemplars of good practice, others might, it was important that the appropriate levels of support were in place. Councillor Simson was heartened to hear however, that there was the ability for advance payments to be made.
- 25.8 Councillor Peltzer Dunn stated that he was very concerned that it was proposed by government that payments be made direct to clients, in his view to do so for people whose finances were stretched and where there were likely to be a number of calls on their very limited resources would result in a far greater propensity to fall into debt or behind with rent especially when there could be an in-built delay in processing the initial claim. Councillor Peltzer Dunn was also concerned that there could be a number of individuals and families who were "below the surface" and were as yet unknown to the various support agencies. Councillor Bewick concurred in that view.

25.9 In answer to further questions it was too early to assess the full implications of rollout across the city the level of financial support into 2018 was considered to be sufficiently flexible and the structures in place were resilient. The Chair, Councillor Daniel stated that it was important going forward to continue to engage pro-activity with agencies such as food banks regarding take up and to ensure that statistical and other data in that respect was maintained and for this information to be included in future reports to Committee alongside details of increases in the level of rent arrears if that had occurred.

25.10 Councillor West stated that in his view it would be valuable for Members to receive feedback following the workshop training sessions being held. It was acknowledged that Members experiences could be different in different wards. There could also be solitary individuals in private rented accommodation who could come to light during this process. It was important to ensure that the Members knew where best to signpost individuals.

25.11 Councillor Moonan stated that there were a number of strands to be addressed relating to housing stock, Use of food banks and relating to the use of emergency/temporary accommodation, it was important for such data to be collected and monitored.

25.12 **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Committee endorses and comments on the activities within and across services in preparation for the phased rollout of extended UC beginning in October 2017; and
- (2) That Members familiarise themselves with the issues related to UC, either through the newsletter attached in Appendix 1, or that they consider attending UC training provided by the council's Welfare Rights team. Also that this training be made available to schools and other relevant services.

27 ITEMS REFERRED TO COUNCIL FOR INFORMATION

27.1 **RESOLVED:** That the following items be referred to the next full Council meeting for information:

Item 23 Rough Sleeping Strategy Progress Update
Item 25 Universal Credit Readiness and Response