

Universal Credit implementation for Gloucester City– Update Mid January 2018

- 1.1 Gloucester City Council is now well underway with preparations for the implementation of Universal Credit Full Service due on 21st February 2018.
- 1.2 The Universal Credit Board of staff members and partners from Civica, Gloucester City Council and The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) has been meeting monthly since November to oversee the project work required of the City Council teams in order to ensure we will be providing the right support required of this implementation. We have been supported by The DWP and Civica UC specialist, and have received real time updates on relevant changes and reforms to consider going forward.
- 1.3 The Universal Credit Full Service message has now been announced across the city to create awareness of the imminent changes. Communications have been sent out via the media and across social media platforms, alongside the reception area of Herbert Warehouse now housing vital information in the form of leaflets and hand-outs for residents in readiness of our 'go-live' date. Roller-banners are also being used to spark questions and create awareness.
- 1.4 The website has been updated to provide a network of support which connects us with key partner organisations and online support who can provide the best support for claimants and landlords affected. The website will be in continual development as Universal credit impacts change, and will be the main foundation of information for residents.
- 1.5 On 12th January a Stakeholder event was held by Gloucester City Council in the Civic Suite which welcomed social landlords, support agencies and Councillors to gain an overview of Universal Credit in the lead up to implementation. The Gloucestershire Partnership Manager for DWP presented an update on what Universal Credit is, how to claim it and gave an overview of the support available. We also welcomed the Service Innovation Lead from Bath Jobcentre Plus alongside an experienced Work Coach to share some of their experiences as a seasoned full service area and what Gloucester should expect in the coming months. Finally we heard from Bromford Housing Group who presented the challenges from the eyes of a social landlord. All attendees were asked to provide us with their most up to date contacts and outline the services they are providing in support of UC so Gloucester City Council can be efficient at connecting residents to the right support.
- 1.6 Operationally, the Housing and Customer Service teams have been working closely with the Client Officer for Revenues and Benefits to organise staff training, streamline work processes and make sure we have on hand the network of support to intercept the new queries we will be receiving from February. We are ensuring that our IT facilities will be prepared for the demand and that customers have guidance on how to get online and make and manage their claim.

- 1.7 Staff briefings were held on 4th and 5th of January to outline key messages and provide support to staff in the customer journey, types of questions they may be asked in the run up to implementation and some of the legislative changes from the Autumn Budget to be aware of; prior to and from 21st February.
- 1.8 On 31st January 2018 a briefing session has been arranged to provide an update on the progression of this project and advise members of the customer journey and the types of questions they may receive from constituents. This will provide a further update on where we are in the planning and the invites have now been sent out to all members.