



North Tyneside Council

Universal Credit - Communications plan

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1.0 Background

The roll out of Universal Credit (UC) to Full Service will present the Council, its partners and its residents with a number of challenges.

UC is a new benefit that replaces 6 current working age state benefits (Housing Benefit (HB), Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Income Support (IS) Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance Income Related (ESAIR) .

The aim of UC is to achieve simplification of the current system negating the need for customers to move between different state benefits and reducing the number of organisations involved in managing a claimant's entitlement to support.

UC is at the heart of the governments policies around 'making work pay'. And with the implementation of conditionality with its tougher sanction regime both of which are a key part of UC, it aims to change behaviours. There are greater expectations around looking for work and claimants are expected to look for more work even if they are employed part time.

Claims in Full Service UC are made and managed via an online account set up by the customer. Claimants are required to have an email account as part of setting up the account and messages and tasks are sent from work coaches via the on line account.

Payment is on a calendar monthly basis which includes housing costs, paid in arrears and into a bank account direct to a claimant. Its aim is to replicate the way wages are generally paid, so improving the transition into work and helping people to become more 'work ready'. These are significant differences to the way state benefits operate in the current system.

In addressing this, the shape of some of the Councils services and their partners will need to be different as their role changes around supporting people in managing this change.

The work we do around supporting people to manage UC claims on line will also support the councils drive to helping people to self serve and do more on line.

2.0 UC roll out

UC started to be rolled out for new claimants from April 2013 in some parts of the country as part of pilot areas. However as part of the roll out for UC 'Live Service' North Tyneside has only seen claims for UC from November 2015 for single people who would normally have claimed JSA (IB).

From February 2018 North Tyneside will go live with 'Full Service' UC. This expands the current customer group able to claim UC from just single people to all claimants;

therefore couples and families with children will now be impacted if they have a change in their income which means they would move onto UC.

To manage this roll out the authority has set up a working group involving officers from the Council, Engie, Job Centre Partnership Managers and representation from the community and voluntary sector. The group, Universal Support – Delivered Locally will manage the roll out of UC at a local level and ensure that there is provision of assistant to help claimants with both the on line claiming process and personal budgeting support.

3.0 Communication

There will be limited national communication but as with all previous reforms of the welfare system there is expectancy that communication to residents is locally lead. Government literature and information provided through various channels has and will continue to be provided, but the Councils role will be to consider as always the appropriateness of this for its residents and customise where necessary.

3.1 Key target audiences

- Elected Mayor and Cabinet
- Senior Leadership Team
- Staff:
 - Those who deal with related public will need in depth knowledge of Universal Credit, supported by key messages and information about how to signpost people to further help.
 - Those who work with families and individuals impacted will need key messages and information re signposting to help.
 - Wider staff – many of whom live in the borough - need a general awareness of the changes and messages around what the council is doing to signpost people to further advice and support, and to help people into work.
- Members - both as decision makers and community leaders.
- Residents
 - Users of council services that may be impacted
 - General residents - supporting improved financial management, signposting to support and advice and employment; general awareness of changes.
- Partners - including those who are providing related services to the public eg private landlords, social landlords the community and voluntary sector and employability support providers so they are able to provide support and advice and offer signposting where appropriate.
- Media

Appendix 1 outlines the Who to, What and How communications will be provided.

3.2 Communications approach

In addition to national communication from DWP, the Council will lead on more localised communications, both general information and specific information to individuals around what support is available.

North Tyneside Council's communications will provide the following:

- Equip staff and relevant partners/ stakeholders with the information to deal with anticipated direct public inquiries about UC
- Communicate with residents about UC and what it means for them
- Raise general awareness about UC, and provide signposting for the public on where to go for advice and support
- Continue to communicate the council's role, commitment and achievements in supporting people into work and promoting better financial management.

We will use established channels and tools of communications and introduce new methods where appropriate to share information. These include the following:

- Marketing and information materials provided by DWP, other government departments and other external organisations (such as 'Quids in' magazine) supplemented by limited new marketing materials where appropriate.
- Informal face-to-face information sharing eg information drop-ins delivered by either council services or partners (eg voluntary and community sector; private landlords) and existing partner forums (eg Private Landlords Forum; North Tyneside Homes tenants events).
- Council produced publications and e-newsletter – the 'Our North Tyneside' (residents magazine); Children First (E-newsletter providing Information for children's services professionals)
- Internal communications methods - including Team Work (council employees); Members News (for councillors), partner newsletters
- Council reports - to inform democratic process and inform members
- Council website - where appropriate linked into national websites eg Direct Gov.
- Desk aids, FAQs briefings to inform staff and partners dealing with specific inquiries
- Partner communications networks - eg GP's, health professionals, community and voluntary sector.
- Use of engagement events

Appendix 1 - Communication Plan - Immediate and ongoing

Who	Communication	Responsibility	Method of updates	Frequency
Senior Leadership	Initial : to provide an update on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roll out of UC, • The challenges faced by residents, the council and its partners • The approach taken by the council to manage this change and a steer from SLT. • Provide regular updates on progress of UC roll out and actions for North Tyneside 	Andrew Scott Representatives of the USDL working group as appropriate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through SLT meetings 	As Appropriate, first update in May?
Mayors Task Group	To provide an update on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roll out of UC, • The challenges faced by residents, the council and its partners • The approach taken by the council to manage this change and support residents • Provide monthly updates on progress of UC and the work of the USDL Working Group 	Andrew Scott/Ian Rice/ Felicity Shoemith/ Tracy Hunter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the Mayors task Force for Welfare Reform 	Bi monthly meetings
Relevant Cabinet/Council Housing, Health and Wellbeing	To provide an update on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roll out of UC, • The challenges faced by residents, 	Andrew Scott Tracy Hunter Ian Rice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports to meetings and Committees 	As appropriate

committees	<p>the council and its partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approach taken by the council to manage this change and support claimants 			
Members	<p>To provide update on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roll out of UC roll out, • The councils approach to managing this change and where members can get further information and advice to support residents. • Provide regular updates on progress both of UC and the work that is ongoing to prepare the council and its residents. 	Andrew Scott/ Tracy Hunter/Ian Rice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members newsletters • All Members briefings 	<p>Monthly newsletter All Member briefings (3/4 October)</p>
Internal Teams/staff (including Schools)	<p>To provide an update on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roll out of UC, the challenges faced by residents, the council and its partners • The approach taken by the council to manage this change and where staff can get further advice to support residents. • Provide regular updates on progress both UC and the Council's work around UC • Discuss and plan together service delivery in North Tyneside 	All USDL group members/ Representatives from service areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork communications • Team meetings/briefings • Basic awareness sessions • Detailed training • Desk aids/training notes • FAQ • Head teachers meetings 	<p>As Appropriate (to start from September 2017)</p>

<p>External Stakeholder groups (including hard to reach groups and communities)</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through established groups and networks/new letters 	<p>As appropriate</p>
<p>Residents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of UC and what it means for them • Councils approach to managing this change • Signposting to advice and information to help claimants access support 	<p>USDL group members</p> <p>All service areas representatives</p> <p>Community and Voluntary Sector stakeholder group</p> <p>Other partners groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents Magazine • External magazine (Quids in) • Teamwork • Community Engagements • Targeted communications • Events • Leaflets • Other engagements opportunities to provide information • Website and media • C& V to provided information as part of engagements with residents 	<p>As appropriate</p>