



Minutes

Title of meeting:	Universal Credit Programme Board
Date:	25 th June 2019, 15:00 to 17:00
Location:	London Caxton House, Room 6.24
Attendees:	Sir Robert Walmsley (Chair), Neil Couling (SRO for UC), JP Marks (Director General Work and Health), Nick Joicey (Director General Finance), David Silk (Director HM Treasury), Angela Macdonald (Director General HMRC), Lara Sampson (Director Migration) Pete Searle (Strategy Director, Working Age), Simon McKinnon (Acting Director General Digital), Gareth Young (Cabinet Office Operations Lead), Deb Walton (Director Human Resources), s40 (Senior Advisor, LGA - Observer), s40 (Observer)
Presenters:	Peter Loosley, Paul McKeown,
Apologies:	Debbie Alder (Director General Human Resources), Lindsey Whyte (Director HM Treasury), Ian Wright (UC Programme Director), Colum Boyle (Deputy Secretary for Work and Inclusion DFC Northern Ireland),

1. Welcome, Introductions and Actions

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and acknowledged apologies from Debbie Alder, Lindsey Whyte, Ian Wright and Colum Boyle.

He welcomed Deb Walton who was attending on behalf of Debbie Alder, David Silk who was attending on behalf of Lindsey Whyte and Lara Sampson on behalf of Ian Wright. David Sales had planned to attend on behalf of Colum Boyle but his flight had been cancelled.

He also welcomed Peter Loosley and Paul McKeown who were presenting papers and s40 who was shadowing Paul McKeown and observing the meeting.

The minutes of the Programme Board of 14th May were approved without amendment.

Update on actions:

01-160419 – closed as paper updating on telephony on today's agenda

01-140519 – closed as note on advances circulated to members.

40% of claimants "did not want an advance" and the SRO is currently trying to persuade the Trussell Trust to work with us on sharing MI to better understand the position on advances.

SRO Update

The SRO feels there has been positive progress obtaining regulations to enable the Move to UC Pilot to start in July. The plan to obtain the regulations is broadly acceptable to all players across government but with some further clarity required on handling. Once an agreement has been reached the SRO will write to inform Programme Board members.

The Programme is due to complete in December 2023, as the assumption was that around 1.7m households would need to migrate onto UC. The SRO reported on an emerging issue due to the latest data showing that those naturally migrating in the meantime via a Change of Circumstances (CoCs) is not as high as expected which means that Move to UC volumes may be higher than first envisaged. A greater volume associated with Move to UC could have wider implications and an impact on costs. We are working closely with analysts and operational colleagues to get to the bottom of what this may mean for the Programme and plan to return to Programme Board in July with a paper on the implications for both the Programme and the public finances. Ministers across Whitehall are not yet aware of this development although DWP Ministers have recently been briefed. The SRO is happy to share the advice given to DWP Ministers with both Cabinet Office and Treasury Ministers.

This potential change could involve higher unit costs falling more slowly than expected, but this will be captured as part of the ongoing work and will be impacted on operations and the plan, details will be included in the paper for July. We will work closely with HMT on this, and the potential choices regarding the Move to UC timetable, as increasing volumes per month would probably have issues for safe delivery. There are also potential impacts for HMRC colleagues who may need to keep Tax Credits cases for longer than first envisaged which may cause difficulties with the alignment with the Spending Review (SR).

Programme Board members:

- a) The DG for HMRC would like to see one set of aligned plans and budgets.
- b) The DG for Finance asked if we had any early insight from either Work Coaches or other parties around what may be causing this issue. The SRO for UC stated there is lots of anecdotal evidence that people are reluctant to move to UC, however, people are happier once they move onto UC which seems to imply a fear of claiming initially. The Chief Analyst is checking the original calculations to ensure the figures were correct.

2. Programme Update

Lara Sampson provided an update in the absence of the UC Programme Director:

An update on Move to UC is on the agenda today however, the Programme are ready to start the pilot on 17th July if the ongoing work to ensure the regulations are in place is successful.

An IPA workshop was held in Harrogate last week on Move to UC and the draft report is supportive of the approach we are looking to take and our readiness to commence the pilot.

Preparations to commence the Pilot in Harrogate remain on track and Pilot staff continue to work alongside Product Development colleagues to support design activity.

A stakeholder event was held on 13th June which was a positive reflection on the type of engagement we have fostered to date, working collaboratively with stakeholders to understand and address challenges. Positive feedback has been received from stakeholders following the event.

Universal Credit Full Service (UCFS) releases 123 & 124 have included important functionality to further automate processes such as; bulk upload of landlord verifications, easements around Childcare reporting and easements of amending sanctions.

Funding drawdown has been approved by the Treasury until the end of September, with delegated approval to use existing resources.

Risks as last month, however, the flight path for the Identity Verification (IDV) risk has been amended.

Financial forecasts are stable and the Programme believe they can meet the 15% efficiency challenge we accepted.

No Unit Cost Data is available this month due to a data lag in June, although the information we do have is not currently a cause for concern.

Remain on track with the Security Risk around Role Based Access Controls (RBAC)

Programme Board members:

- a) The Chair asked if the Acting DG for Digital was happy with the way the long running risk on RBAC is going. The Acting DG for Digital stated that he was and that we have a plan in place to constrain what levels of access staff are given.
- b) The DG for Finance felt the Board needed to look at Fraud & Error on a more regular basis. The SRO stated a paper on Fraud & Error would be brought to a Programme Board meeting later this year.
- c) The Chair observed the lack of up to date Unit Cost data and asked the Finance DG for his view. The Finance DG explained that the delay was an annual event resulting from the department updating it's models at the start of the financial year. The SRO for UC agreed that the lag was not ideal, He also said the consensus was that nothing had changed significantly to impact the unit costs since April. The Programme Board should expect the downward trend to continue albeit on a slower trajectory as there are no new sites pushing up the volumes any longer.

Action Point 01-250619 – Provide an update on Fraud & Error for a UC Programme Board meeting later this year.

3. Operations Update

The Director General for Work and Health provided an update:

Payment Timeliness is currently at a healthy 86.4%, this follows a seasonal downturn in April (Bank Holidays & increased demand). However, these results are better than last year and operations have recovered quicker through the seasonal/bank holiday changes. Analysts are looking at whether figures can be adjusted to take into account seasonal factors. Operations are learning how to manage surges in demand.

From early June new account codes will be available to report Flexible Support Fund Childcare costs including upfront Childcare costs. It is estimated that robust data will be available from around September onwards, this will make a significant difference.

Telephony is still a big issue for operational colleagues and we need to find a way to balance telephony, some ideas will be brought out in the substantive agenda item on telephony later on the agenda.

Driving up accuracy and quality still remains an important focus with the April payment accuracy Caseload Growth Measure at 89% and the three month rolling average at 93%. The underlying trend remains positive but a root cause analysis has been undertaken in view of the in-month dip.

Labour Market performance continues to be strong with record employment rates, and we are looking at how we work with GPs locally around health conditions.

Programme Board members:

- a) The SRO for UC has asked analysts to adjust payment timeliness figures to take into account seasonal factors, because as a Programme Board we need to be aware of what was relevant and taken into account from the previous year if we are making comparisons.
- b) The Chair welcomed the positive Labour Market statistics, but would like more information around how we are helping claimants to progress in work. The Strategy Director Working Age stated there are currently some trials being run and the results will be fed back to the Programme Board in due course.

4. Move to UC Plans

Peter Loosley provided an update:

The Move to UC Pilot is due to start in Harrogate on 17th July if the necessary regulations are in place. The pilot will test different claimant types based on the “Who Knows Me” model, which was introduced as part of the last Programme Board update in April 2019. This will build on our existing relationships with claimants which should allow us to move them on to UC successfully without having to stop benefits.

It is intended to start the pilot with claimants who are well known to DWP and who are currently attending Jobcentres for face to face interventions. These interventions will be used to trigger the move onto UC. By starting with this cohort of claimants we can test that

the 3 core pillars of moving people on to UC are fulfilled prior to extending the pilot, these pillars are:

- The ability to calculate, explain, pay and erode Transitional Protection.
- Ability to engage and persuade claimants to act
- Ability to support claimants through the process (including their first and subsequent payments)

There is an excellent Operational team in place at Harrogate (covering all DWP Job Roles) as well as a Local Authority secondee. The team will be joined by a staff member from HMRC next week. Readiness Criteria have been developed which are focused on our ability to test and learn successfully. An initial walkthrough event was held 2 weeks ago and the assessment at that point was Amber/Green, however the areas rated Amber have been progressed since that assessment. Programme Delivery Executive (PDE) will be updated on the final view of readiness on 10th July prior to the start of the pilot.

The initial “Test the Concept” Phase will cover around 20-50 claimants, the pilot will then move on to the “Develop the Service” Phase. The current estimate is that around 100 claimants, will be moved in phases during the first months. Subject to successful progress a “Learn How to Grow” Phase will be introduced from around January 2020 which will take the pilot up to between 100 and 2000 claimants.

When we are sure we have proved the DWP approach is working well, a Trusted Partner Approach will be instigated, initially with one partner then gradually expanded to others with volumes increasing slowly using the same 3 phases.

Following the learning from the first 2 phases a second site may be introduced, where an alternative approach could be tested.

Positive initial discussions have taken place with HMRC colleagues around testing an HMRC led approach using existing channels later in 2020.

Programme Board noted the current state of readiness as Amber/Green indicating that the pilot can commence on 17th July 2019 as planned, subject to parliamentary approval and PDE’s final decision, currently planned for 10th July.

Programme Board members:

- a) The DG for HMRC asked if we had thought about different customer groups and picking these up as part of the pilot, where different circumstances may have a greater impact nationally but there may only be minimal numbers picked up in Harrogate. Lara Sampson stated that we did not want to pre-determine a selection of claimants, but we have already learned a lot from the 2 million claimants on UC so far.
- b) The Chair felt that the first pilot pillar around calculating, explaining, paying and eroding TP is key. The SRO for UC agreed and felt that how we explain TP to claimants will be crucial.
- c) The Director HM Treasury felt that the paper was helpful and supported the IPA view that if the pilot went well the SR would need to be impacted.

- d) The DG for Finance felt we need to keep an eye on costs and assumptions to inform SR decisions as well as building space to learn lessons.
- e) The Chair would like the team to think about how we could best use a second site in the pilot.

5. Channel Shift Strategy - Telephony

Paul McKeown provided an update:

Following the last update on the contact strategy at Programme Board in March we wanted to highlight the progress that has been made on telephony.

Two of the top four reasons for calls from claimants are either to query the amount they have been paid or to ask about advances. Specific IT enhancements have improved the information for claimants with an improved layout in order to make the statement clearer, these changes took effect from 15th May. There is also clearer and more detailed information planned for Advances on 26th June. It is too early to say if the changes made to the Statement have affected call rates, but overall call and case manager volumes have reduced. We are continuing to monitor MI and data across telephony looking at volumes, ratios of calls and trends.

There are ongoing activities in several other areas of telephony including:

- Revised Call Plans – simplifying the customer journey, and introducing a forced listen (waiting for all the options to be detailed before selecting one) to improve orientation
- Effective Handling – Ready Together ensuring Case Managers understand telephony is a big part of case management. Working with operational colleagues to roll this out across the network.
- Trials – removal of site level routing to improve call matching and understand the impact on national telephony demand. Early evaluation from the initial 4-week trial period highlighted that case manager feedback was positive and that agent time to perform case management activity increased. Plan to expand trial to Derby Service Centre.
- Reason for Call – looking to broaden the use of the Channel Analysis Tool across the wider Service Centre network. This should give us a wider data set to enable us to better understand on-going reasons for contact.

Working with analysts to look at evolving call forecasts over the coming years as this will be key to forecasting telephony volumes moving forward. Provisional forecasts have been produced and have been outlined in the Annexes 1,2 & 3 to the paper, volumes are indicative baseline numbers but show potential increases in telephony.

Programme Board noted the activity and work undertaken to understand the impact on contact types and volumes. Also noted progress on site level routing as well as the planned expansion to Derby Service Centre, and noted the new forecasts and requirement for more impacting as evidence of improvement activity is fully understood.

Programme Board members:

- a) The DG for Work and Health felt this was important work and appreciated the good progress made by Product Development colleagues in exploring what may be possible
- b) The Chair asked what the definition of an “offered call” was. Paul McKeown stated that this was a call that had got into the system but the claimant had rung off before being answered.
- c) The Acting DG for Digital asked what consideration had been given to automated responses. Paul McKeown said that the New Generation Contact Centre technology provides space for this but we need to work through the implications.

6. Hard Facts

The Chair stated his Hard Facts this month would be:

- a) Getting the Move to UC Pilot underway in July is important for keeping the Programme to plan, and maintaining momentum.
- b) Overall Move to UC requires progress on many fronts and will require a significant team effort across government.
- c) Channel Shift is essential for the delivery of efficiency in UC and to ensure enough resource is in place to support the most vulnerable.

7. AOB

The LGA representative stated that the London councils are in the process of discussing who will replace Lesley Seary as the LA representative on the UC Programme Board. A decision is likely to be announced following the LGA Conference next week.

Date of next meeting Tuesday 16th July 15.00-17.00 Caxton House Room 6.24

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