UC Universal Credit

Minutes

Title of meeting:	Universal Credit Programme Board
Date:	24th September 2019, 15:00 to 17:00
Location:	London Caxton House, Room 6.24
Attendees:	Sir Robert Walmsley (Chair), Neil Couling (SRO for UC), Ian Wright (UC Programme Director), Nick Joicey (Director General Finance), Debbie Alder (Director General Human Resources), Fran Beasley (Chief Executive LB HIllingdon), Colin Stewart (Area Director Operations), David Malcolm (Director Work and Inclusion DFC Northern Ireland) Pete Searle (Strategy Director, Working Age), Simon McKinnon (Acting Director General Digital), Gareth Young (Cabinet Office Operations Lead), Rob Allen (Director HM Treasury), Shelagh Brown (Director HMRC), s40 (Senior Advisor, LGA - Observer), s40 Home Office-Observer)
Presenters:	Paul Francis, Graeme Connor
Apologies:	Lindsey Whyte (Director HM Treasury), Colum Boyle (Deputy Secretary for Work and Inclusion DFC Northern Ireland), Angela Macdonald (Director General HMRC), JP Marks (Director General Work and Health),

1. Welcome, Introductions and Actions

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and acknowledged apologies from Lindsey Whyte, Colum Boyle, Angela Macdonald and JP Marks.

He welcomed Fran Beasley the Chief Executive of the London Borough of Hillingdon who was replacing Lesley Seary as the Local Authority representative on the UC Programme Board. Also Rob Allen who was attending on behalf of Lindsey Whyte, David Malcolm attending on behalf of Colum Boyle, Shelagh Brown attending on behalf of Angela Macdonald and Colin Stewart attending on behalf of JP Marks.

He also welcomed Paul Francis and Graeme Connor who were presenting papers and s40 from the Home Office who was observing the meeting.

The minutes of the Programme Board of 16th July were approved with a minor change to page 5 where the current planning assumption should be 100,000 households per month not 160,000 as stated in the minutes.

Update on actions:

01-250619 – Agreed closure as a Fraud & Error update has been provided for today's meeting.

The SRO reminded Board members that following a Freedom of Information (FOI) request last year it was agreed that Programme Board papers would be released on a 6 month rolling basis after 2 years. This ruling has recently been challenged and the Information Commissioner (IC) has found in favour of the applicant, which may require the papers to be released immediately. We are looking to appeal the IC decision and feel that grounds exist to do so. However, the SRO wanted Board members to be aware that if the appeal is unsuccessful Board papers may need to be released earlier than they currently are.

SRO Update

The current political environment remains uncertain and we are expecting renewed scrutiny on UC in the coming weeks.
The SRO is celebrating his 5th anniversary in the role next week. He is currently briefing his 7th Secretary of State (SoS) in that period. The new SoS is solidly behind UC so no major policy changes are expected. We are continuing to deliver the Programme whilst navigating a volatile political environment.

2. Programme Update

The UC Programme Director provided an update:

The current status of the Programme remains Amber.
Move to UC continues in pilot mode. A paper on the early evaluation findings from the pilot will be brought to Programme Board in November.
Good progress is being made on system closures, and Severe Disability Premium (SDP) payments are continuing to progress well with over 13,000 claimants now having been paid.

Monitoring the IR 35 process with our contractors closely and working with finance colleagues on this.

Phase 8 prioritisation which runs from early October 19 to April 20 has been broadly agreed, with representatives from all areas of the Programme and Operations involved in the decision making process. Some P8 milestones will be added to future dashboards.

Updated on milestones including

UCFS (GDPR) milestone is currently Red – this work is complex and relies on migration from UC to AWS. A revised plan has been agreed for Feb 2020, and the milestone is Green against this date. We have updated the Information Commissioners office with the progress that has been made.

GSI e-mail removal milestone currently Red – however, this is part of a wider departmental move due to take place in Feb 2020 and the milestone has been moved by the Department.

ID Verification milestone currently Amber – paper outlining progress on the agenda for today's meeting.

Updated on Risks including:

Identity Verification – this risk has been reduced to level 12 as a direct result of the existing Verify service agreeing a commercial extension for a further year.

The budget forecast has increased by £4m due to operational workforce plans and Verify costs for the current year but we are still below budget overall.

Formal agreement for the next financial drawdown is close to being approved to March 2020.

Service stability for the last 4 months has been good. Digital colleagues have done some outstanding work in this area to make the system more resilient.

Programme Board members:

a) The Cabinet Office Operations Lead asked if the Board could have a paper reviewing Phase 7, and giving an overview of Phase 8. The UC Programme Director was happy for a below the line paper to be brought to a future Board meeting.

b) The DG for HR asked how the economic downturn risk plays into the Programme and core Labour Market shift. The SRO for UC stated that now the Programme had fully rolled out, this risk would be monitored in the Business As Usual (BAU) space by Operational colleagues.

c) The Chair asked how the Security risks feed into the UC Programme risks. The Programme Director stated that the risks were not yet at a level where they would need to be brought to the Board. The Acting Director for Digital stated that security risks are managed via layers of defence and aggregated risk. He feels that we are in a good position currently.

d) The DG for Finance asked if the UC Programme is represented at the Departmental Security Board. The SRO for UC stated that the Programme was represented at this forum.

e) The Chair felt that the security risks may become relevant to the Board at some point and would like the Board to have an overview of Security risks early in the New Year.

f) The DG for Finance asked what assurances the Board would have around Unit Cost enablers and what was in place when volumes increased. The UC

Programme Director stated that it would be reported in the dashboard on an ongoing basis.

Action Point 01-240919 – Below the Line paper reviewing P7 and giving an overview of P8 to be brought to a future Board meeting – Programme Director

3. Operations Update

The Operational Area Director provided an update:

Operations have had a strong summer with payment timeliness up 4.2% on this time last year although the caseload has increased significantly.

Operational Management Teams are reviewing the balance of workload and productivity as caseloads continue to increase, focusing on delivery sustainability and developing risks when felt non-sustainable.

Taking work out of Service Centres (SCs) and moving it into Jobcentres (JCs), an example of this is Work Capability Assessment (WCA) decisions. More automation is expected in Phases 8 & 9 which will help operations immensely. A new telephony calculation has recently been agreed for Average Calls per Case Manager metric that takes part-time workers into account. In August the Average Calls per Case Manager were 64.7 per week.

Unit costs increased by around 1% in-month for July this is primarily due to the final tranche of the Employee Deal pay increase.

The Labour Market Operational Group have developed a narrative to support operational senior leaders to coach and help tell the story behind the Labour Market journey.

Operational focus is also on the health journey and we are currently looking to place Work Coaches at the heart of the referral process. We are reviewing the governance steps required to put this in place.

Programme Board members:

a) The Cabinet Office Operations Lead asked if the review of caseloads included the ability to analyse complexity for each individual staff member. The Operational Area Director stated that individual capability was part of the review process.

b) The SRO for UC stated that Operational colleagues have had a remarkable summer with payment timeliness around 87-88% across the whole summer period. He wanted to congratulate all concerned.

c) The Chair noted that 88% of calls were answered (i.e.12% were not) he felt this could benefit from more automation and asked if improvements were planned. The SRO for UC stated that although we wanted to encourage claimants to contact us via on-line channels primarily, we are looking at our jobcentre offer with some on-going pilots currently looking at this particular area.

4. Identity Verification

Paul Francis provided an update:

It had been agreed at Programme Board in January 2019 that GOV.UK Verify would continue to support UC until March 2020. However, there was an assumption regarding a possible "cliff edge" due to Verify becoming unavailable thereafter. This "cliff edge" has now been avoided by working closely with HMRC and GDS colleagues to extend the current commercial contract to March 2021.

Since February 2019 there have been a number of reports into GOV.UK Verify. A National Audit Office (NAO) investigation took place followed by a Public Accounts Committee (PAC) hearing in March 19 regarding the future viability of GOV.UK Verify. We are currently working with GDS on responses to the PAC recommendations. In July the IPA gave GOV.UK Verify a revised rating of Red from its previous Amber rating.

We continue to work with GDS on an improvement plan that runs to March 2020, although early findings are not suggesting that the success rates of GOV.UK Verify will improve significantly during Phases 8 & 9 of the UCFS Programme. There are matters outside direct influence of the Programme as customers, not controllers, of Verify.

Two of the five current identity providers have signed contracts to provide sign-ups for new users from March 20 to April 21, sign-up will be at a cost s43 per successful ID the ID&T team will be responsible for these costs centrally. On-going running costs will transition to Business As Usual (BAU).
The other three providers have not re-signed but are committed to provide sign in facilities for a further 12 months ending in March 2021 at nil cost.

ID Verification post 2020 is being looked at in 2 phases:

Phase 1 – March 2020, now that a potential "cliff edge" has been avoided we are working closely with HMRC colleagues on the broader use of HMRC Identity Verification (HMRC IV) to ensure that anyone with HMRD credentials can be verified. This will provide an opportunity for customers to "sign-in" using their HMRC credentials and undertake a full identity check via GOV.UK Verify which will retain some dependency on GOV.UK Verify. This should enable around 15% of current HMRC customers to re-use their HMRC credentials to verify.

Phase 2 – from Summer 2020 for all other customers new to UC including those known only to DWP and not HMRC. We will augment HMRC IV with additional capabilities in order to reach Medium Level Assurance (previously described as LOA2). These proposals have been presented to both lawyers and UC Secure Design who have endorsed the approach taken. The cost is s43 per successful ID. We will start to utilise our own data as we progress further reducing our reliance on Verify.

It is proposed to keep GOV.UK Verify as a sign-up for everyone else post March 2020 for up to 9 months a use a controlled ramping up of new users during this period. Verify will start to be phased out as Phase 2 is implemented and will have ceased being used for sign-ups at the 9-month point.

We will report back to Programme Board in January 2020 with an update on HMRC IV testing, commercial activity and deployment
Programme Board members:

a) The Director HM Treasury asked what level of commitment GDS required for this proposal. The Acting DG for Digital stated that there was no obligation on DWP to provide a minimum level of commitment.

b) The DG for Finance asked who will be picking up the running costs moving forward. The SRO for UC stated that the Programme picked up the costs for this year but Operational colleagues would need to bid for the costs from next year. The DG for Finance said that he would follow up bi-laterally on this outside of the meeting.

c) The Strategy Director Working Age asked as Verify performance had improved because fewer people are trying it, did we have a view as to why this was the case. The Acting DG for Digital stated that we do not know the characteristics of the people that are trying Verify.

d) The Chair was keen to ensure that the system can withstand the non-repudiation test and deliver Medium Level Assurance. Who will decide that the system "as implemented" will meet our needs and fulfil design requirements. The SRO for UC stated that the system is using HMRC capability and DWP data which have both satisfied the LOA2 test meaning that it meets our needs.

Further consideration of the paper was prevented due to a fire alarm in Caxton House and this and the remaining item on UC Employment Impacts would be moved to the agenda for the next Programme Board meeting on 22nd October.

However, both the Chair and the SRO for UC asked that the following be recorded as part of the minutes of the meeting.

The Chair and the SRO for UC would like to take the opportunity to thank Pete Searle who was attending his final Programme Board meeting for his consistently constructive contribution to both the Programme Board and the Programme in general over many years.

Date of next meeting Tuesday 22nd October 15.00-17.00 Caxton House Room 6.24

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