UC Universal Credit

Minutes

Title of meeting:	Universal Credit Programme Board
Date:	15th March 2022 13:00 – 15:00
Location:	Caxton House Room 6:24 & Microsoft Teams
Attendees:	John McGlynn (Chair), Neil Couling (SRO for UC), Deb Boore (obo Ian Wright Programme Director), Graeme Connor (obo Angus Gray Director Policy), Chris Drane (Director HM Treasury), Stuart Ison (External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director), Will Garner (UC Product & Move to UC Director), Paddy Rooney (Deputy Secretary for Work & Inclusion DFC Northern Ireland), David Magee (IPA Representative), Deb Walton (Director People and Capability), Rose Doran (Local Authority), Dave Brookes (obo Myrtle Lloyd DG HMRC), Sophie Ingram (obo Nick Joicey DG Finance), Simon McKinnon (DG, Digital), Ed Winfield (SPAD to Secretary of State), Claire Chapman (obo Karen Gosden DG Work & Health Services), Ruth Nolan (Deputy Director Financial Management and Partnering)
Presenters:	Deb Boore, Stuart Ison, Will Garner, Ruth Nolan, Graeme Connor.
Apologies:	Ian Wright, Karen Gosden, Angus Gray.

Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed members, acknowledged apologies, and thanked deputies for their attendance.
Programme Board cleared February's minutes. The chair emphasised on the Action Log and noted this will be revised monthly.

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Paper 1 – Programme Update – Deputy Programme Director

The Deputy UC Programme Director introduced her paper and highlighted the following key points:
Slide 1:

- Overall Programme status remains amber/red.
- Highlighted the ongoing challenge with java developer recruitment and retention, and the risk that poses to completion of Move by 2024.
- Noted the difficulty in clearing the Move publication continues to slow down our external engagement, impacting the voluntary campaign.
- Additional scrutiny requested by No.10 will potentially slow things down further, which is a challenge when simultaneously being asked to speed up the Move exercise.
- Highlighted there are inherent risks in the plan already, with no firebreaks or room for slippage. Any further delay threatens our completion timeline.
- Noted on slide 2, the unit cost has decreased due to reductions in Operational costs.
- Noted that "Help to Claim" implementation and the closure of "GOV.UK Verify" remain on track, with operational activity to manage in hand.

The Chair thanked the Deputy UC Programme Director and requested a future update on Phase 2 of the marketing campaign.

Programme Board discussion:

- The Move to UC voluntary phase marketing campaign has begun, radio adverts are live, and so far, responses are positive. The campaign is being monitored and an update will be brought to the Board as a Below the Line paper.

- The HMT Director asked about "Treasury Drawdown with key delivery milestone 01/04".
- Discussions are ongoing between the prospective team in the Treasury and the information will be provided to HMT by the end of the month.
- The UC SRO requested for the required information be sent to the HMT Director before the end of the month which was agreed.

AP01: The External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director and the Deputy UC Programme Director will send the information required regarding Treasury drawdown to the HMT director before the end of the month.

The Chair noted that the risks on the programme report have been updated and welcomed comments.
- The SPAD to the Secretary of State queried the status of the National Stakeholder Event on Slide 1.
- The UC SRO emphasised how interdependent the plans are and that communication with No.10 and their agreement to publication are essential for delivery.

The Programme Board discussion:
- The Chair acknowledged BTL05: DWP Digital UC recruitment and questioned what other actions can be taken besides the monetary options and the flexibility in the pay rate.
  - The contingent labour rate has been raised to get in new people and retain the current ones.
  - Highlighted we have stabilized the loss of people, however, will require another month to see if we can get contracted people in.
  - In terms of permanent people, discussion around introducing a capability pay framework is underway. The Digital DG acknowledged this is a good view to follow, however highlighted this will take several months to build a business case and get approval.
- The Chair queried if we have a long-term strategic vision for recruitment and retention.
- Noted focus is on building capability internally through an increase use of apprenticeships.
  - 140 people are finishing apprenticeships in the coming year, 1/3 are software engineers.
  - The apprenticeship is a 2-year Programme which covers Java and building on capabilities.
  - In the coming year, some apprentices are already undertaking junior roles.
  - Apprenticeship is a long-term strategy and won't fix the current issue.
  - Most departments have apprenticeship programmes to address their own resourcing challenges, and DWP is increasing our offer based on their learning.
  - 10 cobol programmers are coming out of the scheme to support our legacy systems.
- Should the contingent labour strategy not help in the short term, people will be moved from the other areas to support Move to UC. UC & Working Age Director is looking to identify suitable candidates who could be moved from other digital projects to UC and will move them if necessary, however noted
  - Moving people across department is not the best solution to solve the underlying problem long term.
  - Emphasised that it is important to get the right people, with the right skills and the right location.
- The UC SRO highlighted that resolving resourcing challenges is critical to plan phase 12 successfully. He also emphasised that there are new demands coming in to the Programme despite warning that we faced resourcing issues.
- Highlighted that several senior colleagues are leaving Digital, some of whom are permanent with product knowledge. feedback from exit interviews suggest:
  - Much of the attrition is deferred turnover following the pandemic. Some people who would have left in the past 2 years have effectively stayed for longer than they would have done.
  - People are leaving for different reasons and our Hybrid working arrangements and our technology set up may be making us less attractive than other employers.
- Rate adjustment has had some attraction, however time will tell if it has made a difference.

Paper 2 - Programme Risks – External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director

The External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director introduced the paper and highlighted the following key points:
- The paper is in two parts: firstly, to review and discuss the main challenges and causes of risk to the programme; and how we subsequently articulate and manage key risks.

- Slide 22 in the annex which identified the UC Risks Management and Governance process in place and the Risk Assurance processes to monitor and mitigate risks.
- Flagged the Ukraine conflict and cyber related risks within UC.
- The "UC at Work" document still needs to be published which is resulting in ongoing risks to the programme
- Flagged the "Top UC risks" on slide 2 of the annex; P86 Move to UC – UC Programme completion by December 2024 and P87 -UC Java Developer Recruitment & Retention.

The Chair flagged the 2nd risk on slide 2 is an issue as this is impacting across the Programme further noting the risk has materialized and is more an issue.

Programme Board discussion:
- The UC SRO agreed with the Chair and emphasised the 2nd risk (resourcing) has happened already and we should be actively involved in supporting the below the line paper that the Digital DG shared.
- The Digital DG highlighted the UC programme is managing the secure design of the UC product and noted there are a series of initiatives, e.g. the Adaptive Security Programme taking place around how we protect the department.
- Agreed this is currently high risk.
- The Deputy DG Finance requested if forecasting is tracked and queried if we will get a report in a year that shows the actual trend we are currently predicting. It was agreed that the board will review risks quarterly.
- IPA representative questioned why the deliverability for the first risk on the programme completion is not red.
- The UC SRO explained that the scoring system used by the IPA space and the Programme are different. He underlined that he believed the programme is deliverable but is at risk in terms of the timescales as a result of, for example, the lack of progress in publishing the strategy for Move to UC.
- IPA representative queried when we will move to "Red" status deliverability.
- The UC SRO explained that a deliverability assessment will be driven by progress of the Discovery phase and noted discussions are taking place in relation to a potential IPA review for the end of Discovery to pick up on this point.
- The SPAD to Secretary of State felt the "Causes" on slide 7 needed some tweaks. He felt that the main risk to completing the Programme by 2024 was claimants not engaging with the process.
- The UC SRO agreed and explained that government policy was that claimant's benefit will terminate if they did not move. Further noting this was the assumption underlying the Move to UC plan.
- The SPAD to Secretary of State stated that the Secretary of State is speaking to the UC Policy team to understand what legal power she has to make an award without a claim being made. He questioned whether the Secretary of State can make a claim on the behalf of people if they decide not to move to UC, just so to mitigate the risks of claimants being left without support.
- The UC SRO said that a change in policy might throw into question our completion by the end of 2024.
- The plan to deliver is based on the policy we have now and not what might change. The Treasury said any changes of policy the SoS might decide would need to be agreed by Treasury Ministers.

The Chair sought clarification on current policy.
- The agreed Government Policy was to terminate an individual's benefits if they did not make a claim for UC.
- Risks around the Programme timetable were raised and suggested two possible mitigations: scaling up sooner and scaling at maximum capacity. However, the UC SRO stated this can be done if the Discovery phase ends earlier in the year and more good progress is made. He underlined that this information had already been conveyed to the Secretary of State.
- Noted the slide captured "Planned mitigations" and the one identified today were not planned. However, the UC SRO agreed we can capture them somewhere on Slide 7.
- The HMT Director agreed with the UC SRO on the conversation around termination of benefits and this has implications across government especially for HMRC.

- The External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director noted the Java Developers "Risk" is in fact an issue and that he is not convinced the rating for the Java developers (both likelihood and impact) is higher than predicted.

- The 200k figure is still required and is a significant challenge and that without the publication of the "UC at work" document, it would be very difficult to achieve this objective.
- The risk rating will be reviewed in 3 months.

AP02: The Java Developers "Risk" is an issue and will need to be reflected accordingly.
AP03: The UC SRO highlighted the slide captured "Planned mitigations" and the ones identified today were not planned. However, the agreed we can capture them somewhere on Slide 7.

Paper 3a - Third Party Support Expected to Accelerate Voluntary Moves (Paper 3a) - The External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director.
Paper 3b - Voluntary Move to UC Dashboard (Paper 3b) - The External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director.

The External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director presented the paper which provided an update of areas of progress across the Programme. Highlighting the following key points:
- The paper provided an overview of the voluntary move.
- The leaflet has gone out with the renewals pack.
- There are some avenues being explored with HMRC.
- the positive conversation with the Secretary of State on exploring the use of 3rd parties to provide advice on the move to UC.
- Publication of the document is key in driving progress.

The Chair queried how data on voluntary moves was collated given the consistency in numbers (3000) in recent months.
- Noted there was a robust methodology underpinning the estimates of voluntary moves.
- The UC SRO proposed to regularly review the data especially when coming out of the Discovery Phase.
- Noted it will be good to see uptake in voluntary migration as a result of the radio adverts, further noting it can take a couple of months for the data to feed into the system.

Paper 4 - Product Development phase 11: mid- phase review summary – UC Product and Move to UC Director

The Presenter introduced his paper, informing members of the considerations and decisions PDE has taken at the midpoint of phase 11. Noted the following key points:
- There are 16 product development teams.
- The resource attrition was worst at the start of Phase 11. Noted this phase runs from 25/11/21 to 25/05/22.
- Resources were reprioritised for Move to UC.
- Noted more work is needed around the Habitual Residency Test (HRT) but this deprioritised in favor of Move.
- The Programme has scaled up to 16 teams but has not been able to scale to the intended 17 teams due to the impact of attrition and challenges hiring enough developers.
- A supplier partner is on board to work on Targeted Case Review and supplement the Fraud and Error team.
- Flagged the end to end F & E process is relatively tactical, manual and complex and will take time to automate. This automation is a lower priority than Targeted Case Review.
- The UC Product and Move to UC Director emphasised how additional requests over the current priorities are impossible to accommodate.
- Noted a clear view on capacity is required for Phase 12.
Programme Board discussion:
- The UC SRO highlighted the impact and pressure of the additional requests on the current delivery and requested the support of the board in reminding people across the department on priorities, delivery and halting to take on additional requests.
- A meeting is taking place on 21/03/22 to bring the policy team together to discuss the impact of additional requests and discuss alternative solutions. Departmental coordination is required, and the Deputy Director Policy is onboard with this.
- The Chair sought clarity with regards to automation and efficiency on the system seeing that this is being pushed back due to the current priorities.

- There is a balancing act on the service goals and in some areas outcomes such as Move or helping claimants into work take precedence over automation to release efficiencies in operations.
- The loss of experienced senior technical staff will affect the roadmap but stressed the service is safe.
- Targeted Case Review and the MVFE plan will not be impacted.

Paper 5 - Discovery Progress - UC Product and Move to UC Director.

The UC Product and Move to UC Director shared a progress update and highlighted the following key points:
- The team is focused on establishing and learning from the "Earliest testable service".
- First migration notice will be sent by May 2022.
- Identified 13 areas of the country to conduct Discovery tests. Highlighted Bolton and Medway are the first areas to run the test.
- Data sets have now been agreed and this will be sourced from HMRC and DWP systems.
- Noted on point 9, a clerical process will be in place to validate if someone has been issued a migration notice and also eligible for TP.
- Work has started on the design of the migration notice and will be tested with benefit claimants.

Programme Board discussion:
- The UC SRO noted:
    - The Minister was apprehensive to 250 migration notices in one go. The minister suggested 10 migration notices to minimise day 1 risk.
    - That in his opinion, highlighted the lessons learnt from the Harrogate Pilot and stressed on the 250 migration notices that it would enable more learning.
    - The Minister has kindly offered to talk to local MPs.
- The UC SRO stressed how the publication of the document is essential. He requested the support of the board in getting the right conversation to get the publication of the document out.
- In Regard to Point 5:
    - The first test is basic.
    - Highlighted this is a self-serve journey for claimant with support.
    - Information will be available on GOV.UK.
    - Highlighted there will be a dedicated 0800 phone line and staff will be equipped with the right script and support.
    - There is a Below the Line Paper from the learning on Harrogate and the support people may ask for.
- Questions raised in regards support available should claimants turn to JobCentres and whether they will have the capacity to provide support due to the already high caseloads.
    - The UC Product and Move to UC Director noted he is working alongside the Deputy Programme Director to see how they can provide support but that Job Centers are well equipped to support people making new claims to UC.
    - The Deputy Programme Director highlighted, in her opinion, we will have to prepare the Job Centers and legacy colleagues.
    - Jobcentre will need to be briefed on how to handle queries.
    - A survey carried out in Northern Ireland identified what people look for in terms of support. This emphasised the need for telephony staff to have the right skills.

The Chair agreed the first test needs to ensure colleagues in JobCentres have the knowledge and are not burdened with enquiries on top of their workload. Further noting he hopes to get to the first 250 letters by the 9th May.

Paper 6 - SR21 Allocation and Winter 21 Volume Refresh - Deputy Director of Financial Management and Partnering and the Deputy Director Policy.

The Deputy Director Financial Management and Partnering provided an update on the financial forecast highlighting the following key points:
- £865m was secured excluding depreciation for 3 years up to 24/25.
- Highlighted the funding included Targeted Case Review and Future Support offer.

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- Noted the funding secured is sufficient to deliver the UC Programme.
- The team is working with HMT to secure the Drawdown for the start of the year.
- Other departments have their own budget and we are not funding BAU.

The Deputy Director Policy provided an update on the Winter Volume Refresh and highlighted the following key points:
- During 2020/2021, there was movement in volumes and great amount of uncertainty.
- The reduction in the full life costs and overall savings for the full business case.
- Highlighted the complexity over the estimates but questions are welcome.
Programme Board discussion:
- The UC SRO noted he will write to NAO about how UC is value for money.
- The UC SRO highlighted the net gain every year and highlighted this point on the annex, page 7
The Chair queried where the team delivering UC sit in terms of running costs.
- The Deputy Director Policy and the Change DG & UC SRO noted they are in the investment of running costs.

The Chair noted the good progress on the move despite some challenges around resourcing problems.

AOB: None
Date of Next Meeting: 26th April 2022.

Contact:	S40
Email:	ChangeandResilience.Secretariat@dwp.gov.uk