To: UC Programme Board Members

From: Ian Wright

Sponsor: Neil Couling

Author: Ian Wright

Date: 19 January 2023

Universal Credit (UC) Programme Status

Issue: This paper sets out the reduced level of risk faced by the Universal Credit (UC) Programme in terms of the Move to UC plans following the November Autumn Statement.

Recommendations / Decisions required: In view of the reduced level of risk as described in this paper, for the SRO to determine whether to change the Programme risk rating from 'Amber/Red' to 'Amber'.

Timing: No timing implications.

Background / Introduction

1. The UC Programme has maintained an internal Amber/Red risk rating since November 2021, reflecting the compressed timescales, with no planned capacity for firebreaks or contingency, to complete the move of all remaining legacy claimants to Universal Credit by the end of 2024.

2. Following the November 2022 Autumn Statement announcement to not start the Managed Migration of claimants on income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and ESA and Housing Benefit until 2028/29, the Programme has undertaken an impact assessment in view of the change in scope to the current plan. The impacting work, based on a revised set of planned assumptions were agreed at the Programme Board on 20 December 2022 and included a revised and de risked volume profile and Phase schedule through to the planned closure of the Programme in March 2025.

3. With this agreement the overall Programme Risk rating has been reviewed and, for the reasons listed below, we recommend to the SRO a downgrading of the internal rating from AMBER/RED to AMBER. This recommendation was endorsed by Programme Delivery Executive on 11 January. The reasons are:

- **Independent Assurance:** The most recent IPA review concluded an overall Amber Delivery Confidence Assessment

- **Funding**: The recently completed Treasury Approval Point (15 December) confirmed funding for 2023
- **Reduced Scope:** The November 2022 Autumn Statement announced the Managed Migration of claimants on income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and ESA and Housing Benefit will not now commence until 2028/29.
- **De-risking the commencement of scaling:** The revised volume profile plan ensures sufficient time to fine tune and stabilise the service ahead of scaling, including delivery of the key enabling features required to support the service. Controlling the build-up of work through the issue of Migration Notices enables a smooth and balanced ramp up of volumes through the customer journey as confidence builds in operating the new service
- **A smoothed volume profile to support operational planning**: Working closely with operational colleagues we have smoothed the peak volumes to avoid peaks and troughs that would hinder operational planning. To further smooth the planning for work coaches we have also now incorporated the Self-Employed Tax Credit cases into the 2023/24 profile.
- **Planned Contingency:** From end of December 2024 to March 25 we have planned a contingency period, within the time scheduled for Programme Closure and Handover
- **Command and Control:** Based on best practice and lessons learned from the roll out of the Full Service we have implemented a monthly Readiness assessment to support a throttle/brake/continue assessment aligned to the planned volume profile. The Programme has also introduced an Implementation Control Centre (ICC) to monitor and control performance of the service in live running. Change Impacting Group (CIG) and Senior Impacting Group (SIG) also remain in place to ensure any possible changes to scope are fully understood and impacted.

4. Should the Programme Board recommend this change in status to the SRO, and he accepts, we recommend that he separately notifies key stakeholders across Government as part of his regular engagement with them on UC issues.

Decision / Recommendation

5. This paper recommends the SRO changes the overall Programme risk rating to 'Amber' ("*successful delivery appears feasible but significant issues already exist requiring management attention – these appear resolvable at this stage and if addressed promptly should not present a cost/schedule overrun*") from the current 'Amber/Red' rating ("successful delivery of the project/programme is in doubt with major risks and issues apparent in a number of key areas – urgent action is needed to ensure these are addressed and whether resolution is feasible")