

Present: Councillor Bob Bushell (*in the Chair*)

Councillors: Alan Briggs, Kathleen Brothwell, Chris Burke, Sue Burke, Helena Mair, Lucinda Preston, Christopher Reid, Hilton Spratt and Naomi Tweddle, Gary Hewson

Also in Attendance: Graham Metcalfe and Helen Oliver

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Gill Clayton-Hewson

23. Confirmation of Minutes - 6 November 2018

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2018 be confirmed.

24. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

25. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee were noted.

26. Introduction from the Chair

Councillor Bob Bushell, Chair of Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee, introduced members and external representatives to the meeting and explained the purpose of the review following the recent Government announcement that Universal Credit would be transferring over to the Citizens Advice Bureau from April 2019.

27. Intelligence from Key Witnesses

(a) Graham Metcalfe - Department for Work and Pensions

Graham Metcalfe, Department for Work and Pensions:

- a) explained that the DWP were made aware of this news at the same time as the CoLC and CAB and felt that it was an ineffective way of treating stakeholders.
- b) highlighted that there were concerns around how the service was going to be delivered.
- c) stated that there had been a significant input locally with regards to Universal Credit and other authorities were yet to sign up to the service
- d) stressed that the DWP customer base would need extra support in changing fortnight receipt and legacy benefits.
- e) explained that there could be a possible 3-4 month delay in the roll out of the service due to issue of the Autumn Statement. This would allow the organisation time to look at other partnerships and if there was a gap in the

revision, it could be assessed and partnerships could be put in place to bridge the gap.

f) Invited members questions and comments.

Question: There was a possibility that the CAB may not take this service on, why is this?

Response: At this stage there were a number of possibilities being considered but that overall decision was up to them.

Question: Was there any safeguarding issues if the service was transferred?

Response: Safeguarding hadn't been affected greatly.

Question: Who would the link partners be that would bridge the gap?

Response: They would look to go through a national provider or training providers who were already funded, potentially Lincoln College.

Question: If the CAB refused to take on the new contract, would it be offered to another organisation?

Response: Options were currently being explored but it could potentially be delivered elsewhere.

Question: What other contracts were available? Were there restrictions on how money could be moved?

Response: There was no finalised contract moving forward and the DWP weren't sure what the contract involved. They were done on an annual basis, last year it was issued at the end of March so it was not unusual for it to be put together at late notice.

Question: The City of Lincoln Council were spending more to administer Universal credit, were they doing more than what was expected?

Response: The contract was linked to areas such as digital support. Local authorities had delivered over and above what was expected.

Question: What were the main concerns regarding the switch over?

Response: Why wasn't there flexibility to retain a system that was currently working? There were doubts that the system would work if it changed. The best practise at the moment would be to spread the service out nationally.

(b) Martin Walmsley - City of Lincoln Council

Martin Walmsley, City of Lincoln Council, advised the committee of the following:

- a) the current system had been a huge success so far
- b) it would be impossible to provide digital support without a partnership in place
- c) the demand on staff since 7 March 2018 had been:

- 831 people supported for digital help
 - 410 offered people face to face support
- d) 92 DHP's (Discretionary Housing Payments) had been awarded since 7 March
- e) he highlighted some of the challenges that the City of Lincoln Council were facing:
- Insufficient funding
 - Late sign off of the contract
 - Investment and demand of time
 - Difficult/suicidal callers
 - Universal Credit Legislation charges
 - Uncertainty of future plans
 - Impact on Housing (Evictions)
- f) invited members questions and comments

Question: What would the impact of the service be during the transition?

Response: It would need to be looked into further to ensure that the transition was seamless. The date that was announced was also a worry as it would clash with the Council Tax collections so it could potentially change.

Question: What were the arrangements with regard to direct payment?

Response: It hadn't been fully investigated. People were already in debt prior to the introduction to Universal Credit. The preference would be direct debit as the process would be quicker and the payment would be made every 4 weeks

Question: What were the figures with regard to suicide callers?

Response: Response: There had been 15 suicidal/ distressed callers in contact with the UC Support Team recently

Question: Would there be any redundancies as part of the transition?

Response: Staff that had taken on this work would retain employment and return to their previous post.

Question: Would the new system help people in arrears?

Response: No.

Question: With regards to the 114 possession orders, was it due to Universal Credit?

Response: Yes. If the individual got evicted the City of Lincoln Council would have a responsibility to house them.

(c) **Helen Oliver - Citizens Advice**

Helen Oliver, Citizens Advice advised Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee of the following:

- There were 280 independent charities that worked for Citizens advice
- The Citizens Advice supported individuals through the process until they received their first payment
- The national organisation had approved the contract and signed it off
- The organisation supported the following:
 - Digital access
 - Client support in submitting claims for Universal Credit
 - Setting up new accounts
 - Advising on changes and the practicalities of monthly payments
 - Checking of evidence
 - Council Tax Support
- The Citizens Advice would receive £23,000 to deliver the service of Universal Credit
- 414 people had been supported in the last year. If the service was kept in-house a total of 21 hours of support would be provided per week including 15.5 hours face to face support.
- The issues Citizens Advice faced were:
 - During the holiday period there was no cover and the service would grind to a halt
 - 20-15 clients were seen a day through the drop in service
 - 20-35 booked appointments were dealt with per week
 - The opening hours were currently 9am-1pm Monday – Thursday
 - It was getting to the point where clients were being turned away due to staff being above capacity
 - The funding that was being offered was not sufficient to cover the office having to open for extra hours
 - Staff weren't trained to a sufficient level in comparison to CoLC staff and were solely a workforce of volunteers
- Locally, the Citizens Advice hadn't put a strategy in place yet and were working with the DWP and CoLC on potential partnership working.
- Invited members questions and comments.

Question: Why did the Chief Executive of Citizens Advice sign it off?

Response: A significant amount of money had been offered. A gold star service was currently being delivered at the moment however Citizens Advice wouldn't be capable of delivering it alone due to not having access the vital systems.

Question: What support would be required if the transfer took place?

Response: 15 hours face to face contact and supporting customers online or via phone.

Question: What would happen if the application process was delayed?

Response: The DWP would be involved but it would all depend on what was agreed long term.

Question: How many people had used the system in the past year?

Response: 1,211 since 7th March 2018.

Question: Would there be a waiting list for Universal Credit clients?

Response: Citizens Advice would work with the DWP and assess it. If it was urgent it would be dealt with immediately.

Question: Was there a Plan B?

Response: If the transfer didn't take place it could potentially be sub contracted back to a partner. If it did take place and was delivered in-house, resources would be pulled in from other areas.

Question: Would any training be provided for Citizens Advice staff if the transfer took place?

Response: There was a national training package that involved dealing with vulnerable clients. Citizens Advice felt that following the announcement it would be unfair for volunteers to do the work of paid staff. Since then a number of volunteers had threatened to leave as a result.

Question: How would the transfer be subcontracted back to a partner?

Response: There was the option to subcontract it back to a partner and they would deliver it. The funding would also be transferred.

Question: Would the DWP have the capacity to take the work on if the CAB decided against it?

Response: They would ensure they did.

Question: What implications would the transition have on wider areas?

Response: The main concern was dealing with the increase in demand which would be a huge challenge.

28. Scrutiny Annual Report 2017/18

RESOLVED that the Scrutiny Annual Report for 2017/18 be noted.

29. Draft Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2018/19

Jess Cullen, Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the draft work programme for 2018/19 as detailed at Appendix A of her report
- b. advised that the work programme for the Community Leadership Committee was put forward annually for approval by Council; the work programme was

then regularly updated throughout the year in consultation with the Community Leadership Committee and its Chair

- c. reported that items had been scheduled in accordance with the existing work programme and officers' guidance regarding the meetings at which the most up-to-date information could be reported to the committee; the work programme also included the list of portfolio holders under scrutiny
- d. requested any relevant comments or changes to the proposed work programme for 2018/19.

RESOLVED that the work programme 2018/19 as detailed at Appendix A to the report be noted.