



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP Central Freedom of Information
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Owen Stevens

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Our Ref: IC 223724 – B8Q1

Date: 23 October 2023

Dear Owen Stevens

On 4 November 2022 you requested,

'The UCPB papers for October 2020 were recently deposited in the House of Commons library:

<https://depositedpapers.parliament.uk/depositedpaper/2284676/details>

The minutes for the previous UCPB meeting are usually included in the deposited papers. On this occasion the minutes for the previous meeting, which took place in February 2020, have not been included in the deposited papers.

Please provide a copy of the minutes for the February 2020 UCPB meeting. If there is no final version of the minutes, then please provide the most recent draft of those minutes'.

Following a Decision Notice from the Information Commissioner on 18 September 2023 we have attached the draft Programme Board minutes as requested.

Please note, we have redacted names of DWP colleagues that are below Senior Service Level as this constitutes personal data of someone other than yourself and as such, it is being withheld in accordance with section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act.

Section 40(2) exempts information in response to a request if it is personal data belonging to an individual other than the requester and it satisfies one of the conditions listed in the legislation. In this case the condition contained in section 40(3A)(a) applies - that disclosure would breach one of the data protection principles, specifically that "Personal data shall be processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner...".

We do not consider that disclosing this information is necessary or justified in order to satisfy your information request and the requirements of the FoI Act. In relation to this request, we consider that there is no strong legitimate interest that would override the prejudice to the rights and freedoms of the data subject.

Please also note that the attached Programme Board minutes for February 2020 is a draft version only. We only hold a draft version of this information and therefore are unable to confirm or endorse the factual content as they were not finalised or ratified through our normal clearance processes.

Yours sincerely,



Minutes

Title of meeting:	Universal Credit Programme Board
Date:	18 th February 2020, 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), Debbie Alder (Director General People and Capability), David Silk (Director, HMT) Katie Farrington (Policy Director, UC and Employment), Simon McKinnon (Acting Director General Digital), Colum Boyle (Deputy Secretary for Work and Inclusion DFC Northern Ireland), Fran Beasley (Chief Executive LB Billinghamdon), Angela Macdonald (Director General HMRC), Colin Stewart (Area Director Operations), Anne Turner (Deputy Director, Infrastructure and Projects Authority), Hitesh Mehta (Deputy Director Finance), s 40 (Senior Advisor, LGA - Observer), Conrad McConnell (UC Programme Director DFC Northern Ireland - observer)
Presenters:	s 40 Pauline Crellin
Apologies:	Lindsey Whyte (Director HM Treasury), Nick Joicey (Director General Finance), Gareth Young (Cabinet Office Operations Lead), JP Marks (Director General Work and Health)
<p>1. Welcome, Introductions and Actions</p> <p>The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and acknowledged apologies from JP Marks, Gareth Young, Lindsey Whyte and Nick Joicey.</p> <p>He welcomed Colin Stewart attending on behalf of JP Marks, Anne Turner attending on behalf of Gareth Young, David Silk attending on behalf of Lindsay Whyte and Hitesh Mehta attending on behalf of Nick Joicey.</p> <p>He also welcomed Sarah Gaskell, Natalie Rhodes and Pauline Crellin, who were presenting papers at the meeting.</p> <p>The minutes of the Programme Board from 10th December were approved with just a minor typo amended in the final paragraph of page 6.</p> <p>2. SRO Update</p> <p>The Cabinet reshuffle was completed with a full return of the incumbent DWP Ministerial team.</p>	

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The Secretary of State has requested some options for speeding up Move to UC and would like more numbers in the pilot sample. The paper to be presented later on during the agenda on Move to UC will discuss this. The UC SRO emphasised that going faster will fundamentally change the nature of the pilot, and the plan would also have to change.

Programme Board members:

- a) The Chair stated that Programme Board members are conscious of these choppy waters, looked at some of this carefully last year, and would be happy to look at the conduct of the pilot again if necessary. He also warned against changing a plan that has been carefully assembled.

3. Programme Update

The UC Programme Director provided an update:

The overall status of the Programme remains Amber. The extension of the Programme to September 2024 to cope with migration volumes, was formally announced on the 3rd of February.

IR35 is continuing to dominate the time of senior digital colleagues, with two more discussions left. 22 contractors have left so far and more are expected to leave, which has resulted in some reprioritisation of Phase 8.

Digital Plus continues to roll out.

The 2nd Year of Help to Claim has been agreed with the Secretary of State.

Discussions are ongoing with the Treasury about the next draw down funding stage post March 2020, and how long it should last.

A number of NAO audits are now reaching the report stage.

Updated on Programme milestones:

- GDPR – remains Amber. Progress is being made and it is hoped it will become Green in March.
- Help to Claim (HtC) provision is Amber as there are still a number of steps to go through. The external review of HtC is Red as it is awaiting sign off from Ministers before procurement can begin. A revised date will be provided at the next Programme Board.
- Identity Verification – phase 1 is on track. Phase 2 is Amber as we still do not have a decision on Verify funding. If Verify stops in March, we will move back to verifying claimants face to face in Job Centres. In addition, around 1,000 people a day use Verify to sign in to their UC account, and they will need to recover their sign in details. Due to where we are at this stage, work is about to begin on the assumption that Verify will cease to be available.
- Move to UC has a number of Amber milestones due to resource issues. The next move to support the Partner and HMRC pilots require 3 feature teams, and currently only two exist, and these are not fully resourced themselves.

Risks – these remain the same and some mitigations have been updated.

Finance – This year the Programme forecast reduced by a further £4.5 million, mainly due to a £3.3m reduction in marketing strategy, and £1.2m in lower staffing and IT expenditure. Against the budget there is still a £26.6m overspend due to additional Operational funding for staff. This is expected to be offset by additional budget made available to support EU Exit, which will bring us to an underspend of £1.5m against budget.

Security – The VERY HIGH Risk relating to the vulnerability in VirtualBox has been reduced to a HIGH as this vulnerability has now been limited to only a small number of MacBooks.

Service Stability – After a small glitch in January, extra checks are now in place to prevent a recurrence.

Affordability – The team is going through the forecasting of reductions for next year and will have a revised picture of costs that is completed.

Programme Board members

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- The UC SRO confirmed that the Chief Executive of the Civil Service has been made aware of the urgent need to get an answer regarding future funding for Verify.
 - In regard to the delay in sign-off for the HiC external review, the Chair emphasised that as Citizens Advice 2nd year completes in March 2021, procurement for the third year needs to be completed in good time and requested that it be put on the critical path. The Policy Director, UC and Employment, volunteered the help of analysts to assist wherever necessary.
 - The Director General People and Capability suggested that a Plan B is needed with regards to Verify. The Acting Director General Digital confirmed that Cabinet Office colleagues have agreed what their proposal to the Chief Executive of the Civil Service is, but he has not yet signed off keeping Verify for the next 18-months. The Director, HMT confirmed that the Chief Executive of the Civil Service is speaking to the Treasury about this, but emphasised that HMT have not given any guarantees so far.
 - The UC SRO informed PB that UC statistics went out today which gives a sense of the case load journey over the past 18 months, and agreed to circulate the link to this information to PB members.
 - The Chair asked whether there were any lessons to be learned from the experience of dealing with the reported glitch in rebooting the UC system. The Acting Director General Digital confirmed that lessons were learned, but pointed out that the level of outages have been extremely low and that on average 99.5% of changes go in without any issues.
 - The Director General People and Capability stated that while current case work is increasing in complexity, recruitment is not being done at volume, so it is expected that agents will be reasonably stretched. However, costings are being done through the volumes to work out how much FTE is required to cope with current and future demand. The UC Programme Director noted that work has not yet been done to translate this into a unit cost. The Deputy Director Finance suggested that the

forecast could be included to provide a comparison of where we are and where the Business Case says we should be. The Chair requested an improved projection of unit cost per caseload at the next meeting and that it be included as an Annex to the papers.

Action – Circulate the link to UC statistics to Programme Board members – Neil Couling

3. Operational Update

The Area Director Operations provided an update:

Labour Market - The latest stats are strong and show the employment rate is at a record high of 76.3%.

Labour Market Indicators:

- New indicators are being developed to support labour market delivery:
 - Movement Into Work
 - Sustainment
 - Preventing worklessness
 - Earnings change
- Initial analysis of the movement into work measure shows significant variance at site and regional level.
- Data is being used to investigate site by site comparisons where the deprivation indices are similar to assess whether performance levels are at the level expected.
- Further analysis is required into the preventing worklessness indicator and the team is working to develop the appropriate intervention to activate customers whilst keeping the balance on In to Work. This will be assessed and monitored going forward to set expected levels of performance.

Payment Timeliness – Payment timeliness remains steady in January and stands at 90.3% in the first assessment period, up 5% on the same week last year, and is at 96.7% in subsequent assessment periods.

Advances – Improvements to the UC service delivered at the end of 2019 have reduced the risk of opportunistic and organized UC Advances Fraud. The requirement to attend a face to face appointment before requesting an advance, as well as better agent guidance and communication, to reduce the opportunity for wholly online journeys to be manipulated by organized gangs, has led to a decrease in the number of claims that request an advance but close before they reach the 1st assessment period.

2020/21 planning – Risk: Case Manager workloads increasing above available capacity:

- Productive hours have been reset at 4.5 hours a day.
- There was a downturn in Oct-Dec 2019 due to HRT recheck to-dos dropping by 50% and a slight decrease in journals received. There were also less automated calculation to-dos generated due to Christmas planning.
- Analysis is being worked through the digital cost model, ahead of resource planning for 20/21.

- Agent time is increasingly being consumed by Telephony. Calls per Case Manager averages 58.7 and time spent on Telephony is 19%.

Programme Board members:

- The Chair noted that the work on Labour Market Indicators provides a real insight into where we are and how we can do better.
- The UC SRO stated that less emphasis should be placed on payment timeliness, and noted that historically, payment timeliness tends to decline from late February through to Easter. The Area Director Operations confirmed that there is a plan to hold numbers as high as possible during this period.
- The Deputy Director, Infrastructure and Projects Authority queried how the rise in demand for telephony maps against the intent for Channel Shift. The Area Director Operations confirmed that Operations has a strategy looking at demand reduction to see what operational elements can help to reduce time spent on telephony. The UC SRO noted that Digital demand has increased more than the demand for telephony, but it is not clear from the data whether we are where we thought we would be, and the picture is as yet incomplete. It was agreed that this would be looked at in more detail at the next Programme Board.
- The Chair requested that all axis of graphs presented should be labelled appropriately to make it clear what they relate to.
- The Deputy Secretary for Work and Inclusion DFC Northern Ireland stated that he has always found the operational update paper good and has modelled the NISSA Operational paper on it. He asked how long it would be before the Labour Market Indicators start to mature and we would begin to have a real feel for what good is. The Area Director Operations stated that it is hoped this would be available in April.
- The Policy Director, UC and Employment stated that the graph detailing Integrated Call Volumes Vs Calls per Case Manager was very helpful, and that it would be good to have data on telephony showing changes and reductions in calls, and the issues causing this, for the discussion at the next Programme Board. She stressed her interest in knowing what is driving telephony demand as it doesn't appear to be money. She suggested that perhaps guidance and practice in jobcentres can be amended to help this. The Area Director Operations stated the intention to look at jobcentre / service centre teams and pick one to do some coaching. The aim is to try and coach down demand by coaching customers to be more confident using UC.
- The chair asked what is in place regarding a Coronavirus plan. The Director General People and Capability confirmed that the Department is following Department of Health protocols, with some members of staff currently on self-quarantine. The focus is on people knowing what process they need to follow. The Area Director Operations confirmed that there are teams in place to help people in quarantine. The Chair was glad to know that this is being thought about and stated the need to also know what contingency plans our suppliers have in place. The Acting Director General Digital undertook to find this out.

AP – Find out what contingency plans UC suppliers have in place to deal with the Coronavirus outbreak – Simon McKinnon

4a. Move to UC update

Sarah Gaskell provided an update:

Since the launch of the Move to UC pilot, the team has been steadily learning what works and where the challenges lie. An updated plan has been taken to Ministers to try and meet their requests.

The “who knows me” model has begun with the use of the Work Coach led approach which uses the existing relationships that DWP claimants have with their work coaches, and the learning from this process is being documented. The team have followed the same process as was used for UC rollout in Sutton in 2014, making things simple and adapting the journey to what is learned about claimants. Information gleaned so far has been taken to Ministers.

It is important that numbers are tracked on an ongoing basis, and that we avoid getting diverted by a focus on volume, as our approach and focus needs to be on understanding our learning.

Expansion – A package of alterations to the pilot has been proposed to Ministers in response to their request to increase pace:

- Accelerate the current Work Coach-led approach by bringing forward a second Jobcentre.
- Trial an alternative engagement approach in Harrogate.
- Continue work to co-design and trial a partner-led approach.
- Commence design activity for the HMRC-led approach.

Risks – the greatest risk to delivery is to maintain fully resourced teams with all the skills necessary represented in each team. Subject to sufficient mitigation of the risks, the plan outlined balances the imperative to learn, iterate design and create credible evidence for evaluation, alongside providing confidence in scale and pace.

The team will return to Programme Board in April with a further update and a proposal for planning the move out of the pilot phase and into the next stage of the Move to UC approach.

Programme Board members:

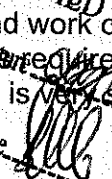

- a) The Chair noted that the purpose of the Move to UC pilot is to learn how to safely move claimants from legacy benefits onto UC, without increasing vulnerability or causing a break in income. He queried whether there really would not be a break in income as there is a 5 week wait when a claim is made for UC. In addition, there is a difference in payment regularity, with claimants receiving payment fortnightly on legacy benefits, but monthly on UC. This could cause difficulties for people without savings. The UC SRO stated that the plan in the pilot is to ensure there is no break in entitlement so that people are more likely to engage, and asked that, for more accuracy, the paper be amended to show that safely moving claimants means minimising the impact of changing to a monthly payment. The Chair asked whether the point that moving to UC will result in a break in income for a certain number of weeks should also be added, as claimants who receive two-weeks' of entitlement

as a run-on, will then have three weeks to wait for their UC payment, which is one week more than if they were waiting for their legacy benefit payment. The Chief Executive LB of Hillingdon stated that this issue will be a factor in the success of the pilot as for real people such a gap in finances is a real problem. She noted that advances do not always help and there are examples of people given one showing up at Local Boroughs for help after having spent the money. She emphasised the importance of recognising this and supporting claimants to fully understand the gap before they embark on loans. The Policy Director, UC and Employment stated that this is the right issue to worry about as people coming brand new to UC often come after a delay and with debt, and giving them an advance can exacerbate their debt. She suggested that the timescales over which advances are paid back be reviewed.

- b) The Chair queried whether the combination of things being done to smooth the journey for people moving to UC from legacy helps them enough. The UC SRO stated that it is a tricky transition for some people but noted that the run on is effectively replicating what was done when claimants were moved from one week to fortnightly payments, which worked then. The Chair emphasised that we cannot have an obscure definition of safety.
- c) The Director General HMRC noted that many customers in transition will come from Tax Credits (TC) and have TC debt, and wondered to what extent the process has been modelled regarding what it might do to TC customers and the proportion of TC customers it will impact on. The UC SRO said he was happy to take more data and that DWP data shows about 30% have TC debt to repay. We now need to learn what happens when they come over, and understand the income experience of customers once debt comes over to UC. The Chair thanked the Director General HMRC for reminding PB of the additional financial burden on TC customers moving to UC.
- d) The Director General HMRC confirmed that her Department is very happy to work in partnership on the HMRC-led approach, but there is still no design as yet for them to join into. HMRC would also like the option to say yes or no to opt in to whatever is designed, and need to be confident that it is something they can deliver. The UC SRO stated that he has been very clear with Ministers that DWP and HMRC are working well together but that HMRC have the option to decline something if they do not like the plan.
- e) The UC SRO and the Deputy Director, Infrastructure and Projects Authority, both emphasised that although policy affects delivery of the Programme, the Board should not stray into this area.
- f) The Deputy Director, Infrastructure and Projects Authority noted that the expectation of reaching 1,000 claimants engaged in the Move process by June seems to rely on alternative engagement and asked on what it is based. Sarah Gaskell confirmed that the data which informs it is based partly on the number of claimants attached to Harrogate and on assumptions on how we will engage with them. She further explained that the rate of engagement is based on people we have engaged with and not necessarily on whether they have moved to UC. The UC Programme Director emphasised that the pilot is being done to get the right learning, and that at the moment things are based on assumptions. He worried that the focus will end up on measuring stats and numbers rather than on learning.
- g) The Policy Director, UC and Employment stated that after the learning comes the scaling, and that scalability is going to be crucial once we move to the next stage,

so it is important to have conversations on the pros and cons, and things to be considered as we come out of this phase.

- h) The Deputy Secretary for Work and Inclusion DFC Northern Ireland stated that the issue of Tax Credit debt is worrying as there is no certainty on how to manage financial affairs. He emphasised the need to understand this better as if we get it wrong it could endanger UC.
- i) The Director General People and Capability warned that there are so many unknowns and there is a risk in presenting the plan as it has been on the chart in the paper as it looks like what is learnt from the work coach led approach can be built on and scaled in the other approaches. However, they are three separate approaches and there will be slow learning on all of them. The UC SRO confirmed that he will explain this and the need for a controlled approach, in his next discussion with the Secretary of State. The Director General People and Capability asked whether there is a place where Programme Board can help the dialogue so that it is clear that there are three separate sets of learning and they may each have separate sets of scaling criteria. The UC SRO stated that the key thing about this trial is that it is about learning and emphasised the need to allow the team enough space to do that and work out how Move to UC is built to scale. He further explained that automation is required to build volume and this takes time, which is why the growth plan for UC is very slow for 2021.

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4b. Move to UC User Research Findings

Natalie Rhodes provided an update:

The Move to UC pilot is providing an understanding of claimant barriers to moving. There are some common barriers which fall into 3 groups – Mental Health, Support Needs, and Practical Issues.

Several case studies relating to tackling claimant barriers have been done which involved:

- Tackling claimant worries and misconceptions early in the move journey. It has been learnt that telling claimants they will be discussing UC at their next meeting caused worry and anxiety. This 'Plant the seed' conversation has now been removed from the pilot journey. This allows work coaches to have a more detailed discussion at the initial conversation with claimants, and to immediately tackle misconceptions and worries claimants have.
- Providing reassurance and removing issues that stop people claiming. A calendar was developed to reassure people about payment cycles. This helps claimants understand how payment cycles work on UC.
- Reassurance about using the UC account online. Work coaches direct claimants to 'learn My Way' to help beginners develop digital skills and to view a safe account on which they can practice and get reassurance, before making their claim.

The team have a compliance scale from early discovery work, based on Move to UC personas and focus on how to move claimants up the scale and eventually to move over to UC, by understanding the barriers and changing the service to help people move. The intention is to scale up the research as numbers increase, in order to codify the learning.

Programme Board members:

- a) The UC SRO noted that originally UC was being designed for use on a smartphone but claimants have said they can't use a phone to complete such an important form and prefer to use a computer, so our assumptions are being changed by having this test pilot.
- b) The Acting Director General Digital asked how much of the learning from this research relates to any other person coming onto UC. Natalie Rhodes confirmed that the calendar for instance, is something that could be used outside the Move to UC journey.
- c) The Area Director Operations asked what is being done about customers who refuse to engage. Natalie Rhodes responded that the team has started to think about what it can do to try and indicate the seriousness and importance of moving.
- d) The Deputy Director Finance noted that UC is expected to land by September 2024, and asked when the three cohorts are expected to be up and running. The UC SRO reminded the Board that the UC pilot launched in September 2014 and was rolled out nationally by September 2018. This is a live process that has worked before, and the aim is to use this tried and trusted method again. He emphasised that there is enough time to learn. We will need our partners, and some of our hypothesis will not work so we will find new ways to develop and build features to support this work. He reiterated that he is confident on a 2024 date.

Decision: UC Programme Board members noted the learning from Harrogate and the plans to expand the pilot. PB agreed to provide its continued support and to champion the approach to the pilot – in particular to retain the focus on learning and iterative design.

5. £10 million Transition Fund

Pauline Crellin provided an update:

The £10m fund was announced by the Secretary of State in November 2019, shortly before purdah. The aim is to provide money to partner organisations at grass roots level to help harder to reach groups and build on the work being done with the Prime Minister's Implementation Unit.

Since the end of purdah detailed discussions have been held with new stakeholders. There is a great deal of appetite from Job Centre colleagues to be able to tap into grass roots organisations to help the demographic they deal with.

Our advice to Ministers is to initially target the fund at particular vulnerable groups where there is less or limited provision, including care leavers, refugees and prisoners.

A delivery mechanism has not yet been agreed with Ministers, however the money will only be available for a year and there is no ongoing funding commitment. The hope is to use the Flexible Support Fund as it will allow funding to be put in place and moving for April 2020.

Although Help to Claim and the proposed Transition Fund are separate and have different aims and objectives, the aim is to ensure alignment between the evaluation of the two

projects. Running both projects in parallel and working with small to medium organisations may help to build capacity in the advice and voluntary sector and provide further insight about the support needs of vulnerable groups in UC.

Programme Board members:

- a) The Chair noted that aligning the Transition Fund with the Citizens Advice run HtC feels like an attractive option, however any idea of putting the CA grant fund together with the transition Fund complicates matters as it will take a lot of time to sort out and may negatively impact the CA re-procurement.
- b) The Chair liked the concept of keeping the delivery mechanism small, as giving funding to many small organisations helps to spread the risk; if one goes wrong, it will not impact the others.
- c) The Deputy Director of Finance noted that the purpose of the fund is to help customers getting onto UC and asked whether the fund lines up with other Programmes. Pauline Crellin responded that it is about helping support UC claimants to move into work, as legislation dictates that we can only give people money under this vires, however there is some flexibility within that.

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6. Hard Facts

- a) The availability of resource to fully staff developmental teams can be endangered by any strategic policies. IR35 departures are a potential hazard to Digital resource, which in turn impacts UC delivery.
- b) We need to maintain the new strategic focus on Fraud, Error & Debt
- c) We need to ensure we do not overwhelm operations with telephony.

Sir Robert Walmsley informed the Board that this meeting would be his last one and said he had extremely enjoyed being a part of UC Programme journey. He stated that the Programme is well led, with enthusiastic staff, and that of the many Departments he has worked in, he has enjoyed his time at DWP the best. The UC SRO and PB members thanked Sir Robert for the fantastic job he has done as Chair of the UC PB over the past 7 years.

Date of next meeting Tuesday 21st April 15.00-17.00 Caxton House Room 6.24

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