

TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

26 March 2013

Report of the Management Team

Part 1- Public

Executive Non Key Decisions

1 UNIVERSAL CREDIT – LOCAL SUPPORT SERVICES FRAMEWORK

Members are advised of a document received in respect of the delivery of Universal Credit, and are asked to endorse a response sent in consultation with the Leader.

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Appended to this report at **[Annex 1]** is a document recently received from Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform, regarding a proposed Local Support Services Framework.
- 1.1.2 The Framework sets out principles for working collaboratively in respect of the delivery of the welfare reform agenda.
- 1.1.3 Comments are invited by 15 March. In view of the tight deadline ahead of the meeting of Cabinet, a brief response was agreed with the Leader. That response is attached at **[Annex 2]**.

1.2 The proposed Framework

- 1.2.1 Members in the past have expressed concerns about the assumptions that were initially made about how claimants would make application for Universal Credit – “digital by default” was the DWP’s assumed method. Local authorities, including Tonbridge & Malling, have, therefore, lobbied Government to press the case that not all claimants will be in a position to ‘function’ digitally, and will need help and guidance to make claims.
- 1.2.2 Government has listened to these concerns and we have been awaiting details of how local authorities are to be involved in the process (and what funding is available).
- 1.2.3 This Framework sets out the ‘aspiration’ for partnership working across the public and voluntary sector, but does not give any detail as to how this might be funded.

Clearly this is a vital issue and must be addressed before any detailed partnership arrangements can be formulated.

- 1.2.4 As Members will note, the response (Annex 2) we have sent back to Lord Freud welcomes the principles of providing adequate and appropriate support channels for those individuals who have the need to apply for Universal Credit. However, this is caveated by the need to understand how both public sector bodies and the voluntary sector are to be grant funded to enable them to rise to the challenge.

1.3 Legal Implications

- 1.3.1 None

1.4 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

- 1.4.1 As set out in the report, the funding arrangements are critical in deciding how this can be progressed.

1.5 Risk Assessment

- 1.5.1 Members have expressed the wish and the need to support residents as they move away from Housing Benefit (administered by TMBC) and onto Universal Credit (administered by DWP). We all, however, understand that the absolute amount of support we can give is dependent upon the funding we receive from Government. There is, therefore, the risk that the level of support we can provide does not meet the demand for assistance.

1.6 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.6.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

1.7 Policy Considerations

- 1.7.1 Communications; Customer Contact; Equalities/Diversity; Community

1.8 Recommendations

- 1.8.1 Members are **RECOMMENDED** to endorse the response sent to Lord Freud in respect of the proposed Local Support Services Framework

Background papers:

contact: Sharon Shelton

Nil

Julie Beilby
Chief Executive

Sharon Shelton
Director of Finance & Transformation

Screening for equality impacts:		
Question	Answer	Explanation of impacts
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	This is a response to a 'consultation' from DWP
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	N/A	This is a response to a 'consultation' from DWP
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.