

**BUSINESS SUPPORT  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
2 FEBRUARY 2016  
6 MONTH REVIEW OF WELFARE REFORM TASK GROUP  
REVIEW**

Report from: Phil Watts, Chief Finance Officer

Authors: Jon Poulson, Revenues and Benefits Contract  
Manager  
Marc Blowers Head of Housing Management

**Summary**

This report provides Members with the third bi-annual update on progress made with the Committee's recommendations from the Welfare Reform in-depth review, which were agreed by the Cabinet on 2 September 2014.

**1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 The Welfare Reforms are seen as relevant to a number of council policy documents, such as the Council Plan 2013/16 and Sustainable Community Strategy 2010/26, and are particularly relevant to the council's core values and strategic priorities that underpin all of the council's work and its delivery of services to the people of Medway.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 In 2011 Medway Council adopted a systematic approach to identifying and prioritising work topics for in-depth review, by time limited Task Groups. This evaluated topics in line with potential impact, corporate priority, potential outcomes and timeliness.
- 2.2 Following consideration of a number of topics for 2013/14 the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2013 selected 'Impact of Welfare Reforms'. In particular, Members expressed an interest in reviewing the impact of Central Government's plans to radically reform the welfare benefits system on the council and residents from April 2013.
- 2.3 The review document was presented to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 August 2014. It was subsequently presented and approved at Cabinet on 2 September 2014.

- 2.4 A copy of the review document can be viewed using the following link:  
<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=24708>.
- 2.5 The list of actions agreed by Cabinet on 2 September 2014, along with a commentary to update the committee on progress against each action, is attached at *Appendix 1*.
- 2.6 A six monthly update on progress was last presented at the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 August 2015.

### **3. Update**

#### **3.1 Universal Credit (UC)**

- 3.1.1 Universal Credit continues to be introduced in stages and whether someone claims depends on where they live and their personal circumstances. It was rolled out to Chatham Job Centre for single job seekers from October 2015. The aim is for Universal credit for all single job seekers nationally to be complete by early spring 2016.
- 3.1.2 Roll out for claimants with a partner or with children has started in the North of England with a similar roll out pattern across jobcentres as expected, as was experienced for single claimants. As yet no date has been provided as to when this will occur in Medway.

#### **3.2 Autumn Statement – November 2015**

- 3.2.1 In the Autumn Statement the Government announced the complete abolition of proposals to reduce working tax credits which had previously been reported to members as one of the key changes within the reforms. Currently with effect from April 2016 the new Welfare Reform changes now consist of:

- Personal allowance increased to £11,000;
- Higher rate tax threshold increased to £43,000;
- National Living wage set at £7.20 per hour;
- Social Sector rents reduced by 1% per year for four years;
- Work allowances lowered or eliminated under UC;
- JSA, ESA Work-Related Activity Group and Income Support rates frozen for four years;
- Child Benefit rates frozen for four years;
- Housing Benefit applicable amounts and LHA rates frozen for four years;
- Family Premium eliminated from Housing Benefit will be abolished for new claims and new births from 1 May 2016;
- Increased support for child care costs for people on UC from 2016;
- Termination of unemployment benefits for migrants with no prospect of employment;
- Greater incentives for Local Authorities to reduce housing benefit fraud and error;
- Benefit cap set at £23,000 in London and £20,000 elsewhere. If affected by the reduction in the benefit cap, housing benefit will be reduced after April 2016. When this happens will depend on resident location and as yet no schedule has been released;
- Backdating of housing benefit will be reduced so that new claims from working age claimants will be backdated for a maximum of four weeks;

### 3.2.2 With effect from April 2017:

- Personal allowance increased to £11,200;
- Higher rate tax threshold increased to £43,600;
- Family element, first child premium and child elements after third and subsequent children eliminated for new births or claims on UC;
- 18 to 21 year olds to lose automatic entitlement to housing support under UC;
- New ESA Work-Related Activity Group claimants to receive the same rate as JSA recipients;
- 18 to 21 year olds on UC to receive intensive support at the start of their claim and are expected to earn or learn after six months;
- Social tenants on incomes above £40,000 in London or £30,000 elsewhere to pay market rents;

### 3.2.3 With effect from September 2017:

- Free childcare entitlement doubled from 15 to 30 hours for parents of three and four year olds;

### 3.2.4 With effect from April 2018:

- Support for Mortgage Interest to become a loan;

### 3.2.5 With effect from April 2020:

- Personal allowance increased to £12,500;
- Higher rate tax threshold increased to £50,000;
- National Living Wage set at £9 per hour;

## 3.3 Council Tax Reduction Scheme

3.3.1 Following a robust 12 week consultation process, involving 5,560 questionnaires and seeking to involve ALL existing claimants, Cabinet on 15 December 2015 recommended an amended Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) to council for adoption on 21 January 2016, reducing the maximum discount from 75% to 65% and enhancing the extended payments period from four to eight weeks. Overall 53% of respondents voted to “continue to pass on the government cuts to all those of working age who are entitled to a council tax reduction”

## 4. **Universal Credit Medway - DWP Partnership Agreement**

4.1 In preparation for the introduction of Universal Credit for single job seekers across Medway, a Delivery Partnership Agreement was signed with the DWP for the period of 12 October 2015 to 31 March 2016 with the aim of delivering a joined up and coherent journey between services for new UC claimants. Key components of the agreement are for the council to provide budgeting support to prepare and support claimants for the financial changes Universal Credit brings. Specifically, these include the single household payment, the Universal Credit monthly payment and housing costs paid directly to the claimant and for the council to provide assistance with complex housing cost claims.

4.2 Additionally, the council has committed to supporting claimants to get online to claim Universal Credit. The DWP will be first point of contact for claimants but those simply wanting to get online to claim can take advantage of the use of free computers at our Community Hubs, Libraries and at Kingsley House, where trained staff are also on hand to provide help if required. In addition to this, the library service also provides computer skills training in partnership with UK Online and Medway Adult & Community Learning, for those wanting to enhance and gain confidence in their general use of computers.

4.3 Over the period of 12 October 2015 until 30 November 2015, 245 Universal Credit claims have been received by DWP from single person claimants across Medway. 54 of those never pursued the claim. 60 plus customers are now working, although we cannot officially claim those results until the HMRC provides an information report which will be 3 months in arrears.

- So far Universal Credit has been considered to be positive according to the Department of Works and Pensions Officer, with claimants welcoming the flexibility of hours. Some claimants who have claimed JSA previously have taken time to adjust to the increase of expected job search activity in return for benefits but there are no major concerns as of yet.
- Personal budgeting has been taken up by 4 claimants and 2 alternative payment arrangements (e.g. rent direct to landlord) have been set up for 2 vulnerable claimants.
- As part of the preparations and a review of learning from other social housing landlords who have already seen Universal Credit introduced in their areas, the council as a stock retained Housing Authority is proposing to move towards a 52 week rent payment cycle from April 2016. Rent is currently charged across a 52 week cycle but paid across 50 weeks. There are currently 2 non payment weeks at Christmas traditionally known as "rent free". The move towards a 52 week rent payment cycle will ensure that the payment weeks fit more comfortably within the 12 monthly payment cycles where tenants will receive their benefit payments. This is subject to full council approval on 25 February 2016.

## **5. Staff training and awareness**

5.1 Prior to the launch of Universal Credit, wide ranging staff briefings and Member briefings took place, with the DWP providing over 150 staff from across the council with an overview of the principles of Universal Credit, including details of the customer journey and ways in which this new benefit may impact Medway residents. These sessions lasted two hours. Additionally CC, Housing and other staff from across the council provided welfare advice as part of their remit e.g. Welfare Benefits advisors and Adult Social Care Financial Assessment Officers, received a full day in depth Universal Credit specialist training.

## **6. Work of Corporate Steering Board and Sub Groups**

6.1 The Officer Board continues to meet regularly and it was recognised that a subgroup focused on Communication and ICT technology was required. Arising from this board it was also agreed for a number of subgroups tasked with looking at key Universal Credit themes. These are:

- Supporting Vulnerable Customers
- Communication and ICT technology.
- Personal Budgeting and Debt Advice

## 6.2 Vulnerable Customers Work Stream

6.2.1 The main focus of the group concerned with vulnerable customers focuses around those most likely to be impacted by the changes. One immediate challenge has been the lack of data or information, especially around those whose income is unknown by the Local Authority and may be affected by the new benefit cap. Subsequent to this group meeting, DWP have advised it is their intention (in recognition of this lack of data) to provide the information to relevant Local Authorities. This is a key piece of information so that the group may then develop a series of actions to promote the forthcoming benefit changes and to potentially prepare residents for money management and debt advice.

## 6.3 Communications and ICT Technology Work Stream

6.3.1 The Communications and ICT group will work to ensure that customers and key stakeholders are aware of the changes taking place as a result of welfare reform. Communications to customers and stakeholders has already taken place to generate awareness of Universal Credit through Medway Matters and developing webpages on Medway.gov. The group will deliver a communications strategy to support the Welfare Reform agenda. The council is currently going through digital transformation programme and it is anticipated that the digital requirements of welfare reform agenda will be decided by the wider group and fed into this subgroup.

## 6.4 Debt Advice Work Stream

6.4.1 The council offers a range of personal budgeting and debt advice support, primarily initial contact help and advice followed by signposting to generally more in-depth support provided by various third parties, some of which is supported by the council. The group is currently mapping these various pathways to personal budgeting and debt advice to ensure consistency of response and outcomes and to review the opportunity to consolidate internal and funded third party support to provide greater coherence and value for money. The group has further taken ownership of embedding Taktix across the council. This is a directory of support and advice provided by the public and voluntary sector across Medway and Kent, an invaluable aid to signposting.

## 6.5 Joint Kent Chiefs Welfare Reform Task and Finish Group

6.5.1 A new reinvigorated cross county task group has been formed and Medway is represented upon this. The first meeting took place on 8 December 2015 attended by a range of key stakeholders including Housing Associations, Local Authorities, DWP and KCC themselves.

6.5.2 The meeting reviewed progress across Kent in terms of implementation of Welfare Reform changes, impact on organisations and customers and to assess recently announced changes in the autumn statement and draft Housing and Planning bill 2015.

### 6.5.3 Key issues that were discussed are:

- Everyone is at different phases and stages;
- Confirmed Universal Credit is not to be fully rolled out until 2017 in Medway;
- The roll out of digital online applications for residents (for benefits at job centres in Kent) is likely to follow the same programme as the Universal Credit roll out. These will initially be in tranches of five in May next year then a further five (nationally) in late summer, then cascade approach to full roll out not expected until 2021.
- There is concern about the benefit cap and unknown numbers and it is estimated that the £20K cap is likely to affect ten times more people than previously anticipated. DWP have agreed to obtain anticipated numbers of people affected;
- It was suggested by KCC teams that there are some positive trends, with less children living in poverty and less use of food banks;
- Last tranche of Kent Local Authorities to use Universal Credit to be rolled out on 25 January 2016 for single persons;

### 6.5.4 Members of the meeting were advised that across Kent there were currently 2350 verified Universal Credit claims.

- 28 Alternative Payment Arrangements, which were for both arrears and some fortnightly payment requests;
- 70 people needed personal budgeting support;

## 7. Local Welfare Provision

7.1 The specific grant that had been made available to local authorities in the short term (following abolition of the Discretionary Social Fund Scheme from April 2013) has in itself now ceased and since April 2015, Local Authorities have been expected to fund any discretionary welfare provision from the Revenue Support Grant.

## 8. Housing HRA Services

8.1 As a stock retained authority the income to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is ring fenced and all income generated from rent and service charges is restricted for use, to manage this part of the council.

8.2 The impact of the Welfare Reform changes is and will continue to directly impact on a high percentage of our tenants and leaseholders.

8.3 Since April 2013, working age tenants who are in receipt of housing benefit and under occupy their home have had their benefit reduced by 14% if they under occupy by 1 room or 25% if they under occupy by two or more bedrooms. As at 14 December 2015, 218 tenants were affected by these changes and the collective arrears of these tenants have increased around £10,000 since April 2015.

8.4 With effect from April 2016 (for the next four years) Medway Council and all social landlords will be required to reduce their rents by 1%. This will have a detrimental effect on the HRA Business Plan and the council is required to ensure that the HRA balance remains in credit. Therefore services and income

will be regularly reviewed to ensure services are delivered in the most efficient way whilst ensuring the Business Plan can be sustained.

- 8.5 As of April 2017 the Government proposes to introduce a new scheme called “Pay to Stay” whereby tenants earning more than £30,000 per annum will be required to pay market rent as opposed to Social Housing Rent. A publicity campaign focused on those residents currently not in receipt of any Housing Benefit will commence summer 2016, to raise awareness of this and to ensure appropriate support is in place in relation to money and debt advice.

## 9. Risk Management

(See chart below)

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Forecast cost of CTRS falls short of estimate	Claimants may have reduced benefits ‘unnecessarily’	Use of data modelling tools and data analysis	Likelihood D (Low) Impact 3 (Marginal)
Forecast cost of CTRS excessive	Cost of scheme exceeds budgeted amount	Use of data modelling tools and data analysis	Likelihood D (Low) Impact 2 (Critical)
Effect of CTRS on Council Tax collection	Increasing payment requirement on low income council tax payers could lead to an increase in arrears, and impact on collection of other council income such as housing rents	Quick and efficient recovery processes	Likelihood B (High) Impact 2 (Critical)

### 9.1 Organisational / Financial Risks

- 9.1.1 The HRA Business Plan needs to be sustainable and kept in surplus. Changes brought about by Welfare Reform mean less income to the HRA over the next four years of approximately £6.7 million.

### 9.2 Impact on Vulnerable Residents

- 9.2.1 The Welfare Reform agenda includes the three major areas of triage, digital inclusion and financial inclusion and reaches into most areas of the council. It is vital therefore that there is a co-ordinated approach between services and projects to ensure a smooth and efficient transition.

10. **Financial and legal implications**

10.1 There are no financial or legal implications arising directly from this report.

11. **Recommendations**

11.1 The Committee is recommended to note the progress made against the actions from the review.

**Lead officer contact**

Jon Poulson, Revenues and Benefits Contract Manager

Tel: (01634) 333700

Email: [jon.poulson@medway.gov.uk](mailto:jon.poulson@medway.gov.uk)

Marc Blowers, Head of Housing Management

Tel: (01634) 334382

Email: [marc.blowers@medway.gov.uk](mailto:marc.blowers@medway.gov.uk)

**Background papers:**

**Cabinet Report – Welfare Reform Task Group**

<http://democracy.medway.gov.uk/mgconvert2pdf.aspx?id=24708>.

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - Update on actions agreed by Cabinet in September 2014



	DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
145/2014	<p>The Cabinet agreed that the Welfare Reform Officers Working Group continues to lead the Medway response to Welfare Reform and to work to develop communication between the Council and other agencies, with the objective of providing the customer with the single journey through a coordinated response. This should include:</p> <p>(a) a Stakeholder event explaining the Welfare Reforms and the schemes in operation in Medway. This event should enable organisations to showcase their response to the reforms;</p> <p>(b) the development of a booklet (in print and online) for all affected residents, signposting the various organisations providing support.</p>	Welfare Reform Officers Working Group	<p>03/02/15 Originally scheduled for December / January the date has been put back to give more time to identify all the relevant organisations for whom it would be relevant to attend. A live date for Universal Credit was also expected by now which would enable a more informed discussion.</p> <p><b>13/08/15 ONGOING</b> Event to be held nearer launch of Universal Credit in Medway</p> <p>03/02/15 The booklet is scheduled to follow the Stakeholder Event. In the meantime, however, there will be a build-up of information relating to Universal Credit in Medway Matters from the February 2015 until go-live or later if necessary. In addition a draft communications plan has been produced for approval at the next Officers Group meeting</p> <p><b>13/08/15 ONGOING</b> Database of partner support organisations now established. Given the number of organisations, the Officers' Working Group believe that a printed publication may be out of date as soon as it is produced and would prefer to produce an online version It has been agreed that the Stakeholder event not take place at the current time as many of the key partners attend the Corporate Officer Board meeting. This will be reviewed at regular interviews by the Board as the full transition to all the</p>

DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
(c) A briefing for all Members on the Welfare Reforms.		<p>Welfare Reform changes are implemented.</p> <p><b>3/12/2015</b> It has been agreed that the main source of information in regards to Welfare reform will be on line fitting in with the Councils corporate Digital Transformation Programme. A revised leaflet within the Housing Services Team of relevant organisations where residents may seek support has been revised and placed on the website. Staff have been given access to the corporate database "Tactix" an online directory for staff of key partner organisations who can assist when dealing with resident enquiries. Medway Matters and Housing Matters will be used to keep residents updated on Welfare Reforms changes and details of contact organisations and useful telephone numbers.</p> <p><b>03/02/2015</b> Briefing held on 10 December with presentations from both Medway Council and DWP officers. Copies of the slides are at Appendix A.</p> <p><b>13/08/15 ONGOING</b> Given the welfare reforms announced in the summer budget and the influx of new councillors following the election the Working Group is arranging a further briefing for members in September.</p> <p><b>3/12/2015 – COMPLETED</b> – this was held on 30 September 2015.</p>
<p>The Cabinet agreed that the Welfare Reform Officers Working Group undertakes further work to improve communication channels for potentially vulnerable claimants of discretionary payments, who may find themselves excluded. This should incorporate:</p> <p>(a) any positive learning from existing cross agency partnerships, such as Street</p>	Welfare Reform Officers Working Group	<p>03/02/2015 DWP representation on the Officers Group includes a member of the Street Weeks team whilst other members maintain contact with the Troubled Families Team. A further two DWP representatives are dedicated to keeping up to date with all developments within the national pilot schemes.</p> <p>03/02/2015 There are no obvious links between the Council's current council tax systems and other corporate systems. However, the future of the council tax document management system and the possibility of migrating to the corporate system is an on-going exercise within in finance &amp; ICT.</p>

DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
<p>Weeks and Troubled Families;</p> <p>(b) a review of Council systems, with a view to highlighting vulnerable claimants, especially where there may be safeguarding issues, and the potential need for 'personal intervention' in the debt recovery process;</p> <p>(c) undertaking a Diversity Impact Assessment to understand the cumulative impact of the Welfare Reforms including the impact on groups with protected characteristics and to identify the necessary actions to take forward.</p>		<p>03/02/2015 Officers have been unable as yet to identify a means of doing this which will guarantee meaningful answers. Discussion with a private sector company identified a service which would extract all the Council' housing benefit data and show the impact across equality groups. The service cost £11,500 and even then would only include housing benefit recipients and thus not all those affected by Welfare Reform.</p> <p>Further research identified a letter written by the Minister for Welfare Reform to the Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee in which he confirms that Government is unable to break down the results to smaller sub groups of the population. (see appendix B).</p> <p>However, officers acknowledge that this is an important issue to address despite the impediments. Accordingly a small group of 'council experts' is to look again at this issue and attempt to produce a more meaningful answer outside the constraints of a formal DIA exercise.</p> <p><b>13/08/2015 ONGOING</b> Officers have completed a Mosaic profile of CTRS recipients. Initial results show an over representation in the group considered to be a municipal challenge (hard to help) with 4 in 5 CTR claimants within this group being of working age and a higher than average number being single. A total of 2,143 households in Medway fall into this category while around 55% are in receipt of CTR alone. The majority of municipal challenge CTR claimants are within three wards; River, Strood South and Chatham Central and although there is little variation in gender they are more likely to be from diverse backgrounds with a lower than average number from an English background.</p> <p><b>12/01/2016 ONGOING</b> A revised DIA has been completed in the light of proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Potential for adverse impact in respect of age, disability and race was identified. However, the council tax discretionary relief is available to claimants across all groups and can therefore be seen as a mitigating factor.</p>

DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
147/2014	Welfare Reform Officers Working Group	<p>03/02/2015 A trial was undertaken in September where 605 benefit cases who were still paying their 2013/14 council tax and now had liability orders granted against them for the 2014/15 council tax were sent 'need to sleep leaflets' from the national Stepchange campaign. Where the debtor made contact with the recovery team and a suitable arrangement could not be made attempts were made to 'warm transfer'. An issue has been identified in so far as any call transferred from the Council to the Stepchange Freephone number will still result in call charges as the line from the debtor to the Council remains open.</p> <p>11 clients contacted Stepchange in October, and the Stepchange recommendations were as follows:</p> <p>Bankruptcy x 1</p> <p>Debt Relief Order x 3</p> <p>Debt Management Plan x 2</p> <p>Income maximisation x 3</p> <p>No debts x 2</p> <p>A second tranche of letters were sent to a further 463 cases in the middle of November and a request made to Stepchange for updated statistics to be provided.</p> <p>Stepchange to provide training to council tax recovery staff, bailiff representatives and some members of the Officers Group on 28 January 2015 (10.30 to 12.00) and (14:00 to 15:30) on debt collection techniques, spotting vulnerability and the services Stepchange can provide.</p> <p>A second trial is on-going at Riverside 1 where The Money Advice Service have undertaken surgeries by appointment. Pre-booking turned out to be challenging and more success was obtained with a "come over and have a chat" approach during periods where no appointments had been held.</p> <p>Whilst these trials are of use to those having money difficulty, it is also recognised by the Group that budgeting advice at an early stage can avoid</p>

DECISIONS		ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT																								
			<p>debt becoming an issue in the first place and will be actively seeking to identify and progress such schemes.</p> <p><b>13/08/2015</b> Total referrals are only updated on an annual basis and as such the following table is a little dated but does show an increasing trend.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Post Code</th> <th>No. of referrals 2013</th> <th>No. of referrals 2014</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>ME1</td> <td>94</td> <td>118</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ME2</td> <td>144</td> <td>152</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ME3</td> <td>98</td> <td>90</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ME4</td> <td>135</td> <td>143</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ME5</td> <td>186</td> <td>198</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ME7</td> <td>181</td> <td>229</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ME8</td> <td>130</td> <td>154</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>In 2014, 21 cases stated they had been referred by Medway Council. By the end of June 2015, an additional 24 cases said they had been so referred.</p> <p><b>3/12/2015</b> Process mapping completed of key front line services to understand the sign posting routes for debt advice. Further work underway to understand corporately the various services who provide directly or sign post residents to debt advice services/organisations. This is likely to inform a decision to a corporate tender approach for debt services for all residents.</p>	Post Code	No. of referrals 2013	No. of referrals 2014	ME1	94	118	ME2	144	152	ME3	98	90	ME4	135	143	ME5	186	198	ME7	181	229	ME8	130	154
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148/2014	The Cabinet agreed that the Welfare Reform Officers Working Group continue until after the introduction of Universal Credit and that the Corporate Management Team reviews its membership, with a view to ensuring appropriate	Welfare Reform Officers Working Group	<p>03/02/2015 The Officers Group continues to operate on a monthly basis.</p> <p>Corporate Management Team has appointed the Assistant Director Housing and Regeneration as the new chair for the group.</p> <p><b>13/08/2015</b> 'Task and finish' groups have been established for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ICT/Digital inclusion: As well as looking at UC requirements for</li> </ul>																								

DECISIONS		ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
	representation at the relevant time and enhancing its collaborative work with partners.		<p>customers the group will also cover the proposed citizens portal, to be used initially for Care Act issues, but in due course can be used to communicate with customers regarding Welfare Reform in general</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training: This group will identify and organise the various levels of training needs for the authority and its partners</li> <li>• Vulnerable customers and support. Work will be focused around vulnerability and the need to identify who the vulnerable customers are, raise awareness and establish the impacts for them</li> </ul> <p>The purpose of the task and finish groups is to ensure progression and delivery of the UC transition with joined up working and avoiding crossover of work</p> <p><b>3/12/15</b> This is on going with relevant and appropriate Partners and Senior Officers being invited to the board as required on ad hoc basis to discuss specific work streams as well as having permanent Officer and Partner base.</p>
149/2014	The Cabinet agreed that the Welfare Reform Officers Working Group ensures that it continues to track and respond to the emerging requirements of Universal Credit and Welfare Reforms, reporting on progress to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee every 6 months.	Welfare Reform Officers Working Group	<p><b>03/02/2015</b> As per this report.</p> <p><b>13/08/2015</b> As per this report.</p> <p><b>3/12/2015</b> As per this report.</p>
150/2014	The Cabinet agreed that the Council write to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and Secretary of State for Communities and Local	Mick Hayward	<b>03/02/1015 COMPLETED</b> Letters sent 16 October 2014, reply received 8 December and circulated to Task Group members 2014

DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
<p>Government, copying in the Chairman of the Local Government Association, highlighting the:</p> <p>(a) recognised delays and impact of the assessment phases of Employment and Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payment processes;</p> <p>(b) concerns expressed during the evidence sessions as to direct payments;</p> <p>(c) benefits of a localised Local Welfare Assistance Fund and stressing the need for Central Government to make alternative funding provision for this to continue.</p>		
<p>151/2014</p> <p>The Cabinet agreed that the Welfare Reform Officers Working Group reflects on digital access, use and support across Medway. This should give particular focus on:</p> <p>(a) assisting in the development of a Corporate Customer Access Strategy and the development of an assisted digital offer;</p>	<p>Welfare Reform Officers Working Group</p>	<p>03/02/2015 There is little doubt that digital access is a major part of the Welfare Reform programme. However, it is only a part of the Council's larger Digital Strategy. The challenge is trying to maintain the differing the expectations and aspirations of the various organisations involved in the Officer Group. Housing and MHS being landlords are looking to ensure their tenants are fully up to speed with Universal Credit and can apply on-line to ensure their rent arrears don't go up. As such they are perhaps a little keener than the rest of the group to get things in place. To that end they are looking at schemes such as installing wireless broadband services into their estates. The rest of the group will be dealing with a larger number claimants direct and don't want to encourage a stream of enquiries until the relevant resourcing is in place and are aware that digital access is a far bigger issue when looking at the whole of the Medway area rather than close knit housing</p>

DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
<p>(b) linking in with community networks and considering the potential role of Digital Ambassadors (led by partners and the wider community);</p> <p>(c) learning from research and pilot projects that are being undertaken both locally and nationally to establish barriers and enablers to digital access and use;</p> <p>(d) the evolution of community hubs and considering the potential for privacy for claimants at Council access points.</p>		<p>estates.</p> <p>The Officers Group is currently seeking to establish a Digital Access sub-group to work closely with those involved in the corporate Digital Strategy to ensure a unified approach, encourage joint working with welfare reform partners and maximise efficiencies and savings.</p> <p>The role of community hubs will become a standing agenda item from the January meeting of the Officer Group and will include the new facility at Kingsley House. This will have overlapping links with the Digital Strategy.</p> <p><b>13/08/2015 ONGOING</b> This mainly falls within the remit of the ICT/Digital Inclusion Task &amp; Finish Group which has as yet concentrated on the scoping of the proposed citizen's portal.</p> <p>Kingsley House has now opened as replacement for Riverside One and includes a computer suite where customers can access online services and have a member of staff on hand to offer assistance.</p> <p><b>3/12/2015</b> Work commences on building works at the new Twydall Hub on 11 January which will open in Summer 2015. where residents can access on line services and have a member of staff on hand to offer assistance. This includes a private interview room/meeting room that can used by staff for confidential matters. A working sub group arising from the Corporate Officer Board has been set up that will take forward both Communication and Digital aspects of Welfare Reform.</p> <p>Housing (HRA) have installed wifi as a pilot project at a large block of flats at Twydall. Arising from this it is envisaged that tenants will become more confident with the use of the internet and digi champions can be identified from these tenants to support and shadow less confident residents. If successful this may be rolled out further across HRA Estates.</p> <p>Wifi access has also been installed in all of the Councils 8 sheltered housing</p>



DECISIONS	ACTION BY	STATUS/COMMENT
		schemes. The Councils digital transformation programme will include work in later stages to ensure information, sign posting and advice is available 24/7 to all residents in terms of Welfare Reform, Debt Advice, and Money Management.