Preparing for Universal Credit Implementation

Key Questions and Answers for Local Authorities

December 2013

Foreword by Lord Freud

The local authority-led pilots have given us a unique opportunity. Through them we have learnt important lessons to influence how the local support for Universal Credit should be organised. This learning is being put to practical use in developing the Local Support Services Framework. I am confident that this Question and Answer Learning Paper will prove valuable and interesting to all local authorities and their partners.

I want this to support your preparations for successful implementation and delivery of Universal Credit locally. It will provide a sound basis upon which to begin local discussions and develop the most appropriate approaches for your locality in creating your successful partnerships. I realise that there is no single solution and each partnership will need to be built to respond to your specific local needs and challenges.

Local authorities and local authority associations - supported by the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Communities and Local Government and Scottish and Welsh Governments - have worked closely together to produce this. It is a real and positive example of the benefits of joint working at local and national level and a solid platform on which to build over coming months.

The Paper addresses a number of key questions that all local authorities will want to develop their own unique answers to. It reflects the real depth of learning that has been gathered from across the pilots since they started in the autumn of last year, which has informed not only this paper, but the wider development of Universal Credit and the preparation of the Local Support Services Framework.

But this is only part of the wider learning underway to support the successful implementation of Universal Credit. Within my own department we have the continuation of live Universal Credit running in Pathfinder areas, the further rollout of Universal Credit in an additional six locations which has already begun in Hammersmith, Rugby and Inverness with the other three offices following by spring 2014, and also the roll out of the claimant commitment across the whole of the UK by spring.

I know that many of you are keen to learn from the pilots' experiences and I hope that this paper is useful and informative. However, I recognise that further important lessons will emerge from the pilots and through ongoing work within the Department and Jobcentre Plus. Therefore, in the New Year, we will publish a further more comprehensive and detailed version of this Question and Answer paper to fully reflect the pilots' experiences. This second version will provide an insight into the pilots' findings about what worked and what didn't and why, as well as case studies and examples of best practice.

My Department will continue to work with our partners to deliver learning and ensure it informs the final version of the Local Support Services Framework, and the successful implementation of UC.

Lord Freud
Minister for Welfare Reform

Responding to Lord Freud's Challenge

Background

Twelve LA led pilots, including a partnership between Melton and Rushcliffe, were selected and launched in September 2012 for a period of twelve months. The aim of the pilots is to support Universal Credit go live by delivering learning and evaluation about more collaborative working to reduce mediated support for those claimants who may require some assistance in becoming work ready and more able to self-serve.

In June this year the pilots were extended by three months to 31 December in order to provide more time to gather learning. One of the conditions for the extension was that Lord Freud asked the pilots to collectively develop a set of questions and answers which the wider LA community could use to shape their local provision of Universal Credit. This paper is the first output of that work.

DWP Evaluation of the Pilots

Since their launch the pilots have been gathering learning which has been shared widely with local authorities and has informed the development of Universal Credit. This learning has been evaluated and assured regularly by DWP analysts, and findings were published earlier this year in an [interim evaluation report](#).

Although the internally produced report is more analytically biased, it complements this Question and Answer Paper. Together they build a compelling picture of the benefits of the pilots. DWP will be publishing a further analytical report in the summer of 2014, which will reflect the totality of the pilots' findings.

Links to the Local Support Services Framework

The rationale for setting up the pilots was to test the various elements of practical support for UC claimants that we knew would need to be replicated across the wider LSSF partnerships. By running the pilots early it has given us the opportunity to collectively learn what works and what we should avoid in the future.

This learning has already begun to be shared across local authorities and has also been incorporated within the latest version of the Framework. The pilots were never intended to answer all the outstanding questions, but they have highlighted those areas where we now know we need to do more work to fully understand the processes and support that will be needed to ensure effective and robust LSSF

partnerships. This work will be part of the future testing and piloting strategy which will be taken forward over the coming months.

Developing the Questions

The pilots are focusing on delivering learning in four key areas which will be of interest to all local authorities when considering Universal Credit implementation. These are:

- Digital Inclusion

- Financial Inclusion

- Triage

- Partnership Working

At a workshop in June with pilot local authorities and DWP stakeholders we developed an initial draft of key questions focusing on these four themes. Following the workshop we reviewed the content and produced a set of questions upon which we and the pilot leads were collectively agreed.

Developing the Answers

In developing our approach to preparing the answers to the questions, it was clear that the pilot leads, whilst very supportive, were keen that it recognised the different approaches across all local authorities. In addition, the answers had to contain strategic and lower level detail to take account of the wide ranging audience at which the paper is aimed. It was agreed with pilot authorities that a high level strategic answer, supported by highly recommended, desirable and aspirational requirements, would meet the needs of all local authorities at every level, and provide them with key information upon which to take forward their planning for Universal Credit implementation.

All twelve pilots contributed to the answers by initially providing responses to each of the questions posed, from which "model" answers were prepared. These model answers formed the basis of discussion at a workshop in mid September which was attended by pilot local authorities, local government representatives and DWP stakeholders. The content of the answers was reviewed at the workshop through a series of Tradeshows which provided every delegate with the opportunity to input and influence the high level strategic answer and consider the highly recommended, desirable and aspirational elements. Following the workshop, the latest version of strategic answers and highly recommended, desirable and aspirational elements were shared with delegates for final agreement.

We hope this document is of benefit. It is designed to stimulate and inform local discussions. We look forward to receiving feedback from you which could help develop the next iteration, due to be published early in 2014. Of particular interest are thoughts you may have regarding additional questions or further information that you believe would add value to the development of your local partnerships.

The next version will contain case studies and examples of best practice, and provide an insight into the pilots' findings about what worked and what didn't and why. In addition, we will include tools, products and guidance based on your feedback about what you need. This information will help to illustrate the answers to the questions and support the recommendations.

We look forward to receiving your feedback on this document.

Please email your comments and thoughts to us at
LALED.PILOTS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK by **Wednesday 8 January 2014**

Key Questions and Answers for Local Authorities

The LA led pilots have been testing a variety of approaches to inform Universal Credit design and implementation and these questions, answers and recommendations are a result of their real, practical experiences during the pilot period. The pilots have gathered learning from their activities at regular intervals and this has informed not only this document, but also the wider development of Universal Credit and the Local Support Services Framework.

Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion is one of the key requirements for the successful delivery of Universal Credit. We need to understand how local partnerships can encourage and support customers to use digital services and develop the confidence that they will be able to manage their claim to Universal Credit on line, independently.

Digital Inclusion Question 1

How can local authorities and their partners encourage digital inclusion in preparation for Universal Credit implementation and what are the benefits to them and their customers?

Answer
Local authority and partner organisation's digital inclusion strategies are key in identifying innovative ways to up skill and influence customers. Promotion and expansion of "easy to navigate" digital services across all service providers will increase customer capabilities and make this the preferred route of access. Success will lead to efficiency savings for local authorities and partners whilst increasing self sufficiency, accessibility to services and confidence levels for customers, improving employability prospects.

Digital Inclusion Question 1 – Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Develop an active corporate channel shift / digital inclusion strategy for your locality which should incorporate all of the points below.

- Co-ordination of activities and strategies with key partners – relate this to customer, choice, channel, connectivity, content, communication, cost, capability/competences and champions.

- Understand, map and promote the provision and accessibility of free local IT services including training support available to customers.

- Using triage to understand the digital skills of the customer base, identifying gaps and working with those who are most prepared.

- Establish support mechanisms including development of user friendly forms and website, staff mediation, digital champions and partner involvement.

- Continuous and sustainable support toward self sufficiency and wider personal benefits of on line access.

- Invest in staff training and communication to support cultural shift.

- Provide internet enabled IT self serve workstations within main contact point

- Wide network of public access internet enabled points.

Desirable

- Align corporate channel shift policy to digital as preferred access route

- Provide WiFi access points

- Provide internet enabled IT self serve workstations within local customer contact points

- Provide additional support for those who are further away from using digital services

- Provide WiFi and computers for use in community locations.

- Provide community based IT training.

- Community support networks/hubs available throughout area

- Access via smart phone/app format.

Aspirational

- All local partners to provide online support and services

- Move all transaction based services online and develop intelligent scripts that allows for "Tell us once" approach across all services

- To engage everyone in the locality including those who are furthest away

- Fast, subscription free broadband available across area.

- Local authorities and Partners to invest in broadband

- Wider provision in a variety of languages.

Digital Inclusion Question 2
Part 1

What are the barriers that customers face in accessing the internet in terms of:

- Affordability

- Skill level

- Confidence

- Limited broadband access

- Mistrust of digital systems

- Capability

Answer

Customers may face multiple issues in accessing the internet:

Affordability

- Cost of PC, laptop, mobile devices and associated broadband, landline contract

- Design and device compatibility.

Skill level

- knowledge and ability to complete complex forms online

- Language barriers.

Confidence

- Assurance regarding reliability of security and use of personal data and assurance that the content is completed correctly.

- Lack of real time on line help and advice.

Limited broadband access

- Broadband coverage, limitations and bandwidth.

Mistrust of digital systems

- Lack of confirmation about form submission and receipt.

Capability

- Numeracy and literacy, mental health issues and complex needs and disability

Part 2

What are the solutions and how can they be applied effectively across different locations and council types with a variety of demographics?

Answer

Affordability - access to free WiFi and equipment hosted by a range of partners in suitable locations. Signposting customers to affordable broadband packages available e.g. BT basic package to passport benefit.

Skills level - coordinated digital training, mediated support, peer group digital champions. Delivered in accessible locations. Language barrier support identified.

Confidence - online "help" function for customers.

Limited broadband access - communicate where support/equipment available. Improved broadband availability and speed. Explore different connectivity models and procurement of devices. WiFi set up in partner and community locations.

Mistrust of digital systems - national promotion of digital inclusion, highlight positive outcomes of digital claiming, simple to navigate reliable systems.

Capability – targeting and developing longer term provision delivered at the most appropriate time.

Part 3

Who needs to be involved in the mapping, provision and marketing of digital access and support for customers?

Answer

Following on from the digital strategy, based on customer insight, all service partners with customer contact should actively provide digital access and support for customers where possible, and market service availability.

Digital Inclusion Question 2 – Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Work with partners to map availability of public internet access with available support, WiFi hotspots and broadband coverage.

- Map opportunities for customers to undertake IT courses and levels of support.

- Encourage usable email accounts maintained by customers.

- Gather customer insights looking at current usage/behaviour

- Ensuring there is a solution for IT failure particularly where there is a dependency to complete forms.

- Install self serve PCs within customer reception areas

- Wider affordable broadband coverage with required levels of connectivity.

Desirable

- Facilitate community based digital support network.

- Engage partners in digital strategy

- Local partners including parish councils engaged to support customers.

Aspirational

- Move appropriate transactions online.

- Joint IT facilities with digital support

- Public access IT with volunteer support in every community.

Digital Inclusion Question 3

How do local authorities and partners tackle staff resistance to encouraging customers to self serve?

Answer

All local authorities and partner organisations need to engage early with staff and adopt a joint cultural change strategy focusing on the rationale, benefits and effectiveness of digitalisation. Communication, staff involvement and acceptance are key to embedding digitalisation as a way of working.

Digital Inclusion Question 3 – Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Staff engagement incorporating current staff perception, training, awareness, development planning and ownership.

- Communicate customer and organisational benefits of on line services to staff and public.

- Introduce measures to identify success and provide regular feedback on achievements and digital uptake impact.

- Fit for purpose, reliable and easy to navigate services.

- Remove alternative methods of claiming / contact where appropriate thus providing more time to help support customers with complex needs.

Desirable

- Share best practise across the partnership

- Within the staff network digital champions providing support, coaching and continuous improvement.

- Develop a co-ordinated digital strategy with neighbouring authorities.

Aspirational

- Incentives-encouraging staff to identify opportunities to shift services online

- Make digital inclusion part of staff roles and processes.

Financial Inclusion

The implementation of Universal Credit will signify a key change for customers in that they will receive a single monthly payment rather than weekly or fortnightly as in the current system. It is important that DWP, local authorities and partners understand the type of financial support different customer groups may need, who is best placed to deliver that support and the most effective method of delivery.

Financial Inclusion - Question 1

How do you identify and recognise the different categories of financial exclusion and what are the solutions to tackling each category?

Answer
The Local Support Services Framework and local knowledge may help to identify those customers who may be affected by the various types of financial exclusion (e.g. access to banking services). Effective triage is vital in identifying the category of financial exclusion, together with tailored financial support to address a customers needs. It will be important that individuals recognise and tackle their financial issues. Success will be determined by the extent of an individual's understanding, recognition and improvement of their financial position.

Financial Inclusion Question 1 - Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Effective triage, including questions focussed on behaviours, to enable customers to understand financial matters or budgeting issues/challenges

- Understand the different categories of financial exclusion (determined locally) and the most appropriate effective solutions for each

- Effective partnership links, co-ordination and referral systems need to be in place (understanding of financial services available would help this)

- Identifying trigger points that cause financial stress/hardship

- A range of accessible financial products/tools available locally, which allow customers to manage their finances effectively and flexibly via their chosen channel e.g. online, face-to-face or via telephony

- Integrate financial awareness into existing customer interactions

- Education of staff in financial awareness / where to find additional, expert advice for customer where necessary

- Cross referencing available data to see where a customer has arrears of council tax/rent etc. to target those customers for assistance/budgeting support.

Desirable

- Have a detailed financial inclusion strategy

- Work with local Credit Unions and high street banks to offer affordable financial products

- Use Citizens Advice/Money Advice Service /Local Authority expertise in developing financial awareness sessions and products

- The language used in communications to customers needs to be right and targeted based on their situation i.e. is it debt management, money management or financial management?

- Updating websites and providing links to relevant budgeting tools and organisations can help

- Sharing of resource/premises through a multi-agency approach

- Financial champions to be available (especially in rural areas).

Aspirational

- Work with High Street banks to offer customers affordable basic bank accounts

- Provide more Credit Union funding to enable them to become more sustainable

- Education of children/young people on the importance of budgeting, saving etc.

- Incentivising customers to manage their own finances.

Financial Inclusion Question 2

How do you effectively engage with hard to reach customers or those in denial of financial hardship?

Answer

Ensure local partnership networks are working to the same aims, giving consistent messages and that all relevant staff are provided with awareness training to identify those in need of support / help / education. Remove the stigma associated with 'debt' by improving awareness of the types of financial hardship, suitable support mechanisms and encouraging earlier access to advice services to improve a customers financial capability.

Financial Inclusion Question 2 - Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Identify the most vulnerable via greater data sharing between organisations and target these groups i.e. via Focus Groups, home visits, surgeries (more expensive in rural locations)

- Strong partnership working with clear aims, objectives and consistent messaging with an effective referral mechanism to ensure a one door/multi-agency approach

- Agree within a partnership who are the more hard to reach

- Education of relevant staff in financial awareness. All agencies made aware of support available and trained to recognise potential signs of financial stress using the range of tools available

- Make best use of trusted individuals to promote real life stories of people improving their lives

- Integrate financial awareness into existing customer interactions

- Identify "touch points" where financial hardship is evident but customer not aware/ not wanting to admit they have problem.

Desirable

- Using customer/ customer insight to understand how certain groups prefer to be contacted (e.g. personalised customer contact has been found to achieve greater impact)

- Social norming of best practice in communications e.g. "90% of UK population do direct payments as it is quick, easy and convenient".

- Support services available at point of contact or very soon thereafter, to avoid problems escalating

- Go out into communities delivering road shows if your demographic shows a need

- Provision of confidential support in suitable locations without fear of breach of confidence

- Understand a customer's aspirations and help them to recognise how financial problems may be preventing their achievement i.e. better off calculator.

Aspirational

- Training for children in school on life skills and budget management

- Financial help should be available on an outreach basis.

Financial Inclusion Question 3

How do you overcome the barriers to customers taking up debt advice/help?

Answer

The time needs to be invested up-front with the customer to understand their barriers. Working with partners already known and trusted by a customer helps to build trust and open relationships, providing an environment for individuals to tackle their financial management issues. By promoting how others have benefited from financial advice and explaining the advantages of taking up support e.g. living a better lifestyle, shows how other customers have come through their challenge.

Financial Inclusion Question 3 – Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- There needs to be a clear and quick referral process between partner organisations and a consistent approach

- Provision of confidential support in suitable locations without fear of breach of confidence

- Use Customer Insight to provide a clear definition of the barriers that prevent customers from taking up advice

- Provide relevant budgeting and financial management tools to assist customers with their journey to financial independence

- Removing the stigma associated with 'debt' will help in educating customers that financial burden/stress is not a problem they need to deal with on their own

- Use "nudge" techniques to persuade customers to undertake support/help to change their behaviour

- Provide links on all partner websites to financial management products i.e. Money Advice Service or sign post to advisory groups.

Desirable

- 1-2-1 provision although more expensive is more effective

- Remove customers ability to access money lending services on locally provided IT equipment and instead educate them on local Credit Unions.

Aspirational

- Incentivise financial management help and related budgeting accounts

- Use Community Financial Champions (e.g. retired accountants/bankers etc) as volunteers

- Funding customers who have been through the 'financial journey' to become advocates of the service that we are trying to achieve

- Educating children on the importance of work, money and financial skills - influencing parents

- Partnership monies being made available for marketing campaigns to increase signposting etc.

- Monies being made available to 'employ' professionals i.e. Citizens Advice, Money Advice Service; to devise training/products and/or 1-2-1 advice on-site on financial management.

Financial Inclusion Question 4

Who is best placed to provide advice/help and what role can they play?

Answer

All partners must recognise that there is a role to play for a trusted individual (someone the customer has already built a relationship with) in supporting customers to access effective financial tools, advice and practical support from partner agencies. Working collectively, a blend of local and national partners including local expert services is best placed to provide tailored advice and help for customers.

Financial Inclusion Question 4 – Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Mapping exercise of advice services throughout the area

- Clearly defined partnership approach (inc. Landlords and Housing providers) to financial management and advice

- Raise awareness and provide training on the benefits to customers and front-line staff of the support available inc. awareness of bad debt advice e.g. pay day lenders and loan sharks

- Minimise the barriers to access through the provision of a range of referral and self-help options

- Range of support and budgeting tools available to all agencies and not independent of each other – to ensure a consistent approach

- Provide links on partner websites to where financial advice can be provided or sought

- All partners need to provide the same clear and consistent message

- Understand what kind of advice people want – Customer Insight – to tailor it locally.

Desirable

- Improved links between financial inclusion and employability services to show the benefits of work

- Prevention is better than the cure – improved data matching/sharing to pick up the warning signs e.g. Discretionary Housing Payment applications

- Signposting to all customers on the availability of help, not just those with issues

- Co-location of services to provide the one-stop approach

- Recognise the need to provide increased investment to small local groups to deliver targeted services in rural communities

- Outreach provision in rural authorities

- Money Advice Service /Citizens Advice/Local Authority financial training for relevant staff.

Aspirational

- More funding for independent advice agencies to enable them to have greater capacity

Financial Inclusion Question 5

How can local authorities and their partners assist in promoting work as the best way of maximising income and reducing dependency on welfare benefits?

Answer

Partnerships need to create a cultural shift in thinking for customers and organisations that 'benefit maximisation' is no longer the norm and that 'income maximisation' is the way forward, with the promotion of work as the key element in people being better off and moving from dependency to independence. This cultural shift should be supported by a range of products to meet the needs of local customers, increasing employability and skills.

Financial Inclusion Question 5 - Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- A multi agency approach to promoting 'work as the new benefit'

- Provision of basic IT, literacy and interviewing skills for relevant customers, to prepare them for the job market

- Communicate the Universal Credit message that customers will keep more of their money in work

- Mapping of local services (seen in previous answers and part of Local Support Services Framework)

- Recognition of the benefit of delivering outreach employability services in rural areas and the costs associated with this

- Provision of more locally available IT or broadband access, so that people can access Universal Jobmatch, learn basic skills/training and create CVs etc. without the fear of being 'timed out'

Desirable

- Working with Health organisations to promote people working as a way to increase their health/lifestyle

- Better off in work calculator available to all customers (funding centrally so it is available across the UK)

- Co-location of partners/services so customers can see how the multi-agency/joint approach is working for them.

Aspirational

- Joint interviews with partners i.e. Jobcentre Plus, Colleges and housing providers to provide a customer with all the help they need to get into employment

- Consider enhanced payments to people to travel to employability sessions in rural locations

- Provision of 'travel to work' support in the early stages (first 5 weeks) for employees from remote/rural communities

- Referrals to employability services be a condition of receiving welfare payment in those cases where that is appropriate.

Financial Inclusion Question 6

How do we know that the provision of financial management/training works for customers? What measures have been introduced to see how effective this has been?

Answer

At the outset, set clear objectives that will support measurable achievements of the customer through sustained financial capability. There needs to be a collective monitoring process put in place which supports this i.e. where Local Authorities are not delivering the training. Financial management and customer education is an ongoing process which takes time to deliver quantifiable results and show sustainability.

Financial Inclusion Question 6 - Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Implement effective monitoring and evaluation over a realistic period of time in order to evaluate financial training (6/12/18 months)

- Where Local Authorities are not delivering the help/support, partners provide relevant data to allow for effective monitoring (this is not achievable otherwise)

- Set Key Performance Indicators and outcome measurements that are transferable across organisations i.e. engagement levels, income maximisation, debt reduction, work readiness, reduction in arrears (Rent etc), reduction in Alternative Payment Arrangements (Universal Credit)

- Set realistic goals at organisation and individual level

- Self assessment tool completed by customer and reviewed continuously to monitor progress

- Shared definition of success across the partnership

- Recognition of the benefit of delivering outreach employability services and associated costs

- Recognition that it is not simply a case of giving money to agencies to deliver enhanced services, often the infrastructure, skills and expertise may not exist.

Desirable

- Access to tailored financial capability training which allows the building of relationships, trust and confidence

- Case studies to illustrate how customers have benefited from local support

- Flexibility to allow local partnerships to make greater use of local networks (Rural)

- Longer-term tracking of impact – difficult to track people over 2-3 year period

- Understand and recognise the capacity of local services to deliver effectively

- Making attendance at financial training a requirement of receiving Discretionary Housing Payments/Local Welfare Payments (Carrot and Stick) and sanctioning repeat offenders who ignore the help provided.

Aspirational

- Invest in the infrastructure of small rural groups over the medium – long term

- Investing in existing infrastructures using outcome based payments

- Develop a range of preventative and early intervention options to include partners.

Partnership Working

In line with the Local Support Services Framework published in February, work is already underway in many local authority areas to build on local partnership working to structure and deliver more customer-focused, integrated services in preparation for the implementation of universal credit. We need to understand the combination of agencies that make this worthwhile and the problems that will be addressed.

Partnership Working - Question 1

Given data sharing protocols, how will local authorities and partners address emerging data sharing issues to enable delivery of joined up customer focused services?

Answer

There will need to be absolute clarity and high level commitment from all partners around partnership governance arrangements with a joined up approach to information sharing solutions. Local data sharing arrangements including policy, training, communications, information sharing agreements, etc. should be established early and ensure that they are beneficial to the customer.

Partnership Working Question 1 - Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Understanding and ensuring compliance with all legislative requirements.

- Gaining agreement from the customer that their information can be shared with relevant services/partners in the safest way for sharing personal information

- Understand what information your partners keep and need about their customers.

- Secure agreement with all partners on the range of ways that data will be used and that sharing will be between more than one partner (two way direction)

- Reassure partners that sharing of data in this context is intended to be beneficial to the customer

- As part of the high level commitment there needs to be sufficient capacity and resource to address data sharing

- Ensuring good quality consistent information is held and shared

Aspirational

- A joint data system across all UC delivery organisations to enable viewing of customer data, a more effective service delivery and reduce duplication

Partnership Working Question 2

How do you develop local partnerships that deliver effective, comprehensive collaborative working that meets customer need (e.g. the design and delivery of partnerships)? And how will partnerships respond to fluctuating, local demand?

Answer

Building a successful partnership is a long term process and the length of time needed should not be underestimated. It is important to understand the local customer demographics and build a partnership that will meet their needs through shared objectives. Understanding the partner's resources, abilities, flexibilities and expectations is key as is allowing time to build trust. There must be commitment to partnership working at all levels across the organisations, with open communication and regular review points to monitor projected demands.

Partnership Working Question 2 – Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Understand local customer need

- Identify appropriate partners and establish, understand and seek to influence their capacity

- Evaluate success of meeting customer needs and effectiveness of the partnership activities

- Collect and analyse management information to identify and manage peaks and troughs of demand.

- Define all partners' roles and responsibilities

- Clear governance arrangements including transparent and responsive decision making -eg a regular Partnership Steering Group or regular individual partner liaison meetings

- Needs of all vulnerable groups are represented

- Partnerships should ensure geographic coverage

- Involvement of a variety of LA departments eg Social Services, Housing etc.

Desirable

- Take advantage of any co-location opportunities

- Partnership meetings could be independently (non LA or DWP) led to ensure impartiality and encourage involvement of a wide range of organisations.

- Integrate appropriate services where co location is not sustainable

- All partner front line teams trained to deliver a basic level of partner services

- Effective signposting to the right organisation

- Informal networking particularly with volunteers involved in the project

Aspirational

- Extend partnership to include neighbouring local authorities

- Community budgets

Partnership Working Question 3

When working in partnership how can you ensure that arrangements add value for the customer and deliver efficiencies in service delivery?

Answer

Each partner needs to understand the contribution of others and this has to be communicated to all involved. Agree on shared objectives and focus on a holistic service to meet the needs of the customer by sharing best practice and maximizing service delivery. The introduction of key measures and outcomes should be jointly monitored to identify gaps, changes in demand for service and removal of duplications.

Partnership Working Question 3 - Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Understanding customer situation, identifying appropriate partners and tailoring service provided

- All activities should provide value for money and ensure quality of partner provision

- In line with Local Support Services Framework planning and the Universal Credit rollout timetable, a mapping exercise should be undertaken to determine available service, gaps and duplications in partner provision.

- Ensure that there is always open and clear dialogue between all partners and that they remain customer focussed and make timely interventions.

- Marketing of all available support and how and where to find it and manage customer expectations as part of a wider communications strategy

- Undertake customer insight e.g. surveys, workshops and focus groups to develop a true understanding of the needs of the customers that will be supported by the partnership.

Desirable

- Develop broad and relevant partnerships for sharing of ideas,

- Shift the culture of partnership working away from theme/issue based approaches towards people/customer centric, taking account of changing needs

- Train support workers to deliver a broad service at a basic level, enabling customers to access these services and get an initial response to support needs

- Increase the range of services available online

- Organisations to share accommodation

- Outreach services to be provided

Aspirational

- Pooling of available funding to enable better service provision and avoid duplication.

- Full range of services to be available to residents in any part of the district.

Partnership Working Question 4

How can partnerships provide seamless customer services that ensure clarity for the customer?

Answer

It is important to have joint strategic aims and objectives to ensure provision of a quality service. This can be provided through a clear, consistent and agreed approach to partnerships' aims. Effective signposting and good communication of the roles of partners and how they contribute to service delivery to provide a clear path for customers. Exchange of appropriate information between partners will be required to avoid customers having to repeat detail.

Partnership Working Question 4 - Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Effective, trained and engaged frontline staff who have good understanding of available support across agencies and eligibility criteria and how to find it

- Staff supported by IT systems which supports the process

- Provide effective signposting and referrals with warm handover as required

- Mapping of service provision to avoid duplication

- Ability to provide services in different locations

Desirable

- Give customers an opportunity for face to face access to a number of partners from a single location periodically

- Create opportunities for frontline staff to shadow/meet each other and share best practice

- Ability to see people in different locations (geographical)

- Design a dedicated, easy to use, self service website incorporating all partner services

- Appropriate mobile technology solution in place

- Ability to provide services at own home

Aspirational

- Co-location of all partners

- Develop multi-disciplinary team with potential for single point of contact for the customer

Triage

Triage is the process to assess customer needs at the initial point of contact and to identify customers requiring additional support at the earliest point in the customer journey. For some this will simply be direction to the nearest digital access point, whereas for others it will be the start of one to one support and signposting to appropriate help.

Triage Question 1

What different methods of triage are used by local authorities and are they effective in identifying customer needs and directing them appropriately?

Answer

All customer contact must offer some degree of triage, aim to be consistent across all partners and be effective at identifying all customer needs. Successful triage involves a single assessment of needs across a range of issues with subsequent support tailored to individual requirements by effective referral of customers to appropriate services.

Triage Question 1 - Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Strong partnership working between the local authority, DWP and partners with clear aims and objectives.

- A culture of working with the individual to assess need rather than telling the individual what they need

- Simple initial triage process for all customers which is capable of identifying those who are most vulnerable

- Develop a holistic face to face triage process for those who are most vulnerable, including triage questions which cover multiple aspects such as housing, employment & skills, digital inclusion, physical & mental health, confidence/resilience, financial inclusion that will quickly identify customer needs and barriers to work.

- Effective trained customer focused staff who have a broad knowledge of available support services and know exactly what provisions partners provide

Desirable

- Use intelligence from other partners and agencies for example, JCP data on customers impacted by the spare room subsidy or benefit cap changes, to identify potentially vulnerable customers who may need assistance

- A caseworker approach to follow up the most vulnerable referrals to other agencies to ensure that action is taken and the customer receives ongoing support to address barriers to work

- Enhanced role within council offices to ensure effective triage is conducted by a trained member of staff

- Map out provision and eligibility criteria and build results in to IT systems to ensure a positive customer experience

- Easy access for customers including in own homes

Aspirational

- The same triage process could be used by multiple agencies ensuring customers receive consistent service regardless of where they present.

Triage Question 2

How can triage help local authorities and partners in effective organisation and delivery of services?

Answer

An effective triage process will enable an organisation to understand customer's holistic needs, providing them with an appropriate and cost effective level of support. It will enable the partnership to focus intensive support only on the customers that need it most. Where specific customer needs are identified at the first point of contact, the correct interventions can be offered to create a more targeted customer journey that avoids duplication of provision.

Triage Question 2 – Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Agree a structured approach to meeting customer needs determining how resources will be targeted appropriately across different access channels

- Awareness and mapping of the support available from all partners

- Identification of potential support needs at the earliest stage possible to deliver effective and consistent sign-posting – common directory of support

- Ensuring that existing services are provided with the opportunity to assist people to overcome barriers, therefore making the best use of resources

- Monitoring of the service including customer satisfaction feedback

- Monitor demand and types on a frequent basis to ensure that the correct level of resource is kept to reflect the need of the customer

- Work with partners to understand what customer information they require from the triage process to prevent duplication on referral.

Desirable

- Commitment required to whole system approach across partners focused on early intervention and vulnerability

- Provide the customer with an overview to ensure they have an awareness of the partner process and requirements.

- Using triage data to inform commissioning of partners' services

Aspirational

- All vulnerable people get access to the support they need at the time they need it and consequently are able to live their lives more independently.

- Fully integrated triage service across all partners

Triage Question 3

What is required to deliver effective triage to ensure successful delivery of local support services?

Answer

Triage needs to be underpinned by effective partnerships delivering a customer centric approach based on a shared understanding of customer need. Clearly defined governance arrangements, data sharing protocols and common goals to achieve outcomes, linked to a strategic partnership plan will facilitate the delivery of consistent local support services.

Triage Question 3 - Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Analyse demand, establish capacity, develop solutions with partners and resource appropriately

- Defined triage process including triage questions which cover multiple aspects such as housing, financial management, employment and skills, physical and mental health, confidence and resilience.

- All front line staff have the appropriate knowledge required.

- Map appropriate support services (including eligibility criteria)

- Triage process is understood and valued by the individuals engaged with it.

Desirable

- Common triage process between you and your partners for identifying

- customer needs at the first point of contact

- Sufficient capacity to support triage for all vulnerable people

- Job shadowing between customer service advisors and partners to increase knowledge and understanding

Aspirational

- Integration of partner services so joint triage can occur at the first point of contact, no matter which partner the customer approaches first.

Triage Question 4

What effective measurements are there for triage processes and how can these best be captured?

Answer

Development of triage measurements is still work in progress. Partnerships should agree key criteria that reflect on national and local objectives with a focus on customer experience and outcomes. A range of qualitative and quantitative indicators need to be in place to offer the opportunity for continuous improvement to ensure resources continue to be targeted appropriately. Existing systems and processes will need to be reviewed to ensure that functionality is built in to capture and report this data.

Triage Question 4 - Recommendations

Highly Recommended

- Agree key outcomes/measures/data sharing that you want to track from the outset and ensure there is a simple way of collecting that data e.g. via back office systems/excel sheets

- Effective Customer Relationship Management systems (or similar)

- Implementation of a monitoring system for referrals, take-up, engagement rates and outcomes with adequate resource

- Monitoring the number of customers that get to each stage of the triage process will show how effective it is

- Monitoring of impact of triage on take up of appropriate support services

- Regular meetings with partners to review data and ensure that signposting from triage is accurate and effective

- Obtain customer feedback following triage eg through customer surveys.

Desirable

- Make all agencies jointly accountable for outcomes in a locality in order to drive the necessary partnership working

- A single tool for capturing this data would allow comparisons across partnerships to inform improved service delivery.

- Building the triage process into a Customer Referral System will enable data to be tracked and trends and patterns to be identified.

Aspirational

- A Customer Relationship Management system (or similar) that is jointly accessible by all partners

- An on-line measurements site that can collate all different types and demand from triage automatically, and provide essential information.