

EAST SUFFOLK BUSINESS PLAN 2015 - 2023



CASE STUDY

ENABLING COMMUNITIES

UNIVERSAL CREDIT SUPPORT PARTNERSHIP

Our Business Plan sets out a vision where those in need of welfare support and benefits receive them promptly and where we work in partnership with other organisations to deliver easily-accessible services to our customers.

eastsuffolk.gov.uk/east-suffolk-business-plan



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Beccles Library, Blyburgate, Beccles
Felixstowe Library, Crescent Road, Felixstowe
Marina Centre, Marina, Lowestoft
Woodbridge Library, New Street, Woodbridge

WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT CUSTOMER TRANSITIONS TO UNIVERSAL CREDIT



WHAT WE DID?

In order to help customers with their transition to Universal Credit (UC), Waveney District Council implemented a multi-agency approach. This approach builds upon the Council's Universal Support responsibilities which offer assistance with making and maintaining a UC claim online and help with Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) to manage the transition to a monthly payment. Stakeholder organisations were invited to meet with the Council's Benefits, Customer Services, Housing and Housing Needs teams along with the DWP Partnership Manager for Suffolk, the Lowestoft Jobcentre Relationship Manager, Lowestoft Jobcentre specialist officers (including the officer for customers with complex needs) and North East Suffolk Citizens Advice (NES CAB) who provide PBS on behalf of the Council. A partnership was then formed to identify issues and find solutions using a systems thinking approach. Regular quarterly meetings are held and sub-meetings have been formed each with a particular focus. A network of organisations and contacts have been formed to enable communication as regularly as required to solve particular issues.



600 PEOPLE
HELPED SO FAR
WITH UNIVERSAL
CREDIT
APPLICATIONS



WHY WE DID IT?

UC is the biggest welfare reform in a generation and encourages a change in culture for not only the claimant but also for the organisations providing support. As a local authority with housing stock, and a duty to prevent homelessness, we saw that for UC to work we must work together to support our claimants. Working together ensures issues are resolved quickly and efficiently and that services can evolve and grow with UC, to best support the needs of our customers. With a systems thinking approach we can;

- Tailor services to meet the needs of varying customer groups
- Ensure services are accessible and claimants are not excluded
- Escalate issues to help shape the 'agile' system of UC to best meet the need of the claimant
- Ensure staff of each front-facing office can support each other to best support and enable customers to apply and maintain their UC claim, especially important in times of increased demand
- Identify potential barriers to claiming, maintaining a claim and managing financially, and subsequently work together to implement solutions.



THE DIFFERENCE THIS MADE?

Since UC Full Service was introduced in Lowestoft in 2016, we have helped 600 people apply for or maintain their UC claim online and 509 people manage the transition to a monthly payment. By working together, we have supported our private landlords and escalated issues that have contributed to changes to the UC scheme; these changes have an impact on private landlords' acceptance of UC. We have developed a support pack for private landlords to help them navigate the scheme with their tenants and reduce the chance of rent arrears accruing. We have also created an online map identifying locations where support with online claims, along with free internet access, is available. This is used by our partner organisations and has been promoted by the DWP to other areas. PBS is an important aspect of ensuring Universal Credit works; independent advice is vital for helping customers with the transition to a monthly payment. We have co-located our PBS officer at the Jobcentre which has helped to embed the PBS scheme with Jobcentre staff and made it more accessible for claimants. This has resulted in increased referrals which have exceeded the DWP forecast. DWP quotes this model as good practice nationally and other areas have now adopted this way of working. The Council has helped NES CAB to offer support with online claims by funding public access terminals in branches across the district, simplifying the application process for customers.

"Co-location has now been used across the district, and indeed nationally, as the recognised way to get the best results and service for customers who need budgeting support within Universal Credit." - Department for Work & Pensions