

## **Rapporteur report on Universal Credit**

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I'm referring to a Bite Size Briefing broadcast from 30<sup>th</sup> October last year, which was to brief councillors on the implementation of Universal Credit in Lancashire. This report sets out my findings from that event.

Whilst it is recognised this briefing was held a long time ago and that a lot may have changed both locally and nationally since the broadcast, I was looking for the flagged issues which relate to this committee in terms of "what implications for the county council might exist in Universal Credit not being properly applied" and this broadcast brought these issues to the fore.

The briefing was presented by Joanne Barker, our own Welfare Rights Officer as I understand under Clare Platt's department as Head of Health Equity, Welfare & Partnerships.

On Universal Credit going from paper to digital, Joanne stated that across Lancashire:

- Households with no internet access was 27%.
- Residents with no basic online skills was 30%. This is for Lancashire as a whole, not service users.

Often people who don't have the skills to represent themselves to get the benefits to which they're entitled, bring in an appointee, who might be an elderly relative and who often don't have the skills either. At the briefing one councillor asked whether the county council had increased its Welfare Rights team to help those people who could become isolated due to Universal Credit going digital.

In addition to this, Joanne identified that there could be an unintended consequence for the county council's libraries in that people would need to gain access to them to use a computer. If the National Government is not getting income to people then people can't then transact with the county council to get their care packages. So there's an issue for us.

Organisations that we directly relate to over Universal Credit, which we may want to invite are; Citizens Advice and the Department for Work and Pensions who run a visiting service for people and vulnerable groups.

Finally I would like to point out that the county council, runs a Crisis Support Service providing furniture, food and fuel to people in hardship, which ends according to the broadcast I watched, at the end of this month.