

Report to Stronger Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 4th February 2020



Portfolio: Customer Services – Councillor S Kane

Subject: Universal Credit Impact – Waltham Abbey Multi-Agency Centre

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Recommendations/Decisions Required:

1 To note the establishment of a new Waltham Abbey Multi-Agency Centre based at the Epping Forest District Museum

Report:

1. Members will recall from previous meetings that a Universal Credit (UC) Impact Working Group has been running assessing the impacts of welfare reforms on our residents and services. One of the findings of the Group is that to mitigate against any impacts from the introduction of Universal Credit a single-agency approach would have limited effect and to truly meet the needs of those residents affected a more integrated cross-sector approach is needed. The Working Group itself is not only attended by Council services including Benefits, Housing and Homelessness, Debt Recovery and Community Engagement but also has representation from the DWP, Epping Forest Foodbank, Peabody and Citizens Advice amongst others.

2 The DWP has for some time operated a monthly Multi-Agency Centre (MAC) in Loughton involving a number of partners to support claimants. The UC Working Group recognised the real benefits of providing those in need with a variety of support services available at the same time and place. The Group decided that the Loughton model be built on and developed for Waltham Abbey. The key difference with the Waltham Abbey MAC is that it is to be run by EFDC with the ultimate aim of focussing the service offering based on the needs of the residents of Waltham Abbey and its locality with an increased focus on the district's own services. There is also the opportunity at this MAC to further support one of the key recommendations of the Citizens Online report which focussed on Waltham Abbey as a geographic area with a potentially higher risk of digital exclusion.

3 The MAC itself will be held on alternate Thursdays in the Epping Forest District Museum in Waltham Abbey. As Members are aware the museum is ordinarily closed for business on Thursdays so by providing a MAC on those Thursdays will help further maximise a key Council asset whilst increasing awareness of the museum itself.

4 The first MAC will be held Thursday 13th February 2020 preceded by a publicity campaign within the local area and associated organisations. Services that will be available for residents are:

Organisation	Service
Epping Forest District Council	Benefits Debt Recovery Housing and Homelessness Digital Inclusion and Assistance Active Living
Citizens Advice	UC applications and general advice
DWP	UC applications and benefits
Changing Pathways	Community Safety
Peabody	Care and Support Services
Epping Forest Foodbank *	Available to issue voucher and direct to Foodbank Waltham Abbey
MIND	Mental Health Charity
Provide	Essex Lifestyle Service

* DWP, Citizens advice and Ciara from Revenues & Benefits can write foodbank vouchers, so they will be able to issue on the day. The foodbank centre in Waltham Abbey will then be open on the Thursday for us to direct residents straight to the foodbank if voucher given.

4 Officers will report back on the outcomes achieved from the MAC. This new service offering and its use will also provide insight into the demands from the residents of Waltham Abbey to help inform future service delivery plans.

Reason for decision: To update Members on the latest steps to mitigate against the effects of the introduction of Universal Credit and other welfare reforms

Options considered and rejected: N/A

Consultation undertaken: N/A

Resource implications: N/A

Legal and Governance Implications: N/A

Safer, Cleaner, Greener Implications: N/A

Consultation Undertaken: N/A

Background Papers: N/A

Impact Assessments: Risk assessments were carried out in conjunction with partners.