

**Sent on behalf of Cllr Alison Webb, Breckland Council's Executive Member for People and Information:**

## **Briefing: Universal Credit roll out**

Dear parish/town council chair/clerk,

Universal Credit (UC) has now been introduced in parts – but not all – of Breckland. The roll out is being coordinated by the Department of Work and Pension (DWP) and it is being launched across the country in stages.

Universal Credit is a payment to help people with their living costs if they are on a low income or out of work and replaces some other types of existing benefits (such as Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, and Jobseeker's Allowance).

In Breckland, the Job Centre based in Dereham has now switched to Universal Credit, while the Job Centre in Thetford is expected to change over the Universal Credit in September. This means that people in Breckland whose postcodes fall within the remit of the Dereham Job Centre office will access benefits under the Universal Credit scheme, while those in the remit of the Thetford Job Centre will remain under the previous scheme until the autumn. People can check whether Universal Credit is available in their area using a postcode checker on Breckland Council's website (see links below).

It is very important to note that the change to Universal Credit **only affects new claimants** – anybody who already claims benefits (regardless of their Breckland postcode) will remain under the previous system for now and **does not need to do anything** unless their circumstances change (for example, they enter employment and later become unemployed so need to submit a new benefits claim).

There are some differences between Universal Credit and the benefits it replaces. In particular:

- most people will be paid Universal Credit once a month direct to their chosen account
- they'll get a single payment for their household
- if their Universal Credit includes rent they'll need to pay this to their landlord themselves
- they'll be expected to make their claim online

While Universal Credit is led by DWP, Breckland's website has now been updated with lots of useful background information about Universal Credit (links below).

In addition, the council recently launched an interim Customer Contact Service based within libraries in Swaffham, Attleborough and Watton so people can access advice and information about the new system. As DWP expects residents to make their claims online, our staff will be on hand to support anybody who is having difficulty completing their application and help them develop the skills so they can update their application independently in the future.

**You – and residents who approach you – may find the following further information useful:**

- Universal Credit page with postcode checker: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/universalcredit>
- Frequently asked questions for residents: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/universalcreditfaqs>
- Frequently asked questions for landlords: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/8838/Landlord-FAQs>
- Video about how to open a Universal Credit account: [https://youtu.be/4WgJU8Y\\_bQg](https://youtu.be/4WgJU8Y_bQg)
- Libraries and council office locations and opening times: [www.breckland.gov.uk/8866](http://www.breckland.gov.uk/8866)
- Help setting up an email account: [www.breckland.gov.uk/8844](http://www.breckland.gov.uk/8844)

