

## **Housing and Community Safety Select Committee – Review of Welfare Reform and Financial Inclusion – Update for Arts, Leisure and Culture Select Committee**

Housing and Community Safety Select Committee completed its review of Welfare Reform and Financial Inclusion in April, at the same time as the review of Child Poverty.

A summary of the latest monitoring report on the outcome of the review is below (nb. this is draft and due for sign-off at Committee on 27 November).

During 2014-15, the Committee is continuing to review issues relating to welfare reform.

In July the Committee considered the Council's latest Welfare Monitoring update, and received an update from Stockton District Advice and Information Services (SDAIS), in particular the impact of the assessments for Personal Independence Payment (PIP), and benefit sanctions. Relevant papers are available on request or can be found via the following link:

<http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=HCS&meet=114&arc=71>

SDAIS will be reporting back later in 2014-15, and the Committee will continue to receive the Council's Welfare Monitoring Reports.

On 18 September the Committee discussed the operation of the DWP Work Programme with the providers for the Tees Valley area – Ingues (mainly delivered via sub-contractor Triage), and Avanta. Papers from the meeting are available on request or can be found at:

<http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab12.pl?cmte=HCS&meet=115&arc=71>

Following the meeting, Members of the Committee will be visiting Triage to speak with clients and staff.

At the same meeting - and as noted in the update report below – the Committee considered the future of the Back on Track Scheme, which is the Borough's local welfare assistance scheme. This was subsequently agreed at Cabinet in October. A progress update will be reported to both the Housing Committee and Cabinet six-month after its implementation.

Review of Welfare Reform and Financial Inclusion – First 6-Monthly Progress Update (Due to be considered at Housing Select Committee on 27 November)

| No | Recommendations  | Responsibility                                      | Date                           | Q1/2 Progress Update Presented to Committee on 27th November 2014  | Q1/2 Assessment of progress (Categories 1-4) |
|----|--|---|--------------------------------|--|--|
| 1  | Further scrutiny work should take place during 2014-15 to continue to review the impact of welfare reform. This phase of work should include particular reference to Universal Credit including fraud investigation, food poverty, advice and information, and the local housing market. | Housing and Community Safety Select Committee       | July 2014 onwards              | <p>Universal credit has not been rolled out locally and we have no indication of when it will be, although we received a letter from the Universal Credit Programme Director saying national rollout would be from 2015. The Council's housing benefit fraud team are moving to DWP at the end of May 2015 and work has commenced to ensure the move goes smoothly. A detailed timetable will shortly be drawn up with DWP.</p> <p>The social fund has now been reviewed and a report is going to Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2014. It is proposed the fund be administered in house from April 2015 to reduce the cost of administering the scheme.</p> | 1  |
| 2  | The indicators used in the welfare monitoring framework are kept under review, and that consideration is given to including the workload of the animal welfare service as an additional measure, alongside the existing indicators including child protection activity.                  | <p>Kate Fulton</p> <p>Julie Nixon/Peter Mennear</p> | <p>Complete</p> <p>Ongoing</p> | <p>Measures and overall framework have been reviewed for year 2 monitoring.</p> <p>Information on data collected by the Animal Welfare team has been gathered and consideration is now being given to the most appropriate measure for inclusion in the WR Framework, this will be reported on in Quarter 2.</p> <p>Sanctions data is also being tracked however very current data is not available, neither is the detail that sits behind the overall headline figures. Work continues to analyse and track any potential trends and impacts emerging from this data.</p>  | 2  |

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| 3  | The joint working across Council and partner agencies (including third sector and Registered Providers) to mitigate the effects of welfare changes and support residents should be supported and continued in future phases of reform. | Welfare Board / Julie Nixon  | Ongoing                              | Joint working ongoing between SBC staff and Registered providers on key agendas such as the Benefit Cap, bedroom restrictions, use of discretionary housing benefit fund, sanctions etc.  | 1  |
| 4  | Where appropriate, the Council and partners raise awareness of the advice available to residents who have had their benefits sanctioned, particularly in relation to vulnerable groups.  | Welfare Board Partners including Welfare Rights / SDAIS<br><br>Billy Park / SDAIS<br><br>Julie Nixon | Ongoing<br><br><br>June 2014 onwards | Report recently produced by SDAIS with input from a range of partners about the impact of sanctions locally. SDAIS and Welfare rights continue to work with individuals who have been sanctioned to appeal the decision. Welfare rights and SDAIS undertake outreach work with vulnerable clients to ensure support for those sanctioned e.g. at Hartington road, foodbanks, community venues etc | 2  |
| 5  | The Council should raise awareness of sustainable financial solutions for local residents, including advice, alternatives to high cost credit, and information on enforcement agencies including the Illegal Money Lending Team.       | Welfare Board / Julie Nixon  | TBC                                  | Review now concluded with social fund, Council resources to be provided to Credit Union for low cost loans. Report to Cabinet 9 October 2014.   | 1  |

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| 6  | All Members should be provided with an information pack outlining the range of services available to residents that support the financial inclusion agenda.  | Billy Park   | Oct-14                   | Welfare Rights have produced A4 laminated information sheet detailing key services for Members with contact details. To be distributed October 2014.                    | 1  |
| 7  | Stockton Council and partners sign up to the Stockton Stop Loan Sharks charter and when implementing the Charter, particular emphasis should be given to raising awareness of the Illegal Money Lending Team, within targeted communities where appropriate. | Dave Kitching<br><br>Dave Kitching                       | Sep-14                   | Launch completed on 3 <sup>rd</sup> November 2014 prior to the Stockton Financial Inclusion Group 'Infinity' meeting on that date.                                      | 1  |
| 8  | A sustainable future for the 'Back on Track' funding and alternative methods of delivering 'crisis/short term' support is identified, and this be considered as part of the future scrutiny work on welfare reform.  | Julie Nixon/ Dawn Welsh<br><br>Julie Nixon/Peter Mennear | July 2014<br><br>Ongoing | Review now concluded and options for the future of the fund presented to Cabinet on 9 <sup>th</sup> October 2014, following consideration by Committee on 18 September. | 1  |