

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting12th January 2012

1. Title of Item/Report

EIT GATEWAY REVIEW OF BENEFIT SERVICE

2. Record of the Decision

Cabinet considered a report detailing a Gateway EIT Review conducted to identify options for efficiencies and, improvement within the Benefit Service. The review had been reported to the Housing and Community Safety Select Committee.

It was explained that the continuing uncertainty over the future of the service, as a result of the Welfare Reform Bill proposals, for the introduction of Universal Credit, published in February 2011, meant that there were significant risks associated with committing to any long term improvement arrangements and therefore the review had concentrated upon identifying improvements and efficiencies which could be made immediately, without investment in new technology or any requirement for significant service reconfiguration. The priority would be to protect claim processing performance whilst still ensuring that the process was secure. Efficiencies would be achieved by eliminating work which, over time, with a shifting agenda was no longer necessary, automating some straightforward work and providing a simpler and more direct service to customers. The review had identified potential savings of £180,000 from a service restructure with a further £100,000 income generated from increased overpayment recovery.

When details of the DWP national transition strategy to Universal Credit were published, a local transition strategy would be developed, and reports presented to Cabinet at that time.

RESOLVED that

1. the benefit service be restructured, with estimated savings of £180,000 per annum (excluding any potential redundancy costs). The start of formal consultation with unions and employees be approved and authority be delegated to the Head of Housing in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety to implement the new structure on completion of the consultation.

2. arrangements for the recovery of old outstanding housing benefit overpayments are approved in accordance with established processes outlined in paragraph 21, with anticipated additional income collected of £100,000 per annum.

3. no new cases be accepted onto the Combined Payments Scheme.

4. Members endorse the trial to determine the effectiveness of using the Community Protection Service's Enforcement Officers to collect outstanding overpayment debt which is unsuitable for recovery by other methods. The team have experience of debt collection and currently collect unpaid Fixed Penalty Notices for a range of offences including littering and dog fouling.

5. Further reports be presented to Cabinet relating to the local transition strategy to Universal Credit and the proposed Localisation of Support for Council Tax when more detail of the government proposals are available.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The recommendations were in line with the principles of the review which were to identify improvements and efficiencies which could be made immediately without significant investment or service reconfiguration. The savings proposed of £180,000 could be achieved whilst enabling the service to maintain high performance and levels of customer satisfaction.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

As per options described in the report.

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Midnight on Friday 20 January 2012

Proper Officer
16 January 2012