

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting3rd October 2013

1. Title of Item/Report

Mitigating the Impact of Welfare Reform - Policy and Delivery

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report on mitigating the impact of Welfare Reform – Policy and Delivery.

The report presented a summary of the strategic approach, approved policies in place and activity to support local residents in dealing with the economic climate generally and to mitigate the impact(s) of the Welfare Reform Act specifically as they emerged.

Previous reports to Cabinet had detailed the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 which set out Government's intention to reform the benefits and tax credits system to provide greater incentives to work and have included details of how the impact would be monitored. The first monitoring report was being reported to Cabinet and would be the subject of regular reports to cabinet.

The report provided a summary of the strategic approach being taken to support residents across the Borough in relation to the impact the economic downturn. The report also sets out the work, in more detail, that was being undertaken in relation to policy development and activity to those specifically affected by the impact of the Welfare Reform Act. It was noted that in some instances it was difficult to evidence the impact was directly as a result of welfare reform rather than the wider economic climate. Furthermore, the evidence of impact of the changes introduced in April and July was still emerging.

In line with the Councils approach to evidence based policy development, the report included examples of where policies had already been amended to take account of anticipated and emerging impact. As the data and intelligence (for example via case studies) from the monitoring framework was gathered over time it was anticipated further evidence of direct impact to emerge to shape further policy.

It was noted that the main content of the report was focused on the

Council's response to mitigating the impact of the welfare reform changes, although reference was made to key partners such as Tristar. The report did not capture the detail of the wide range of activity being undertaken, for example, by the voluntary and community sector, in supporting those affected by welfare reform and the wider economic climate.

With regard to the next steps the network of meetings and forums both locally and regionally, along with monitoring and activity data being collated, would be used to inform future policy and service delivery as the changes following the introduction of Welfare Reform continue to embed. Although the Council and partners were responding and reacting to individual circumstances as necessary where policy or procedures were causing undue difficulties, no significant change to agreed policy needed to be undertaken, until further evidence was available to support change or following a review of impact.

The complex nature of this legislation and the possible multiple impact of the individual elements of the reform meant that in some areas this may take a minimum of 12 months before a full understanding / impact was known, especially given the delay in implementation of Universal Credit.

The monitoring framework, review programme, networks, planned consultation and commissioned research would provide the necessary evidence to support and inform future strategies and policies to deal with the impact of the legislation and continue the Council policy to support the vulnerable and target resources to those most in need.

Members would continue to receive regular updates to Cabinet linked to the monitoring framework in place to monitor Welfare Reform at both a local and regional level.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The approach being taken to support residents in dealing with the current economic climate in general be noted.
2. The proactive and evidence led approach being taken to mitigate specifically the impact of Welfare Reform and the activity undertaken to date be noted.
3. It be noted the evidence relating to specific impacts of the various elements of the Welfare Reform Act is still emerging and is being regularly reported to Members through the agreed monitoring framework (Qtr 1 2013/14 Welfare Reform monitoring report also on the agenda for this Cabinet meeting) and regular sessions on the Members Policy

Seminar agenda.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The report provides an update on the introduction of the various reforms, highlighting early indications of impact and areas of concern. Performance indicators have been developed which will help to identify impacts of welfare reform changes within the borough and provide a basis for future actions and policy development.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Nelson declared a personal non prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 10 – Mitigating the Impact of Welfare Reform – Policy and Delivery as he was a Member of Tristar Board.

6. Details of any Dispensations

None

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

Midnight on Friday, 11th October 2013

Proper Officer
07 August 2013