

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting3rd October 2013

1. Title of Item/Report

Welfare Reform – Monitoring Update

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report that presented an update on Quarter 1 monitoring of the impact of Welfare Reform legislation, across our Borough.

Previous reports had detailed the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 which set out Government's intention to reform the benefits & tax credits system to provide greater incentives to work. The report provided details of the first quarters monitoring using the framework agreed by Members in July 2013.

Welfare Reform meant several changes to benefits, the introduction of which was staggered across different geographical areas and over a period of time, as detailed below:-

- Universal Credit (Roll out delayed from October 2013).
- Personal Independence Payment (introduced Stockton in April 2013 as part of a national pilot).
- Under Occupancy/ Restriction to Housing Benefit (April 2013).
- Transfer of responsibility for elements of The Social Fund to Local Authorities (April 2013).
- Local Council Tax Support Scheme (April 2013).
- The Benefit Cap (15th July 2013).

By July 2013 all reforms were introduced into the geographical area of Stockton with the exception of Universal Credit. The DWP had announced that the rollout would be delayed with further pilot work taking place in 6 areas across the country. Further work would also be undertaken on the national IT system that was required to facilitate the rollout and operation of Universal Credit. It had also been determined that more training was required for clients in support of future on line access, which was a requirement of the new Universal Credit benefit. Further updates on the timeline of the rollout would be provided once known.

Members agreed a framework for monitoring the impact of the Welfare Reform which included both qualitative and quantitative data collection as detailed below:-

- Monitoring of performance indicators and activity data.
- Case Studies – To capture multiple impacts not always collectable through data sets.
- Use of Survey Data to capture, impact on lifestyles, mood, feeling happy / healthy / positivity measures.

Work on developing the definitions and source of the information for the performance measures had been underway since agreement in July. Available data had been collected retrospectively for the first quarter of this financial year and was attached to the report.

Further work had been on-going to develop the outstanding definitions and gather data for the remainder of the measures along with some historical data and context where appropriate. Measures identified in the appendix, under the “other category” would be supported with narrative at Quarter 2. Case studies would also be provided. This would allow for fuller reporting from Quarter 2 onwards with some analysis, trends and context. A report was scheduled for Cabinet in November 2013.

A number of the measures were being collected to the same definition across the region. This would allow for comparisons between authorities in the region and provide data that could be aggregated to identify impact on the region. Where available this would form part of the regular report to Members.

A template had been developed to capture case studies through a number of organisations supporting those impacted by the Welfare Reform changes. These would be collated and discussed at the Welfare Reform Board and reported to Cabinet as appropriate.

The Council viewpoint panel were to be used to monitor impact on lifestyles, mood, feelings of wellbeing etc. One survey a year would be used to capture this information. This would take place towards the end of the first year of the reforms.

Data and analysis from all 3 methods of collection would be used to inform:-

- Policy Shaping
- To provide information to the Elected Leadership and Executive of the Council
- To benchmark regionally / nationally

- To identify any emerging trends.
- Measure short, medium and long term impact
- Lobby as appropriately.

With regard to the next steps the information would continue to be collected on a quarterly basis with regular updates to the Welfare Reform Board, CMT and elected members through Cabinet, Scrutiny and Members seminars. Information would be shared regionally through ANEC and the Institute of Local Governance who had been commissioned regionally to monitor the short medium and long term impact of these reforms.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

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 11 – Welfare Reform Monitoring Update 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