

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting27th November 2013

1. Title of Item/Report

Social Fund Localisation - Back on Track Pilot

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report on the Social Fund Localisation – Back on Track Pilot.

The Borough's Back on Track Support pilot scheme for 2013/14 went operational from 2nd April, 2013 replacing at a Borough level some discretionary elements of the Department Of Work and Pensions (DWP) administered Social Fund that were abolished under the Welfare Reform Act 2012. The report provided an interim evaluation of the pilot at the 6 month point and proposals for continuation of the scheme, with some minor amendments, for 2014/15.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The early evaluation of the Back On track Pilot be noted.
2. No major changes be made to the scheme at this time.
3. The following minor amendments to the eligibility criteria to address the service gaps and issues identified at paragraph 15 be agreed:-
 - a. That Contribution Based Jobseekers Allowance is added to the list of eligible benefits for settlement support.
 - b. Alignment to wage- allow support with rent costs and an extension to the number of days of crisis support that can be provided (i.e. food, fuel), on a zero interest loan basis, for JSA claimants making the transition into work, providing an affordable alternative to pay day lenders for this client group.
 - c. Work is undertaken with colleagues in Welfare Rights and advice agencies such as SDAIS to develop a guide to maximum income level for clients, in determining access to Back on Track and dependent upon their

circumstances.

d. The requirement for the client to have approached DWP for a Short Term Advance first be removed where the application is for an immediate need for crisis support for food and fuel.

e. Applications for Back on Track support can be considered without eligible clients first approaching the DWP for a Budgeting loan where a financial assessment has already shown a lack of affordability for a loan.

f. That a Communication and Marketing strategy be developed.

4. The government allocation of programme funding of £743k and the administrative funding is used to fund a second year of the scheme with delivery to be commissioned out for a year with the option of up to two years extension.

5. Authority be delegated to the Head of Policy, Improvement and Engagement to make minor changes to the eligibility criteria and process as appropriate to respond in a timely way to emerging welfare reform related issues, where it would improve the client journey without having a significant impact on funds or services.

3. Reasons for the Decision

No major changes to the scheme are proposed at this time as it is still difficult to quantify the level of demand for the rest of the pilot year and beyond with only 6 months available data whilst in the early stages of welfare reform, and the rollout of Universal Credit still to happen. However discussions with partners in advice agencies indicate a consensus feeling that the real impact of welfare reform is yet to appear and that need for support will increase. This resonates with previous reports to Cabinet on Welfare Reform. The minor changes to eligibility will address some of the issues/anomalies/gaps in service provision that have emerged since the scheme has been operating.

The pilot ends in March 2014 so for the scheme to continue, a commissioning process would need to be undertaken to put in place a contract for delivery from April 2014.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Nelson declared a personal non prejudicial in respect of agenda item 12 – Social Fund Localisation – Back on Track Pilot as he was a Member of Tristar Board.

Councillor Mrs McCoy declared a personal non prejudicial in respect of agenda item 12 – Social Fund Localisation – Back on Track Pilot as she was the Chair of Stockton District Advice Information Service.

6. Details of any Dispensations

None

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

Midnight on Thursday, 5th December 2013

Proper Officer
29 November 2013