

AGENDA ITEM XX

REPORT TO CABINET

12 MARCH 2015

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Leader of the Council – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Cook

WELFARE REFORM UPDATE: QUARTER 3 2014/15

1. Summary

To present an update on Quarter 3 monitoring of the outcomes/impact of Welfare Reform, a summary of actions undertaken to mitigate against circumstances arising from the implementation of the act and details of the work undertaken to date on the refresh of the Brighter Borough for All Tackling Family Poverty Framework document.

2. Recommendations

1. The contents of the report be noted;
2. Members note the Quarter 3 performance monitoring outcomes and observations
3. Those members receive a more detailed report on the rollout of Universal Credit following a DWP meeting in March 2015.
4. Approve £110,000 from the Welfare Reform budget : to continue to address staffing requirements in Welfare rights and SDAIS as identified in paragraph 19; to support of the 12 month LCTS pilot detailed in paragraph 51
5. The Brighter Borough for All – Tackling Family Poverty document is refreshed and presented to cabinet for approval in the summer 2015.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

This report provides an update on the various welfare reforms, highlighting early indications of impact and areas of concern.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted Members) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in **paragraphs 9 and 11** of the Council's code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of **paragraphs 12 - 17** of the code.

5. Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 16** of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, in accordance with **paragraph 18** of the code, consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or
 - relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.
6. A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code).
7. Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

8. It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.
9. Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code).

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INTRODUCTION

1. Quarterly reports are presented to Cabinet providing information on a range of indicators which show how welfare reforms are impacting on residents and service provision across the borough. These reports also include detail on any updates the Council has received with regard to further roll out of welfare reform and interventions the Council is making to manage the impact.
2. Most aspects of the Welfare Reform Act have now been in place for some 21 months, monitoring of impact evidences that patterns of behaviour, impact on services and levels of activity remains high. Changes in patterns and trends from quarter to quarter are becoming less variable which fits with an emerging understanding that, with the exception of Universal Credit which is still to be rolled out locally, implications from the Welfare

Reform Act are more embedded and have become more “business as usual” rather than something “new” .

3. Since its introduction our monitoring framework has allowed us to better understand the impact on communities and services and react accordingly to mitigate impact, amend policy and service delivery, shifting resources where necessary. This report highlights some of the work already undertaken in this respect.
4. As time moves on since the introduction of this legislation and the immediate impacts continue to be supported through mitigation, a picture of the more medium to longer term impact start to emerge. Gathering of data and intelligence supporting welfare reform, the impact of the recent economic climate, case studies and work undertaken at a local and regional level and with our VCSE partners, suggest that the medium to longer term impacts are more akin to the wider determinants of Poverty.
5. Out with our current monitoring arrangements, new or unexpected trends have emerged such as activity around sanctions, take-up of food banks and shifts in the rented housing sector from social to private landlords. In a number of areas activity levels have plateaued with little change in position from one quarter to the next, this leads us to consider the value of some of the measures and activity we currently collate and to review how best we might capture this impact going forward. Consideration will be given to the currency and value of monitoring arrangements at year end to ensure they remain fit for purpose.
6. There are clear links to our Brighter Borough for All - Tackling Family Poverty document. This has been subject to review following a workshop with our partners, considerations of new national policy documentation on Poverty, benchmarking of regional poverty strategies and work undertaken by Children North East, the North East Poverty Commission and social policy research undertaken by Joseph Rowntree organisation.
7. This work suggests that our current document requires some review, details of this are summarised at paragraph 66.

BACKGROUND

8. As part of the Government’s roll out of welfare reform a number of changes have already been implemented as previously reported to members.

Welfare Reform Measures for 2014/15

9. Members agreed the framework to monitor the impact of Welfare Reform in line with principles in support of a manageable and informative process, monitoring short and long term impact.
10. The monitoring framework for 2014 /15 is set out under the following themes, which are linked to the Welfare Reform legislation.
 - Universal Credit
 - Personal Independent Payments
 - Under Occupation
 - Social Fund/ Crisis Loans
 - Local Council Tax support Scheme
 - Benefit Cap
 - Satisfaction Measures
 - General / cross cutting e.g. crime, advice/ information.

11. Measures used to track impact are detailed at Appendix 1. Measures are shown as having a direct or indirect link to the implications of the act. Satisfaction measures are detailed under a separate category. Children's activity data and the economic climate update reports, received regularly by members should be considered alongside this welfare reform monitoring arrangements.

Quarter Three 2014/15 - Update

12. The following provides a summary of key points from the most recent Welfare Reform data collected and recent activity to mitigate against impacts. A further list of ongoing activity which forms part of the day to day business of the Council, in accordance with the Policy Principles outlined in the Council Plan, are referenced at paragraph 10.

Universal Credit.

13. The DWP has recently announced a national rollout of Universal Credit for new single claimants who would otherwise be eligible for Jobseekers Allowance. Roll out will take place over four tranches from February 2015 and will be introduced into the Stockton area in tranche four with effect from December 2015.
14. The DWP has advised that it is putting in place funded arrangements between Jobcentre Plus and LAs to make available support for those needing extra help to claim UC. These interim arrangements will apply for national expansion only. Once the roll out is extended to all claimant groups DWP will be developing arrangements under the 'Universal Support – delivered locally framework', formally referred to as the Local Support Services Framework.
15. All indications are that a substantial amount of work will remain with the benefit service, at least for some considerable time including:-
- Discretionary Housing Payments for Universal Credit Cases and non-UC cases
 - The housing cost element for Exempt Supported Housing
 - Housing costs for those living in temporary accommodation
 - Local Council Tax Support.
 - Pensioner housing costs
 - Recovery of outstanding Housing Benefit and Local Council Tax Support overpayments
 - Appeals / reconsiderations / written enquiries / for LCTS, DHP and overpayment decisions / decision in relation to exempt accommodation and for existing housing benefit cases
 - Fraud investigation for LCTS (should the LA decide to have a fraud presence) and possibly to handle fraud enquiries from the new SFIS in connection with former HB cases.
16. A meeting is scheduled with DWP for March 2015 to discuss the detail and plans for this rollout. A more detailed report will be presented to cabinet after this date. Once the detail is known consideration will be given locally to how best monitoring of impact on residents and services can be gauged.
17. ANEC have recently commissioned on behalf of the North East Authorities, the Institute of Local Governance (ILG) to undertake a piece of work monitoring the impact of Universal Credit on individuals. This work stems from the initial work commissioned by Stockton through the ILG to look at the impact of Welfare Reform on residents and the economy of the Borough. This work was held up as good practice and led to wider research on the impact on the Region. The second report on this is due to be published later in the year.

Independent Payments

18. Measures monitoring direct impact of PIP are mainly related to requests for advice, guidance, assistance and representation for applications and appeals. Figures show a slight decrease on the previous quarter for those accessing advice and information about financial matters and benefits. Welfare Rights have to date supported some 718 clients, figures indicate that still the largest proportion of clients approaching their service are for advice on the Employment and Support Allowance (which replaced Incapacity and Sickness Benefits) and Personal Independence Payments (PIP) (which replaced Disability Living Allowance). Over 53% of the enquiries received by the Welfare Rights Team are Welfare Reform related.
19. Additional funding of £70,000 has been allocated for the last 2 years to provide capacity in the Welfare Rights Team and SDAIS. It is proposed, given the level of demand this continues for a further year. Longer term arrangements will be addressed through the review of Advice and Information services, the outcome of which will be presented to members in June 2015.
20. To date this year Welfare Rights have successfully supported 94 tribunals and raised an additional £1,036,171 for clients through benefit checks and maximisation.
21. Although numbers are down on the same point last year (9632), some 8665 people have accessed SDAIS for support this year.
22. Indirect measures include approaches for housing advice, requests for DHP payments and number of applications to the Back on Track Fund, calls to Customer Services about Council Tax or benefits and in year Council Tax collection rates.
23. Approaches for housing advice have seen a slight decline on last quarter but overall a cumulative increase compared to the same period last year. Numbers per category remain comparable with previous trends however private and social rent arrear queries has seen an increase this quarter from 27 enquiries to 43.
24. Discretionary Housing Payments data at Quarter 3 shows 540 payments made to date. For the second year running careful management of this fund will enable support provision to be available through to the end of the financial year, with all funding allocated. The access criteria provide funding to families easing their overall financial burden.
25. The Back on Track fund has seen a further 10% increase in applications compared to Quarter 2, which can be attributed to the increased promotion and subsequent awareness of the scheme.
26. Other indirect measures show an increase of calls with queries about Council Tax from the last quarter and an increase overall on the number of enquiries taken last year.

Discretionary Housing Payments

27. The Department for Work and Pensions provides councils with a cash limited Discretionary Housing Payments fund, (DHP) to assist people requiring additional help with their housing costs. Since the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 a number of legislative changes have been introduced and the funding has been increased to assist with the impact of the new welfare reforms.
28. Stockton's DHP budget for 2014/15 was £446,762. To date we have spent and committed approx. £415,143. Expenditure on DHP's is being monitored on a daily/weekly basis as we

approach the end of the financial year. This is a key priority for the benefit service as funding cannot be carried over into next financial year. Any unspent money must be returned to the DWP.

29. Joint arrangements are continuing between the housing benefit and the housing options services to work with customers to try and find a longer term, sustainable solution whilst the immediate financial difficulties are being addressed using the DHP fund.
30. The DHP policy is kept under regular review to reflect any gaps in provision and to reflect any changes in housing benefit legislation that could affect the amount of benefit a customer is entitled to.
31. Distribution of the government contribution and upper limit for 2015/16 - We have recently been advised that Stockton's DHP allocation for 2015/16 will be £389,061 this, is a reduction of 13% on the previous year, with a permitted total of £972,653. The funding incorporates four areas of support – Core funding, to help people with non-welfare reform related matters, such as issues with non-dependents and helping people transition into work, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) reforms, Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS) and the Benefit Cap. It is for LAs to apply discretion as to which claimants will receive payments.

Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

32. Members were previously advised of the programme that will result in our LA Housing Benefit Fraud Service transferring over to DWP. The transfer will take place from 1st May 2015 and we are now in discussions with the DWP implementation team to ensure a smooth transition for the staff.
33. LAs are required to sign up to a Service Level Agreement which sets out the principles for effective collaborative working and information sharing between the LA and DWP Fraud and Error services (FES) for the purpose of investigations and prosecutions of Housing Benefit claims.
34. A named Single Point of Contact (SPOC) within the benefit service will receive DWP requests for information and provide all information and data requested to FES within locally agreed timescales throughout the investigation process. We are now in discussions to establish the most appropriate mechanism for dealing with this area of work.

Under Occupation

35. Direct measures monitoring the impact of under occupation include actual numbers affected by under occupation, bids on properties v availability, rent arrears, evictions, repossession orders and approaches for housing advice. Discretionary housing payments, tenancy failures and homelessness applications also support monitoring of the impact of this element of the reforms.
36. Current figures show that some 1953 individuals are affected by under occupation, compared to 2129 at the same point last year. Further data is awaited on current waiting times for properties and numbers of applications for properties, although evidence suggests that movement has stabilised. The DHP payments significantly mitigate against this aspect of welfare reform.
37. Rent arrears remains an issue although numbers in arrears are slightly down on the same period last year, 4523 compared to 5166, this impacts on housing providers with some 40% of Tristar (Thirteen) tenants in rent arrears. Tristar properties continue to see an

approximate 10% of starter tenancies failing within the first 12 months although this quarter is slightly down on last quarter, with affordability and demand the key influencing factors.

38. Some 700+ clients approached the Housing Options service, some of whom potentially presenting as homeless. With the exception of 3 cases other resolutions were sought to prevent these clients becoming homeless.
39. Indirect measures identify that there has been a slight increase in the numbers of children taken into care the majority of which are short term admissions. In general these children and young people have complex needs/ behavioural problems.

Local Welfare Assistance Scheme

40. There have been some 915 applications for funding from the Back on Track service. To date this year there are 628 awards for crisis support, 599 awards for settlement support and 157 awards for rent in advance. The budget has been profiled until the end of the year to ensure provision of ongoing support is maintained.
41. Members approved a report in October 2014 setting out sustainability arrangements and new ways of working to ensure a holistic approach to supporting those in need of settlement and crisis loans and to ensure sustainability of funding until March 2019. A Welfare Assistance Reform workshop involving representatives from front line agencies across the voluntary and community sector and Council services, along with data collated through the current Back on Track provider, informed these suggestions for change going forward.
42. The agreed changes will come into effect from April 2015 bringing the service in house and providing a holistic package of support. Good progress is being made, with the support of the current provider, to ensure this is in place for April 2015.

Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

43. The Local Government Finance Act imposed a duty upon local councils to adopt a Local Council Tax Support Scheme, to replace Council Tax Benefit, from April 2013. The existing scheme will remain in place for the financial year 2015/16. It is designed to safeguard the financial position of the council whilst trying to ensure that the effect of the scheme does not disproportionately affect any particular group of residents.
44. The impact of Council Tax Support on both in-year and long-term collection performance is being monitored through the agreed welfare reform monitoring framework.
45. Direct measures to monitor the impact of the introduction of this scheme include enquiries made directly to customer service regarding Council Tax, in year Council Tax collection rates and enforcement activity.
46. Overall there has been a slight decrease in the number of contacts either face to face or by telephone regarding Council Tax enquiries compared to Quarter 2. Cumulative figures show there is an overall increase of approximately 7% on the number of calls compared to the same period last year.
47. Collection rates are slightly lower than that in the same period last year, some 83.16% compared to 83.45% last year at the same point and long term collection rates of 99.10%.
48. Collection rates of those paying council tax for the first time is 69.12% (Jan 2015) compared to 75% last year.

49. Software changes, which have recently been installed and are now being tested, means that data on enforcement activity, summons and bailiff referrals will not be available until year end or Quarter 1 in the new financial year.
50. Work has also been undertaken on a number of LCTS cases to identify whether particularly vulnerable Council Tax payers are accessing all available benefits and support. Twenty five cases were considered in detail:
- 4 were submitted for discount
 - 8 were awarded disabled relief
 - 5 were awarded carers relief
51. The work is extremely labour-intensive and cannot be accommodated within existing resources. On the basis of the success of the pilot, £40,000 is requested from the Welfare Reform Fund for a temporary period of 12 months to carry on the work. Monitoring of outcomes will be provided via future Welfare Reform reports.

The Benefit Cap

52. The benefit cap restricts benefits paid to a customer to a maximum of £350 per week for a single person or £500 per week for a couple or lone parent. The benefit service continues to work closely with the Housing Options service to try and find longer term, sustainable solutions for customers affected, whilst the immediate financial difficulties may in some cases be addressed through the use of the DHP fund.
53. Numbers impacted by a benefit cap fluctuate regularly depending on a change in circumstances. Latest figures suggest approximately 115 clients are impacted by the benefit cap. A reduction in availability of funds can impact on individuals in many different ways depending on individual circumstances.
54. Support is provide in many different ways depending on the need; for example, support from the Housing Options team or a CAF referral, whatever is the most effective solution.

Survey Measures.

56. A temperature check to monitor perceptions, satisfaction levels, future optimism about the economy and general wellbeing of individuals is collated through our Viewpoint Residents survey. Autumn 2014 results were reported in the Quarter 2 report. Further updates will be available later in the year following our main resident's survey.

JSA and ESA Sanctions

57. Updated information to September 2014 has been published on JSA and ESA sanction decisions. For JSA claimants since a peak in June 2013 (3145 decisions) overall number of decisions has seen a decline in numbers with the latest quarter published showing 1554 decisions in all. Monthly statistics vary with published information showing no real consistent trends between adverse, cancelled and non-adverse decisions. This makes rationale for increases and decreases difficult to interpret.
58. ESA decisions has seen a rising trend with an increase in the number of decisions overall. (Quarter July to Sept 2014 seeing an increase in the number of overall decisions from 78 in the previous quarter to 112.) Figures indicate a large increase in cancelled decisions. Without further details it is difficult to understand the reason behind the sharp rise in this period. The increase in ESA decisions correlates to the increase in numbers accessing

support from the Welfare Rights team over a similar time period. Statistics are provided at Appendix 2.

59. Relationships with DWP continue to build at a local and regional level. DWP colleagues are engaging through the Assistance Chief Executives network as well as on a more local level following their changes to working arrangements. Closer working following the announcement of our inclusion in tranche 4 of Universal Credit will also allow further dialogue.

Activity in support of residents impacted by Welfare Reform and the wider economic climate.

60. For some time now the authority has worked alongside our partners with a focus on “promoting achievement and tackling disadvantage”, supported by the underpinning principles of “protecting the vulnerable”, “reducing inequalities” and “targeting those most in need” which are set out in many of our approved strategies.
61. In addition to the services detailed above there are many activities or initiatives which are part of our daily business that support, mitigate or look to prevention the short or longer term impacts of Welfare Reform, Poverty and the inequalities that exist across our Borough. Detailed below is a summary of activity undertaken over the last two years which either directly or indirectly supports our residents impacted by the reforms introduced or the longer term economic climate.

DIRECT

Financial

- A range of financial support including Hardship Relief Fund
- Additional funding in year 2 of DHP money and a revised policy approved in April 2013 to better support those in need.
- Established links between the Housing Options Service and the DHP fund to enable access to the fund in extreme circumstances.
- Support for Foster Carers as a result of the “under occupancy payment reduction”
- A commitment to ring fence the Back on Track funding and more latterly the reconfiguration of this service to deliver a more holistic service and more sustainable funding arrangements.
- Approved the localisation of Council Tax scheme designed to support the most vulnerable
- Decision to subsidise court costs where debt is less than £200
- Additional financial support through Public Health Funding to SDAIS to deliver a more coordinated approach to Food Bank provision
- Additional £100k each year for the next 3 years to serve as a loan pot administered by Tees Credit union. Repayments would mean funding is recycled.
- Additional funding allocated to provide capacity within Stockton District Advice and Information Service and the Welfare Rights Team

General Support and Advice

- Support for TCU through a change team to ensure sustainability, development of its capacity and the modernisation of its systems. Further work and investment in TCU including the provision of a loan service.
- Briefings and training of staff from across the Authority on the detail of the welfare reforms in support of residents enquiries.
- Introduction of a payroll deduction scheme for SBC employees to TCU
- Introduction of a voucher scheme for recycled furniture.

- Improved communications and advertising to raise awareness within the Council and its partner agencies linking into the Stockton Welfare Agencies Network (SWAN) project which is co-ordinating mapping of welfare reform related support across the Borough.
- Supported a free or low cost events programed which residents can enjoy all year round
- Undertaken scrutiny reviews of Poverty and Welfare Reform
- Invested in our VCSE partners.
- Taxation Service invested in a texting package to support those in arrears advising them to get in touch.

Housing

- Delivered a home improvement programme reducing those in fuel poverty.
- Supported the Community energy switching scheme delivering reduced energy cost for residents.
- Worked with our housing providers and private landlords to ensure appropriate housing provision, policies and practice supports those most in need of housing support, advice and information. RSL's have also put in a significant amount of support for residents. This work has had a big impact on mitigating impact on many residents.
- Re-launch of the compass choice Based Letting Scheme.
- Supported housing developments such as affordable housing schemes, the extra care housing provision, new builds and refurbishment of empty properties.
- Taken steps to address the issues of a mismatch of social accommodation in terms of 'family size' and 'property type' (i.e. the majority of the social housing stock in the borough is family accommodation, generally three bedroom properties, whilst demand is for smaller units). By working with our Registered Provider partners to ensure that future new build affordable housing in the Borough includes smaller accommodation (2 bedroom family housing and 1 bedroom flats). The Homes and Communities Agency has recently confirmed that a number of sites across the Borough have secured funding from the 2015-18 new build programme, these sites will include the provision of much needed smaller (1 and 2 bedroom) accommodation.
- Advice and support provided through the Housing Options Team preventing debt problems, homelessness and signposting to other services.

Wider Activity

- Investment in and Regeneration of our Town Centres providing employment opportunities and improved prosperity of residents.
- Investments in road and rail transport leading to improved journey to work time and supporting inward investments.
- Multiple housing regeneration schemes providing affordable housing and a pleasant environment in which to live.
- Investment and support to Tees Achieve enabling them to improve the skills provision supporting both residents and local businesses and those in NEET.
- Through investment improve economic prosperity of the area.
- Invested in the borough parks and open spaces providing an improved place to live and work.
- Delivered free early years and childcare provision.
- Continued to work with and support our Children Centre providers.
- Effectively rolled out the new SEN arrangements supporting the most vulnerable families
- Developed an Early Intervention strategy giving children the best start in life.
- Supported our educational establishments to ensure standards are maintained.
- Delivered the Spark of Genius project bringing our most vulnerable children back into the borough.
- Implemented the early year's pilot "A Fairer start."

- Invested and improved our libraries and customer access points making it easier of people to access services across the borough
- Continued to reduce crime and support those more vulnerable to committing offences
- Successfully delivered the Troubled Families programme supporting families most in need.

BRIGHTER BOROUGH FOR ALL – TACKLING FAMILY POVERTY.

62. This framework to tackle family poverty has been in place for a number of years and is the focus of the Stockton Local Strategic Partnership with Locality Forums supporting the two aims of “Giving every child the best start in life” and “Maximising Family Income”.

63. A Welfare Reform Assistance workshop, which involved representatives from front line agencies across the voluntary and community sector and Council services including homelessness prevention, was held last year to look at what support was available to resident across the borough and identify any gaps and opportunities for better linkages.

64. The outcomes from the workshop identified that there was a need for:

- awareness raising of the support that is available across the agencies/charities
- a gap in support for single people under 35 years with no children, crisis or particular health need.

65. Some of the issues raised have been addressed through the revised arrangements for the administration of the Back on Track fund approved by members in October last year. Other aspects are being considered through the review of Advice and Information services. The launch of the SWAN Network and its web site due for official launch in March 2015 will address further gaps identified.

66. Some additional work has been undertaken to consider the Brighter Borough For All – Poverty Framework document taking into consideration recently published policy documentation, consultations from government on poverty, some local and regional work considering the impact of welfare reform changes and links to poverty and recent social policy research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. This has highlighted a need to review our current Brighter Borough for All - Tackling Poverty Framework document to ensure it is meeting the needs of our residents and fit for purpose in the coming years.

67. It is recommended that a review of the framework document, a refreshed needs assessment and gap analysis will be undertaken, with a further report back to cabinet in the summer.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

68. Possible impact on MTFP/Council Tax collection, impact on staff/potential redundancy costs in connection with Universal Credit roll- out.

69. Continued additional funding of £70,000 for Welfare Rights staff and SDAIS.; £40, 000 for 12 month pilot in Council Tax. Both to be funded from the Welfare Reform Budget

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

70. None.

RISK ASSESSMENT

71. There is a risk that the housing benefit administrative grant which funds the majority of staffing costs will reduce at a greater speed than the work reduces causing pressure on the

medium term financial plan. There are concerns about the readiness of the national IT system and how this may impact on local service delivery. There are unqualified risks around roll out of universal credit and impact on staffing.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

Environment and Housing

72. The raft of welfare benefit changes continue to cause issues around the availability of affordable housing.

Healthier Communities and Adults

73. Supporting people via advice services to claim appropriate benefits and challenge sanctions where appropriate assists with financial inclusion. Discretionary housing benefits and our back on track arrangements provide additional support to residents facing financial issues.

Stronger Communities

74. Continuing support to residents via the provision of appropriate advice and information services will promote financial inclusion. The further development of anti-poverty measures will further strengthen this.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

75. The introduction of any new interventions around welfare reform will be subject to an equalities impact assessment.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

76. Previous member seminars on welfare reform, ongoing Select Committee consideration of key issues.

Name of Contact Officer: Julie Nixon (Lead Head of Service for Welfare Reform)

Post Title: Head of Housing & Community Protection

Telephone No: 01642 527072

Email Address: julie.nixon@stockton.gov.uk

Education related N/A

Background Papers: None.

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: See above. Property N/A