

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting23rd March 2016

1. Title of Item/Report

Welfare Reform Update Q3 2015/16

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report on monitoring of the outcomes / impact of welfare reform and a summary of actions undertaken by the Council to mitigate against circumstances arising from the implementation of these changes.

Quarterly reports on welfare reform had been provided to Cabinet for the past three years, providing information on a range of indicators which showed how these changes were impacting on residents and service provision across the Borough. These reports had also included detail on any updates the Council had received with regard to the further roll-out of welfare reform and interventions the Council was making to manage its impact on residents.

As part of the existing monitoring arrangements, new or unexpected trends had emerged such as heightened activity around benefit sanctions, the use of local food banks and shifts in the rented housing sector from social to private landlords.

Following feedback received on previous quarterly reports, at the end of 2014/15 there was a review of the large range of information previously provided to ensure that it was more focussed and easier to follow, yet continued to provide an accurate and robust summary of welfare reform issues. The report continued to use that more focussed range of information.

The Institute of Local Governance (ILG) was continuing to undertake work monitoring the impact of welfare reform across the region. The outcomes from that research work were proving useful in understanding the local impact of welfare reform and whether it differs from the impact across the wider region.

A basket of monitoring indicators had been developed to support the ILG research work, which had been entirely included within the monitoring

framework and was attached to the report, with each of those measures clearly labelled.

Measures used to track impact were detailed in the attachment to the report. The monitoring framework was set out under the following issues:

- Advice and Information Services;
- Discretionary Housing Payments;
- Social Fund/Crisis Payments;
- Housing;
- Local Council Tax Support Scheme;
- Employment; and
- General/Cross-cutting.

In March 2015, Members approved funding for a temporary period of 12 months for work to help to identify some of the potentially vulnerable Council tax payers in receipt of local council tax support, to ensure they were accessing all the relevant benefit and support they were entitled to.

The work undertaken had been very successful and the Council had contacted over 400 council tax payers and had been able to help more than a 100 more vulnerable customers by maximising their entitlement to various reliefs and discounts. Most customers had received an average reduction in their council tax bills of between £53.00 and £70.00 with a small number of customers being eligible to a full council tax discount or exemption from the charge. This work was extremely labour intensive and cannot be accommodated within existing resources and there remains a lot of work to do.

Members were requested to approve funding of £40,000 from the Welfare Reform Fund to continue the Council's temporary support work to assist residents in receipt of local council tax support in accessing all the relevant benefit and support they were entitled to, for another 12 months from April 2016.

Public Health had part-funded a one-year project for SDAIS to look in detail at the usage of food banks in the borough. A summary of the report was attached to the report, with the following profile of Stockton food bank users collated through this research:

- most food bank users are aged 25-44 (59%), with 16% aged between 16-24 and less than 2% aged over 65;
- over half of food bank clients were single (57%) and a further 24% were households with dependent children;
- 55% of food bank clients were male; and
- 7% of food bank clients were from black and minority ethnic

communities.

As a direct result of this research, SDAIS had identified a pressing need to provide support to those people who had repeatedly accessed emergency food relief through food banks. During the period from January to November 2015, 1,371 people used food banks in Stockton, with 225 people (16%) having used food banks on three or more occasions.

SDAIS had submitted a proposal to SBC that they would recruit, train, support and supervise a team of 30 volunteer advocates to this client group, to deliver positive outcomes on improving their welfare position and general financial wellbeing and accessing training and employment opportunities. SDAIS had advised that £29,831 would fund the provision of the proposed service for 2016-17, with the initial training undertaken during this period enabling the service to be provided on a longer term basis.

Members were requested to approve funding of £29,831 to Stockton District Advice and Information Service (SDAIS) from the Welfare Reform Fund to fund the recruitment, training, support and supervision of a team of 30 volunteer advocates to provide support to people who have repeatedly accessed emergency food relief through food banks, for 12 months from April 2016.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The contents of this report be noted.
2. The performance monitoring outcomes and observations provided be noted.
3. Funding of £40,000 from the Welfare Reform Fund be approved to continue the Council's temporary support work to assist residents in receipt of local council tax support in accessing all the relevant benefit and support they are entitled to, for another 12 months from April 2016.
4. Funding of £29,831 to Stockton District Advice and Information Service (SDAIS) be approved from the Welfare Reform Fund to fund the recruitment, training, support and supervision of a team of 30 volunteer advocates to provide support to people who have repeatedly accessed emergency food relief through food banks, for 12 months from April 2016.

3. Reasons for the Decision

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

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Mrs McCoy declared a personal prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 10 - Welfare Reform Update Q3 2015/16 as she was a member of SDAIS. Councillor Mrs McCoy withdrew from the meeting and left the room during consideration of the item.

6. Details of any Dispensations

N/A

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

Midnight, 4th April 2016

Proper Officer
29 March 2016