

Housing and Community Select Committee
Update to Executive Scrutiny Committee – 22 October 2013

Update on Progress (including issues/problems/successes)

Review of Welfare Reform and Financial Inclusion

The review will examine the early impact of the welfare changes introduced in April 2013 on the Council and partner agencies, and identify where policies will need to be reviewed in response. The review will also consider the wider aspects of financial inclusion, looking at a range of factors such as food banks, illegal money lending, and credit unions. There will be close links with the review Child Poverty.

Due to the fast moving nature of the issues under review, it was agreed that the Committee may make interim reports to Cabinet on a particular issue should the need arise.

The Committee met on 12 September to consider the issue of food poverty and food banks in the local area, and receive evidence from A Way Out (a provider of a food bank service). The Committee also considered the early trends of welfare reform as reported by SBC's Welfare Rights Team, and Stockton District Advice and Information Service.

The Committee is exploring what support could be provided to food banks and the Council's relationship with them. It was also agreed to receive evidence from Job Centre Plus in order to understand a range of issues including access to its hardship fund.

On 17 October the Committee focussed on housing issues. Representatives from Endeavour Housing and Tristar Homes, and SBC Housing Options were in attendance. Discussion focussed on the impact of the underoccupation charge, housing allocations, and general support to tenants.

In advance of the meeting the Committee were provided with the results of a survey of all the Registered Providers of housing in the Borough. This has provided the Committee with an overview of the impact of welfare reform across the sector, and what support is being provided to tenants.