

**Housing and Community Select Committee**  
**Update to Executive Scrutiny Committee – 4 February 2014**

**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 of Child Poverty.

On 5 December the Committee met with Job Centre Plus, in order to better understand the Claimant's Commitment, the impact of the sanctions regime, use of hardship funds and signposting to other services, and support for vulnerable clients.

Members had a number of issues that remained unanswered following the meeting and a request for further information was submitted to Job Centre Plus.

Following discussion at the meeting, all Members were invited to contribute to the Council's submission to the national independent review of the operation of the benefit sanction regime.

On 23 January the Committee met jointly with members from Arts, Leisure and Culture Committee in order to consider issues relating to financial inclusion and crisis support. Thrive presented their work on debt levels on Teesside, Five Lamps updated members on the operation of the Back on Track pilot scheme, Trading Standards discussed the work to tackle illegal money lending, and Tees Credit Union gave an overview of their services.