

5 NOVEMBER 2012

E X T R A C T

26 **WELFARE REFORM**

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Adult Social Services outlining the significant impact of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 which legislated for the biggest change to the welfare system for over 60 years.

The report indicated that the Act introduced a wide range of reforms contained within the Coalition Agreement to make the benefits and tax credits systems “fairer and simpler” by:

- Creating the right incentives to get more people into work
- Protecting the most vulnerable in society
- Delivering fairness to those claiming benefit and to the taxpayer

Members were asked to consider some of the implications for vulnerable local residents and also for health and social care services; and to agree what actions were required to respond to those.

Rose Boylan, Principal Economic Officer, gave a presentation on the welfare reforms and elaborated in respect of the changes, including:

- Housing Policy, Housing Benefits and Under Occupation
- Localised Council Tax Support
- Local Welfare Assistance
- Benefit Cap Thresholds
- Personal Independent Payment (PIP)
- Universal Credit

Responding to Members’ comments, Rose Boylan informed the Committee that PIPs would contain a daily living element and a mobility element. Changes would be made in how assessments were carried out although final details of these were yet to appear from the Government. In relation to changes to Local Welfare Assistance, a Wirral scheme was currently under development. There would be a certain amount of start up and management costs and delivery and administration issues were being worked up in advance of the April 2013 implementation date.

Rose Boylan commented that she would circulate further detailed information in response to Members’ questions in respect of the PIP medical assessment, Under-occupancy and older people and LHA and private landlords.

The Chair suggested that visits could be undertaken to other Pilot authorities who were further on with implementation; or that a member of staff could be embedded within another Pilot authority for a period, to learn from that authority's experiences.

The Director suggested that the Committee would need to consider how it monitored and responded to the impact of the reforms.

With regard to the housing changes, there would be a need to establish the scope of the review which was already being undertaken into this aspect of the reforms by the Economy and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

On a motion by the Chair, duly seconded, it was -

Resolved – That

- (1) Cabinet be requested to ensure that the Council had enough resources to work through the reforms from January.**
- (2) The Scrutiny Programme Board be asked to look into the issue of a cross-cutting scrutiny review in respect of the implications of the welfare reforms, particularly in relation to housing matters.**
- (3) The report outlining the significant impact of the Welfare Reform be noted.**
- (4) Further updates be brought back to the Committee as specific social care policies are developed in response to the changes outlined within the report and the Chair and Spokespersons meet with the Director of Adult Social Services and Rose Boylan to discuss the impact in relation to this Committee's scrutiny role.**