

14 NOVEMBER 2012

EXTRACT

30 **WELFARE REFORM AND UNDER OCCUPATION
- DRAFT SCOPE DOCUMENT FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY REVIEW**

Further to minute 24 (5 September 2012), the Chair provided an update on progress with the Benefit Reforms and Under-Occupation Scrutiny Review and presented a detailed Scope for the review, which was agreed by a Task and Finish Group of Members of the Scrutiny Committee on 18 October 2012. The proposed focus of the review was to investigate the impact of changes to housing benefit and the welfare reforms specifically related to under occupation in both the public and private housing sectors. Key issues for the review would be:

- The impact of the introduction of the Housing Benefit Cap;
- The impact of changes to the Local Housing Allowance, with special reference to the Shared Accommodation Rate for under-35's;
- The allocation process for Discretionary Housing Benefit;
- The impacts of the reforms relating to Under-occupation and how this affects households and communities;
- The impact of the reforms on the Social Housing sector (Housing Associations).

The Chair commented also upon the Select Committee-style of evidence gathering that was to be used for the Scrutiny Review and he set out proposed guidelines to be adopted for the Evidence Gathering Days, which he envisaged would be held in January 2013. Additional evidence-gathering would take place in late January and early February 2013, if necessary, with a final report presented to the Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 7 March 2013, prior to its referral to Cabinet. In response to comments from Members on the impact of Universal Credit, the Chair indicated his willingness for additional people to be added to the list of invitees to the Select Committee sessions. However, so as to ensure that the scrutiny review was completed before the end of the municipal year, he believed that the review should focus upon its previously agreed scope. At the present time, full details of Universal Credit were not known and he suggested that it could form the basis of a separate scrutiny review, when more precise information was available.

Resolved –

- (1) That the Scope for the Benefits Reform and Under-Occupation Scrutiny Review, as detailed in Appendix 1, be approved and the progress to date, be noted.**
- (2) That the proposed guidelines for the Evidence Day(s) and the indicative timescale for the review, be noted.**

- (3) That, in addition to the list of invitees to the Select Committee Session, the Task and Finish Group be requested to obtain evidence from representatives of the following organisations –**
- **The Probation Service**
 - **Wirral Homes**
 - **HM Armed Forces**
 - **The Adaptation s Team**
 - **The Director of Wirral YMCA (to be accompanied by a client affected by the Government proposals)**
- (4) That officers be requested to undertake further planning of the review, in consultation with members of the Task & Finish Group and that an easy to use questionnaire be developed to facilitate evidence gathering.**