

POLICY INFORM: REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT

Directorate Policy: September 2015

The Directorate Policy briefings will provide an overview of key political events, ongoing and recent national legislation, and emerging policies. The Directorate Policy briefing will be produced specifically to inform Portfolio Holders and Elected Members and will be taken to Policy & Performance Committees for discussion.

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Introduction

The policy briefing paper is intended to provide Members of the Policy and Performance Committee with the latest position on emerging policy and legislative developments to support the committees work programme and future scrutiny work.

The following table outlines the timetable for the preparation and reporting of policy briefing papers:

| Policy & Performance Committee Briefings | |
|---|--|
| July 2015 | The first policy briefing will focus predominately on the Queen's Speech, which will establish the Government's legislative programme for the parliamentary year ahead. |
| September 2015 | The second policy briefing will be produced in September and will focus on the Chancellor's July 2015 Budget Statement. The policy briefing will provide an update on policy and legislation and will consider relevant implications for Wirral. |
| January 2016 | The third policy briefing will focus on the Autumn Statement and the local government finance settlement which informs the annual determination of funding to local government. The policy briefing will provide an update on policy and legislation and will consider relevant implications for Wirral. |
| March 2016 | The fourth policy briefing will focus upon the 2016 Chancellor of Exchequers Budget. The policy briefing will provide an update on policy and legislation and will consider relevant implications for Wirral. |

The September policy briefing outlines the key features of the Chancellor of Exchequers Budget Statement, which was announced on the 8th July 2015. The policy briefing also alludes to any potential implications that have been highlighted by relevant Officers for Wirral Council, and elaborates on any legislation or policy updates that have been implemented or developed since the last policy briefing in July.

The Committee may wish to identify specific policy areas to focus upon which are in line with the Committee's work programme. Detailed briefing papers can be prepared for these subject matters at the request of the Committee which would be in addition to the regular policy briefing papers outlined above.

Chancellors Statement- 8th July 2015

On 8th July 2015, the Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne gave his Budget statement to the House of Commons. The budget set out £17bn of savings and deferred announcements on another £20bn to the autumn's Spending Review. The key announcements outlined in the statement have been divided into themes and are displayed below:

Social Housing

- The budget details plans to legislate to freeze working-age benefits, including tax credits and the Local Housing Allowances, for 4 years from 2016-17 to 2019-20. This is forecast to save £4 billion a year by 2019-20.
- Rents in social housing in England will be reduced by 1% a year for 4 years.

Welfare

- Working-age benefits, including tax credits and Local Housing Allowance, will be frozen for 4 years from 2016-17 (this doesn't include Maternity Allowance, maternity pay, paternity pay and sick pay).
- The household benefit cap will be reduced to £20,000 (£23,000 in London).
- Support through Child Tax Credit will be limited to 2 children for children born from April 2017.
- Those aged 18 to 21 who are on Universal Credit will have to apply for an apprenticeship or traineeship, gain work-based skills, or go on a work placement 6 months after the start of their claim.
- From April 2017 the Budget will remove the automatic entitlement to housing support for new claims in Universal Credit from 18-21 year olds who are out of work.

Housing

- Rents for social housing will be reduced by 1% a year for 4 years.
- £800 million of funding is designated for Discretionary Housing Payments over the next 5 years.
- Social housing tenants with household incomes of £40,000 and above in London, and £30,000 and above in the rest of England, will be required to "Pay to Stay", by paying a market or near market rent for their accommodation.

Children and Education

- From the 2016-17 academic year, cash support for new students will increase by £766 to £8,200 a year. New maintenance loan support will replace student grants. Loans will be paid back only when graduates earn above £21,000 a year.
- From September 2017, the free childcare entitlement will be doubled from 15 hours to 30 hours a week for working parents of 3 and 4 year olds.
- Parents with a youngest child aged 3 or older (including lone parents) who are able to work will be expected to look for work if they are claiming Universal Credit.
- £30 million will be provided to further speed up the adoption process while paving the way for the introduction of regional adoption agencies.

Pay

- From April 2016, a new National Living Wage of £7.20 an hour for the over 25s will be introduced. This will rise to over £9 an hour by 2020.
- Public sector pay will increase by 1% a year for 4 years from 2016-17.
- The budget details plans to increase the National Insurance contributions (NICs) Employment Allowance from £2,000 to £3,000 a year.

Efficiency

- The budget supports plans to continue to pursue more efficient ways of working and further reform to public services. The government will provide funding for the Cabinet Office to explore a number of cross-cutting savings proposals. The Treasury, working with Cabinet Office, will develop specific proposals to inform the Spending Review.

Devolution

- The budget commits to transport devolution in all of the country's city regions that elect a Mayor, as well as the country's counties. This includes the rollout of Oyster-style smart and integrated ticketing systems.
- The government is working towards further devolution deals with the Sheffield City Region, Liverpool City Region, and Leeds, West Yorkshire and partner authorities, to be agreed in parallel with the Spending Review. The Budget notes that agreement will be reached based on combined authorities agreeing to an elected mayor working with local leaders to oversee any new powers devolved from ministers.
- The Budget announces further devolution of powers to Manchester, including devolving Fire Services under the control of the new directly-elected Mayor, establishing a Greater Manchester Land Commission and granting the city region more powers over planning subject to the agreement of the Cabinet member representing the district in which the power is used.
- The Budget states that it will be offering towns and counties the opportunity to agree devolution deals.

Economic Development

- The government is inviting bids for a new round of Enterprise Zones. The existing Enterprise Zones have supported the creation of over 15,000 jobs throughout England.
- To ensure that local areas have a greater say over their own economies, the government will consult on devolving powers on Sunday trading to city mayors and local authorities.
- The budget details plans to invest £23m in 6 Next Generation Digital Economy Centres over 6 sites (London, Swansea, Newcastle, Nottingham, York and Bath), leveraging £22 million of additional funding, and partnering with LEPs, regional councils, and local SMEs. These centres will exploit opportunities across sectors of the digital economy including the creative industries, finance, healthcare and education.

Queen's Speech 2015- Designation to Policy and Performance Committees

On Wednesday 27th May 2015, the Queen unveiled the Government's legislative plans for the year ahead. Below is a list of each individual Bill which will have implications for local government that were announced during the speech. The list identifies the Policy and Performance committee with whose remit the legislation most closely aligns:

| Legislative Plans | Policy and Performance Committee |
|---|--|
| National Insurance Contributions Bill/ Finance Bill | Transformation and Resources |
| Full Employment and Welfare Benefits Bill | All Policy and Performance Committees |
| Trade Unions Bill | Transformation and Resources |
| Housing Bill | Regeneration and Environment |
| Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill | Regeneration and Environment |
| Buses Bill | Regeneration and Environment |
| High Speed Rail Bill | Regeneration and Environment |
| Childcare Bill | Families and Wellbeing |
| Energy Bill | Regeneration and Environment |
| Education and Adoption Bill | Families and Wellbeing |
| Enterprise Bill | Regeneration and Environment |
| Policing and Criminal Justice Bill | Families and Wellbeing Transformation and Resources |
| Draft Public Service Ombudsman Bill | Transformation and Resources |
| Psychoactive Substances Bill | Families and Wellbeing |

Additional bills that have been announced are outlined below. These will be monitored in relation to any emerging implications for Local Government and reported to the relevant Policy and Performance Committee as appropriate.

| Additional Legislative Plans |
|--|
| EU Referendum Bill |
| Scotland Bill |
| Immigration Bill |
| Extremism Bill |
| Investigatory Powers Bill |
| Charities Bill |
| Armed Forces Bill |
| Bank of England Bill |
| Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill |

| |
|---------------------|
| Wales Bill |
| Votes for Life Bill |

The bills relevant to the Families and Wellbeing Committee are discussed in further detail below. The information provided has been sourced predominately from the LGiU, as well as SOLACE and the LGC and therefore solely represents a fact-based introduction to the bills.

Queen's Speech 2015- Developments and Implications

Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- The Bill will provide for the devolution of powers to cities with elected metro mayor, continuing the government's commitment to building a 'northern powerhouse'.

Key Points:

- To provide new primary legislative powers to fulfill the Government's manifesto commitments.
- Together with existing powers under the Localism Act 2011, the Bill would also enable the Government to empower towns and counties, building on the programme of Growth Deals which the Government implemented in the last Parliament.

The provisions in the Bill would be generic (to be applied by order to specified combined authorities and their areas) and would enable:

- An elected mayor for the combined authority's area who would exercise specified functions and chair the authority.
- The mayor to undertake the functions of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) for the area.
- Where a mayor is to have PCC functions, allow the current PCC term of office to be extended until the mayor is in place.
- Remove the current statutory limitation on its functions (currently these are limited to those on economic development, regeneration, and transport).
- Enable local authority governance to be streamlined as agreed by councils.

Further Developments:

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill has recently completed its journey through the House of Lords resulting in some significant changes:

Agreed changes to the role of Mayor-

- Mayors will be appointed for a term of four years
- The consent of member authorities will be needed to the allocation of responsibilities to elected mayors.

Setting up a Combined Authority-

- A major new proposal creating a streamlined route to setting up a combined authority was put forward during Report stage of the Bill. The aim is to create a two-track process. The fast track will make it possible to establish a combined authority based on a negotiated devolution deal, removing the requirement for councils to undertake the lengthy process of preparing a governance review and scheme.

Further Developments Continued:

Structuring Combined Authorities-

- New possibilities for structuring combined authorities are being introduced. These new structuring arrangements include:
- Local authorities that do not have contiguous boundaries will be able to form combined authorities and economic prosperity boards. This will include combined authorities and economic prosperity boards that have a 'doughnut-shaped' area
- A county council in a two-tier area will be able to join a combined authority for only part of its area where that area coincides with one or more districts.
- Councils will be able to prompt changes to the funding, constitution or functions of an economic prosperity board.

Local Authority Functions and Responsibilities-

- Two new clauses introduced changes that will allow functions of public authorities to be conferred on local authorities as well as combined authorities. Amendments that were agreed include provision for:
- Responsibilities being exercised either by the public authority or the combined authority, or by joint working arrangements.
- Avoiding devolution of regulatory functions to local authorities which are providing the regulated service.

Accountability and Governance: Overview and Scrutiny-

- Opposition amendments have been aimed at bringing the government's original proposals for overview & scrutiny of mayoral and combined authority decisions into line with practice in local government. These arguments have struck a chord with government, and some key points were agreed:
- Members of committees will have access to documents containing exempt or confidential information
- Panels and members of the combined authority will reach agreement on how decisions made but not yet implemented will be scrutinised, and allow for a delay while the decisions are under consideration
- It will be possible to follow general rules for the appointment of an independent chair of scrutiny, or to agree local arrangements for inclusion in the Order creating the mayoral combined authority
- Rules on political balance will apply.

Accountability and Governance: Audit Committee-

- The Government also agreed proposals for a Audit Committee:
- A requirement for a combined authority to appoint an audit committee
- Audit committee functions to include reviewing and scrutinising or assessing:
 - the authority's financial affairs
 - the authority's risk management, internal control and corporate governance arrangements
 - the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which resources have been used in discharging the authority's functions

Further Developments Continued:

Parliamentary Accountability-

- Two requirements introduced at the start of the debate, and agreed after a vote and against government opposition, are more radical. These require
- An annual report to parliament on the devolution programme for all areas of England
- A devolution statement for each new parliamentary Bill, in which the minister introducing the Bill confirms that it is compatible with the principle that powers should be devolved to combined authorities or the most appropriate local level.

Wirral Implications:

- Wirral has an ongoing role with LCR partners in working up the detail about our devolution asks;
- LCR proposals to be submitted to Government's Comprehensive Spending Review by 4th September;
- Senior Civil Servants and LCR Officers will continue to work up the further detail required to underpin the deal by mid-November this year;
- Communications and engagement with key stakeholders is taking place over the coming weeks.

Housing Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- This legislation will give housing association tenants the chance to own their own home. It also aims to increase housing supply and access to home ownership.

Key Points:

- The main elements of the Bill can be separated into two sections:

Home Ownership-

- To enable the extension of Right to Buy levels of discount to housing association tenants.
- To require local authorities to dispose of high-value vacant council houses, to help fund the Right to Buy extension discounts and the building of more affordable homes in the area.
- To provide the necessary statutory framework to support the delivery of Starter Homes.
- To take forward the Right to Build, requiring local planning authorities to support custom and self-builders registered in their area in identifying suitable plots of land to build or commission their own home.

Housing Supply-

- To introduce a statutory register for brownfield land, to help achieve the target of getting Local Development Orders in place on 90% of suitable brownfield sites by 2020.
- To simplify and speed up the neighbourhood planning system, to support communities that seek to meet local housing and other development needs through neighbourhood planning.
- To give effect to other changes to housing and planning legislation that would support housing growth.

Further Developments:

- There are no further developments at this time. The Housing Bill will be kept under review and developments will be outlined in future Policy Inform briefings.

Wirral Implications:

- **Extend Right to Buy-** There is still further detail to be announced as to how the actual scheme will work, discounts to be offered, the level of high value assets, however the extension of right to buy to housing association tenants and the Councils tenants (the council owns 23 houses where tenants have the preserved RTB) will reduce the availability of social housing stock generally to meet housing needs in the borough. It is likely this would be seen more so in the more attractive residential areas thereby reducing provision in these. The extent of the take up is difficult to forecast as levels of discounts, individual's financial circumstances and the ability of people to secure mortgages would need to be taken into account.

The impacts of this would need to be mitigated in part by increased provision of even further new build social housing stock. However whilst the aim of the

Wirral Implications Continued:

- Government is for income received from sales to be reinvested into new affordable housing provision, it is unlikely that the sale of higher value local authority housing assets will fund this and it is anticipated that any future provision will have to be subsidised. The Institute for Fiscal Studies have identified that under the existing Right to Buy initiative only one in ten homes have been replaced, this is likely to cause an increased pressure on the supply available to meet housing needs via the Allocations System.

There could also be issues around the charitable status of RPs and their standing as being outside of the public sector borrowing and the use of assets to cover loans which RP have to enable development and investment. Any shortfall to be covered by RP's will result in less being able to be invested back into replacement affordable housing and also services.

- **Starter Homes**- The detail on how this will be achieved in a balanced way to ensure the Borough is able to at least take a pro-rata share (which would be equivalent to 1,300 homes) is unknown at present. The pledge to build 200,000 Starter Homes is supported by an exception site policy which directs Starter Homes to under-used or nonviable industrial and commercial land that has not been currently identified for housing. This could put pressure employment sites in Wirral that have been identified for employment use to support sustainable communities. It could have the unintended consequence of site owners resisting future employment uses and removing existing employment uses where higher land values could be accrued for Starter Homes sites. The Starter Homes policy could also undermine the provision of alternative forms of affordable housing, in areas where it is needed. In stronger market areas, a 20 per cent discount on open market value may still price out many first time buyers. Furthermore, the CIH (Chartered Institute of Housing) have indicated that these developments would be exempt from section 106 agreements, meaning no new affordable housing could be sought within these developments.

- **Brownfield Land**- The Government has pledged to encourage the provision of housing on previously developed (brownfield) sites. The Council could be required to maintain a register of all brownfield sites available and ensure that 90 per cent of suitable brownfield sites have planning permission for housing by 2020 through local development orders. The provision of local development orders on such a scale could represent a significant use of limited Council resources, particularly when planning permission can still be granted on sites, irrespective of whether a local development order is in place. This initiative has previously been subject to public consultation to which the Council submitted an officer-level response, which forms the basis of these comments.

- **Right to Build**- The new Right to Build (once enacted) will require the Council to establish a local register of custom builders who wish to acquire a suitable land to build their own home and to have regard to the demand on their local register when developing its Local Plan and determining planning applications. The Right could require the Council to offer registered custom builders suitable plots of land (with some form of planning permission and servicing), which would have resource implications for planning and housing. The Right could have an impact on the future capital receipts from the sale of Council-owned land for self-build plots, if plots are to be provided at a discounted rate. This form of development is also driven by the demand and capability and ability of individuals to be able to build or commission new build. There have been very few expressions of interest from community organisations on this in the Wirral area as part of the approach to looking at Custom Build when this has been promoted as part of the HCA programme.

Energy Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- The aim of this Bill is to improve energy security. It gives new powers to the Oil and Gas Authority (OGA) to maximise the economic recovery of oil and gas from UK waters and changes the law to give local communities a greater say in planning applications for wind farms.

Key Points:

- Ensuring local planning authorities have consenting powers for all onshore wind farms.
- The Bill would make legislative changes to remove the need for the Secretary of State's consent for any large onshore wind farms (over 50MW)
- This, in effect, would devolve powers out of Whitehall by transferring the existing consenting powers, in relation to onshore wind, to local planning authorities.
- This will mean that in future the primary decision maker for onshore wind consents in England and Wales will be the local planning authority. These changes will be supported by changes to the national planning policy framework to give effect to the manifesto commitment that local communities should have the final say on planning applications for wind farms.
- These changes would not impact on the planning regime in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- The commitment to end new subsidy for onshore wind farms will be delivered separately, and DECC will be announcing measures to deliver this soon.

Further Developments:

- The Energy Bill had its second reading which consisted of a general debate on all aspects of the Bill on 22nd July 2015. The Committee Stages of the Bill will commence on 7th September 2015.

Wirral Implications:

- Wirral will become the Local Planning Authority for all future planning applications for on-shore wind farms. These applications will be dealt with through the existing Development Management processes which are already in place.

High Speed Rail Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- The aim of this Bill is to provide the Government with the legal powers to construct and operate phase 1 of the High Speed 2 (HS2) railway.

Key Points:

- Give the Government deemed planning permission for the railway between London and the West Midlands.
- Give the Government compulsory purchase powers and the power to temporarily take possession of land required to construct and operate the railway.
- Help rebalance the UK economy and free up space on the UK rail network, improving connections between London, the Midlands, the North and Scotland

Further Developments:

- On 2 July 2015, the Government published their response to the House of Lords' Economic Affairs Committee report on 'The Economics of High Speed 2'. Their overall conclusion is that there is a convincing and compelling case for investing in HS2. In response to the Committee's concerns about the final cost of HS2 being even higher than the £50.1 billion currently estimated, the Government says that they aim to deliver HS2 below this figure and that there are strong controls in place to ensure they remain within budget.
- The members of the current HS2 Hybrid Bill Select Committee were appointed on 8 June 2015. On 4 June 2015, the Secretary of State for Transport as promoter of the Hybrid Bill for the first stage of HS2, published his response to the 'First Special Report' (PDF document) which was published by the Bill Committee in March. Many of the Committee's recommendations related to specific local areas or concerns about the compensation arrangements for those whose properties are affected by construction of the line and much of the response focuses on how these issues will be addressed.
- The Government announced in June 2015, that it was instructing the HS2 Bill Committee to consider more than 120 amendments it wishes to make to the Bill. These amendments have resulted from discussions between HS2 Ltd and communities on phase 1 of the route. They include changes to the route near Lichfield which will avoid the need for two crossings over the Trent and Mersey Canal; altering the proposals for the relocation of the existing Heathrow Express depot at Old Oak Common to Langley near Slough; and the construction of sidings to the west of the Old Oak Common station, which could facilitate a future connection between Crossrail and the West Coast Main Line, if needed. These amendments were debated and agreed by the House of Commons without a vote on 23 June and will now be subject to a consultation which is expected to run from mid-July to late August. Anyone affected by the changes will also be able to petition the Bill Committee about them.

Wirral Implications:

- The passing of this Bill confirms the start of the construction of Phase 1 of HS2. The significant investment in infrastructure should unlock growth but ensuring that these benefits are fully realised within the city region will require the progression of HS3 linking the key cities across the north including Liverpool.

Enterprise Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- This bill will include measures to reduce regulation on small businesses in a bid to boost job creation.

Key Points:

- Seek to cut red tape for British business by at least £10bn and, for the first time, require independent regulators to contribute to that target.
- Proposes to create a new Small Business Conciliation Service, to help settle disputes between small and large businesses, especially over late payment practices.
- To improve the business rates system ahead of the 2017 revaluation, including by modernising the appeals system
- To introduce a cap on public sector redundancy payments to six figures for the highest earners

Further Developments:

- There are no further developments at this time. The Enterprise Bill will be kept under review and developments will be outlined in future Policy Inform briefings.

Wirral Implications:

- 'There are no recorded implications at this time. This policy will be kept under review by the relevant officers with any future implications reported in future policy papers to Elected Members.'

Welfare Reform and Work Bill

Synopsis and Key Points:

Synopsis:

- The overriding aim of the Bill is to reduce expenditure and “help to achieve a more sustainable welfare system.” A related aim is to support efforts to increase employment and “support the policy of rewarding hard work while increasing fairness with working households.”

Key Points:

- It is essentially a Bill of three parts. First, it will introduce a duty to report to Parliament on:
 - Progress towards achieving full employment.
 - Progress towards achieving 3 million apprenticeships in England.
 - Progress with the Troubled Families programme (England).
- Second, it will repeal almost all of the Child Poverty Act 2010 and introduce a new duty for the Secretary of State to report annually on “life chances”: children living in workless households and educational attainment at age 16, in England.
- Finally, the Bill allows for the introduction of extensive changes to welfare benefits, tax credits and social housing rent levels. These will account for around 70% of the £12-13 billion in welfare savings identified in the Summer Budget 2015. The welfare/housing measures include:
 - Lowering the benefit cap threshold and varying it between London and the rest of the UK.
 - A four year benefits freeze.
 - Limiting support through Child Tax Credits/Universal Credit.
 - The abolition of Employment and Support Allowance Work-Related Activity Component.
 - Changes to conditionality for responsible carers under Universal Credit.
 - Replacing Support for Mortgage Interest with Loans for Mortgage Interest.
 - Reducing social housing rent levels by 1% in each year for four years from 2016-17.

Further Developments:

- The Welfare Reform and Work Bill was presented on 9 July 2015. The Bill passed its second reading on 20 July 2015. MPs also agreed a programme motion which schedules the Bill to be considered in a public bill committee. Proceedings in the public bill committee are scheduled to conclude by Thursday 15 October 2015, but could finish earlier.

Wirral Implications:

- **Freeze Working Age Benefits** - This will impact on household disposable income, not previously frozen albeit uprating was nominal in 2014/15. This will potentially increase the strain on Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Local Welfare Allowance (LWA) with consequential harder to collect charges. This will affect all Revenues areas such as Personal Finance Unit charges, Benefits overpayments and Council Tax. Rent arrears locally will increase as with all cuts and will continue as (social) landlords maintain rent levels and annual increases.

Wirral Implications Continued:

- **Freeze Working Age Benefits Continued** - This will increase pressure on LA Housing Benefit services from Social Landlords which is evident already via the rent shortfall in Bedroom Tax and insufficient DHP. In the private sector it may see a freezing of Local Housing Allowance rates which will give Private Sector landlords further issue with taking on tenants who rely on HB. This is likely to have a consequential impact on the levels of people being threatened with homelessness in the Borough.
- **Cutting Household Benefit Cap** – This will certainly impact locally, regrettably we cannot identify how many within present caseload will be affected, nor by how much in monetary terms on a weekly basis, as DWP consider circumstances of household and benefits in payment that LA are unable to identify from records held. The LA's HB service administers the Cap not the DWP who advise us of each situation. There are currently 72 cases live (but cases go on and off and DWP projected our numbers would be 130). The change would bring more case with a consequential impact on resources, both front and back of house. Those affected would have an increased reliance on other means of support, financial, Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP - annual cash limited budget) or the Local Welfare Assistance potentially (LWA - finite residual budget as scheme no longer nationally funded). Likely impact will see increased problems for those in temporary accommodation with large families and again, for LA, placing the homeless or those at risk etc., then reliance on the limited discretionary schemes (DHP).
- **General Issues for Wirral/Benefits Service** - As a consequence of these changes there will be a need to revise local schemes and policies with an increased reliance on any discretion the authority can, within its local policies and resources, exercise (again for example its LWA/DHP funds). The definition of 'vulnerable' will need review given the ratio of those reasonably deemed to be vulnerable which are those financially at risk, including dispossession. This will impact on key grant limited local schemes such as Council Tax Support Scheme which currently awards £27m pa. This will provide a significant challenge for officers reviewing the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2016/2017 onwards and will see collection issues increase as more people face difficulty paying, ultimately having their national benefits reduced at source to pay Council Tax. Broadly we can expect from these changes increased contact to services, both front facing public contact and back of house processing and decision making services with an increased need and reliance on knowledgeable, experienced, skilled resource, ensuring accessibility.
- **Remove Housing Benefit from Young People** 18-21 year olds, this will see more remain at home where it may not be appropriate to do so which will see issues for householder with Housing Benefit non dependant charges being applied and more rent to pay (as adult is meant to contribute as resident). These cases which will increase already provide issues for the LA with collection of information and provision of evidence of household occupants.
- **Troubled Families Programme-** It is expected that approximately 450 of the 600 families Wirral will work with this year, through the Troubled Families Programme (Family Intervention), will be affected by the Welfare Reform and Work Bill through changes to benefits and the implementation of Universal Credit. To support these families Wirral's provision of Advisors from JCP (Job Centre Plus) has increased from 1FTE (full time equivalent) to 2FTE. These staff will work specifically with

Wirral Implications Continued:

- those affected by the changes. They will also provide the wider Family Intervention workforce with updates and training about the roll out of universal credit and enable them to support their families better. A Manager has been appointed from JCP to oversee all work with Troubled Families across Merseyside and he will be joining Wirral's Troubled Families Board to provide quarterly updates on the progress of moving Troubled Families into employment.
- Wirral will continue to report to the DCLG on progress into employment for Troubled Families and to submit the cost benefit analysis for each of those families.
- At this stage it is hard to predict what the specific implications for families might be. This could be: more reliance on food banks, more families moving out of social housing into private housing, more families unable to secure tenancies, more applications for discretionary payments.
- Reports will be provided outlining the implications as time progresses.

Policy Developments

Briefing: The first 100 days: impact on local government

August 14th 2015 marked 100 days since the election of the new government. As per tradition, this milestone provides an opportunity to review government actions during this period and assess the impact on local government.

Key areas of development have been in relation to devolution; social care and housing and planning.

Devolution and local government

- Publication of 'Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill' about to go into the Commons from Lords.
- Cornwall is the first county to have negotiated a deal and groups of authorities are pressing ahead with new deals.

Health and Social Care

- Postponement of cap on social care costs until 2020
- Councils affected by proposed £200m cut in 2015-2016 public health grants.
- Progress on improving mental health services.

Housing and Planning

- Plans to extend the Right to Buy to 1.3m housing association tenants has been confirmed in the Queen's speech and forms part of the housing bill to be published in Autumn.
- A commitment to increase the housing supply by 200,000 homes
- Faster planning application processing

Significant developments have been the momentum behind the devolution bill; however, controversy and concern remain in areas such as Social care and the Environment.

Source: [Janet Sillett, Briefing: The first 100 days: impact on local government, LGiU 19th August 2015](#)

Faster decision making on shale gas for economic growth and energy security

Under new government measures, shale gas planning applications will now be fast-tracked through a dedicated planning process in a bid to ensure faster decision making on the exploration of shale gas for the purpose of economic growth and energy security.

Local authorities must now fast-track applications and provide a decision within a 16-week timeframe to prevent prolonged uncertainty.

The government asserts that there are plans that will ensure that local people have a strong voice over any development of shale exploration in their area and that they will ensure both communities and industries benefit from the faster processes for developing new sites.

Councils that repeatedly fail to process applications and provide decisions within the specified timeframe will be identified and any further applications may be decided by the Communities Secretary. Councils have therefore been urged to take full advantage of funding available through the £1.2 million shale support programme for resourcing to enable timely decision making in 2015 to 2016.

The government has also stated that communities that participate in the development of shale and gas exploration should benefit from the financial returns generated. Proposals for a new sovereign wealth fund will be presented later in the year.

Source: [Department of Energy & Climate Change, Department for Communities and Local Government, 13th August 2015.](#)

Briefing: Mapping climate disadvantage in England

“Climate change is a route through which deprivation can be worsened.”

The briefing outlines a new online mapping tool has been developed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) in partnership with Climate UK, the Environment Agency and Manchester University. It aims to help local decision makers understand at a fine level of spatial detail the relationship between climate change and social vulnerability/disadvantage

- The mapping tool can be used to overlay various climate change impacts with a range of socio- spatial vulnerabilities at the neighbourhood scale.
- The online portal contains a wealth of more guidance and information to get the most from the mapping tool.

The mapping tool has been described by Core Cities as “a fantastic resource that will enable councils to understand the climate disadvantage in their area and respond accordingly, planning for a changing climate whilst also creating a more equal society”.

Source: [Steven Bland, Briefing: Mapping climate disadvantage in England, 4th August 2015](#)

Briefing: High Speed Rail Update: Summer 2015

This briefing reports on key developments in the HS2 project and other related proposals since April 2015.

It covers:

- The Government response to a report from the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee examining the economic case for HS2 and concluded that the analysis presented to justify the project is seriously deficient.
- The briefing includes the Secretary of State’s response to the ‘First Special Report’ by the Select Committee examining the Bill for phase one of HS2. It also includes a brief overview of other recent developments relating to HS2 and HS3, the proposed east-west high-speed rail link.

Source: [Ruth Bradshaw, Briefing: High Speed Rail Update: Summer 2015, 23rd July 2015](#)

Briefing: What does the new government mean for planning? Part 2: The Productivity Plan

The government’s productivity plan ‘Fixing the Foundations: Creating a more prosperous nation’ identifies the planning system as being a key constraint to improving productivity.

It focuses on:

- Improving the rate of building on brownfield land
- Punishing local planning authorities that fail to get a local plan adopted or are slow to make planning decisions.

Source: [LGiU, Briefing: What does the new government mean for planning? Part 2: The Productivity Plan, 22nd July 2015.](#)

Useful Sources

Chancellors Budget Statement

[Chancellor George Osborne's Summer Budget 2015 Speech, Government website, 8th July 2015](#) - Full speech

[Andrew Jones, July 2015 Budget Analysis, LGiU, 14th July 2015](#) - Brief analysis and key points emerging from the Chancellor Budget Statement

Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill

[Hilary Kitchen, Devolution Bill: Important changes in the Lords, LGiU, 28th July 2015](#) – Outlines some of the key changes to the Devolution Bill

[Hilary Kitchen, Devolution: 2nd Reading of Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, LGiU, 15th June 2015](#) – Outlines the main topics discussed at the House of Lords on 8th June 2015

[Dr Jonathan Carr-West and Dr Patrick Diamond, Devolution: A Road Map, LGiU, 5th June 2015](#) - Outlines the practical ways in which devolution can happen at scale and at speed to avoid a bureaucratic log jam in Whitehall.

[Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, Parliamentary website](#)- Previous debates on all stages of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill and any latest updates

[Mark Upton, Wave 1 City Deals – NAO report, 29th July 2015](#) – Examines the progress of Wave 1 City deals

Housing Bill

There are no further developments at this time. The Housing Bill will be kept under review and developments will be outlined in future Policy Inform briefings.

Energy Bill

[Energy Bill, Parliamentary website](#) - Brief analysis of the Welfare Reform and Work Bill

High Speed Rail Bill

[High Speed Rail Bill, Parliamentary Website](#) - Brief analysis of the High Speed Rail Bill

[Ruth Bradshaw, High Speed Rail Update: Summer 2015, LGiU, 23rd July 2015](#) – Update on key developments and other related proposals since April 2015.

Enterprise Bill

There are no further developments at this time. The Enterprise Bill will be kept under review and developments will be outlined in future Policy Inform briefings.

Welfare Reform and Work Bill

[House of Commons, Briefing Paper- Welfare Reform and Work Bill, 16th July 2015](#) – Brief analysis of the Welfare Reform and Work Bill

[Welfare Reform and Work Bill, Parliamentary website](#) - Previous debates on all stages of the Childcare Bill and any latest updates

[Andrew Jones, The Welfare Reform and Work Bill: Welfare Reform Update, 20th August 2015](#) – Brief overview of the Bill and any latest updates