

TOPIC:
POLICY & RESOURCES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - *IMPACT OF WELFARE CHANGES*

FRAMEWORK FOR SCRUTINY:

Issues to be addressed:

To examine the implications of Welfare Reform changes and the impact it will have on local residents and the Council, with a view to recommending ways of mitigating its adverse affects.

Objectives:

- ✚ To gain an understanding of the legislative changes, including the financial impact on the local authority, residents and our partners
- ✚ To consider the impact on council tax collection (collection rate)
- ✚ To review the local council tax support scheme
- ✚ To consider impact of changes in housing benefit (Universal Credit)
- ✚ To look at the use of targeted funding available and financial assistance which can be offered in its totality (e.g. Discretionary Housing Fund, which the LA can top up)

Constraints (and what is not to be included generally in the scope of this review):

- DWP & sharing personal data of those affected by the abolition of Disability Allowance
- Any change to the Council Tax scheme would need due consultation.

Method: gathered through project team meetings and witness sessions

Target date: May 2014

MEMBERSHIP:

Councillors Gilbert (Chair), Ayling, Burdett, Byford, Evans, Godwin, Habermel, Longley (Vice Chair) and Robertson.

Officer / partner support –Veronica Dewsbury, Christine Lynch, Lynn Hyam, Keith Harding and Fiona Abbott, project coordinator.

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

- National guidance
- SBC policy / strategy and guidance
- Management information
- Information from partners
- Third sector information
- Primary & secondary implications of Welfare Reform

POTENTIAL WITNESSES:

- Community Housing (SBC)
- Voluntary & Community Sector Relationship Manager (SBC)
- HARP
- Storehouse
- Rep from the Trussell Trust backed food bank (e.g. in Southchurch)

- Rep from South Essex Homes and possibly other social landlords
- Department for Work & Pensions / JobCentre Plus

STAGES OF THE PROJECT:

3 stage process:

- (a) evidence from witnesses (reality check)
- (b) review how the Discretionary Housing Fund / Local Council Tax Support Scheme / Social Fund is working
- (c) partnership with 3rd sector (anything more can do)

Scrutiny process to add value and is supportive of challenges already set to be delivered have limited resources which need to be focused on providing the front line service and the priority outcomes for the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To make appropriate recommendations to the Council which pull together information on financial assistance offered, to enable the LA to make better informed recommendations on support for families.