

<b>DECISION-MAKER:</b>	<b>SCRUTINY PANEL A</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	WELFARE REFORMS INQUIRY MEETING 3: ASSESSING THE IMPACTS OF THE WELFARE REFORMS
<b>DATE OF DECISION:</b>	6 DECEMBER 2012
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	SENIOR MANAGER, CUSTOMER AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT
<b>STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY</b>	
None	

### **BRIEF SUMMARY**

This report provides details for the third meeting of the Scrutiny Panel A's Welfare Reforms Inquiry. The aim of this meeting is for the Panel to gain an understanding of the potential direct impact on residents of Southampton, and the organisations that support them.

At the meeting, local individuals, groups and organisations who are worried about the impacts of the Welfare Reforms will be highlighting their experiences and concerns. The Chair of the Panel will also provide an update on actions from the last meeting.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- (i) The Panel is recommended to consider the information provided by the guests, alongside the appendices, as evidence in the Inquiry.

### **REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. To enable the Panel to analyse the evidence in order to formulate findings and recommendations at the end of the inquiry process.

### **DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)**

2. The third meeting of the Inquiry will highlight the impacts of the Welfare Reforms on residents and organisations supporting them.
3. Southampton Connect's [Gateway to a Better Future Priority Project](#) held a Benefit Awareness event on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2012. Over a hundred frontline community representatives attended from sectors ranging from advice services, homelessness advice and support and community groups.
4. The aim of the event was to provide an update on the Welfare Reforms including Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payment, Council Tax Scheme and other benefits changes and an introduction to the Welfare Reforms Inquiry.
5. At the event, the aims of the Welfare Reforms Inquiry were outlined alongside the launch of a 'Call for Evidence', which aimed to encourage and enable the voice of the people, communities and organisations most impacted by the Welfare Reforms to be included in the Inquiry.
6. Members of the public were invited to respond to the Welfare Reforms through the Local Council Tax Scheme consultation. The responses to this were appended to the Scrutiny Panel A papers for 22 November 2012.
7. The Welfare Reforms Call for Evidence was also raised at the Anti-Poverty Network, a forum of local practitioners involved in raising awareness of the

effects of poverty and relieving the effects of poverty.

8. Respondents were requested to respond to the following questions:

- Has your organisation seen any direct or indirect impacts from the welfare reforms so far?
- Are there any issues or concerns you have about the changes due to come in from April 2013?
- Is there one key issue you like to see addressed by the Inquiry?
- Do you have any 'best practice' examples you could share?

9. The 'Call for Evidence' closed on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2012 with contributions from No Limits, Southampton CAB, Plus You Limited, SCC Homelessness Advice team, Street Homeless Prevention Team, Homeseekers Letting Section and the Welfare Rights and Money Advice team. The responses have been collated alongside the feedback received at the Benefits Awareness event on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2012.

10. Overall the key challenge will be the cumulative impact of the Welfare Reforms. A summary of the responses to the Welfare Reforms Call for Evidence are attached at Appendix 1.

Key concerns highlighted in the 'Call to Evidence' included:

- Lone parents on benefits being required to show they are fit for work
- Disabled people who fail their medical assessments
- Young people struggling to find affordable accommodation
- Increased demand for food vouchers
- Landlords asking for rent in advance, deposits and holding fees
- Demand on current resources and services
- Support needed for "digital by default" implementation of Universal Credit

11. At the Welfare Reforms Inquiry / 'Call for Evidence' launch and through the Anti-Poverty Network, organisations were also invited to attend the December Inquiry meeting to give more detailed evidence on their concerns and experiences of the Welfare Reform changes.

12. The organisations who will be attending the Panel meeting are:

<b>Organisation/Resident</b>	<b>Service/link</b>
Community Voices	Thornhill community representatives
Citizens Advice Bureau	Southampton general advice and support
DAIN	Disability Advice and Information Network
Just Money	Money and debt advice
No Limits	Advice and support to young people
Plus You Limited	Thornhill community representatives
Radian	Registered Social Landlord
Rev Jennings	Church community, Bitterne
Resident, Louise Forster	Millbrook Ward
SARC	Welfare benefit employment advice and representation
SCRATCH / City Mission	Furniture, food and clothing referrals
Stonham	Registered social landlord
Southampton City Council	Adult Social Care
Street Pastors	Church community
Two Saints	Homelessness Support

13. In addition, Panel members have invited residents who have voiced their concerns about the reforms to attend.
14. An update on actions from the first meeting will be given by the Chair of Scrutiny Panel A. Evidence circulated to Panel A members includes:
  - Matrix of Welfare Reforms impacts in the City (Appendix 2)
  - Welfare Reforms Communication Plan (Appendix 3)The following documents were discussed at the meeting on 22 November and will be attached to minutes
  - Indices of Multiple Deprivation and Mosaic presentation
  - Cumulative Impact Assessment of Southampton City Council Budget on Poverty
  - Summary of Local Council Tax Scheme
  - Dealing With Hardship and Exceptional Circumstances under Council Tax Support in Southampton
15. The Panel is invited to have a discussion on the issues raised by people giving evidence and the potential impact in the city's residents, organisations and communities to formulate their findings and develop a final report and recommendations.

#### **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

16. None

#### **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

##### **Capital/Revenue**

17. Not applicable

##### **Property/Other**

18. Not applicable

#### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

##### **Statutory Power to undertake the proposals in the report:**

19. The duty to undertake overview and scrutiny is set out in Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

##### **Other Legal Implications:**

20. None

#### **POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS**

21. None

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**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Non-confidential appendices are in the Members' Rooms and can be accessed on-line**

**Appendices**

1.	Welfare Reforms Call for Evidence: Summary of responses
2.	Welfare Reforms Direct Impacts in Southampton from April 2013
3.	Welfare Reforms Communication Plan