

REPORT TO: Employment Learning and Skills PPB

DATE: 25th March 2013

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Children and Enterprise

PORTFOLIO: Economic Development

SUBJECT: Topic Group: The Impact of Welfare Reform on Employment Learning and Skills Provision in Halton

WARDS: Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to propose the establishment of a topic group to consider the main impacts of the Welfare Reform changes on Employment Learning and Skills provision in the borough.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 2.1 Members agree to the establishment of a topic group on the main impacts of Welfare Reform in respect of the Employment, Learning and Skills agenda;
- 2.2. Members nominate representatives of the PPB to sit on the group;
- 2.3. An evaluation report is presented to the ELS and Community PPB no later than September 2013.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Background

A presentation to the borough's Local Strategic Partnership Board earlier this month (March 2013) explained that measures introduced in the *Welfare Reform Act 2012* represent the biggest changes to the welfare system since its conception 60 years ago.

The *Welfare Reform Act* received Royal Assent in March 2012. It introduces a number of new measures which the ELS and C PPB might wish to consider in more detail. The Act will begin to take effect in phases from April 2013.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are a number of considerations that the topic group might wish to discuss which will ultimately inform and influence the Council's response to the Welfare Reform Act i.e.

- 1) What, if anything, are we doing/have done to address these issues both as a Council and as a partnership for our residents?
- 2) Is there any information/documentation that has been produced or which needs to be produced to advise our staff/customers/residents on the changes?
- 3) How can we best collaborate with partners in order to mitigate the impact of the Welfare Reform Act in Halton?
- 4) Are there any changes needed in how we deliver our services. Do we anticipate an increase/change in demand for the services provided?

Therefore, it is suggested that a Topic Group will be a useful forum for developing a coordinated response to how best to deal with the issues arising out of the changes to the Benefits System.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Not applicable

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

There are a number of potential implications for this priority, although the Topic Group will consider the implications in more detail.

For example, employers and employees will be required to learn and understand new in-work benefit changes. There are, for example, changes to benefits in respect of part time employees which may have an impact on the ability of an organization to have a flexible and responsive workforce

There will be a potential increase in demand for specialist advice services on finances, debt, and eligibility for benefits which could put extra strain on service providers, in particular Job Centre Plus and Citizens' Advice Bureau.

However, there may also be an increase in demand for the adult education services provided by the Council and other partners as residents will need a sound ICT, literacy and numeracy skills.

Equally, given the focus on people finding work, it is possible that there will be a demand for the borough's job brokering and employment services.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

It is possible that the reforms will lead to raised levels of stress amongst the borough's workforce which could lead to an increase in the need for support from the healthcare sector.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Not Applicable

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Not applicable

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

There are no anticipated risks associated with the implementation of this topic group

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The Topic Group will focus on how we can ensure that our most vulnerable residents are supported in responding to the challenges presented in the Welfare Reform Act.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act.