

REPORT TO: Employment Learning and Skills PPB

DATE: 5th June 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 update Members on the topic group which has been established 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 note the summary of key considerations and actions from the Topic Group's first meeting on 29th April.
- 2.2. An evaluation report is presented to the ELS and Community PPB no later than September 2013.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Background

The *Welfare Reform Act* received Royal Assent in March 2012. It introduces a number of new measures which the ELS and C PPB Scrutiny Topic Group is considering.

The Chair of the PPB has requested that a short update report be provided to outline the scope and remit of the proposed topic group.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are a number of considerations that the topic group has started to assess and discuss which will ultimately inform and influence the Council's response to the Welfare Reform Act These considerations are set out below.

- What are the problems and impacts facing pilot areas?
- Rules and changes and more being introduced and we need to assess this.

- Bill/Act is quite broad; impact of how we cope from both Member and Officer perspective.
- Use of the Topic Group to set KPIs to evaluate impact.
- Consider impact on housing associations.
- Assess and map out systems already in place.
- Impact of and on Welfare Rights Service.
- Map out Training facilities – what is available?
- The impact on access to services.
- Possible use of Schools.
- Need to factor in bedroom tax and partner input.
- Also Housing Strategy and whether this reflects changes in Welfare Reform

Key Actions:

At the first meeting of the Topic Group, Members identified key actions which would inform the contents of future meetings as follows:

1. Gathering a Partner View and Expert Opinion from Colleagues.
2. Mapping out what support can and will be provided.
3. A Literature Review which summarises what the legislation says.
4. Identify opportunities for service development
5. Identify problems → and solutions.
6. Determine which partners are doing what.
7. What information do we need to set a baseline and how do we measure/establish the impact?
8. Targeting of resources. How we do this.
9. Impact on debt/debt recovery.
10. Universal credit – budgeting and support → e.g. identification of training needs.
11. Impact on wider economy e.g. retail sector.
12. Pilot scheme – how this is working.

A further meeting of the group is scheduled for 23rd May and, therefore, a verbal update will be provided at the meeting.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Not applicable

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

There are a number of potential implications for this priority, and the Topic Group is starting to 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.

5.3 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.

5.4 A Safer Halton

Not Applicable

5.5 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