

REPORT TO: Employment, Learning, Skills and Community
Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 11 November 2013

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Children and Enterprise

PORTFOLIO: Economic Development

SUBJECT: Draft Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review
Report and Recommendations

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To present the Board with the draft Scrutiny Review of the Welfare Reform Topic Group Report and recommendations.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- i) ***the Board approve the draft Welfare Reform scrutiny review report and recommendations.***

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 This report (attached as Appendix 1) was commissioned by the Employment, Learning, Skills and Community Policy and Performance Board. A scrutiny review working group was established with five Members from the Board, Operational Director, Principal Policy Officer and Partnership Officer.

The report was commissioned as the *Welfare Reform Act 2012* represents the biggest change to the welfare system since its conception 60 years ago. Given that a key pillar of the Government's reform is a focus on "making work pay", it was felt that there were a number of issues that required further exploration within and ELS and C. context.

The scrutiny review was conducted through a number of means between June 2013 and September 2013, as follows:

- Monthly meetings of the scrutiny review topic group;
- Presentations by various key members of staff from the Council and partners (detail of the presentations can be found in *Annex 2*);
- Provision of information;

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Existing policies are endorsed by the report.

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The recommendations highlighted within the Action Plan will require resources to undertake, mainly from operational teams.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The welfare reforms will continue to impact upon children, young people and families in the borough due to potential new charges to families such as the bedroom tax, contribution to council tax costs, possible loss in income etc

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

The Welfare Reforms will result in an overall loss of money to residents and therefore will result in less money in the local economy. Also people who may not have worked for many years due to ill health etc will now potentially be required to seek work. This will be a real challenge particularly for HPIJ. As the welfare reforms require applications to be made online, then there may also be a need for more access to IT and improvements in residents' IT skills .

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Elements of the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review impact on this priority, for example, people being taken off disability benefits and required to seek work opportunities. Also changes to the benefits system is likely to cause stress for some vulnerable groups, for example those with mental health problems, which may impact upon their health and well being.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

Due to reductions in household income and the potential impact on vulnerable groups, such as those with substance misuse issues, there could be a corresponding rise in crime, in particular domestic abuse.

6.5 **Halton's Environment and Urban Renewal**

The welfare reforms will result in less money in the economy which may impact upon existing and new development. On the positive side Halton has a good supply of local labour skills to support economic growth and regeneration.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The report and recommendations support the Council's strategic priority of Employment, Learning, Skills and Community. The welfare reforms present a number of risks to children and families in the borough, due to families being likely to have less money and increasing demands on that income

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The implementation of the recommendations will help to mitigate against the impacts of the welfare reforms on the residents of Halton.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
None		