

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of Meeting:** 5 December 2013

**Subject:** Welfare Reform Update

**Report of:** Welfare Reform Member Reference Group

**Wards Affected:** All

**Is this a Key Decision?** No

**Is it included in the Forward Plan?** No

**Exempt/Confidential** No

### **Purpose/Summary**

At its meeting of 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013, Cabinet approved a partnership Welfare Reform Action Plan to seek to mitigate on a limited basis, the impact of the changes on local community and requested that progress reports be brought back to the Cabinet on a six monthly basis. This report provides the second six monthly progress. The first progress report presented to Cabinet on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2013 provided considerable detail on progress which is updated in this report on the work of the Member led Welfare Reform Reference Group.. The Reference Group which sets the direction for welfare reform mitigation which encompasses the:

- (1) Impact of implementation of Welfare Reform legislation so far.
- (2) Work that partners and the Council are doing collectively around mitigation of impact where possible.
- (3) Preparation work for further Welfare Reform legislation impacts.

### **Recommendation(s)**

It is recommended that:

- (1) the continuing energy and commitment from partners and within the Council to mitigate the impact wherever possible is noted and encouraged.
- (2) the considerable progress to date on key Partnership Action Plan themes as set out in Section 2 is noted.
- (3) the update on Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme (ELAS) as set out in Section 2 is noted.
- (4) the emerging issues and proposed mitigation measures are understood and endorsed by Members.
- (5) that the Cabinet extended its thanks and deep appreciation of the sterling work and commitment of volunteers across the Borough delivering support to those in need.

**How does the decision contribute to the Council’s Corporate Objectives?**

	<b><u>Corporate Objective</u></b>	<b><u>Positive Impact</u></b>	<b><u>Neutral Impact</u></b>	<b><u>Negative Impact</u></b>
1	Creating a Learning Community	X		
2	Jobs and Prosperity	X		
3	Environmental Sustainability	X		
4	Health and Well-Being	X		
5	Children and Young People	X		
6	Creating Safe Communities	X		
7	Creating Inclusive Communities	X		
8	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening Local Democracy	X		

**Reasons for the Recommendation:**

- (i) Ensure that the Council are fully aware of the emerging impact of Welfare Reform.
- (ii) Enable the Council to focus efforts and capacity in the most appropriate ways to try and mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform wherever possible.
- (iii) To put into place any mitigating actions if possible and work with partners to do so.

**What will it cost and how will it be financed?**

**(A) Revenue Costs**

Existing officer and partner time is the major resource. The use of the pump priming resource element of the Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme as approved by Cabinet on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2013 is also supporting some of the infrastructure that is needed to mitigate the impact wherever possible.

**(B) Capital Costs**

N/a.

**Implications:**

The following implications of this proposal have been considered and where there are specific implications, these are set out below:

<b>Legal – Welfare Reform Act 2012 and S1 Localism Act 2011</b>		
<b>Human Resources</b>		
<b>Equality</b>		
1.	No Equality Implication	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Equality Implications identified and mitigated	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Equality Implication identified and risk remains	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**Impact on Service Delivery:** The partner Action Plan has been put into place and the Welfare Reform Reference Group established to mitigate wherever possible the impacts of Welfare Reform. However, it remains clear that even with partner engagement, the Council will only ever be able to make a marginal impact.

**What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?**

The Head of Corporate Finance (FD2679) confirms that costs other than that of officers time are being funded from the Social Fund, which is government funding for 2013/14 and 2014/15, and Head of Corporate Legal Services (LD.1984) has been consulted and has no comments on the report

**Are there any other options available for consideration?**

The proposed mitigation measures have been developed in partnership with key organisations such as JobCentre Plus, Citizens Advice Bureau, One Vision Housing and the voluntary, community and faith sector. Various options have been discussed and suggested at the vibrant and well attended partner workshops as well as an internal workshop. All of these have been considered for deliverability and viability. The options put forward are those that are considered to have a practical and realistic outcome.

**Implementation Date for the Decision**

Following the expiry of the “call-in” period for the Minutes of the Cabinet/Cabinet Member Meeting

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**Background Papers:**

None

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1.1 This report sets out further progress in terms of mitigation, reflection on the impact of some legislation now in place and how the Council and partners are planning actions as the reforms take further effect

## **2. CURRENT POSITION AND FUTURE MITIGATION PLANS**

- 2.1 Notable progress against the key themes in the Welfare Reform Action Plan are as follows:

- 2.2 Foodbanks.

- 2.2.1 Sefton now has four fully operational foodbanks. Up to mid November 4,102 people have been fed which equates to 2,543 adults and 1,559 children. The greatest level of demand has been in the South of the Borough where 2,706 have been fed.
- 2.2.2 All foodbanks have been working collaboratively and redistributing food to South Sefton. The recent Harvest Festival collection for the foodbanks in schools and churches brought in 3 tonnes of food alone.
- 2.2.3 Due to the increased demand on South Sefton Foodbank as evidenced by the figures above the Cabinet Member Reference group have committed further resources to support the infrastructure of St Leonards. This commitment will enable a further two years of sustainability for the organisation and support the South Sefton Foodbank.
- 2.2.4 St Leonards Youth and Community Centre, the hub for anti-poverty work in South Sefton is currently putting together a lottery bid to enable it to cope with the demands of the community. The Council, One Vision Housing and Sefton CVS are supporting St Leonards with this, whilst also looking at what wider anti-poverty measures can be developed to address deprivation in the most vulnerable communities.
- 2.2.5 A celebration meal and event took place with 68 foodbank volunteers in attendance at St Leonards Youth and Community Centre on 21 November 2013. Cabinet Members, Ward Members and Council officers helped with the preparation and delivery of the event as a small token of appreciation for the fantastic work being undertaken.
- 2.2.6 The foodbank network across Sefton currently has 250 volunteers. The volunteers who give up their time to support the foodbanks across the borough are providing invaluable support to some of our most vulnerable individuals and families. It cannot be

underestimated the impact that this generosity has on the well-being of our residents and communities.

2.2.7 There will be a national foodbank collection at Tesco on 29 and 30 November 2013. This again will be supported by Council officers and the volunteers.

2.2.8 Work is ongoing to raise the profile of foodbanks. The Council intranet page has been updated with a Festive Friday initiative to encourage staff and Councillors to donate items in high demand. Council papers also carry the request for foodbank items.

## 2.3 Furniture Recycling

2.3.1 Helping Hand continue to provide an excellent community based service in terms of crisis packages. Working with One Vision Housing and the Council, they have secured additional premises and are now able to receive unwanted items of furniture from OVH.

2.3.2 The Council has facilitated conversations between Helping Hand and other Registered Social Landlords including Riverside, Plus Dane, Adactus, Pierhead and Liverpool Housing Trust.

2.3.3 The Cabinet Member Reference group has agreed to support infrastructure costs of Helping Hand for a further year due to the excellent partnership work already undertaken and the demand on their service being high from our most vulnerable residents and communities.

2.3.4 Helping Hand is also a distribution centre for the Crosby Area Foodbank.

## 2.4 Community Kitchens

2.4.1 A mapping service of existing services has taken place and gaps in provision have been identified. A standalone kitchen will be sourced and available to be lent out to community centres or groups who do not have the facility to hold cooking classes on their premises.

2.4.2 There has also been discussion around developing a “ministry of food” style shop in the Strand, which would be used as a drop in facility for people to access information on nutrition and simple cooking classes.

2.4.3 A workshop is being planned for early 2014 to train volunteers and build their confidence in giving cooking classes and advice.

## 2.5 Welfare Reform Workshop

- 2.5.1 A welfare reform workshop was held in September which was again well attended. The focus was on finding out about volunteer experiences of the impact of Welfare Reform and also beginning conversations around digital inclusion.
- 2.5.2 Two films have been produced by Citizens Advice Bureau and the Young Advisors reflecting volunteer experiences which were shown at the event. They were incredibly powerful and attendees were then asked to reflect on their feelings after watching them, the issues that were presenting in their communities and the tangible things as organisations that we could do. In particular, the implications on staff, partners and volunteers personal resilience in dealing with individuals and families coping with complex and difficult individual and personal circumstances.
- 2.5.3 A session on digital inclusion followed and a draft action plan to be discussed further with partners had been developed. This is attached at Appendix A. It should be noted that this is a huge area of development and will take time to implement. As a Council, Members of the Welfare Reform Reference Group are keen to ensure that all main Council facilities are WIFI accessible for residents. This is being progressed and Cabinet will be updated as and when it becomes operational.

## 2.6 Financial Inclusion

- 2.6.1 Work is ongoing to develop affordable alternatives to payday loans and encourage effective money management. These discussions are at an early stage and are being led by One Vision Housing. The Council has made a commitment to pay people on a Friday when payday falls on a Sunday to prevent people from taking out loans. The block on payday loan sites being accessible from Council ICT systems continues.
- 2.6.2 A successful illegal money lending event took place in Birkdale. Sharky the Shark the symbol of the national Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) attended Farnborough Road Children's Centre in Birkdale during half-term to raise awareness of the risks of loan sharks and illegal money lending.
- 2.6.3 At the half-term session, Sharky spent time with both staff and children at the Fun4Kidz half-term play session to oversee a colouring competition that the children undertook. Leaflets and drink-mats were also given out to parents providing details of the service that the Illegal Money Lending Team can provide to get people out of the problem they may be experiencing because of loan sharks.
- 2.6.4 Following a number of events across Sefton, the Illegal Money Lending Team are now working with Sefton's first two cases and are targeting a known Loan Shark. Sefton are planning further Loan

Shark awareness days for other affected areas in Sefton, including an appearance of Sharky at planned markets in Bootle and Netherton to hand out IMLT leaflets.

## 2.7 Emergency Limited Assistance

- 2.7.1 5132 applications have been received from 1 April 2013 until 3 November 2013. 60% of these have been approved. 1,433 foodbank vouchers and 1,311 paypoint vouchers for electricity and gas “top ups” have been issued. 248 referrals have been made to Helping Hand for crisis packages. 78% of all applications have come from South Sefton with 75% being from people aged between 16 and 45 years old. 28% come from Linacre ward.
- 2.7.2 The Welfare Reform Members Reference Group have made limited contingency arrangements for Christmas cover and the impact of cold weather. These have been made in the context of budget constraints and Christmas shutdown arrangements.
- 2.7.3 The Emergency Limited Assistance scheme priorities for expenditure have been discussed and agreed by Members. This is in recognition of the emerging impact of Welfare Reform and the increased demand on the infrastructure support to deliver against this. This has committed all resource within ELAS up to March 2015.

## 2.8 Targeted work for those families most affected by the Benefits Cap

- 2.8.1 Fifty-two families have been identified as being most affected by the Benefits Cap. A small group has been established which provides access to advice and guidance and support for these families. Some have accessed Discretionary Housing Payments, debt management advice from Arvato, CAB and Registered Social Landlords and employment and training support. The number has been less than expected, although it's a rolling number and more may or may not be affected over time. The principle of flagging up who may be most affected and offering support is an ongoing commitment.

## 3 Next Steps

The above sets out a snapshot of activity undertaken and a further report will be submitted to Cabinet in July 2014. This will be an annual report and will include the foodbanks and Helping Hand which will have been in operation for a year.

## **Sefton's Digital Inclusion Action Plan**

### **What is Digital Inclusion?**

Where people are directly or indirectly excluded from using digital technology to improve their life chances in the places where they live.

The Sefton Digital Inclusion Action Plan fits Sefton's Health & Wellbeing Strategy promoting training/volunteering for all ages/abilities [Sefton MBC, 2013]; Sefton's Strategic Needs Assessment in improving skills, training, volunteering, employment opportunities and service accessibility [Sefton MBC, 2012]; Sefton's Economic Strategy in developing skills and abilities [Sefton MBC, 2012]; Sefton's Local Economic Assessment (LEA) by addressing 'the low skills equilibrium' [SQW 'Sefton LEA' 2011]; and Sefton's Strategy for Older Citizens boosting financial security, communications, social ties, participation and engagement [Sefton Partnership for Older Citizens].

Regionally the project complements the Liverpool City Region's (LCR) Skills for Growth strategy closing ICT skill gaps [LCR, 2013]; LCR's aim of reducing poverty, helping families make good financial choices and optimising job opportunities [Child & Poverty Needs Assessment Refresh (ibid)]; and LCR employment, education, skills, training and social inclusion priorities within the European Structural Funding Programmes 2014-20.

### **Understanding the problem - Local Context**

The Linacre, Derby, St. Oswald, Litherland, Ford, Church, Victoria and Netherton & Orrell wards (the Bootle Parliamentary Constituency) are significantly worse than the England average for income deprivation, unemployment, people with limiting long-term illness or disability, and older people in deprivation. 46% of Lower Super Output areas are in the most deprived 10% in the country (3 are in the most deprived 1%); employment in skilled trades has fallen by 45%. South Sefton's residents have lower than average levels of aspiration and educational attainment.

- 33% of UK households do not own a PC
- Of those who are not online, 77% are not working
- Internet use by people with a disability at 41%, is about half that of non-disabled people (78%)
- People in households in the highest income category are more than twice as likely to use the internet as the lowest income category (99% versus 43%)

### **Why is Digital Inclusion important?**

Non-users are being increasingly marginalised as the public, private and third sectors move towards 'digital by default' service delivery.



Rapid technological change also means increasing amounts of learning is now required for non-IT users. Hence digital benefits are not being shared equally by all members of society.

### **Direct benefits of Digital Inclusion**

Social inclusion means people are engaged in community and digital lives, and that they have opportunities for training and employment. They can also take advantage of reduced costs for goods and services that are only available online, access to information, services, goods and opportunities.

Digital Inclusion also provides increased employability by providing core skill for number of employers.

### **Digital Inclusion Vision for Sefton**

Sefton's Action Plan will reduce lack of access to digital media to enable people to gain lifelong, transferable skills that will enable and enrich Sefton residents' lives.

To improve residents:

- Access to computer equipment or internet connections;
- Attitude towards and perceptions of the internet and its relevance in everyday life;
- Skills, confidence and capability to use online services

### **Action for Digital Inclusion – what are we going to do?**

Sefton Council and 3tC combined to deliver a partner focussed workshop session that explored what is already being done, where the gaps are and how those gaps can be filled. The below action plan has helped to be formulated from the feedback received from partners at this event.

A 5-step process for moving forward with Sefton's Digital Inclusion Action Plan:

- 1 Convene stakeholders
- 2 Develop an understanding of what is being done & gaps
- 3 Create an Action Plan
- 4 Implement the Plan
- 5 Evaluate and revise

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Solution - Action</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Where are Digital Exclusion hot-spots in Sefton?	Map areas of internet usage in Sefton. Understanding digital exclusion and the demographics around the issue	
Strong lead to ensure that the Action Plan is delivered and partner agencies are and remain on-board.	List main agencies involved in delivering the agenda  3tC act as the main co-ordinator around the agenda, helping to publicise what courses, training, equipment is available within the community.	
Need to offer more than just IT support & facilitate access to online facilities  More and more being asked of Community Centres and CAB at breaking point	Reinforce libraries, community-based organisations, and city/county managers as local leaders in facilitating digitally inclusive communities	
Training and support required to the areas that need it	Map training & support packages provided by partners within areas that need it. Asking all partners to link into 3tC, to promote and publicise	
Public access needs increasing, particularly at weekends	Opportunity for more internet cafes, or, better use of existing facilities/premises	
1:1 interaction required	Volunteer students at new Hugh Baird centre 3tC provide support Making use of resources such as Parenting 2000 bus	
Worry that agency may be held accountable if they have provided	Clarification sought on issue.	

support to complete an on-line application form	Disclaimer signed by applicant before IT support begins at a centre  Map where support available ranging from general to specialist	
Rural areas – poor to no access to internet	High speed internet scheme being introduced over next few years for rural areas	
Lack of access by some groups to laptops and computers		
Increase the ability to determine and address local needs through effective engagement with the community;		
Equip participants to initiate or augment digital inclusion efforts in each community.		
Asset map – the availability or access to facilities that offer online provision? Also tied into this is risk management (eg if community centres currently have equipment but it may become obsolete in the short term what are we building in to ensure resilience against this?		
Wi-fi strategy e.g. – wi-fi being provided in public buildings (Council and Partners) so that people who may have smart phones (but can't afford to		

use them) can make use of them		
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