

## Welfare Reforms Inquiry – Summary of Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION	ACCEPTED BY EXECUTIVE (Y/N)	CURRENT ACTIVITY	PROPOSED FUTURE ACTIONS	RESPONSIBLE ORGANISATION/OFFICER	TARGET DATE FOR COMPLETION
<b>BUDGET 2013/14</b>					

### Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme

#### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

##### **Discretionary Fund:**

That Cabinet, as part of its decision on the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, considers:

- a. A Discretionary Fund for Local Council Tax Scheme that is aligned to Discretionary Housing Payments.
- b. That the Council Tax Discretionary Fund is directed for the most vulnerable.
- c. The Council Tax Discretionary Fund applies the principles of fairness. This should include:
  - i. Development of a transparent approach for determining applications for the fund.
  - ii. An appropriate complaints process.
  - iii. A fund that is operated in line with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 2: - Transitional Grant**

That Cabinet, in making its decision on the Local Council Tax Scheme, gives further consideration to applying for funding from the Government's Transitional Grant scheme, in the

context of the Final Grant Settlement for Southampton. This should take into account the benefits and concerns highlighted by Scrutiny Panel A's report on the scheme. In their considerations, the Panel recommends that the decision should be made in accordance with the principle of 'making work pay'.

#### **Social fund to local welfare provision**

#### **RECOMMENDATION 3: Resources**

That Cabinet allocates the full unringfenced grant transferred to the Council for the transition of the Social Fund for 2013/14 and 2014/15 solely for the use of developing Local Welfare Provision.

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 4: Principles and Model**

That Cabinet, in relation to the development of the Local Welfare Provision, considers:

- i) To delegate authority to the Head of Communities, Change and Partnership, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Communities, the Cabinet Member for Resources and the Chair of Scrutiny Panel A, to develop and implement a sustainable and holistic mixed model approach to Local Welfare Provision. The scheme should harness existing provision to enable residents vulnerable to financial crisis to become more self-reliant whilst building the capacity of the voluntary sector.
- ii) That the Local Welfare Provision for Southampton has a phased and tiered approach, be strategically co-ordinated by the council (Communities, Change and Partnership Division), supported by a multi-agency, advisory group and

includes the following principles:

- a) A mixed model of support will be established, with a combination of in-house and external provision – where possible, provided by local anti-poverty services.
- b) Support to be led by agency referral with mechanisms in place for direct access / self-referral.
- c) In-kind support will be the main mechanism for help with limited cash provision in emergencies.
- d) Any small cash payments provided this will usually be in the form of affordable loans.
- e) A contingency fund of £100k is set aside and used to respond to unpredicted gaps in provision.
- f) The delivery model should maximise funding to the frontline to support vulnerable people and minimise central administration costs.

## **ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES**

### **RECOMMENDATION 5:**

All Council services and partners should work towards empowering individuals and communities that are most impacted by the Welfare Reforms, by providing the necessary tools (i.e. easily accessible information about the changes as well as access to IT).

Access to services should also be a priority (i.e. benefit advice, money management, and advocacy support) to help develop self-reliance. People having the knowledge and skills to prepare for the reforms will limit their impact and give individuals the best chance to find how 'making work pay'

best fits them. This should be achieved through encouraging behavioural change, developing targeted locality support in priority neighbourhoods, working with most impacted groups including young singles, lone parents, disabled people, BME groups, those where English is not their first language, and older people close to retirement.

## **MAINTAINING AN OVERVIEW OF THE REFORMS**

### **RECOMMENDATION 6: Monitoring**

That a Welfare Reforms Monitoring Group involving Members, council officers and key agency representatives is established for the 2-year transition period to:

- Monitor the impacts of the Welfare Reforms.
- Work with city leaders through Southampton Connect and other key partnerships as appropriate, to minimise the long term impact of Welfare Reforms on wider issues for the city.
- Monitor the implementation of Local Welfare Provision (Recommendation 4) to ensure that the local model continues to support those in financial crisis.
- Consider and agree changes to Local Welfare Provision, including allocation of any contingency fund approved, following recommendations from agencies.
- To review the Council's approach to the Local Council Tax Support.
- Ensure a collaborative council-wide approach to better coordinate resources, activity and pool budgets / discretionary funds, to support those most at risk of crisis due to the Welfare Reforms.

- Ensure implementation of recommendations regarding welfare reforms and report to Cabinet and Council on progress and any emerging issues or changing need.

**RECOMMENDATION 7: Prioritising the Welfare Reforms**

That Cabinet,

- Ensures all Cabinet Members prioritise the impact of the Welfare Reforms in each of their portfolios when bringing forward and implementing policies - at least for the next two years whilst the changes are being implemented.
- Agrees to maintain a strategic overview of the changes as they are implemented.

**COMMUNICATING THE REFORMS**

**RECOMMENDATION 8: Communication and Awareness**

To continue to raise awareness of the Welfare Reforms and their impacts on individuals within the city by building on the work to date with partners on 'the Welfare Reforms Communications Plan' through the 'Gateway to a Better Future' Southampton Connect Priority Project, led by Jobcentre Plus.

Communications on the changes and signposting to support should be made (where practical) through the various formats and channels that are preferred by those most likely to be impacted by the Welfare Reforms.

Communications must deliver a consistent and clear message across the city that the only way out of the benefit system is to 'make work pay', and should:

- Aim to maximise reach to all

- residents impacted by the Welfare Reforms (i.e. through libraries and G.P. surgeries).
- Develop a response for people who are likely to be hardest hit, i.e. people living in priority neighbourhoods; housing estates; traditionally hard to reach groups including young singles, lone parents, disabled people, BME groups and those where English is not their first language as well as older people close to retirement. Responses should also focus on the impact on the individual/household and help those families with the most complex needs.
  - Maximise support to voluntary sector organisations helping vulnerable people that will be most impacted by the reforms.

## **VOLUNTARY SECTOR CAPACITY**

### **RECOMMENDATION 9: Voluntary Sector Capacity**

- i) That Cabinet agrees to prioritise support to help increase capacity in voluntary organisations offering:
  - a) Advice and money management support services targeting those being impacted by the Welfare Reforms.
  - b) Opportunities for vulnerable residents, especially those on long-term benefits, to improve their chances of getting a job.
- ii) All council services work with relevant partners to maximise opportunities to help build the capacity of voluntary sector organisations offering welfare advice and support and pathways

to employment. More general support for the voluntary sector could include encouraging council staff to support voluntary organisations i.e. through development of trustees and bid writing skills etc.

## **PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT**

### **RECOMMENDATION 10: Pathways to Employment**

To continue to work in partnership with organisations, businesses and the voluntary sector to increase opportunities for pathways to employment, especially for people who have been on long-term benefits and/or on lower pay. The aim should be to 'make work pay' by developing and promoting local job opportunities, skills development and encouraging employers to signpost advice to lower paid workers on in-work benefits, alongside maximising our own council based opportunities through developing local jobs and apprenticeships.

## **JOINING UP COUNCIL POLICIES**

### **RECOMMENDATION 11: Joining up Council Policies**

To review relevant council policies to ensure they support the most vulnerable people of working age and most impacted by the Welfare Reforms, to become more self-reliant in dealing with money management and debt, encourage behavioural change, and maximise opportunities that support people improving their skills and employability.