

Welfare Reforms Inquiry – Summary of Recommendations

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

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

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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.

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

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<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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

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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.

Key recommended actions:

- Promote the use of credit unions and money management with Registered Social Landlords.
- Focus resources and consider locality based holistic support and advice from local service point to support those in the most deprived areas of the city.
- Consider the option of a single point of contact for Local Welfare Provision.
- Consider how to boost face to face support and advice available for disabled people who are more likely to have complex needs, potentially at key locations or centres.
- Ensure innovative use of Discretionary Housing Payments to support disabled people to stay in their home or avoid reduced income if affected by the under-

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<p>occupancy rate, where an extra room is essential.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote IT access and training opportunities at libraries, Sure Start Children's Centres, housing offices, GP surgeries concentrated on the most deprived areas. Work with Third Age Centre and other agencies to ensure community support and advice available to older people under retirement age. Work with community development workers to work with community groups, community elders and churches to raise awareness of welfare reforms and signpost to support. Ensure effective signposting and referral between advice services and specialist support groups where English is not someone's first language 					

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, **to include a strong emphasis on health.**

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- 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,

- Identifies a clear plan to respond to the impact of the Welfare Reforms in each of their portfolios.
- Gives due consideration to the impact of the Welfare Reforms on Poverty within the Equality Impact Assessments when developing new policy and agreeing key decisions.

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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

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complex needs.

- Maximise support to voluntary sector organisations helping vulnerable people that will be most impacted by the reforms.

Key recommended actions:

- Develop benefits road shows in priority neighbourhoods to signpost residents to changes, advice and support.
- Ensure wider publication, promotion and distribution of Moneytree both in the Council and discuss wider publication / funding with partner organisations.
- Moneytree sections to be made available as pick and mix online information for individuals and organisations to use.
- Develop Welfare Reforms packs and guidance for members and council services.

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

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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.

Key recommended actions:

- Ensure support and training on Welfare Reforms is available to all voluntary sector agencies.
- Establish a scheme through colleges, JCP and SVS to get young volunteers to provide IT training to older people.
- Hold further event with the voluntary sector to consider the best way forward for the transition period for Welfare Reforms.
- Make better use of the voluntary sector to deliver messages and cascade/signpost changes.
- Maximise the spread of the Communication Plan for Welfare Reforms.
- Work with partners to consider the sufficiency of advice services in the city and identify a sustainable way forward.

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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 **maintaining an emphasis on economic development opportunities** 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.

Key recommended actions identified by the Panel were to:

- Continue to develop local jobs and apprenticeships **through the robust application of section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy.**
- Promote opportunities for jobs:
 - Encourage SME and self-employment through developing small contract opportunities at the council e.g. Housing maintenance.
 - Continue to develop increased job opportunities in the Green Economy.
 - Hold an employment conference to raise awareness of employment

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<p>opportunities / jobs growth areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review options to support the development of affordable childcare. Support businesses and voluntary sectors to work together through Building Bridges Forum. Ensure projects encouraging economic growth e.g. City Deal and Getting the Economy Started make connections to the impacts of the Welfare Reforms to maximise opportunities where need is greatest. Support needed to encourage gender specific engagement. Continue to develop the council's community leader to promote jobs at a living wage. 					

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.

Key recommended actions identified by the Panel were to:

- Coordinate a holistic council-wide response and strategic approach to the impacts of the Welfare Reforms.
- Ensure Housing and Social Care

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<p>services work together to avoid increasing costs and service bottlenecks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review housing and planning policies including payment of rent in arrears and housing allocations to ensure they reflect changing needs linked to Welfare Reforms. Review debt recovery policy across the council to support people struggling due to Welfare Reforms, to maximise the use of mediation, signpost people to money management and minimise the need for additional court costs. Consider innovative use of discretionary payments to help disabled people living in adapted properties to stay in their homes. Work in partnership with registered social landlords to support IT literacy and managing finances. Ensure awareness of benefits changes and impacts on residents is disseminated to all levels of the council, including signposting to advice for lower paid workers. 					