

## NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

#### ACTION PLAN: SCRUTINY PANEL 1

Recommendations from Scrutiny Panel 1 (Impact of the Welfare Reform Act) completed in July 2014

#### Proposed dates for monitoring implementation of accepted recommendations

Report received by Cabinet	Response received by Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Monitoring activity	Monitoring complete
12 November 2014	25 November 2015	13 June 2016	

**Recommendation 1:** Raising awareness of the ongoing reforms, the impact and support available from partners, the Voluntary Sector and various community groups and organisations is continued.

Action	Implementation/responsibility by:	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
The Revenues and Benefits Partnership and Development Officer meets with landlords, voluntary organisations including Community Law and Citizens Advice and updates them on	December 2015	Revenues and Benefits Partnership and Development Officer. Money advice and customer service teams		Completed

<p>Welfare Reform impacts. The Money Advice and Customer Service teams give support and advice to customers including external support where appropriate</p>				
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> Revenues and Benefits, LGSS, together with Officers from NBC continue to provide briefings in relation to the emerging reforms and their impact.</p>				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
<p>Staff are receiving regular briefings, the voluntary sector and community groups are receiving briefings and updates as are councillors. The officer welfare reform steering group continues to lead on this.</p>	<p>December 2015</p>		<p>Completed</p>	

<b>Recommendation 3</b> In recognising the timescales for relevant processes and procedures in relation to Welfare Reform, Revenues and Benefits, LGSS, works closely with Housing Services, NBC, in order that these processes and procedures are speeded up.				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
LGSS Revenues and Benefits work closely with customer services to ensure that where possible new tenants have their claims processed in one day. Housing Services have a regular presence in the One Stop Shop to ensure that co-ordination between the relevant services is as streamlined as possible.	December 2015			Completed
<b>Recommendation 4:</b> A dedicated resource for benefits advice, financial inclusion and digital inclusion is established.				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
Resource is provided for benefits advice,	December 2015			The recommendation has not been completed in so far

<p>financial inclusion and digital inclusion. This is through a mixture of officers and external support. Officers within the housing money advice team offer financial inclusion and advice, customer service and revenues and benefits officers offer face to face and telephone financial and benefit advice. The Credit Union are based in the one stop shop and regular referrals take place. We work closely with Barclays Digital Eagles who offer digital training and support and have floor walkers within the One Stop Shop who assist customers with making claims and will</p>				<p>as a dedicated resource has not been established however the mixture of officers and external support providing financial inclusion and benefit advice and support for digital inclusion has met the intention of the recommendation which is to provide a high degree of support for customers in need.</p>
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be trained to support customers with universal credit claims.				
<b>Recommendation 5:</b> Claimants are continued to be advised of the availability of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and awarded payment as necessary.				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Implementation/responsibility by</b>	<b>Resources required/available</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Achievement/Completed</b>
Promotion takes place when customers claim either on the phone or face to face and LGSS Revenues and Benefits work closely with Northampton Partnership Homes and the Housing Options service to maintain tenancies and provide time and support to organise moves to more affordable accommodation.	December 2015			Completed

<b>Recommendation 6:</b> A financial Risk Assessment is undertaken and published.				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Implementation/responsibility by</b>	<b>Resources required/available</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Achievement/Completed</b>
Monthly reports are produced which monitor the amount of DHP awarded and the remaining balance within the fund for future applications. Each case is considered on its own merit and a customer financial risk assessment is undertaken as part of the application process.	December 2015			Completed

<b>Recommendation 7:</b> A project is undertaken to establish the roles and responsibilities in relation to Welfare Reform, in particular Implementation, Transition and Post-Transition				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
LGSS Revenues and Benefits completed a project which reviewed the specific impacts and actions required in line with the transition to Universal credit. This is monitored through the welfare reform steering group.	December 2015			Completed
<b>Recommendation 8:</b> Staff from the relevant service areas - Customer Services, Housing Services, NBC, and Revenues and Benefits, LGSS, are trained and skilled so that they can support individuals through Welfare Reform				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed

<p>Staff have received training to understand the issues and support is available from all service areas and voluntary sector organisations as appropriate. The training is ongoing as welfare reform changes are implemented.</p>	<p>December 2015</p>			<p>Completed</p>
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**Recommendation 9:** Links with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) are actively explored, including the possibility of benefits advice, in particular the application of sanction, and support presence within the one Stop Shop.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Implementation/responsibility by</b>	<b>Resources required/available</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Achievement/Completed</b>
<p>The provision of benefit advice from the DWP has been discussed and they do not provide this service. The DWP themselves provide</p>				<p>Not implemented in full – partly implemented through provision of advice in partnership and through surgeries. Ongoing discussions are taking place with regard to wholesale</p>

<p>benefit Advice at their benefit advice centres (via phone &amp; email) and the Job Centres focus on into work activities. We have colocation for regular surgeries in the One Stop Shop for Job Search Advice but will not be able to get direct advice and will continue to assist customers where possible or signpost them to get this support.</p>				<p>co-location of the DWP into the Guildhall to support greater integration and partnership working.</p>
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**Recommendation 10:** Links with ATOS (or relevant organisation) regarding the impact of the delays in assessing the entitlement of PIPs and the delays with appeal are actively explored.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Implementation/responsibility by</b>	<b>Resources required/available</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Achievement/Completed</b>
<p>We cannot influence the process although we can make representations</p>				<p>Not completed as unable to influence the process other than to make</p>

through our links to the relevant organisations for an improvement in assessment and appeals timescales.				representation.
<p><b>Recommendation 11:</b> The Sustainable Independent Living (SIL) Scheme Toolkit - Northamptonshire County Council Social Fund 2014/2015, as attached at appendix J of the Overview and Scrutiny Report constructed between January 2014 and July 2014, is disseminated to all Councillors and staff. A workshop for all Councillors is scheduled explaining the work of the Sustainable Independent Living Scheme and Charity Link and the application process.</p>				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Implementation/responsibility by</b>	<b>Resources required/available</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Achievement/Completed</b>
This recommendation is no longer applicable due to the cessation of the SIL fund.				Not completed as the recommendation is no longer applicable due to the cessation of the SIL fund.

<p><b>Recommendation 12:</b> Consideration is given to the development of viable alternatives to pay day loans, for example, facilities are introduced to assist clients to set up direct debits from the Northamptonshire Credit Union to pay bills such as rent (Council and private sector), Council Tax and utilities.</p>				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
<p>Customers for whom this is appropriate are referred to the Credit Unit who offer an account "Budget Plus" which provides a means to ensure bills are paid first and only the balance of the income is transferred to a current account with the CU or high street bank. The cost is £1 per week.</p>	<p>December 2015</p>			<p>Completed</p>

**Recommendation 13:** Consideration is given to Northampton Borough Council joining the East Midlands Credit Union Initiative where rent would be paid directly to the Council, as the social landlord, rather than directly to the tenant.

Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
<p>During the past year, a variety of initiatives have been introduced by social landlords to improve tenants' budgeting skills and mitigate any negative impact that welfare reform has on rent collection rates. Consideration is being given to the relative merits of all of these initiatives (including the East Midlands Credit Union Initiative) but, at present, rent collection rates are still good.</p>	<p>December 2015</p>			<p>Completed</p>

<b>Recommendation 14:</b> The work of Northamptonshire Credit Union is promoted to encourage people to use it as an alternative to pay day loans.				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
The ongoing promotion and partnership with the Credit Union includes a presence in the One Stop Shop. Since the Credit Union have been based in the One Stop Shop referrals have increased significantly.	December 2015			Completed

**Recommendation 15:** Close links into and between the Voluntary Sector and Northampton Borough Council are promoted.

Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
Awards continue to be made annually to the voluntary sector both through Partnership Grants and Community Foundation grants. Community Law Service and Citizens Advice are both now located permanently in the One Stop Shop.	April 2016			Completed

**Recommendation 16:** Active promotion of the work of Voluntary Sector organisations, such as (Charity Link, Citizens Advice Bureau and Community Las) takes place on the Council's website, within the One Stop Shop and as part of outreach activities such as tenants' conferences.

Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
Promotion is taking place through the	January 2016			Completed

OSS, the Council website and intranet and through tenants' conferences.				
<b>Recommendation 17:</b> Service Level Agreements with Voluntary Sector organisations are explicit in relation to the necessity to provide support and advice to customers facing sanction.				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
Service Level Agreements have been updated for 15/16 onwards in relation to Information and Advice and include outcomes in relation to the number of customers supported.	November 2015			Completed

<b>Recommendation 18:</b> Northampton Borough Council supports the development of Food Hubs.				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
				Completed
Food Hubs continue to be promoted to those customers for whom this is beneficial.				
<b>Recommendation 19:</b> Monitoring of the accumulative impact of Welfare Reform as changes are implemented and embedded continues, to inform the development of appropriate support and, in particular, to help prepare for the implementation of Universal Credit.				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
Monitoring is carried out through the Officer Welfare Reform steering group will continue to be closely reviewed	December 2015			Complete

<p><b>Recommendation 20:</b> Relevant key findings from this Scrutiny Review are presented to an evidence gathering meeting of the Scrutiny Panel that is investigating Poverty in the Town to inform its evidence base.</p>				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
The key findings have been presented.	The Scrutiny Review (Poverty in the Town) received a copy of this report to inform its evidence base as part of the evidence gathering process	n/a		Complete
<p><b>Recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b></p>				
<p><b>Recommendation 21:</b> The Overview and Scrutiny considers commissioning a Scrutiny review on the impact of Universal Credit after it has been in operation in Northampton for 12 months.</p>				
Action	Implementation/responsibility by	Resources required/available	Target date	Achievement/Completed
This recommendation is accepted and will be considered through the Overview and Scrutiny Planning process	This suggestion will be presented to a future Overview and Scrutiny Work Programming event at the appropriate time	n/a		

<b>Recommendation 22:</b> The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as part of its monitoring regime, reviews the impact of this report in six months' time.				
<b>Action</b>	<b>Implementation/responsibility by</b>	<b>Resources required/available</b>	<b>Target date</b>	<b>Achievement/Completed</b>
Included onto the O&S Monitoring Work Programme 2015/2016	Added to the O&S Monitoring Work Programme - Overview and Scrutiny Committee	n/a	Monitoring to take place in June 2016	