

Impact of Welfare Reform

Background

During the course of 2012/2013, the Overview and Scrutiny Board¹ gave consideration to welfare reforms being implemented by central government, not least the introduction of the Council Tax Support Scheme to replace Council Tax Benefit and the changes to Housing Benefit. These changes also included the amalgamation of different “hardship” funds as well as the transfer of some of those schemes to the local authority.

The Board’s report² was considered by the Council at its meeting on 6 December 2012.

Scope of the review

To review the impact of the changes in the welfare system following their introduction and how the impacts are being mitigated.

To consider how future service changes may further impact those affected by welfare reforms.

Areas of questioning

A. Torbay Council

1. What has been the impact of the introduction of the Council Tax Support Scheme?
 - a. Collection rates
 - b. Bad debt
 - c. Hardship Scheme applications
 - d. Claim handling times
 - e. Numbers of callers – face-to-face, telephone, digital
2. What has been the impact of the changes in Housing Benefit?
 - a. Hardship Scheme applications
 - b. Claim handling times

¹ 20 June 2012, 3 October 2012 and 21 November 2012

² [Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Board](#)

- c. Numbers of callers – face-to-face, telephone, digital
 - d. Requests for re-homing
- 3. How have other welfare changes introduced during the past year impacted on Council services? What mitigation measures has the Council put in place?
- 4. How is the Council monitoring any impact from welfare changes?
- B. Citizen’s Advice Bureau and Registered Social Landlords
 - 5. What has been the impact of the recent welfare reforms on your service?
 - 6. What additional resources have you made available to support your clients/tenants?
- C. Future Changes
 - 7. How are agencies working together to ensure that the cumulative effect of future service changes and further welfare reforms are mitigated as well as possible?
- D. Comparator Authorities
 - 8. What impact are welfare reforms having within your local authority? What mitigating actions have been put in place and how effective have they been?

Plus Question 6
- E. General Public
 - 9. What has been the impact on you of the welfare reforms, in particular changes to Council Tax and Housing Benefits?
 - 10. How have you sought advice and/or information? Where from?
 - 11. What more can the Council do to assist you?

Sources of Information

Torbay Council – Strategic Welfare Group
 Torbay Citizen’s Advice Bureau
 Registered Social Landlords
 Comparator Authorities³
 General Public – Press Release, Social Media, Webpage

³ Bournemouth Borough Council, Blackpool Borough Council, Isle of Wight Council, Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, Poole Borough Council, Portsmouth City Council, Southampton City Council

Methodology

Representatives from Torbay Council, Torbay Citizen's Advice Bureau, Registered Social Landlords and comparator authorities will be invited to submit written information.

The public will also be invited to submit information.

Appropriate representatives will be invited to attend at the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 18 September 2013.

A further update will be requested for the meeting of the Board on 9 April 2013.