

REPORT TO: Employment Learning and Skills & Children
Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 23rd June 2014

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children and Enterprise

SUBJECT: Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review Report and
Recommendations

PORTFOLIOS: Economy and Enterprise and Children, Young
People

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1.1 **Members are requested to comment on the actions identified from the review and prioritisation that has taken place and in particular the actions that would require additional resources, which are costed within the report.**

1.2 **Members consider submitting a report to the Council's Executive Board, which presents the work of the topic group on Welfare Reform in relation to Employment, Learning and Skills.**

2.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

2.1 To present the Board with the recommendations from the ELS & C PPB Welfare Reform Scrutiny Topic Group and the process undertaken to prioritise the recommendations. The aim of this work was to identify actions that are most likely to be of most benefit, so that resources can be targeted more effectively.

2.2 To present the outcomes from the prioritisation process to members for their consideration.

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 At the Employment, Learning, Skills and Community Policy and Performance Board on 11th November 2013, members agreed to endorse the recommendations in the Welfare Reforms Scrutiny Topic Group report.

3.2 On 8th January 2014, the Employment, Learning, Skills and Community Policy and Performance Board, received a report on taking forward the 19 recommendations from the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Topic group. Members recognised that not all of the recommendations would be achievable due to the council's current financial position and budget constraints. ELS & C PPB agreed to continue the work of the Topic

Group and further investigate how the recommendations could be implemented. Members also noted that the recommendations were aligned under four priority themes:-

- Information and support
- Adult Education and Skills
- Data/research/Performance Measures
- Policy Development Areas

3.3 At the Scrutiny Topic Group meeting on 6th February 2014, it was agreed that Wesley Rourke, (Operational Director, Economy, Enterprise and Property) would go through the recommendations with the relevant leads for each area and refine in line with the recommendations from members and bring back to the Welfare Reform Topic Group. This report identifies the prioritisation process followed and the outcomes alongside the Recommendations from the ELS & C PPB Scrutiny Topic Group.

4.0 **PRIORITISATION PROCESS**

4.1 The prioritisation process was broken down into four separate stages. These were:-

- Identifying any completed actions where no further action is identified
- Identifying actions that are on-going.
- Identifying actions that are new.
- Prioritisation Assessment of each action identified as 'new' against set criteria, including cost, impact/benefit, statutory requirement, additionality/added value and deliverability.

4.2 *Stage 1 – Identify Completed Actions*

Of the 16 actions within the report, the first recommendation to, 'produce a resource pack of information relating to welfare reform' was identified as completed. This work was undertaken as part of the work of the Halton Strategic Partnership Board in relation to the welfare reforms.

4.3 *Stage 2 – Identify On-going Actions*

The actions identified as on-going are already funded and resourced, so do not need to be prioritised as part of the work of the Scrutiny Topic Group. There may however be a need at a later time to identify milestones and targets and establish if there is an end point for these actions.

Of the 15 remaining actions recommended by the Scrutiny Topic Group, 8 were identified as on-going. These are listed below and identified in the Topic Group Action Plan in *Appendix 1*.

- Events at library with staff available to support people to access the internet
- Adult education support to help ensure people have necessary IT, literacy and numeracy and budgetary skills.
- Encourage businesses to set up paid internships, work experience placements, apprenticeships and opportunities for voluntary work
- Increase opportunities for voluntary work
- Develop budgeting and It skills as part of curriculum in schools
- Establish public internet access centres where people have support to help access on line services etc
- Develop performance measures to monitor the impact of the welfare reforms over time
- Work with HHT and other housing providers to promote house swaps, expand Property Pool Plus etc

4.3 *Stage 3 – Identify new actions*

The actions identified as new, are those that would need to be resourced if they are to be taken forward. Excluding the 1 completed action and the 8 actions identifies as on-going, there remains 7 actions to be prioritised. These are:

- Advocacy support - Ideal is for duty advisors to be at court picking up cases without representation
- Development and roll out of the Halton Go –ON project
- Credit Union join up days for council staff and work with other employers to do the same
- Support for people through appeals process through working together with health services to get people the information and support they need.
- Support for people with lower levels of disability who are more likely to lose disability benefits as part of the changing criteria through the welfare reforms
- Virtual one Stop Shop approach to benefit advice and support, either through co-location or a single front door approach.
- Consider a review of planning policy to build more one bed homes so residents can down size if needed, to avoid paying bedroom tax

5.0 **PRIORITISATION MATRIX**

5.1 A prioritisation matrix is a simple tool that provides a way to rank the recommended actions, based on agreed criteria that are determined to be important. This will enable us to see clearly which projects are the most important to focus on first and which if any could be withdrawn or put on hold.

5.2 As part of the prioritisation process we identified a number of set

criteria, against which to assess the new actions. The criteria were chosen as each was considered to be an important factor in ranking the recommendations. The criteria chosen were:-

- Cost
- Impact/Benefit
- Statutory/Non statutory
- Deliverability
- Additionality /Added Value

5.3 For each of the set criteria, a rating scale of 1, 5 and 9 was established. The description for each of the rating scales as they apply to each criteria, is set out in the prioritisation matrix, attached in **Appendix 2**

5.4 Each of the criteria was then placed in descending order of importance. The criteria ranked as of highest importance was then given the highest weighting and so on, with the lowest important criteria given the lowest weighting.

5.5 *Stage Four – Prioritisation Process*

The prioritisation matrix was then established with the criteria down the left column and the weight and actions across the top. Each project was evaluated against the first criteria and given a rating. The rating was then multiplied by the weight to give a numerical figure. This process was completed for each of the other criteria in turn and then all the values added together to give an overall numerical value for the action. This process was repeated for all of the actions identified. The resulting completed matrix is attached in Appendix 2

6.0 **PRIORTISATION OUTCOMES**

6.1 The numerical values for each of the projects from the prioritisation process are set out below. The higher scoring projects are the ones we should focus on first and the lower scoring projects should be considered at a later date or possibly be withdrawn.

Project	Prioritisation score
Halton Go –ON project	125
Credit Union join up days	125
Support for people with lower levels of disability	113
Consider a review of planning policy to build more one and two bed homes	113
Virtual one Stop Shop approach	113

to benefit advice and support,	
Work in partnership to support people through appeals process	93
Advocacy support	21

6.2 Based on the outcomes from the prioritisation process the Halton Go-On project and Credit Union join up days, should be the projects to focus on first and as we move down the list the projects would be ones to focus on later. The Advocacy Support project which scored the lowest ranking, may want to be considered for withdrawal, until such time as the significant resources necessary to enable this to happen become available.

7.0 RESOURCES

7.1 For each of the new projects, the project leads were asked to identify the resources required to take forward this action, as shown in the table below. Based on the resources required, a recommendation has been put forward as to whether members should consider taking forward each of the actions.

Project	Prioritisation score	Lead Officer	Resources required to take forward this recommendation	Recommendation to be taken forward? (yes/no/partially)
Development and roll out of "Halton Go-ON" project	125	Shelah Semoff	Halton Go-ON Project has the support of the Halton Strategic Partnership Board and a small resource allocated. However an action plan for its implementation is being written and will need to go through the appropriate approval processes.	yes
Consider organising a credit union join up day for council staff and also work with other employers in the borough to encourage their employees to join the Credit Union.	125	Debbie to speak to Credit Union	The council payroll system is already set up make payments to the Credit Union upon request. Therefore it would be staff time only to organise join up days.	Yes
Consider how we could better support people	113	David Gray	See note 1. Below Publicity for advice agencies when this	

<p>with lower levels of disability who are more likely to lose out with the benefits reforms. (If we have access to data on the people in Halton on low level DLA, we could target early support.)</p>			<p>process starts will be vital but publicity too early could generate considerable anxiety over an extended period of time.</p> <p>Resources; Small budget for publicity materials in Sept/ Oct 2015 would help this client group to gain advice.</p> <p>Resources - Employment of additional staffing resources would assist with this peak of form completion and complex appeal caseload being handled.</p>	<p>Yes (<i>Small budget for publicity materials in Sept/ Oct 2015 - £200</i>)</p> <p>Significant expense for discussion. (<i>Employment of additional staff for form completion/ handling complex appeals - £40,000 approx</i>)</p>
<p>Consider review of planning policy to build one and two bed homes etc.</p>	<p>113</p>	<p>Tim Gibbs</p>	<p>See Note 2. Below There is no need to amend planning policy to require RPs to build smaller accommodation</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Consider the feasibility of a one stop shop type approach to benefit advice and support, either through co-location of services and/or a one front door approach with referrals to the most appropriate support service. Also explore the possibility of piloting a welfare reform information stall in Halton's market(s)</p>	<p>113</p>	<p>Shelah/ Dave Gray/Hitesh</p>	<p>See Note 3. Below This is seen not as one physical building, rather a joined up advice sector such that appropriate advice services are aware of each other and efficiently refer if necessary between each other.</p> <p>The Advice Services Transition Fund is being used in part to produce a single all-encompassing referral directory, and to enhance links between agencies. Whilst more can always be achieved, links between agencies and awareness are generally good. Resources - No additional resources required</p>	<p>Yes</p>

			<p>The project has a second focus looking at a possible welfare reform information stall in Haltons markets. See Note 4.</p> <p>Resources; Minimal for a leaflet stand, but will need a commitment to maintain and stock this. Resources - Substantial for a full time presence.</p> <p>However, perhaps there is a better solution with a number of one off events, where a number of agencies could attend and work together at a market stall facility. There is a successful track record with the Carers Centre & the Welfare Rights Service trialling this at Widnes Market.</p> <p>Resources - Cost of market stand and a commitment to facilitate the event</p>	<p>Partial (Cost of market stand for occasional events – free (HBC stalls))</p> <p>Partial</p>
Need to consider how we could better support people through the appeals process, by working together with health services to get people access to the information and support they need.	93	Dave Gray	<p>See note 5. below</p> <p>This topic has been debated at length before, and the prevailing view is that it is best left to individual GPs discretion.</p> <p>Resource - Time only</p>	No further action required.
Advocacy support - Duty advisors to be at court picking up those without representation	21	Dave Gray	<p>This would involve significant staff time and be very expensive. A large amount of work could arise from this that would generate significant “back office” casework, of varying merit.</p> <p>Resource - Significant</p>	No

Note 1.

New claimants of disability benefits aged 16/64 can only claim PIP not DLA. However those in this age group now on DLA will from Oct 2015 to Sept 2017 (subject to slippage) be assessed for PIP with their DLA claims ceasing. The picture is far from clear but in general those receiving the Low Rate Care Component of DLA are at most risk of losing their award. Currently PIP new claims are taking 7/8 months and often longer to be assessed. This indicates the strains in the system and that the system is currently regularly found wanting. Slippage is quite likely. Currently good local service networking means that those affected by reforms are easily signposted or referred to an appropriate agency. Difficulties will not be confined to those receiving this component of DLA, and the need for help could be quite widespread. Much will depend on the timescales used for PIP case loading and the quality of medicals given/decisions taken.

Note 2.

There is no need to amend planning policy to require RPs to build smaller accommodation since they are reliant on the authority's support to secure HCA grant for any new developments. This means the Council is already in a strong position to influence the tenure, type and size of accommodation that is built. The bids for Halton recently submitted by RPs under the HCA's 2015/18 Affordable Housing Programme are strongly skewed toward the provision of smaller accommodation, due to RP's own ambitions to increase their capacity to help those affected by the bedroom tax to downsize.

Note 3.

Halton is fortunate in being a small borough geographically with a well-developed advice sector. The voluntary and third sector has a developed awareness through Halton & St Helens VCA. The statutory sector and advice agencies have a very good awareness and dialogue with each other through the Halton Information and Advice Providers group (HIAP).

Note 4.

The project has a second focus looking at a possible welfare reform information stall in Halton's markets. It would seem wrong to limit it purely to welfare reform and it could be envisaged to have a wider advice capacity/ expertise. At the most basic it could be purely a leaflet stand. However it could be resourced with staff to give expert advice. This brings with it accountability and the need for a skilled staffing resource. Whilst these projects often bring a flood of initial enthusiasm, it is a long term commitment that is required and a structured management commitment to prevent the service being ad hoc.

Note 5.

Increasingly as part of the benefits application/ appeals process, people are being asked to gather medical evidence to support their claims. Whilst the focus is not always on GPs to supply this, they are for many people the most apparent and readily available source of medical expertise on their patients. Currently there is a "patchwork quilt" of responses when GPs are asked for evidence. Some GPs simply say no and there are some practices where this is expected. Some GPs charge for a letter with fees varying from £10 to £130 being asked for. The value of such letter is not known until they are paid for and read. Other GPs appreciate that the link between income and well-being and will write accurate letters for their patients if requested without charge. Trying to ensure all GPs are willing to provide evidence is not without risk. In some neighbouring areas a policy has been adopted not to provide any evidence under any circumstance. This topic has been debated at length before, and the prevailing view is that it is best left to individual GPs discretion.

7.2 In summary:-

Actions recommended to be taken forward, that require NO additional financial resources but require staff time only:-

- Development and roll out of "Halton Go-ON" project **Resources required** – Staff time only
- Credit union join up day for council staff – **Recommendation** - Info sent out

- electronically with payslips **Resources required** – Staff time only
- Consider the feasibility of a one stop shop type approach to benefit through a one front door approach with referrals to the most appropriate support service. Also explore the possibility of piloting a welfare reform information stall in Halton's market(s)
Partial Recommendation :- A commitment to a number of one off events, where a number of agencies could attend and work together at a market stall facility. There is a successful track record with the Carers Centre & the Welfare Rights Service trialling this at Widnes Market.
Resources required - Cost of market stall (free) and a commitment from staff to facilitate the event.

Actions recommended to be partially taken forward, that require additional financial resources:-

- Consider how we could better support people with lower levels of disability who are more likely to lose out with the benefits reforms. **Recommendation:- Partial** - Publicity for advice agencies when this process starts will be vital but publicity too early could generate considerable anxiety over an extended period of time. **Resources:** Small budget for publicity materials in Sept/ Oct 2015 would help this client group to gain advice. **Approximate cost- £200**
- Consider how we could better support people with lower levels of disability who are more likely to lose out with the benefits reforms. **Resources – Significant** with the employment of additional staffing resources which would assist with this peak of form completion and complex appeal caseload being handled. **Resources :** Employment of additional staff for form completion/ handling complex appeals . **Approximate Cost -£40,000**

Actions NOT recommended to be taken forward:-

- Advocacy support - Duty advisors to be at court picking up those without representation

8.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 Existing policies are endorsed by the report.

8.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The recommendations highlighted using the prioritisation matrix will require some resources to undertake, however most of the work can be done within existing resources. The prioritisation process has made it more clear which actions are likely to be of most benefit so that we can target resources more effectively.

9.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

9.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The welfare reforms will continue to impact upon children, young people and families in the borough due to potential new charges to families such as the bedroom tax, contribution to council tax costs, possible loss in income etc

9.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

The Welfare Reforms will result in an overall loss of money to residents and therefore will result in less money in the local economy. Also people who may not have worked for many years due to ill health etc will now potentially be required to seek work. This will be a real challenge particularly for HPIJ. As the welfare reforms require applications to be made online, then there may also be a need for more access to IT and improvements in residents' IT skills.

9.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Elements of the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review impact on this priority, for example, people being taken off disability benefits and required to seek work opportunities. Also changes to the benefits system is likely to cause stress for some vulnerable groups, for example those with mental health problems, which may impact upon their health and well being.

9.4 **A Safer Halton**

Due to reductions in household income and the potential impact on vulnerable groups, such as those with substance misuse issues, there could be a corresponding rise in crime, in particular domestic abuse.

9.5 **Halton's Environment and Regeneration**

The welfare reforms will result in less money in the economy which may impact upon existing and new development. On the positive side Halton has a good supply of local labour skills to support economic growth and regeneration.

10.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

10.1 The report and recommendations support the Council's strategic priority of Employment, Learning, Skills and Community. The welfare reforms present a number of risks to children and families in the borough, due to families being likely to have less money and increasing demands on that income

11.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

11.1 The implementation of the recommendations will help to mitigate against the impacts of the welfare reforms on the residents of Halton.

ELS & C PPB Welfare Reform Scrutiny Review
ACTION PLAN

Action No.	Action	Who	Timescale	Progress Update
PRIORITY ONE Information and Support				
1	Produce a resource pack of information relating to welfare reform	Steve Doore	Completed	Completed and attached in Annex 3
2	Need more advocacy support. Ideal is for duty advisors to be at court picking up those without representation. We don't have the capacity to represent everyone in need.	David Gray	New action	This is an ideal although very expensive and time consuming service that isn't practical and can't be resourced at this time
3	Development and roll out of "Halton Go-ON" project	Partnership Steering Group with support from Shelah Semoff	New action	Report currently drafted and once agreed by the steering group will go through relevant partner approval before project launched
4	Consider organising a credit union join up day for council staff and also work with other employers in the borough to encourage their employees to join the Credit Union.	Wesley Rourke/ Debbie Houghton	New action	This work can be considered as part of the development of the Child and Family Poverty Strategy
5	Need to consider how we could better support people through the appeals process, by working together with health services to get people access to the information and support they need.	Julia Rosser (health)/ David Gray	New action	Currently there is an inconsistent service from GPs. Some will provide the information at the request of the individual at no cost, others charge up to £100+, others will only provide info at the request of DWP and not to the individual.

6	Consider how we could better support people with lower levels of disability who are more likely to lose out with the benefits reforms. (If we have access to data on the people in Halton on low level DLA, we could target early support.)	Wesley Rourke/ David Gray	New action	Under the new benefits regime some people will lose their benefits as the rules have changed substantially. However welfare rights will assist people with Mandatory reconsiderations and appeals. Actions might include awareness raising (such as that ongoing with Halton disability forum), and promoting the services that can help more.
7	Consider the feasibility of a one stop shop type approach to benefit advice and support, either through co-location of services and/or a one front door approach with referrals to the most appropriate support service. Also explore the possibility of piloting a welfare reform information stall in Halton's market(s)	Peter McCann	New action	Co-location of services would be very expensive and there is no commitment to do so at this time. A virtual one stop shop with one front door type approach where people phone one provider but are then referred to other providers as appropriate is more feasible. CAB are producing a directory which will help with the referral process but already have good informal referral processes in place.
8	Consider one day event(s) at library with support staff to assist people access internet services	Library staff/ Peter McCann	On-going	Library staff already support people in accessing IT. Currently the only benefit accessed on line is relatively straight forward to complete. Hence demand is not currently there for putting welfare rights staff in libraries. Keep under review however it would need to be resourced if a decision was made to put such a service in place in the future
PRIORITY TWO				
Adult Education and Skills				
9	Adult education support to help ensure people have the necessary IT, literacy and numeracy skills and budgetary	Siobhan Saunders	On-going	IT, literacy and numeracy classes are offered by ELS Adult Learning at Acorn and Kingsway Learning Centres and at other venues across the borough. Managing Money classes are delivered by Adult Learning in Children's Centres.

	skills			<p>Employability Programmes, including the HEP Award, are also delivered in ELS venues.</p> <p>Work Programme and National Careers Service clients are regularly referred to this provision to assist them in improving their skills and employment prospects and to move them nearer to the job market.</p>
10	Encourage other employers to set up paid Internships, similar to that run by Halton Borough Council. Also encourage businesses to offer work experience placements and opportunities for voluntary work.	Wesley Rourke	On-going	<p>Halton Borough Council does not offer paid internships. The HEP team have arranged a couple of unpaid voluntary internships for clients earlier this year which have now come to an end.</p> <p>As part of its employer engagement activity, the HEP team do work with local employers to source work experience placements and graduate internships for unemployed residents. These are normally unpaid and are undertaken on a voluntary basis and priority for the placements is given to Work Programme clients (required as part of WP contracts).</p> <p>As part of the People Plan and the Talent Strategy, there are plans to work with council departments to recruit volunteers, graduates and apprentices.</p>
11	Service providers could do more to maximise the skills that voluntary staff can bring to an organisation. They have now increased the number of hours that you can do on a voluntary basis	Wesley Rourke/John Gallagher	On-going	<p>The HEP Manager has recently been able to gain support from HBC Senior Management to help increase the number of work experience placements across the Council.</p> <p>As part of the People Plan and the Talent Strategy, there are plans to work with council departments to recruit volunteers, graduates and apprentices.</p>
12	Greater need to provide opportunities for residents to develop budgeting and IT skills, particularly important as new benefits system will rely on online systems. (Sue Riley (JCP) to take up with each LA in the sub region. Will take time	Gill Bennett/ Steve Nyakatawa – Lead for schools working with Trading Standards	On-going	Curriculum support packs developed and currently being promoted to schools through Trading Standards

	so don't want payday lenders to benefit from this. Sue must set up a plan that reflects problems in Halton.)			
13	Establish public internet access centres where the public have support to help them access on line services and access application forms for benefits, jobs etc	Siobhan Saunders / Library staff	On-going	<p>IT drop in sessions are delivered by ELS Adult Learning at Acorn and Kingsway Learning Centres/ Community Centres and Children's Centres. The contents of these sessions are determined by the needs of the learners. CV workshops and two-week employability courses are also delivered at both Learning Centres. HPIJ Advisers also deliver workshops in job searching, job applications and interview skills to Work Programme clients at several venues across the borough. (HPIJ deliver 2 Work Programme contracts for Halton for Ingeus and A4E)</p> <p>Public PCs are provided at HPIJ's offices in Rutland House and Moor Lane to enable clients to job search and make online job applications.</p> <p>Public PCs area also available in Halton's Libraries where staff can give support. There are also a number of work Clubs across the Borough offering similar facilities and support.</p>

PRIORITY THREE

Data/Research/Performance Measures

14	Measure the impact of the benefit reforms in Halton	Debbie Houghton/ Wesley Rourke	On-going	As part of the work of the Topic Group, set a baseline for performance measures which will tie into the agreed framework for delivery.
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PRIORITY FOUR

Policy Development Areas

15	Open day HHT, so people can	The Strategic	On-going	All HAs are required to offer free membership for their tenants
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	turn up and look to swap houses. Could we get all HAs together and hold a bigger event.	Housing Partnership		to one of a small number of national online exchange schemes (Abitas, Locata, Homeswapper, House Exchange.). HHT held a first event in September but attendance was poor. A second event is planned for 30 th October, involving HHT, Riverside, LHT, Plus Dane and Guinness so the HAs are already working together on this. This is core business for the HAs
	Consider how to better engage with private landlords re making available one bed properties. Links between private sector HA and public sector HA.	Strategic Housing partnership	On-going	The homeless service already makes as much use as it can of the private sector to accommodate homeless households, but it also is experiencing a shortage of smaller properties. Not sure how much demand there would be for private sector tenancies from HA sector given the unfavourable comparison in terms of rent levels, security of tenure, maintenance and management etc.
	Consider expanding Property Pool Plus to include private sector	Strategic Housing Partnership	On-going	There is already a facility for private landlords to advertise on PPP and we have started to use this in Halton, <u>but only for 'accredited' landlords.</u>
16	Consider review of planning policy to build one and two bed homes etc. However we recognise that should Government policy change around bedroom tax, these properties may no longer be as desirable.	Strategic Housing Partnership/ Tim Gibbs	Keep under review.	Keep under review. However one bedroom properties would no longer be as desirable if the bedroom tax policy changed

		mandates?								
Deliverability	3	Do the council/and or partners have the resources and staff available within existing budgets to deliver this action? Is this action already planned to happen anyway?	<p>1 = Would need to identify new resources to deliver this action</p> <p>5 = Could easily be done by existing staffing and budgetary resources</p> <p>9 = Resources already allocated and action planned to happen</p>	1x3 = 3	5x3 = 15	5x3 = 15	1x3 = 3	1x3 = 3	1x3 = 3	1x3 = 3
Total Project Score				21	125	125	93	113	113	113