

**SUNDERLAND SHADOW
HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD**

22 March 2013

WELFARE REFORM ACT 2012 - UPDATE

Report of the Executive Director Commercial and Corporate Services

1 Purpose

To provide an update of the work complete and ongoing by the council and its partners, through the Welfare Reform Board, in respect of preparing the city for the impact of the Government's Welfare Reform Programme.

2 Background

As group members will recall, the Government's Welfare Reform Programme is the biggest change to the welfare system in at least 60 years. It is intended to save 18 billion pounds per year by 2014-2015 but the main stated aim is to reduce benefit dependency and 'to make work pay' for more people. The majority of changes therefore will impact on people of working age, and in particular those that are sick and the unemployed.

The programme also involves a major change in responsibilities in relation to administering benefits for those of working age, with councils losing responsibility for the current housing benefit system, but gaining responsibility for developing and implementing localised Council Tax Support and for providing support to vulnerable people in emergency situations (previously met by the Social Fund)

Appendix A to this report is a visual representation of how the work of the Welfare Reform Board is planned.

The aim of the welfare reform project is to prepare the council, its partners, employees and other stakeholders for the impending changes. The work of the project has been designed to identify specific responsibilities, cross-overs, links and dependencies to existing strategies and ongoing or planned work programmes. Parameters are also set for where activity needs to be jointly delivered or where it should be delivered discreetly, whilst also avoiding duplication and seeking minimisation of barriers to delivery.

3 Work undertaken

3.1 Working with GPs

During the period November 2012 to January 2013, a number of presentations were made to Northumberland, Tyne & Wear NHS Foundation Trust Ward Managers and Practice Managers to explain the changes and impacts of the governments' welfare reform programme and what Sunderland

City Council plans to put in place to mitigate against the impacts on our residents and how we may pool resources across the city.

As a consequence, a surgery has agreed to be the first GP pilot, to signpost and support their clients with the online tools that the council has developed or procured. To this end, the council is installing a PC in the waiting room in the surgery that may be used by patients to see how they can maximise their benefits, apply on-line for council benefits and also look to see what properties are available within their price range should they chose to move house rather than pay additional under occupancy charges from April 2013 (Bedroom Tax). These easy and free to use on-line tools are described below:

On-line benefit form.

Universal Credit will start to be rolled out in October 2013 and the government expects applicants to apply on-line. To prepare our residents for this we have developed a council benefit on-line application form (Appendix B), which has been used by over 90% of new applications in the first three months of its introduction. This success has been achieved by working closely with advocates across the city to help with self service/supported self service activity. This includes partners such as Gentoo and other Registered Social Landlords, Private Landlords, Citizens Advice Bureau and Age Concern etc.

Property Search Tool

The council has procured a property search tool, 'LetsHelpYou', designed for housing benefit tenants and which has the following key benefits:

- it provides listings that include property details
- rents are transparent so the customer knows if it is affordable.
- it is a free service for landlords and anyone searching for rental property, whether in receipt of Local Housing Allowance or not
- it aims to keep the rental market moving and reduce levels of empty properties and evictions
- it allows customers to move in their own immediate area

More information from LetsHelpYou is available at www.letshelpyou.co.uk. Please see Appendix C for further detail.

Single Financial Assessment and Benefit take-up

The council had procured a number of tools to help residents identify benefits they may be entitled to with the intention of supplying them both on line and via different organisations in the city. The tools enable residents to identify and maximise their current benefit entitlements and provide residents, and organisations working with them, with information on their future entitlements under Sunderland's new localised Council Tax Support Scheme and once Universal Credit is introduced

A number of these tools and e-learning modules have been made available to organisations across the city (including 1st tier advice providers and some registered social landlords) with appropriate disclaimers in place. The online means tested benefit calculator (that covers means tested benefits and tax

credit entitlements for most residents) and a non means tested benefit adviser (that covers potential entitlements to benefits such as Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance) are accessible from the council's web pages. They both provide links to claim forms and other sources of help/information, and form part of the significantly improved welfare reform/welfare rights content on the council's site.

Appendix D shows two sample screen shots of the Benefits Calculator.

As the next section explains, the council has also developed a number of ways in which the changes have been, and will continue to be, communicated to residents and stakeholders, which includes the provision of posters and a video, which will be shown within the Pilot Surgery, council buildings and schools to ensure so far as possible that our residents have the opportunity to see how the changes may affect them.

3.2 Citywide Communication

This is integral to the whole project and the council's communications team is supporting the project and the following ways:

- Creation of an informative on-line portal, which also acts as a signpost facility for residents to direct them to the most appropriate agency.
- 'Stay informed, plan ahead' campaign launched June 2012 including the production and distribution a range of promotional materials e.g. via libraries, leisure centres, schools, GPs and electronic village halls. This included posters, banners, newspapers, radio and social media to direct those affected to the council's web pages www.sunderland.gov.uk/benefitchanges and helpline for advice and support 0191 520 5502
- Production of toolkit for Members, and development of information packs for Landlords and the city's employers.
- Production of a benefits fact sheet for use by Welfare Rights.
- Adaptation of a promotional video about welfare reform for use in Sunderland Customer Service Centres.
- Production of Community News and Workwise articles

3.3 Preparation for the Introduction of Universal Credit

The council's web pages have been enhanced to provide up to date web based advice and guidance, linking with other service providers, which explains how benefits are changing and what organisations and residents of the city can do to help themselves.

The DWP released the Local Support Services Framework in February 2013 for UC and work is ongoing to scope continuing activities.

3.4 Impacts and Analysis

The Council's Strategy, Policy and performance Management Service are designing a model for data collection and monitoring to identify any areas where further measures may be put in place to mitigate adverse impacts on particular communities and groups.

Data sharing policies are also being reviewed and developed to ensure the council can:

- continue to access existing data sources
- develop new data sharing arrangements as appropriate

3.5 Working with Landlords and Housing Policy & Alignment

We are continuing to work closely with Landlords to analyse the impacts and assist tenants impacted by:

- The single room rate change (under 35's).
- The Benefit Cap, which affects 79 of our households, with some losing £145 per week from Housing Benefit.
- Under Occupancy Charges (Bedroom Tax), which will affect over 5,000 Registered Social Landlord claims, of which approx 4,500 are Gypsy tenants and who will be between £10 and £15 per week worse off. The council is likely to provide support (as per government guidance) to those with disability adaptations, foster carers and others subject to means testing

3.6 Local Welfare Provision

From April 2013, the DWP is abolishing the Community Care Grant and Crisis Loan elements of the Social Fund. The budget for these services is transferring to LAs at the 2005/06 rate as 'Local Welfare Provision'. LAs then have the responsibility to support vulnerable people in financial crisis. The DWP are retaining responsibility for budgeting loans and short term advances.

The Council's new LWP service has carried forward the main aims of the DWP's Social Fund and designed two services as shown below for Sunderland residents on council benefits only. However, we will signpost those that do not qualify to other services for advice and assistance.

- **Community Care Scheme**
This service is to help families under exceptional pressure and to also help vulnerable people to enter the community (for example young people leaving care), re-enter the community, or remain in the community (for example to prevent serious deterioration of health within the home). We want to help all of our residents that need such support and our approach to this has been to work with our voluntary and community sector (VCS) to design a cashless support service that relies, in the main, on recycled and reconditioned furniture. Our approach also supports the ethos of having a community asset based approach to our service, believing we will be stronger together and therefore can provide a holistic support package, including advice and practical support to help people move forward.

Web based applications will be made to the council's benefit service and for those that are eligible we will provide a basic furniture pack as appropriate to the household and will include recycled furniture such as bed, sofa, chair, fridge and microwave, with new mattress and bedding. We are working with the voluntary sector and local businesses to maximise our offering as much as possible, taking into account care packages and creating synergy with our own complimentary services.

- **Crisis Support Scheme**

This service is accessed via phone to our Customer Services Network, and is designed to help people that are unable to meet their immediate short term needs either in an emergency (a situation which causes the applicant to have a pressing need, or an unforeseen circumstance which requires immediate action or remedy, which the applicant could not have taken reasonable steps to avoid), or as a consequence of a disaster (sudden calamitous event or misfortune causing loss of or damage to possessions or property – for example fire or flood resulting in a health and safety risk)

Items to be provided are a food parcel, prepaid energy top up cards for gas and/or electricity dependent upon the size of the household and the time of year and emergency travel in exceptional circumstances. Our main partner in this scheme is the Salvation Army, through Sunderland partnership and we are currently part of a working group aiming to develop the food parcel network across the city.

With regard to both schemes, one award will be made per year and additional awards only in exceptional circumstances. Other items may be provided at the council's discretion.

3.7 Localisation of Council Tax Support Scheme

The council's new Local Council Tax Support Scheme has been approved by Council from April 2013. As the council received reduced funding from government, the scheme has been designed to minimise the impact upon claimants, whilst asking everyone to pay something toward their council tax bill. For 15,000 of our claimants, this will come as a new responsibility. Key elements of the new scheme, which is favourable in comparison to other regional councils, are to:

- reduce council tax benefit by a maximum of 8.5% for those entitled to 100% council tax benefit
- abolish Second Adult Rebate
- amend non dependant deductions by a further £1 per week, within the limits of the 8.5% maximum

3.8 Free School Meals

Phase 1 is complete with regard to the involvement through this project, producing a major uptake of free school meals and therefore also helping to maximise of benefits. An exercise is currently ongoing to determine the potential impact of FSM being delivered through Universal Credit.

3.9 Working with JobcentrePlus/DWP

The Project team have fortnightly meetings with DWP representatives to understand emerging issues, joint working/impacts and how we are working together to minimise the impacts upon our residents, but at the same time help customers into work. DWP have agreed to provide funding for one year for Council staffing, training and equipment costs to support:

- the 79 households affected by the Benefits cap
- households affected by the bedroom tax and which may be entitled to support from DHP adaptations
- continuing support for residents on the use of the enabler tools – benefits maximiser and 'LetsHelpYou'

We are also working very closely with DWP partnership managers to understand how DWP processes, backlogs and sanctions will have an affect on our LWP services to find ways to work together to the benefit of our residents.

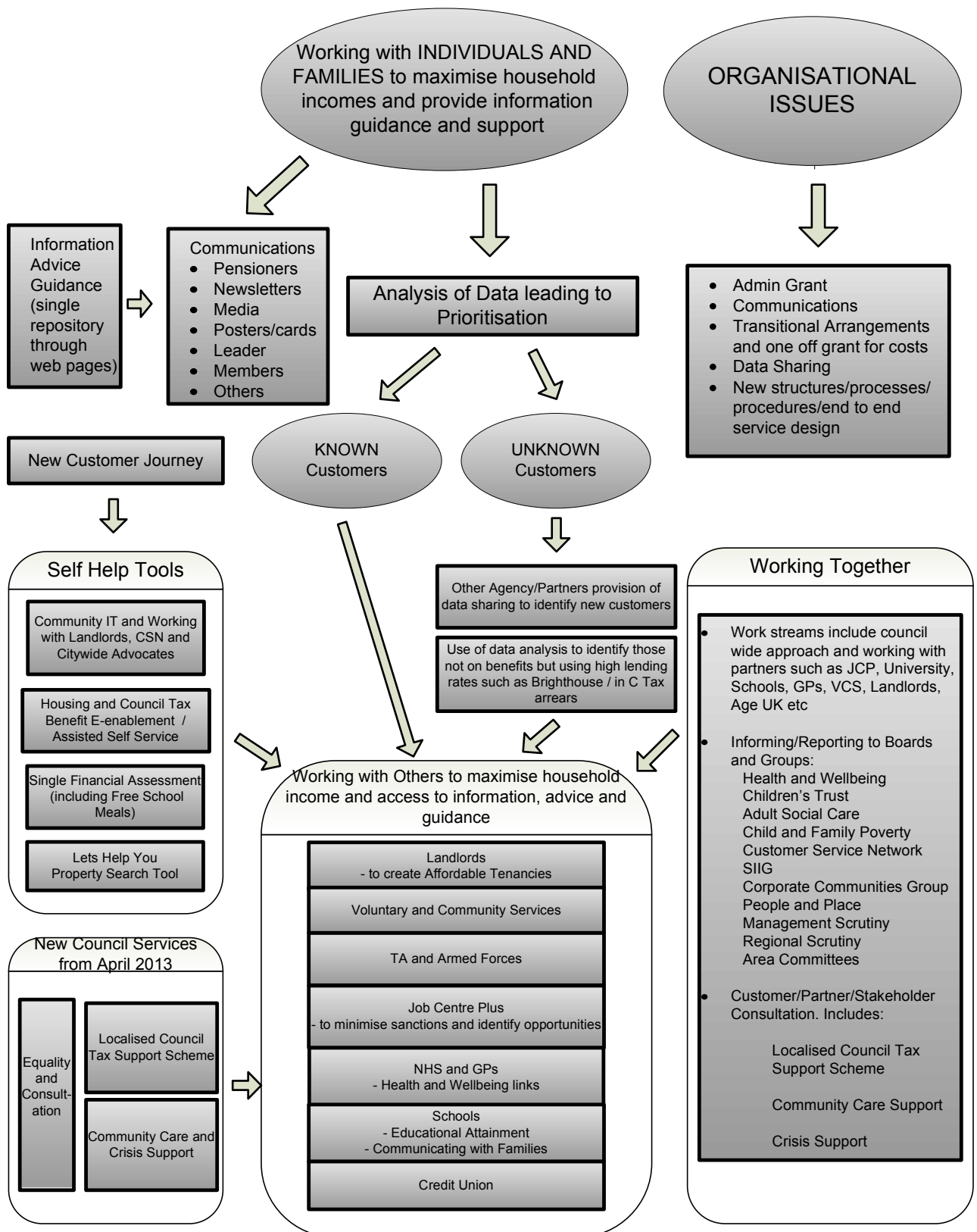
3.10 Working with Voluntary and Community Sector


In order to help mitigate the impacts of Welfare Reform it is essential that there is a collective responsibility throughout the city to help those in need. Key to this is the involvement of the VCS who have helped shape and design the new Local Welfare Provision service and with whom we are working to expand and enhance the service.

3.11 Working with the TA and Army

We are also working closely with the TA and Armed forces to understand the potential impacts that are specific to ex-armed forces, for which the community care support scheme may be heavily relied upon with regard to re-integration into the community. Continuing to work with TA and Armed Forces to develop signposting and advocacy support for their clients

Welfare Reform Project Preparing the City for Welfare Reform














Choose language: English Go Contrast options: C C Text size: AAA

Housing benefit and council tax benefit claim

Contents

Tell us who you are

Reference number: SU55845468

Guidance notes	
Tell us who you are	
About your claim	
About you	
Other people	
Anything else	
Evidence	
Equalities	
Declaration	

Title

Mr

*

Firstname

John

*

Surname

Smith

*

Are you male or female

Male

*

Date of birth

20/10/1973

*

Address line 1

1 Civic Centre Lane

*

Address line 2

Sunderland

*

Address line 3

Address line 4

Postcode

National insurance number

AA 123456A

*

Daytime telephone number

Mobile telephone number

Email address

Previous

Save for later

Next

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Letshelpyou

www.letshelpyou.co.uk is a Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) led project specifically designed to alleviate the pressures faced by local authorities in dealing with recent changes in local housing allowance (LHA). Developed in conjunction with all five West Yorkshire councils - Kirklees Council, Wakefield Council, Calderdale Council, Bradford Metropolitan District Council, and Leeds City Council - this new online housing portal focuses on the affordable housing sector yet is open to all, and totally inclusive.

Letshelpyou offers an exciting and innovative service to individuals and families affected by LHA changes in a viable and easy to follow self-service process, making any future accommodation changes as painless as possible.

Unique to the website is the LHA calculator showing tenants their likely housing allowance and related housing benefit in a specified area or post code (BRMA rate). This facility also allows Landlords to make informed decisions and comparisons when setting property rents.

An example of the product is shown below:-

The screenshot displays the LetsHelpYou website interface. The main heading is "Flat 5 - Fairfax Court, Fairfax Road, Holbeck, Leeds, LS11 8ST". Below this, there is a large photograph of the building and a map showing its location. The page is divided into several sections:

- Details:**
 - Beds: One bedroom
 - Type: Flat
 - Rent: £385.00 per month (£88.54 per week)
 - Bond: £450.00
 - LHA: £99.00 per week
 - BRMA: Leeds
 - £10.46 below LHA rate
- Landlord info:**
 - [Sign in to see landlord info](#)
- Features:**
 - Central heating
 - Double glazed
 - Garden
 - Parking available
 - 1 bed part furnished flat to rent Holbeck south Leeds.
 - Gas safety certificate 'B3658109' **expired**.
- Description:**
 - LS11 8ST
 - South Leeds, Holbeck, 5 Fairfax Court, Fairfax Road
 - A first floor purpose built one bedroom self contained flat. Gas central heating. Double glazing. Oven & hob. Built in wardrobes. Alarm system. Remote control entry gates to private parking. Includes water charges.
 - www.intercity-accommodation.co.uk
 - call 0113 2302303 or 2302304 to view

Web Benefits - Usage implies acceptance of SCC Internet Policy


http://gh-wabden-02/wabden/test/torrid.html


Sunderland City Council

Benefits Calculator

The calculator works out how much money you might get in:

- Income Support
- Income-based Employment & Support Allowance
- Tax Credits
- Pension Credits
- Housing Benefit
- Council Tax Benefit

The questions have been kept simple and there are help texts  on hand if you need some help. It is recommended that you click on the entry help box on the initial options screen as this explains how the calculator works

If you are using this calculator on a mobile phone, using your own read aloud software or screen magnifiers it may be best to choose 1 question per screen from the drop down list otherwise just press start 

Entitlements to benefits can be accurately assessed only when applications are properly made and processed and all relevant information has been supplied. The outcomes produced by the calculator are based upon the adequacy of the information you have supplied and are therefore only estimates of potential entitlements. No liability can be accepted by either the Council of the City of Sunderland or Fernet Information Systems for any loss occasioned from relying on these estimates.

Done

Local Internet 300%

Webben Report - Usage implies acceptance of SCC Internet Policy

http://gh-wabden-02/wabden/test/webben.aspx

Sunderland City Council

Report created on 03 Dec 2012

Periodical monetary amounts below are per week, on the basis of a 52-week year

Tax Credits payable

Figures shown are your likely **medium-term entitlement** (based on current-year income only). This is the amount of tax credits that you can expect to receive over the next few years, assuming there is no significant change in your circumstances during that period.

Working Tax Credit £113.63

To claim tax credits, contact a Revenue enquiry centre or directly on 0845 300 3900 (0845 300 3909 if you use a Telephone). Or visit the Revenue web site: [Claiming tax credits](#). Claims for a tax credit can be backdated for up to a month.

Family Benefits payable – with the Tax Credits above in receipt

Housing Benefit £59.69

To claim Housing Benefit, please use the [Online Application](#) to complete a claim form.

Council Tax Benefit £11.37

To claim Council Tax Benefit, please use the [Online Application](#) to complete a claim form.

Other benefits

The calculator will have provided you with details of any means tested benefits / tax credits that you can claim, but there may be other benefits that you are entitled to or other help available to improve your finances or personal situation.

The More Help - More Information sections below provides these details

More Help - More Information

Check if you might be entitled to range of non means tested benefits including some disability benefits by using the [Non Means Tested Adviser](#)

Use [Benefits and You](#) to find answers to your benefit queries and information about how these might change depending on your circumstances. You can also find out more about any benefits that this calculator or the non means tested adviser may have identified, and where you can go for more help if you need it.

Done

Local Internet 300%

