

Appendix 2 - Mitigation - Welfare Reform

Specific and staged responses to welfare reforms being planned and delivered as follows

Digital Inclusion

- **Digital Strategy/Network** formed to ensure that Sunderland residents are digitally capable and connected. Agreed branding and awareness events, to help develop the increased capacity needed from range of partners to support residents
- **Councils Website**– improved navigation and more transactional useful content that also aligns with Community Hub Development. As well as changes detailed in Appendix 1 the Making your Money Go Further content has been improved with content on banking budgeting borrowing and saving
- **Individual Area Committees (Coalfields)** are funding projects to increase digital skills / capacity –including equipping people with skills needed to manage UC claims / transactions
- **Tea and Teach Digital Course** – delivered in partnership with Barclays Bank to deliver with the joint aims of develop online skills and raising awareness around basic budgeting, price comparison /switching, online safety Cyber Crime and Fraud etc.

Financial Inclusion

Joint activity with the Illegal **Money Lending Team (ILMT)** and the **Credit Union**, has resulted in the following actions:

- Creation of 3,000 postcards to both raise awareness of the dangers of using illegal money lenders/ loan sharks and also promote joining the Credit Union
- Using Proceeds of Crime Act money (POCA) to incentivise new accounts being opened at the Credit Union, e.g. matching savings after 12 weeks with £25 deposit for the customer.
- Credit Union is launching next year to attract new savers / borrowers and promote sensible lending.

Crisis Support

Improvements have been made to the criteria and process around the Councils Local Welfare Provision Scheme with improved forms, assessments and data planned for next year to ensure targeting of resources

The council has also supported the improvement activity linked to progressing End Food Poverty Sunderland Actions which has mainly been undertaken by the Food Bank Network (FBN) members themselves. The following is a brief update

Completed

- Additional Funding – including £15,000 from Guy-Readman Philanthropy Foundation to help the FBN develop the supporting infrastructure required
- Sunderland Food Bank Partnership (FBP) registered with the Trussell Trust and commenced member training and other development actions
- Steering Group formed made up of FBN members, to provide the collective leadership required to take forwards a range of actions While not all FBN members have yet signed up formally to become part of the FBP they are represented by the steering group and involved in the improvements
- Recruited a Part time FBN Coordinator , to work across the FBN to support the delivery of a more consistent approach and joined up offer
- Obtained a central hub with both office space and significantly increased food storage capacity. This enables taking on increased food donations / supermarket spare capacity and better assist with on-going distribution.

- Completed initial mapping of what each food bank delivers directly and links to asset with both developing awareness and integrating referral pathways
- Council Customer Services Network can now directly refer Washington residents to the Washington Community Food Project
- The Council updated its own Local Welfare Provision Scheme from November to enable more successful applications, and also created integrated pathways to provide quicker and more effective support for people being assisted by the Housing Options Team

On-going

- Developing more consistent offer and access arrangements across the city
- Appropriately publicising / promoting FBN and feeding programmes through such tools as the Community Hub - that will assist organisations to signpost or directly refer
- Looking at sharing data to better identify demand across the FBN, and information about the presenting and underlying reasons for customers needing such Crisis Support
- Working with the council to offer '**more than food**' so that appropriate support and services can be directly accessed by referral (integrated pathways) by FBN members for their customers.

An event is being organised for January to increase the numbers of accredited organisations that can make referrals to Food Banks.

Specific Responses

This has focused on improved access to information advice and guidance

- **Welfare Rights Service** Continues to support people to challenge decisions to refuse, suspend or remove benefits and have been very successful with success rates above the national average – regularly over 70%.
- **Contracts** New council advice contracts continue to provide a citywide basic infrastructure for open access benefits and debt support and were awarded for a 3 year period from 2017 to 2020
 - Shiny Advice and Resources Project: Coalfield and Washington Areas.
 - Sunderland West Advice Project: Sunderland West Area.
 - Citizens Advice Sunderland: Sunderland East and Sunderland North Areas.

In the first 5 months of the contracts, the providers have held almost 3,700 casework appointments
- **Benefit Cap** All of the Capped Households in Sunderland consist of families – normally with 2 or more children.
The Benefit Cap Adviser continues to support customers, affected by the Cap Outcomes so far:
 - 90 Exemptions secured, (28% of capped customers)
 - 51 Residents are now in employment, and many of them receive additional income - Working Tax Credits, Carers Allowance, or Personal Independence Payment.
 - 100 residents signposted to a number of services that can help improve mental health/wellbeing