

Appendix 1

Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion recommendations and draft responses

1. A series of recommendations have been made as a result of the research into the impacts of the welfare reform in Brighton and Hove undertaken by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI). These recommendations drew particularly on workshops with Council staff and stakeholders undertaken during the period of research. The responses to the recommendations set out below describe the current work which is happening in the City around welfare reform and planning for future impacts. The ongoing work will be subject to budgetary approval.

CESI recommendation A

Consideration should be given to developing an ‘early warning system’ for identifying residents that are at risk of crisis or falling into crisis.

A more intensive, caseworker-led housing support for those affected by LHA reforms and at risk of eviction should be considered.

2. The decrease in the benefit cap to £20k and the freezing on housing benefit rates for four years will have a key impact in Brighton and Hove because of the proportion of households who live in the private rented sector in the City and because of high rents in this sector. These changes may lead to pressures relating to collecting rents in temporary accommodation and council housing and pressures on homeless services.
3. In preparation for these changes officers from relevant council services are developing an early warning and early intervention programme to prevent people falling into crisis with particular focus on rent arrears and prevention of homelessness. An initial workshop for these officers and representatives from the third sector was held on 15th October. Subject to further development and budgetary approval of any extra resources required the outcome of this work will meet recommendations A and C.

CESI recommendation B

The Moneyworks ‘community frontliner’ model and ‘Money Mentors’ in Council housing should be built on to try to engage residents earlier and to link them up with support services.

4. A report on Third Sector Investment to this committee on 20th July 2015 set out how a new Communities and Third Sector Commission would commence in April 2017. Subject to budgetary approval this report also sought agreement to extend the current Moneyworks commission until this date. The Communities and Equalities Team, the Welfare Reform Team and Moneyworks are working closely together to ensure key priorities around welfare reform are addressed. The learning from this work will be fed into the new full commission from April 2017 to build upon experience and best practice.
5. Using our European Learning Cities funding, Housing provided Money Mentor training for 25 staff from a wide range of agencies across the city to enable them to support and train volunteers to become Money Mentors. Working in conjunction with the Womens' Centre, Trust for Developing Communities and Brighton Housing Trust, the Housing Inclusion Team then advertised citywide and recruited learners for three x 10 week programmes from May to September 2014. These courses were accredited and externally verified by Toynbee Hall/OCN. All residents who completed the coursework/assessments passed and have received their certificates, providing a citywide cohort of Money Mentor volunteers who have used their new skills with neighbours, friends, and family. In addition, some have used their links in the community to help other residents eg at lunch clubs, food banks, school/playgroups, BHT drop in centre etc.
6. Housing were unable to sustain funding and co-ordinating the citywide Money mentor programme beyond the end of the Learning Cities project in September 2014. Moneyworks have continued to provide support to resident volunteers and are delivering a programme of financial capability through the community hubs.

CESI recommendation C

Raise awareness of the Wellbeing Service among those affected by reforms, and to improve signposting to support to deal with welfare reforms

7. The Clinical Commissioning Group commission the wellbeing service. The wellbeing service are currently undertaking pilot work with the Job Centre Plus to support claimants with mental health needs. The service can be accessed either via a referral from a GP or through self-referral, the service is undertaking a drive to promote self-referral. Information about the service and who it supports has been circulated to front line staff in the council who in

particular deal with customers who may be affected by welfare reform. This information will also form a part of new staff induction training. Awareness of the wellbeing service amongst the advice sector is good but information about the service has been re-circulated to ensure coverage is comprehensive.

CESI recommendation D

Residents at risk of homelessness from the private rented sector with shortfalls between Housing Benefit and rent should be encouraged to have difficult conversations earlier.

8. The recommendation refers to having difficult conversations with customers at an early stage around choice of where to live and how to sustain employment.
9. It has been identified in the CESI research that households affected by the reforms have not in the main seen moving as something they would do to counteract the impact of decreasing benefit levels. However with the gap between benefit levels and market rents likely to widen failure to consider this option at an early point made lead to hardship or crisis.
10. These conversations are already starting to be had in some services where these issues are key, particularly around housing. This is a significant shift in service provision and is clearly not an easy message to give or to receive. To be effective this message will have to be consistent across all services, including those provided by the third sector and other public statutory providers. To achieve this will require a cultural shift across the city in the way customer service is provided.
11. This will mean council staff and perhaps members of the third sector having honest and open conversations about how realistic the prospect of families being able to live in appropriately sized accommodation in the city over the period of the next few years if they are reliant on benefits. This may include providing advice about which areas of the country are affordable to live in.
12. The impact of the benefit cap at £20k and the freezing of LHA rates will mean that for many families living in the city on benefits will not be a financially viable option in anything other than the short term. Council staff will be central to promoting this understanding and therefore the organisation as a whole, including members, will need to understand the context in which this advice is being provided and understand that this level of cultural shift is likely to lead to an increase in customer dissatisfaction and complaints.
13. It is recommended this issue is addressed in a report to the City Management Board and monitored as a welfare reform impact thereafter.

CESI recommendation E

As part of preparations for Universal Credit rollout, a joint taskforce should consider how services may need to respond in order to improve triage, budgeting support, digital support and partnership working for residents entering the benefits system.

14. Universal Credit is due to start to rollout in Brighton and Hove on December 14th 2015. The rollout will initially be for a narrow segment of single customers only. It is not clear when the rollout will widen. Between December 15 and March 2016 between 500 and 1000 claims are expected to be made. Once Universal Credit has been fully rolled out it will be paid to at least 20,000 households in the city. The council has visited other authorities where the rollout has already started and met with representatives of the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) to understand the provisions which will need to be in place in the city to support people who will be claiming Universal Credit. This work is being overseen by the Welfare Reform Programme Board and the welfare reform city wide group. The work is on track to ensure triage, digital access and financial advice is available to claimants of Universal Credit when it goes live. This support will be funded by DWP, commissioned by the council and is likely, at least in part, to be carried out by the third sector.

CESI recommendation F

There should be consideration of joint commissioning of intensive employment support for residents that are out of work, want to work and affected by welfare reform.

15. There are a number of areas where Job Centre Plus (JCP) and Brighton & Hove City Council are working closely together and sharing resources in order to improve the employment prospects for people who have been affected by welfare reform.
16. JCP have provided funding to support the work of the team which supports people who have been affected by the benefit cap. One of the key outcomes that this team is set to achieve is to move people into work. JCP have also supported this work by providing visiting staff to assist in making contact with customers affected. Job Centre plus have also provided funding for the Moneyworks commission which covers community learning as well and employability as well as financial advice via community education service.
17. JCP have also provided funding for work focussed activities specifically for tenants of the council's housing stock.
18. The council is committed to maximising the number of apprenticeships it can offer as a large employer. To enable this JCP have provided funding for the council to employ an apprenticeship coordinator

19. JCP have provided two members of staff to work alongside the Stronger Families Stronger Communities programme to provide employment advice to families engaged with the programme and to fellow professionals within the programme itself.
20. More broadly locally the JCP and the City Council are committed to work in partnership with each other in order to meet their joint objectives of maximising employability in the City, the employment and skills agenda, accessing and helping vulnerable groups and issues relating to devolution. This has included members of JCP staff sitting on council commissions (drug and alcohol), working within the local economic partnership together and working to draw down funding focussed on third sector organisations to target hard to reach vulnerable groups who form a priority for both organisations. An example of this is a work club run for people on employment and support allowance (ESA) which is hosted by the library service in partnership with JCP, the Federation for Disabled People and the National Careers Service to assist ESA customers into work via digital inclusion and employability skills.
21. It should be noted that despite all of the above for those in low paid employment, with or without a residual element of benefit support, the conversation around affordability of the city (points 8 to 13) may still be relevant.

Work of the Third sector

22. Partners from the community and advice sector are active in providing employment skills in the community. Specifically the Community Learning Hubs The Bridge, The Whitehawk Inn and the Hangleton and Knoll project with funding via the Skills Funding Agency. Funding post March 2016 is as yet unconfirmed.

Council Approach to Employment and Skills

23. A report titled Development of a new City Employment & Skills plan (2015-2020) was taken to the Children and Young People and Skills committee on 20th July 2015. This report set out the council's main strategic approach to employment and apprenticeships. A full copy of the report has been placed in the members room. The new City Employment & Skills plan will have a particular focus upon actions which aim to eliminate long term youth unemployment in the city and create new apprenticeship opportunities across the city. The key priorities are:
 - Establishing an Employer Skills Task Force to provide the vital business leadership to support both the development and delivery of the new Plan
 - Exploring new delivery models for boosting the number of apprenticeship opportunities across the city and the Greater Brighton

city region, with a particular focus upon high quality skilled apprenticeships, for 16-24 year olds.

- Creating a step change in how the City Council creates apprenticeship opportunities as a major employer
- Explore initiatives which aim to eliminate long-term youth unemployment in the city through new ways of working in partnership with DWP, the council and the private sector, and ensuring that the City Council uses our procurement process to maximise employment, work placement and training opportunities ; and
- Supporting those marginalised from the labour market into jobs.

24. The last point is a key element in the plan which will focus on a number of areas including mitigating the impact of welfare reform and helping those who are affected by welfare changes to get closer to the workplace. This may be achieved through the individuals getting training, an apprenticeship, traineeship, work placement and/or education. This will involve working closely with the Fairness Commission to ensure that the new plan is aligned with wider initiatives that aim to promote fairness and equality in the labour market. It will explore how those marginalised from the labour market can access employment and better jobs through a number of pathways including Pre-employment entry, staying in work and in work progression.

25. The report also sets out the council and city wide approach to apprenticeships. The local authority currently employs 46 apprentices. 48 have completed their apprenticeship programme since November 2012. This includes some individuals who have progressed to advanced levels. 5 care leavers have become apprentices. A key element of the development of the new City Employment & Skills Plan will be working with the Employers Task Force and key supply-side partners to explore new models of delivering an increase in the apprenticeship opportunities across the city and wider city region.

European Funding

26. The Economic Development Team are also leading on European Social Fund (ESF) bids with other neighbouring authorities to create employment support training provision to be provided by training providers in the region. The outcome of this will be dependent on when the calls for the ESF are made.

26. A separate bid is being made in conjunction with European partners for Interreg funding. The basis of this bid is to create a longer term funding base to bring together different teams in the council which currently provide employment support and guidance.