

Council20th July 2017**Agenda Item 24**

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject: Welfare Reform Update - Extract from the proceedings of the Neighbourhoods, Inclusion Communities & Equalities Committee Meeting held on the 3 July 2017

Date of Meeting: 20 July 2017
3 July 2017 – NICE Committee

Report of: Executive Lead for Strategy, Governance & Law

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Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE***Action Required of the Council***

To receive the item referred from the Neighbourhoods, Communities & Equalities Committee for information.

Recommendation:

That the Welfare Reform Update report be noted.

NEIGHBOURHOODS, INCLUSION, COMMUNITIES & EQUALITIES COMMITTEE

4.00PM 3 JULY 2017
COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Daniel (Chair); Moonan (Deputy Chair), A Norman (Opposition Spokesperson), West (Group Spokesperson), Bewick, Cattell, Knight, K Norman, Peltzer Dunn and Simson.

Invitees:- Dean Spears and Lenny Rolles, University of Sussex

In attendance: Joanna Martindale (Hangleton & Knoll Project); Anusree Biswas Sasidharan (BME Brighton & Hove Police Engagement Group), Michelle Elston (CCG) and Chief Superintendent Lisa Bell (Sussex Police).

9. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

- 9.1 The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance and Resources the purpose of which was to update it on the progress of the government's welfare reform programme and in particular the roll-out of Universal Credit in Brighton and Hove and the council's response to it.
- 9.2 The Head of Revenues and Benefits and the Revenues and Benefits Manager introduced the report and explained that work had been undertaken to analyse and identify the impact of both the recent welfare reform measures put in place by central government and arising as a consequence of the roll-out of Universal Credit which was due to be fully rolled out through a phased approach by the Autumn of 2017. Commissioning work was being undertaken across departments and with other partners and stakeholders in readiness and to ensure that those living in the city likely to be most affected by these changes could be supported appropriately. The appendix to the report highlighted the key changes which had begun to take effect in the city from December 2016 and included changes in the benefit cap for households with children and for single people and a reduction in work allowances under Universal Credit.
- 9.3 It was explained that the overall impact from changes to the benefit cap was still unclear. Prior to the changes 67 households in the city were affected by these measures. By March 2017, 440 had been impacted, however around 90 of those had been removed as a result of a technical change in the way management support costs were provided by central government for people living in temporary accommodation. There were however a number of new cases each week and some of them were on Universal Credit.
- 9.4 Councillor Bewick commended the report and information contained in the report itself and set out in the accompanying appendix. He considered that it painted a potentially bleak picture stating that it was key to ensure that means by which mitigation measures could be undertaken across all departments were put in place and were included in an action plan going forward.

- 9.5 Councillor Cattell sought clarification regarding the interface with money advice charities to avoid additional hardship as a result of monies allocated for living expenses being spent otherwise for example by a partner. It was explained that those giving advice had been trained to address such issues and that if necessary partners could be treated as a separate household.
- 9.6 Councillor West whilst pleased to note the positive measures which had been undertaken considered that overall this was a matter for serious concern, particularly as money was being taken away from those in the city who were poorest. He was concerned that access to help could be patchy and was concerned that as many avenues as possible were pursued in seeking to assist those individuals in need. He considered that it would be appropriate to forward the report to the Housing and New Homes Committee.
- 9.7 It was explained that work was taking place in concert with housing, but that the issues to be addressed were broader and in some instances required use of discretionary services in collaboration with other partners/providers, for example in order to assist young single homeless people in the city who had different needs to those with families. Access to private rented accommodation was often difficult for those on benefits.
- 9.8 Councillor Moonan welcomed the work which had been carried out to date and was ongoing. It was important however not to create a “tsunami of fear” but to ensure that budgets were not underutilised as a result of individuals falling through the gaps and being missed. Councillor Moonan stated that rough sleepers often fell on the cusp of the safeguards in place, noting that mechanisms were in place to try and project ahead and to engage collaboratively with them by working with adult social care within and outside the council and through partners such as Job Centre Plus for example. Budgetary constraints and the potential for needs being managed to fit the budget available as a consequence were a source for serious concern.
- 9.9 Councillor Peltzer Dunn agreed with what had been said considering that it was very important to provide support targeted to individual need. Some people found it difficult to manage money and it was helpful if some instances money could be paid directly to a landlord rather than an individual. Problems could also arise if benefits were paid in arrears given that rent was usually required to be paid in advance.
- 9.10 Councillor Daniel, the Chair, enquired regarding measures in place in instances where gaps/or delays arose in payment being, she was concerned that this could result in parents and children facing destitution unless there were safeguards in place for emergencies. It was explained that various housing support measures were available, the council itself had some flexibility in the case of emergencies and could make payments for up to six weeks and in such circumstances would also have duties under its homelessness provisions.
- 9.11 Councillor Bewick considered that it was important to be assured that a multi-dimensional solution based focus was adopted, for instance working with the credit union to guarantee rent to private landlords on order to cover their risk for example. The Chair, Councillor Daniel, explained that this report represented the most recent in a of a series which had been brought before the Committee in order to inform Members of the on-going work which had been and was continuing to be undertaken. This Committee had a monitoring role which was integral to that process. As well as the budgetary

measures invoked a lot of holistic work had also taken place which included work carried out in the community.

- 9.12 Councillor West stated that he considered that this work was cross cutting over a number of the council's own departments reiterating the pivotal role of housing. The Executive Director of Neighbourhoods, Communities and Housing stated that the Housing and New Homes Committee had particular responsibilities and had an important role to play. However, there were many other issues for instance access to good food which also had a significant impact and which clearly fell within the interests and responsibilities of this Committee. Councillor West stated that the Committee needed to be confident that the robust emergency planning was in place to ensure that the council was able to help as many people as it could and that work was being carried out proactively across departments.
- 9.13 The Head of Communities and Equalities undertook to liaise across the relevant departments with a view to submitting a report to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee identifying the on-going impacts for the Committee and continuing work being carried out. The Head of Revenues and Benefits confirmed that it might be necessary to delay the report in the event that the full roll-out envisaged was delayed.
- 9.14 The Chair, Councillor Daniel, responded to Councillor West's request that the report be forwarded to Housing Committee stating that as much of the overarching work being undertaken fell within the responsibilities of this Committee it would be preferable for a further update report to come back to this Committee during its next cycle and subsequently in order to enable members to monitor this situation.
- 9.15 A vote was taken and Members voted unanimously to endorse the recommendations set out in the report and to receive a further update report to the October cycle of the Committee.
- 9.16 Councillor West further proposed that the report be forwarded to the next scheduled meeting of Full Council for information, this was seconded by Councillor Moonan and the Committee voted unanimously in support.
- 9.17 **RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the Committee endorse the response to welfare reform and the introduction of Universal Credit being taken by officers;
 - (2) That the Committee note and comment on the work being done with advice services and other organisations in the city to support outcomes for citizens;
 - (3) That a further update report be provided to the next scheduled meeting of the Committee in October.

12. ITEMS REFERRED TO COUNCIL

RESOLVED: That item 9, Welfare Reform Update report be referred to the Council for information.