

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET - 8TH MARCH, 2011

BENEFIT TAKE-UP STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE, LIBRARIES & CUSTOMER SERVICES & THE CABINET MEMBER FOR ADULT CARE & SUPPORT

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

- 1.1 This strategy & action plan sets out the priorities for undertaking welfare benefit take-up work for the three years commencing April 2011 to March 2014.
- 1.2 In arriving at our priority take-up areas we have analysed a wide range of local factors including population demographics, ethnicity, age, deprivation statistics and have also taken account of the planned welfare benefit changes announced recently by Government and the recommendations made by the Benefit Scrutiny Committee who reported to Cabinet last Summer.
- 1.3 These factors have been compared against national trends and our own benefit caseload data to enable us to establish the following five areas of take-up activity.
- Council Tax Benefit
 - Benefits for Pension age residents, this includes benefits we administer as a local authority and other state benefits
 - In work benefits for low paid employed
 - Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's)
 - Second Adult Rebate

This work is in addition to the ongoing advice and assistance given to residents as part of our day-to-day operations, referral schemes and previous dedicated 'take up work' which as seen an estimated £4m extra benefit being award to those who qualify. Over the last 2 years we have seen a 20% increase in the benefits caseload largely due to the financial climate and it is within this backdrop that we have prioritised our benefit take up activity.

- 1.4 Appendix 1 contains an overview of the methods and actions we intend to use to increase take up against each of these new priorities.

- 1.5 Detailed analysis of our findings and rationale for identifying the above priority areas can be made available to those requiring more background information. A full report is available on request.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the five areas identified as being the priority for take-up activity is approved & the summary of actions contained in Appendix 1 endorsed

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?	
	Yes	<p>Adult Care and Support Priority Plan</p> <p>Help to address homelessness through the identification of benefit support to help individuals pay for accommodation.</p> <p>Supporting people on low incomes to access funding to support them to maintain independence where possible and secure settled housing.</p> <p>Children and Young People Help to Reduce Child and Family Poverty Meet requirement of Child Poverty Bill 2009</p>
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	The strategy focuses take-up activity on five specific areas where there is currently an under-claim in the number of people receiving their benefit entitlement locally.
TARGET COMPLETION/ DELIVERY DATE	The strategy sets out the priorities for the service for three years up to March 2014. On an annual basis we will report to the relevant priority board on progress in increasing take-up against each of the five priority areas.	
FINANCIAL/ VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes/ No	Actions arising from the benefits take up strategy will incur costs associated with marketing material, and officer time. These costs will be met from existing budgets held by the Revenues & Benefits Service
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes/ No	There are no legal implications arising from this report.
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	An Equalities Impact Assessment has been completed and is available for viewing on request

IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	Although the strategy is Borough wide, the analysis of the local population identifies the wards with the greatest deprivation. Therefore it is likely that some specific take-up activity is focused more heavily in certain wards.
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PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

3. INFORMATION

Central government recognises the importance of take up work undertaken by councils and below is a quote from the Department for Work and Pensions (2010)

“It is recognised that the total caseload for many LA’s has increased over the last few years and that this brings with it challenges for maintaining performance. However it is worth noting that increasing take-up may bring additional income into the local economy. Increasing take up may also save money in the long term – helping to break the cycle of poverty by making work pay and enabling families to be less reliant on benefits”

3.1. Benefits for Pension aged residents

Our analysis suggests that it is very important to target pensioners as any extra entitlement may help to provide funds for extra heating and better quality food which in turn could impact on improved health and well being, whilst helping to reduce pressure on service providers such as Adult Social Care and health.

3.2 In Work Benefits

Based on the majority of the Borough’s population being working aged, the national DWP figures show that there is an under claim of benefits, in particular Housing Benefit for those in work. In addition the Governments proposed changes, as part of the benefit welfare reforms, are encourage people back into work and to remove reliance on benefits. Our analysis suggests that this is an area in T&W for a targeted take up campaign.

3.3 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP’s)

DHP’s are additional payments that can be made to residents already receiving Housing or Council Tax Benefit where the amount of benefit does not meet their full liability. DHP’s play an important role in ensuring tenancy sustainability and therefore preventing homelessness by preventing / reducing rent arrears, debt and poverty. They also allow a recipient time to adjust to new financial circumstances. Analysis suggests this is an area of low take up within the borough

3.4 **Second Adult Rebate**

Analysis shows that Second Adult Rebate is one benefit which is under claimed. Nationally it is not a well publicised benefit and the qualification criteria are complex. There are a number of scenarios in which a second adult rebate may apply, but most typically, it will be where there is a single parent with a child aged over 18 on a low income. It is not possible to estimate how many families there are in Telford & Wrekin in that position, but we are confident that it would be significantly more than the 201 families that are currently claiming

3.5 **Take-up Action Plan Summary – Appendix A**

When developing specific take-up publicity we will be mindful of promoting other benefits that may be appropriate in order to gain value for money. We will continue to explore and maintain relationships with key partner organisations to maximise any opportunity for a joint take-up initiatives. The Councils website will be a key communication tool and work in underway to enhance the pages on the site including the promotion of the new on-line benefit calculator.

There are many other take-up activities specific to the 5 priority areas listed in Appendix A.

The results of specific benefit take up campaigns and events will be recorded and reported to the relevant Priority Plan Board.

APPENDIX A - Summary of Actions

Benefit	Action
Council Tax Benefit	Annual publicity campaign
	Review of information on Council website and promote on-line benefit calculator
	Review of information contained within annual bills
	Review and improve information sent with reminder bills etc. to maximise opportunities to promote Council Tax Benefit
	Explore any opportunities for data matching in order to increase take-up
Benefits for Pensioners	Review the current referral and recording system to monitor take-up
	Consider the opportunity for expansion of the referral process and training within other Services of the Council as well as training all new staff in key front line areas
	Continue to explore sites where direct contact with our target audience
	Promotion of home visits for vulnerable customers.
In Work Benefits	Launch and refresh annual a publicity campaign promoting Housing Benefit as an in work benefit
	Review of information on Council website and consider dedicated in-work page
	Promote on-line benefit calculator
	Deliver further training for relevant front line staff on in work benefits
	Attend community events where there is likely to be significant attendance by our target audience, particularly in the most deprived areas
	Explore other opportunities for promoting in-work benefits to our target audience
Discretionary Housing Payments	Analyse the impact of welfare reform and target promotion accordingly
Second Adult Rebate	Explore the opportunity to promote SAR in specific areas when single person discount is removed.
	Explore any opportunities for data matching in order to increase take-up