

CABINET

Decision Notices and Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on Thursday, 10th November, 2011 at 7.00 p.m. at the Civic Offices, Telford

PUBLISHED ON WEDNESDAY, 16th NOVEMBER, 2011

(DEADLINE FOR CALL-IN MONDAY, 21st NOVEMBER, 2011)

PRESENT: Councillors K.S. Sahota (Leader and Chair), E.A. Clare, S. Davies, A.R.H. England, W.A.M. McClements, R.A. Overton, H. Rhodes, C.F. Smith and P.R. Watling

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor A.J. Eade (Conservative Group Leader) and Councillor W.L. Tomlinson (Lib Dem/Independent Group Leader)

CB-58 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 20th October 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

CB-59 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

CB-60 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor C.F. Smith – personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item 6 – National Government Changes to the Disabled Blue Badge Scheme

Councillor C.F. Smith – personal and prejudicial interest in agenda item 10 – Planning of School Places: Secondary School Provision

Councillor E.A. Clare – personal interest (as a Governor of Sutherland School) in agenda item 10 - Planning of School Places: Secondary School Provision

CB-61 100 DAY REVIEW OF 2011/12 SERVICE & FINANCIAL PLANNING STRATEGY

Key Decision identified as **Budget Strategy / Service & Financial Planning Process** in the Forward Plan published on 17th October 2011.

Council decision - not subject to call-in

Councillor W.A.M. McClements, Cabinet Member for Resources & Service Delivery, presented the joint report of the Interim Chief Executive and the Head of Finance, which set out final proposals to revise the Council's capital programme and revenue budget for 2011/12 following consultation on the proposals approved by Cabinet on 26 July 2011.

The amendments to the Budget were particularly focussed on reducing the ongoing cost of servicing outstanding debt. This included halting the planned construction of new Civic Offices (with an annual revenue saving of £1.1m) and scaling back of other capital projects – details of which were provided in the report. It was proposed that that some of these savings be used to increase investment in the maintenance of roads and pavements over the next couple of years. The proposals contained in the report for reducing the cost of borrowings, and the other measures set out in the report, would generate an expected revenue saving in 2011/12 of £1.6m.

Extensive consultations had taken place to obtain people's views on the budget proposals, what their priorities were, and what the Council should be doing differently to save more money. Results relating to the 100 day budget proposals were very positive, with strong support for increased investment in roads and pavements and for not going ahead with new Civic Offices. An equality impact assessment on the proposals had also been completed and had not identified any specific issues that needed to be addressed.

Councillor R.J. Sloan, Chair of the Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee, presented the Committee's response to the revised budget strategy, which was appended to the report. The Committee supported the increased investment in the maintenance of roads and pavements, and recognised the hard work of officers in delivering the public engagement exercise. There was some concern about the effectiveness of the proposed Small Business Loans Fund, and that there was a need for a coherent policy on concessions. Cabinet Members thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their hard work and comments. In terms of the proposed re-instatement of free swimming for under 16s with a flex card, Councillor A.R.H. England (Cabinet Member for Leisure and Wellbeing) stated that this needed to be looked at in the wider context of encouraging healthy lifestyles and increasing take-up of the Council's leisure facilities. In relation to the Small Business Loans Fund, Councillor S. Davies (Cabinet Member: Environment, Co-operative Council & Partnership) advised that he was optimistic that matched funding would be forthcoming.

RESOLVED – TO RECOMMEND to COUNCIL the following amendments to the 2011/12 Budget Strategy:

- (a) The cancellation of the planned building of new Civic Offices to generate additional ongoing revenue savings of over £1.1m per annum;**
- (b) The development of a Community Hub in the Southwater area of Telford Town Centre which will provide customer access to Council services and a new library. The Community Hub could also provide space for community groups/organisations, and other public sector bodies – making the Community Hub a Cooperative Council centre;**

- (c) **Changes to other capital projects and the generation of additional capital receipts generating ongoing revenue benefits of over £1.75m per annum;**
- (d) **A much stronger emphasis on improved procurement processes in order to deliver savings which reduce the overall impact of grant cuts on front-line services;**
- (e) **Increased investment in the maintenance of roads and pavements of a further £1.3m capital in 2012/13 and £0.25m in 2013/14 over and above the existing approved capital programme;**
- (f) **Investment of £2.3m in a regeneration scheme for Hadley and £1.9m for Oakengates;**
- (g) **Creation of a capital budget of £45k to match fund projects of up to £7.5k in each of the 6 Borough Town areas;**
- (h) **Reinstatement of free swimming for under 16s with a flex card;**
- (i) **Allocation of up to £0.6m one-off funding to provide additional support for employees facing compulsory redundancy;**
- (j) **Contributing £25k one off funding to a small business loans fund;**
- (k) **Creation of a Co-operative Council initiatives budget of £15k;**
- (l) **Carrying forward revenue benefits identified in the report of around £1.6m as a one-off benefit to help support the budget for 2012/13 together with any unspent element of the contingency at year end;**
- (m) **that the responses to the engagement exercise included in section 8 and Appendix 1 of the report, and the comments of the Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee shown at Appendix 3, be noted.**

**CB-62 BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE PROGRAMME –
APPROVAL OF FINAL BUSINESS CASE FOR THREE
SCHOOLS**

Key Decision identified as **School Organisation/Capital Financing/Borough Towns Initiative/ Building Schools for the Future/Planning for School Places** in the Forward Plan published on 17th October 2011.

Councillor P.R. Watling, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families, presented the report of the Head of Property and ICT, which sought approval for the submission of a Final Business Case (FBC) for Phoenix Sports & Learning Community, Mount Gilbert School and Newport Girls' High School Academy Trust to Partnership for Schools.

The changes in the scope of the three projects since the submission of the Outline Business Case were appended to the report. The capacity for the Phoenix School project had been reduced to 900 places for 11-16 year olds, and there had been some changes to reduce the new-build costs. The new leisure and health facilities associated with the development remained unchanged, and would receive funding contributions from Sport England and Telford & Wrekin Primary Care Trust. The refurbishment and replacement of buildings at Mount Gilbert School and at Newport Girls High School were largely as originally planned, with some minor reductions to reflect the reduced funding allocation from Government.

The report also set out details of the procurement process and contract arrangements for the works, and detailed the financial and legal implications of the projects. The Head of School Improvement advised that the proposals were in line with the process that had been followed for earlier BSF projects.

Members welcomed the report and the investment into schools and leisure facilities across all parts of the Borough.

RESOLVED –

- (a) **that the submission of the Final Business Cases for the Phoenix Sports & Learning Community, Mount Gilbert School and Newport Girls High School Academy Trust to Partnership for Schools (PfS) be approved;**
- (b) **that, subject to approval by PfS (thereby releasing BSF funding), authority be delegated to the Head of Property & ICT, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families, to award the Single School design and build contracts to Kier Moss, and to enter into all related contract documents;**
- (c) **that, subsequent to the relocation of the Phoenix School to its new site, authority be delegated to the Head of Property & ICT to arrange the demolition of existing buildings and the disposal of the site;**
- (d) **that authority be delegated to the Head of Governance to agree and execute all necessary documentation, including to affix the common seal of the Council to contractual documentation as, in the opinion of the Head of Governance, is appropriate under article 14.06 of the Constitution.**

CB - 63 NATIONAL GOVERNMENT CHANGES TO THE DISABLED BLUE BADGE SCHEME

Non-Key Decision

Councillor C.F. Smith withdrew from the meeting room.

Councillor H. Rhodes, Cabinet Member for Transport & Community Protection, presented the report of the Head of Leisure, Libraries & Customer Services, which outlined changes to the administration of the Blue Badge Scheme following a review by the Department for Transport.

The changes nationally to the Scheme included a new eligibility criteria, a new administration process for the issuing of Blue Badges starting on 1 January 2012, and a new charging scheme. Much of the application process was being standardised and centralised, including a new badge with embedded security features, similar to a driving licence. The introduction of the new format would result in the Council having to pay £4.60 plus VAT for each badge issued to the Government appointed contractor, for its production. Local authorities could now also charge a fee to cover administration costs (for successful applications only), and it was proposed that a charge of £10 be introduced from January 2012 (to include the cost of purchasing the new format Badge). The charge would cover the full three years of issue.

RESOLVED –

- (a) **that the changes in the Blue Badge Scheme being made by national Government be noted;**
- (b) **That the introduction of a £10 application fee for all successful applications from January 2012, at least half of which will be forwarded to the Government appointed contractor for the issue of the new badge, be approved.**

CB - 64 PARISH & TOWN COUNCIL HOTLINE – REVIEW OF PILOT

Non-Key Decision

Councillor R. A. Overton, Deputy Leader, presented the report of the Head of Leisure, Libraries & Customer Services, which provided information on the pilot scheme for dealing with enquiries/service requests from Parish & Town Councils in the Borough.

797 Parish enquiries were received by the Customer Quality Team between 31 January and 31 August 2011, 88% of which were responded to in 10 days. All enquiries were monitored until final completion of works and Parishes were kept informed of progress at key stages. Of the 95 cases that were not responded to within 10 days, annual leave and competing priorities were the main reasons for the delay in responding. Appended to the report were details of a satisfaction survey with the Parish & Town Councils, which showed that 93% of respondents were satisfied with the way their enquiry was handled – with 100% stating they were satisfied with the outcome. Most Parish & Town Councils with the exception of two small parishes were using the system, albeit to varying degrees.

RESOLVED –

- (a) **that the success of the pilot period be noted;**

- (b) that the Parish & Town Council hotline be mainstreamed as part of the core offer of the Council's Customer Service team and the wider Council;
- (c) that Service Heads continue to identify areas for improvement following the receipt of enquiries and service requests from Parish & Town Councils, and look to improve response times where improvements are required.

CB - 65 EVENTS AND FESTIVALS IN TELFORD & WREKIN FOR 2012

Non-Key Decision

Councillor A.R.H. England, Cabinet Member for Leisure & Wellbeing, presented the report of the Head of Leisure, Libraries & Customer Services which informed Cabinet of the proposed calendar of community events for 2012.

To mark the London 2012 Olympics (including Paralympic Games and Cultural Olympiad), a calendar for February to September 2012 had been produced under the brand "The Games and Me". A full list of events was appended to the report, which included a number of local Community Games events. It had just been announced that the London 2012 Torch Relay would be coming through the Borough, and it was planned to work with local communities and parishes on celebrations to mark this unique event.

The Queen would be celebrating her Diamond Jubilee in 2012, and there was potential for a royal visit in July next year. The main event was likely to be at RAF Cosford, and the Council had agreed in principle to support this event, if confirmed. Also appended to the report were a calendar of events led by the Council and a calendar of other key events organised by the community. Business sponsorship and external funding would be key to the continued programme of public events, and support had been secured from two local companies – Ricoh and Keim Paints.

RESOLVED –

- (a) that the Olympic themed events outlined in Appendix 1 of the report and the annual core calendar of community events outlined in Appendix 2 be endorsed;
- (b) that the Arts & Culture team, in conjunction with the Head of Service and Cabinet Member, continue to seek business sponsorship and external support to sustain the annual core programme of community events;
- (c) that the support for the London 2012 Torch Relay and Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations be endorsed, and that the

requirement for additional one-off funding to support these events be noted.

CB-66 URGENCY RESOLUTION – SECTION 100B(4) LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

The Chair made the following statement:

“I am of the opinion that the following item of business should be dealt with as a matter of urgency at this meeting in order to avoid any unnecessary delay.”

CB-67 REVIEW OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Non-Key Decision

The Leader presented the report of the Head of Governance, appended to which was the ‘Review of Senior Management Structure & Operational Arrangements to Progress the Development of the Co-operative Council’, which had been undertaken by the Interim Chief Executive.

The Review had addressed the ruling Administration’s wishes to move away from the traditional “Chief Executive” model and to facilitate the development of a co-operative council model of service delivery. The key recommendations in the report included the creation of a Managing Director post on a salary of £137,000 (£12,000 less than of the previous Chief Executive); a net reduction of one Corporate Director post and a reduction in salary for all Corporate Directors; the re-designation of Heads of Service to Assistant Directors, with a net reduction of 2 posts at this level; the reshaping of responsibilities and a comprehensive programme to achieve the aims of the Co-operative Council; reshaping the Local Strategic Partnership structure; and proposals to improve the support provided to all Borough Councillors.

Cabinet Members welcomed the recommendations contained in the Review, including the designation of a Director for Children’s Services, the proposed Managing Director post (with a more “hands-on” role) and the creation of a Co-operative Council Delivery Unit. The Opposition Group Leaders were broadly supportive of most of the recommendations in the Review, although Councillor A. Eade (Conservative Group Leader) expressed a view that the principle of fixed point salaries should be extended to the proposed Assistant Director posts, and that the proposals would involve a risk in the delivery of critical services. In response to a question regarding the transfer of the Director of Public Health to the Council in April 2013, the Interim Chief Executive advised that the report’s proposals could enable integration of that post. However, there was still much dialogue and planning to undertake before any final decisions could be made. An indication of the likely budget that would be transferred to the Council for the running of the Public Health function was expected in the next few weeks.

The Interim Chief Executive then withdrew from the meeting, during consideration of elements of the proposed senior management pay, and the suggested recruitment process for the Managing Director post. In response to

questions regarding the payment for Returning Officer responsibilities, the Head of Governance suggested that a further paper could be prepared for Members on this issue. In terms of the recruitment process for the Managing Director post, Members spoke of the advantages to the organisation of making an appointment as soon as practically possible, and therefore the prudent approach would be to advertise the post internally in the first instance. If no internal candidates met the identified criteria for the post, then an external recruitment exercise could be considered. .

RESOLVED -

- (a) that the **Review of the Senior Management Structure be broadly supported, ahead of consideration of the matter by Council on 24th November 2011;**
- (b) that the **Managing Director post should be initially advertised internally;**
- (c) that the **proposed salary scale for the new post of Managing Director be £137,000;**
- (d) that the **interim arrangements, including re-affirming that the Interim Chief Executive is expected to implement the proposed re-structure, be continued, subject to any comments that Council might have;**
- (e) that the **proposed savings of £406,000 which would be delivered on an on-going basis be noted.**

CB-68 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED - that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

CB-69 PLANNING OF SCHOOL PLACES: SECONDARY SCHOOL PROVISION

Key Decision identified as **School Organisation/Capital Financing/Borough Towns Initiative/ Building Schools for the Future/Planning for School Places** in the Forward Plan published on 17th October 2011.

Councillors E.A. Clare and C.F. Smith withdrew from the meeting room.

Councillor P.R. Watling, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Families, presented the report of the Head of School Improvement regarding revised options for secondary school provision based on future projections of pupil numbers within the Borough and the funding available through the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. There had been a small

technical amendment to the recommendation concerning a proposed new Christian Academy, and a revised version of the report was tabled.

A review of the BSF programme had allowed the opportunity to look at secondary school capacity (particularly in the Wellington area) and to focus on building new schools in existing communities as part of the Co-operative Council approach. The intention was to develop three new academies that would drive up standards and ensure high quality provision across all parts of the Borough, especially in the most disadvantaged communities.

The key proposals for consultation were a new Christian Academy (incorporating the Blessed Robert Johnson Catholic College) for ages 11-18 on the proposed site in Priorslee; a new 11-16 Co-operative Academy for the communities of Donnington, Oakengates, Trench and Wrockwardine Wood (incorporating the existing Sutherland and Wrockwardine Wood Colleges); to seek to develop a new Co-operative Academy in Stirchley to incorporate the existing Lord Silkin College and Grange Park Primary School; and a new 1200 place school on the vacant Blessed Robert Johnson site in Wellington involving the re-location of Charlton School, which was currently over-subscribed with little scope for expansion on its present site.

The amended plans would now be subject to formal consultation with key partners and stakeholders. However, initial discussions with all relevant partners suggested that there was likely to be widespread support for the proposals. The report also contained detailed information on the financial and value-for-money assessments of the proposals.

Members welcomed the proposals, and thanked the Officers involved in progressing the matter.

RESOLVED –

- (a) **that authority be delegated to the Head of School Improvement to engage in formal consultation with key partners and stakeholders in respect of the following proposals:**
- **To build a new ecumenical 1050 place Christian Academy for ages 11-18 on the proposed site in Priorslee which will incorporate the Blessed Robert Johnson Catholic College and will provide places for the communities of Priorslee and St Georges encompassing the primary attendance areas of Priorslee Academy and Redhill and St George’s CE Primary Schools;**
 - **To build a new 1050 place 11-16 Co-operative Academy for the communities of Donnington, Oakengates, Trench and Wrockwardine Wood which incorporate the combined success and expertise of the Sutherland Business and Enterprise College and Wrockwardine Wood Arts College;**

- To build a community facility that will develop The Lakeside co-operative educational campus on the Stirchley site encompassing primary, secondary and post 16 education;
- To build a new 1200 place school on the vacated Blessed Robert Johnson site to replace the Charlton School.

(b) that a further report be brought to Cabinet on the outcome of the consultation process.

The meeting ended at 8.25 p.m.

Signed for the purposes of the Decision Notices

**Jonathan Eatough
Head of Governance
Date: 16 November 2011**

Signed:

Date:

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

FIRST POINT FOR BUSINESS

**REPORT OF THE CO-OPERATIVE & COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To make recommendations to the Council's Cabinet for the establishment of a single point of contact for businesses to Council services.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members recommend:

- 2.1 **That Cabinet endorses the principle of establishing a First Point single point of contact for businesses to access Council services.**
- 2.2 **That a further report with detailed costings will be brought to Cabinet for approval by summer 2012.**
- 2.3 **The development and implementation of the model is led at senior level within the organisation and with Cabinet members as an Early Adopter project.**

3. PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 3.1 Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee, 12th September 2011.

4.0 SUMMARY

- 4.1 Members of the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee identified the suggestion for the establishment of a single point of contact for businesses to Council services as an item for the 2011/12 work programme.
- 4.2 A Special Interest Meeting was held on 12th September for the Committee to consider a number of areas:
- What and how Council services are currently provided to businesses, how accessible they are and how the relationship with businesses is managed

- The views of businesses on accessing Council services
 - The benefits that a single point of contact service would bring to businesses, the wider economy and the Council.
 - The issues that would need to be considered in establishing a single point of contact
 - The resource implications
 - How the impact of a single point of contact model could be measured and monitored.
- 4.3 Members considered the “First Point for Business” report of the Enterprise and Employment Manager and heard the views of the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Economic Development, the Head of Economy & Skills, the Enterprise and Employment Manager and the Customer & Registration Services Manager.
- 4.4 This report summarises the key issues discussed at the meeting, and the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations.

5.0 KEY ISSUES

- 5.1 It was acknowledged that the Council has a crucial role to play in providing efficient and effective services that support the needs of local companies and potential investors, and that enhance the reputation of the Council and the opportunity to work co-operatively with the business community.
- 5.2 The Council currently delivers a wide range of services to businesses, including collection of business taxes, economic development support, procurement opportunities, licensing and regulations services, trading standards, parking services, health & safety, food safety and environmental services.
- 5.3 The Local Economic Assessment had highlighted access to Council services as a key issue for businesses, and the need for a “one stop shop” whereby businesses would have a single point of contact and could be confident they would receive the services they need. There was further anecdotal information from businesses that supported this view, and indeed a member of the Committee made similar observations from their own employer.
- 5.4 Currently, businesses contact the relevant service area directly depending on what they need, which means they may be dealing with a number of service teams or individuals at any one time with inconsistent standards of customer service.
- 5.5 Client information is not shared between service areas so that one service team may be unaware of what another is doing and communication may be fragmented. This can be inconvenient and frustrating for the client, and result in a negative perception of the

Council as a customer-focused organisation. Furthermore, crucial information about a business' needs may fall through the net, and the opportunity to help a business expand or locate in Telford and Wrekin may be lost along with valuable market intelligence which the Council could use to help shape its offering. Data on the number of incoming enquiries, service performance and outcomes is not currently monitored, and the cost of lost opportunity is not projected (although it was acknowledged this was very difficult to measure).

- 5.6 The economic downturn had heightened the need for business support, especially as it was coupled with the withdrawal of funding for Business Link and other regionally funded support organisations. The need to support existing businesses, potential investors, the voluntary sector and start-up businesses was acknowledged.

6.0 THE PROPOSED SOLUTION

The Committee considered the suggestion in the *First Point for Business* report that the Council looks to develop a one-stop-shop for businesses, and explored some of the key considerations for its development.

- 6.1 A key element would be to involve businesses in the development of the model to ensure that whatever is put in place meets their needs. The Committee wanted to know how businesses would be consulted, and it was suggested that initial consultation could be carried out with the Council's 6 or 7 business fora, and further follow-up and testing of ideas could be done by questionnaires or surveys with wider business networks. The precise details of the consultation would need to be worked out, but Members were assured that the model would be business-led. The Committee was concerned that business expectations could be raised unrealistically, and officers responded that this could be managed by consulting on a range of options.
- 6.2 The most significant barrier to progress was agreed to be funding as there would be clear budget implications. A potential operating model was for a customer service centre within "One Telford" which would aim to resolve around 80-90% of enquiries, with complex enquiries referred to specialists in the relevant service area. This would make more efficient use of resources across the organisation. An assessment would need to be done to determine the current level of time and resource spent by each service unit on business support, and a model developed to provide long-term funding through rationalisation. It was recognised that all service areas are under extreme budget pressure and there may be resistance to a cost-sharing model.
- 6.3 Leadership and governance arrangements were discussed. The Committee felt strongly that the work should have strong corporate leadership from the top of the organisation to ensure its success. This was especially important given that there may be resistance around

shared costs, and the system and culture would need to be embedded across the organisation. When First Point was developed, a project board had been set up as a reporting mechanism to oversee delivery of the project plan and attainment of key milestones. Similar arrangements could be set up, but more detailed thinking needed to be done on the governance arrangements.

- 6.4 There was a discussion about ICT and the need for a client relationship management system. Several databases were in use across the Council. The CRM system used by First Point for residents is an intelligent, decision making system which would optimise the use of ICT to create efficiencies, but there would be a cost attached to using this. The One Telford database, Evolutive, could provide a cheaper short term option. The key point was that the appropriate solution would be developed within the resources available, and this could be a phased approach to spread costs.
- 6.5 The Committee asked how performance of a one-stop-shop would be measured and monitored and were informed that work would need to be done to develop performance measures. Quantitative measures could be used (volume of calls, response times, reduction in avoidable contacts, improved information management etc.) but the Head of Service emphasised that the qualitative impacts for businesses were important and the Telford Business Partnership Board would be involved in developing meaningful measures and providing customer feedback on service quality and outcomes.
- 6.6 The Cabinet Member emphasised that the report was an early paper which needed further discussion internally.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee fully supported the proposal to establish a “one-stop” service for businesses as a way to improve the quality of service provided by the Council to businesses, to help retain and attract business investment in Telford and Wrekin and to enhance the Council’s reputation and relationship with the business community consistent with the Co-operative Council approach.

The Committee heard that examples of this approach had not been found in other authorities, and felt that there could be an opportunity for Telford & Wrekin to gain national recognition for pioneering this way of working.

The Committee has therefore made the recommendations below which are set out in Section 2 of this report.

- **That Cabinet endorses the principle of establishing a First Point single point of contact for businesses to access Council services.**

The Committee felt that there was a need to provide a “one-stop” service to business customers as well as residents for the reasons set out above.

- **That a further report with detailed costings will be brought to Cabinet for approval by summer 2012.**

The Committee will be involved in the further development of the model and fully costed proposals. Members were concerned to look at the business model, the costs, financial implications and impacts on service areas, staff and training issues, the technical infrastructure, governance arrangements, consultation and feedback from businesses and performance monitoring measures.

- **The development and implementation of the model is led at senior level within the organisation and with Cabinet members as an Early Adopter project.**

The Committee wanted to see strong strategic leadership for the proposals to secure the involvement and commitment of service areas across the Council, to drive the project forward and overcome any potential resistance. As an Early Adopter project, the project would be led at Interim Chief Executive level.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

There are no specific equal opportunity issues arising from this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

There are no specific environmental implications arising from this report.

LEGAL COMMENT

If the Council is to implement a “**First Point for Business**”, consideration must be given to the legal functions and processes which need to be maintained. Services such as Planning, Licensing and Environmental Health have prescribed procedures to allow them to perform their legal functions. This is currently administered by staff who in many cases are professionally trained and in any event are fully familiar with statutory requirements and approved processes. In some cases, the communication between businesses and officers could either form a key part of an application (such as a planning application) or could be in relation to a matter that results in enforcement action which could result in scrutiny of the Council’s procedures in court.

When setting up “**First Point for Business**” consideration should be given to what will happen to the administration of statutory functions as this does form a significant part of the interaction which the council has with local

businesses. If there is to be any transfer of functions internally from the officers currently undertaking those assistance and advice roles to “First Point” then there needs to be an appreciation of the risks involved. Provision for both appropriate training and internal systems of communication must be in place to ensure that these functions are properly maintained.

It is advisable to have detailed consultation with the Council’s regulatory services during any development process for this service and further legal input can be provided if required.

LINKS WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

The recommendations in this report link to the Council’s emerging priorities to deliver better customer service, joining together with our partners, and around education and skills.

OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

As described earlier in this report, there is an opportunity to develop a model of good practice in Telford & Wrekin for providing services to businesses to retain and attract investment in the borough.

There is a risk that the lack of resources could be a barrier to progressing the project.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Costs associated with developing and implementing a “First Point for Businesses” contact point need to be worked up in detail. Any additional costs identified of operating a “First Point of Contact for Businesses” will not be funded through the current budget strategy and consideration will need to be given as to how to cover the extra costs to the Council.

WARD IMPLICATIONS

There are no ward implications arising directly from this report.

Report prepared by Stephanie Jones, Scrutiny Group Specialist, Tel: 01952 383114

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET – 8th DECEMBER 2011

RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY REPORT ON FIRST POINT FOR BUSINESS

**REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER HOUSING, REGENERATION &
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

To inform Cabinet Members of the proposed Cabinet response to the recommendations made by the Co-operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee in the scrutiny report on First Point for Business.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the recommendations made in the scrutiny report are noted and the response set out in Appendix 1 is approved.

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?	
	Yes	The recommendations in this report link to the Council's emerging priorities to offer better customer service, joining together with our partners, and around education and skills. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A commitment to user focus and citizen engagement • understanding our communities • clarity of purpose • communicating in appropriate ways; • and delivering change and improved outcomes.
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	No	
TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE	<i>April 2012</i>	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes/No	Costs associated with developing and implementing a "First Point for Businesses" contact point need to be worked up in detail. Any additional costs identified of operating a "First Point of Contact for Businesses" will not be funded through the current budget strategy and consideration will need to given as to how to cover the extra costs to the Council.
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes/No	If the Council is to implement a " First Point for Business ", consideration must be given to the legal functions and processes which need to be maintained. Services such a Planning, Licensing and Environmental Health have prescribed procedures to allow them to perform their legal functions. This is currently administered by staff who in many cases are professionally trained and in any event are fully

		<p>familiar with statutory requirements and approved processes. In some cases, the communication between businesses and officers could either form a key part of an application (such as a planning application) or could be in relation to a matter that results in enforcement action which could result in scrutiny of the Council's procedures in court.</p> <p>When setting up "First Point for Business" consideration should be given to what will happen to the administration of statutory functions as this does form a significant part of the interaction which the council has with local businesses. If there is to be any transfer of functions internally from the officers currently undertaking those assistance and advice roles to "First Point" then there needs to be an appreciation of the risks involved. Provision for both appropriate training and internal systems of communication must be in place to ensure that these functions are properly maintained.</p> <p>It is advisable to have detailed consultation with the Council's regulatory services during any development process for this service and further legal input can be provided if required.</p>
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes/No	<i>If yes, briefly list any other significant impacts, risks & opportunities- see separate guidance note for areas to consider</i>
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	No	<i>Borough-wide impact</i>

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4. INFORMATION

The aim of 'First Point for Business' is to provide local businesses and potential investors with a single point of contact for the diverse range of council and partner services that they need to help them start and grow their companies. Businesses include voluntary and community organisations that face many of the same issues as the private, particularly social enterprises that are essentially businesses with social objectives..

Offering focused customer services will help to widen access, improve responsiveness, improve understanding of local business preferences and develop a more consistent and better value for money response to customer contacts.

5. PREVIOUS MINUTES

None

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

**Report prepared by Corin Crane, Economic Development Manager,
Telephone: 01952 567589**

Cabinet Response to Scrutiny Report

Scrutiny Committee: Co-operative & Communities		Cabinet Member: Cllr. Charles Smith	
Report: First Point for Business		Response prepared by): Corin Crane, Economic Development Manager	
Lead Scrutiny Member: Cllr. Angela McClements Lead Scrutiny Officer: Stephanie Jones		Date of Cabinet meeting: 8th December 2011	
Scrutiny Recommendation	Response and summary of action being taken to implement, or reason for rejection	Date by which action will be taken	Person responsible for action (name and title)
That Cabinet endorses the principle of establishing a First Point single point of contact for businesses to access Council services	Agreed: See actions below	See below	Corin Crane, Economic Development Manager
That a further report with detailed costings will be brought to Cabinet for approval by summer 2012	Agreed: That report will include: Detailed Project Plan – With costings and timetable for roll out containing details around: Contact Centre: A customer Service centre is needed to offer one point of contact for businesses, but aiming to go further than the traditional switchboard and handle a good proportion of simple enquiries as well as monitoring the	June 2012	Corin Crane, Economic Development Manager

	<p>speed and quality of referred cases.</p> <p>CRM System: ICT is only part of the solution – but Customer Relation Management (CRM) systems are helping local authorities better understand and handle customer contact.</p> <p>Performance Management Process The details of this will be set once an appropriate model is decided on, however we should expect large reductions in the number of avoidable contacts by businesses (i.e. those that add no value to the outcome of the enquiry).</p>		
<p>The development and implementation of the model is led at senior level within the organisation and with Cabinet members as an Early Adopter project</p>	<p>Agreed Strong Leadership is essential, both from officers and members and this approach can become a cornerstone of our cooperative approach to businesses. We would hope to establish initiatives such as improved access, better consultations and value for money through business process engineering and case studies have shown that the information taken from this process has been used to alert elected members about issues in their wards and also to feed into budget and policy making.</p>	<p>April 2013</p>	<p>Peter Smith Head of Economy and Skills</p>

TELFORD AND WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET – 8th December 2011

TELFORD INTERNATIONAL RAILFREIGHT TERMINAL

REPORT OF HEAD OF ECONOMY AND SKILLS

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSAL

1.1 Telford International Railfreight Park includes a rail terminal hub and 24 acres of associated development land. The facility was operated by JG Russell (Transport) who executed a thirty month break clause in their 15 year lease / operating agreement on 23rd September 2011. JG Russell are currently operating the railfreight terminal on behalf of the Council under a temporary licence at a maximum cost of £2,250 per week, pending procurement of an operator for the terminal.

1.2 This report seeks Cabinet agreement to commence a European procurement process to secure an operator for the Telford International Railfreight Terminal.

2. RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is recommended to:

2.1 Approve the commencement of a European procurement process to secure a new operator for the Telford International Railfreight Terminal

2.2 Authorise the establishment of an evaluation panel, involving the Cabinet Member for Housing, Regeneration and Economic Development to assess submitted tenders and make a recommendation to Cabinet.

2.3 Agree to receive a further report seeking authority to enter a contract with a preferred operator.

2.4 Agree to extend the current temporary licence agreement for operation of the site, pending procurement of an operator

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

IMPACT ASSESSMENT AT A GLANCE

COMMUNITY IMPACT?	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?	
	Yes	Supports the delivery of the 'helping to boost the local economy' objective within the Housing, Regeneration and Prosperity Priority Plan
	Are there any measures that will be used to show the proposals are making a difference?	
	Yes	Contract delivery, including outcome performance will be measured through agreed monitoring procedures
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	No	The proposals will benefit all residents through boosting the local economy
TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE?	It is anticipated that the OJEU tender process could take between three and six months from initial commencement date to secure an operator.	

FINANCIAL (VALUE FOR MONEY) IMPACT?	Yes	There are a number of financial implications arising from this report which are detailed in paragraph 5
LEGAL IMPACT?	Yes	There are a number of legal implications arising from this report which are detailed in paragraph 5
OTHER RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES?	Yes	Operation of the railfreight terminal offers the opportunity to develop adjacent employment land. There is a risk that no operators come forward with a suitable proposal, this risk has been mitigated by seeking expressions of interest.
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS?	Yes	The railfreight terminal is located in Donnington, and will facilitate job creation on adjacent employment sites.

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4. INFORMATION

4.1 Telford International Railfreight Park includes a rail terminal hub and 24 acres of associated development land, developed in partnership with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Homes & Communities Agency. Development costs were funded through Council; European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); and Regional Development Agency (AWM) funding. Authority was given to the Head of Legal Services to enter into an agreement with JG Russell (Transport) limited as terminal operator at Cabinet on 14th April 2008. Russell's executed a thirty month break clause in their 15 year lease / operating agreement on 23rd September 2011. That agreement included a profit share mechanism which would have generated income for the Council once the facility reached profitability (estimated in the business plan at year 5 onwards). Russell's reasons for executing the break clause were that the Company were bearing losses on the operation of the site that could not be sustained.

Those losses arose from:

- The negative impact of the recession on potential inward investment onto the site that may have generated products for movement by Rail.
- A contract with UK Coal for movement of coal from the site that did not materialise, due to the extraction of lower quality coal than anticipated, which required movement by road to grade with higher quality coal.

4.2 JG Russell are currently operating the Railfreight Terminal on behalf of the Council, under a temporary licence at a maximum cost of £2,250 per week (to be reduced if the operator reduces their operational losses). Authority is sought to continue this arrangement pending procurement of an operator for the terminal.

4.3 It is important to maintain an operational railfreight facility in order to meet grant funding obligations set out in paragraph 5.1, and to enable MoD Donnington (which is adjacent to the terminal) the option to move military vehicles and equipment by rail, contributing to the sustainability of that facility. This report therefore proposes that an operator for the terminal is secured through a procurement process. This procurement will need to be undertaken through the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) tender process. An indicative timetable for this process is set out below:

Timetable	
Return of Pre-Qualification Questionnaire	27th Jan '12

(These are indicative dates only)

Evaluation of Pre-Qualification Questionnaire	10 th Feb 2012
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For those who are invited to participate in further stages:

Issue of Invitation to tender by	24 th Feb 2012
Return of Tenders	30 th March '12
Clarification Meetings if Required	w/c 16 th April '12
Contract start date	14 th May '12

4.4 An evaluation panel involving relevant officers and the Cabinet Member for Housing Regeneration and Economic Development, will assess the submitted tenders. Cabinet authority will then be sought to let a contract with a preferred operator selected through the procurement evaluation process. The criteria for selection of a preferred operator will be:

- Business Plan – demonstration that the operator has the financial and operational capacity, and demonstrable track record, to deliver the contract effectively and ensure sustainability of the facility
- Delivering best value for the Council's investment in supporting delivery of the Council's economic priorities

4.5 11 companies were invited to submit an expression of interest in operating the terminal including both national operators active in railfreight operations and local logistics companies. 4 expressions of interest were received, mitigating the risk that a suitable operator cannot be secured.

5. **IMPACT ASSESSMENT – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Financial impact

There are a number of financial considerations associated with this report:

- 5.1 Clawback of Grant - There is a risk of clawback of ERDF and AWM grant if the terminal is sold or undergoes a substantial change of use. The total grant at risk of clawback in this circumstance is £4.2m.. In addition, there is a further risk of clawback of AWM grant for non delivery of outputs relating to new jobs created. Any potential clawback will be the subject of negotiation between BIS (as the successor to AWM), but officers estimate the grant at risk at £30,000. Provision for this risk has been made.
- 5.2 Cost of Connection to Network Rail – As discussed in paragraphs 5.9 to 5.11, there is a requirement for the Connection Agreement with Network Rail to be retained, Should it become necessary for this agreement to be transferred to TWC the annual cost will be £12,500. These ongoing costs would be met from service efficiencies within the wider service delivery unit.
- 5.3 Work associated with the procurement will be contained as far as possible within existing resources and budgets. It is anticipated that specialist rail operator and legal consultancy advice will be required. Funding has been identified for these costs from within existing resources. These cost will be kept to a minimum and monitored and reported as necessary.
- 5.4 Interim Management of the Terminal by JG Russell's. – As discussed in paragraph 4.1 the terminal is currently being operated under a temporary licence agreement at a cost of £2,250 per week. It is anticipated that the procurement exercise may take

between three and six months. The costs of the interim management of the terminal for the 6 month period will be £58,500. A contingency fund has been retained from identified efficiencies in the Economy and Skills service budget to cover these costs.

- 5.5 Financial advice and support will be provided throughout the procurement exercise and further reports brought forward as necessary

Legal impact

- 5.7 Because of the value of this opportunity the contract(s) must be procured through a European Procurement Process and any process must comply with the European requirements in this regard. Ongoing legal advice will be required in relation to the procurement and property aspects of this project.
- 5.8 The funding contracts attached to the ERDF and the AWM grant state that if the site undergoes a substantial change of use or is sold within 20 years then claw-back of some, or all, of the grant may be invoked. All outputs relating to the ERDF grant have been delivered but the Council are committed to delivering an additional 7.6 jobs by 31st March 2012 as a condition of the AWM grant.
- 5.9 Use of the rail network requires a connection agreement with Network Rail. Officers are in discussion with Network Rail regarding the Connection Agreement which is currently in place between the operator (JGR) and Network Rail. The Connection Agreement governs the maintenance and function of the rail connection between the main line and the Terminal branch-line.
- 5.10 There has to be a Connection Agreement in place before any trains can run off the main line into the Terminal. Such Connection Agreements are detailed and it was a term of the 2009 Operating Agreement with JG Russell that they obtain the Connection Agreement. No new operator will be able to run the Terminal without a Connection Agreement and having one in place during any procurement process may make the Terminal more attractive to potential operators and encourage more bids.
- 5.11 There are also potential cost implications for the Council if the Connection Agreement is terminated because Network Rail can demand a physical disconnection to the mainline on termination which would result in a future cost of re-connection when the Terminal comes back into operation. As long as JG Russell continue to operate the Terminal under the temporary arrangement currently in place they will keep their Connection Agreement with Network Rail. If the arrangement with JG Russell ceases it is suggested that Network Rail be requested to permit the transfer of the Connection Agreement from JG Russell to the Council to keep it in place until the future of the Terminal is clearer. If the Terminal is to be closed for such a long period that it is not worth paying the annual charges to keep it going, the Council will be able to terminate it giving appropriate notice.

6. PREVIOUS MINUTES

Report to Cabinet 14th April 2008 – ‘Telford Railfreight Terminal Update’

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET - 8 DECEMBER 2011

**‘LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD (LSCB) HALF YEAR
PROGRESS REPORT’**

REPORT OF INTERIM HEAD OF SAFEGUARDING

PART A) – SUMMARY REPORT

1. SUMMARY OF MAIN PROPOSALS

1.1. To provide a half year update on the focus and progress of the Local Safeguarding Children Board in delivering its annual business plan

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That consideration be given to the focus and progress made delivering the LSCB business plan.

3. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

COMMUNITY IMPACT	Do these proposals contribute to specific Priority Plan objective(s)?	
	Yes	Children and Young People’s Plan: Keep children safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation
	Will the proposals impact on specific groups of people?	
	Yes	The objectives and actions of the LSCB Business Plan will impact across all sections of the Borough, in particular children, young people, parents and carers- including work to support and protect the most vulnerable in the community
TARGET COMPLETION/DELIVERY DATE	Key milestones <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quarter 3 reporting December 2011• Quarter 4 reporting and production of LSCB Annual Report March 2012	
FINANCIAL/VALUE FOR MONEY IMPACT	Yes	There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendation in this report. The total budget available to fund the work of the LSCB in 2011-12 is £203,810 provided by contributions from a number of partners including the PCT and the Police. Financial reports are presented bi-annually to the LSCB and are reported yearly in the Boards Annual Report.
LEGAL ISSUES	Yes	Section 13 of the Children Act 2004 (2004

		Act) required each local authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).LSCB functions are prescribed by Section 14 of the 2004 Act and the Local Safeguarding Children Board Regulations 2006 (as amended) Section 14A of the 2004 Act requires all LSCBs to prepare and publish a report at least once in every 12 month period.
OTHER IMPACTS, RISKS & OPPORTUNITIES	Yes	The scope of the actions in the LSCB Business Plan will impact on many aspects of the lives of children, young people, parents and carers - including work to support and protect the most vulnerable in the community
IMPACT ON SPECIFIC WARDS	Yes	Borough-wide impact

PART B) – ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

4. TELFORD & WREKIN LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

- 4.1. The Children Act 2004 required each local authority to establish a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The LSCB is the statutory mechanism for agreeing how the relevant organisations in each local area will co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in that locality and for ensuring the effectiveness of what they do.
- 4.2. As well as the statutory requirement, the activities and focus of the Board are aligned with a core priority of the 2011-12 refresh of Telford & Wrekin's Children and Families Plan: *"Keep children safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation"*.
- 4.3. Working Together To Safeguard Children 2010 requires all LSCBs to produce an annual report which reflects the progress of its business plan as well as providing a realistic assessment of the challenges which still remain. This can be found at http://www.telfordsafeguardingboard.org.uk/downloads/file/11/annual_report_january_2011

5. TELFORD & WREKIN LSCB BUSINESS PLAN

- 5.1. The Annual Report was used to inform the development of a 2011/12 Business Plan. The Plan has four safeguarding priorities together with a number of functions and work streams relating to the the Board and its two Professional Practice Themes:

Priority Areas

- Children Abused Through Exploitation (CATE)
- Getting The Right Help At The Right Time

- Children and Young People Feeling Safe
- Missing Children

Functions with Sub-groups

- Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP)
- Performance Management
- Training Sub- Group
- Policies & Procedures
- Serious Case Review

Work Streams

- Communication Strategy
- Funding
- Munro Report Response
- Structure and Membership

Professional Practice Themes

- “Cultural Competence”
- ‘Invisible Men’ The role of men in children’s lives

5.2. Key activity relating to these priorities, work streams and professional practice themes are identified in the action plans of the LSCB Business Plan. Progress reports are received by the LSCB Executive Group quarterly. Achievements of significant milestones or difficulties overcoming barriers are reported to the LSCB by exception.

5.3. The LSCBs achievements, challenges, the involvement of children and young people in its work and how this work has impacted on children and young people, their parents and carers are summarised below:

6. SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

Achievements

6.1. Given the transformational environment in which it operates, the LSCB has made considerable progress towards achieving its Business Plan objectives. Key progress includes:

- Ongoing support to children and families affected by Operation Chalice investigation into sexual exploitation
- Development of the draft 5 steps model for identifying potential CATE issues in a particular geographic area with potential for regional and national implementation.
- The new CAF Performance Information Framework provides a better understanding of trends and patterns for provision of early help.
- A Regional Joint Protocol for Missing Children to enable improved support to be given to the children, young people and families affected
- Comprehensive consultations with children and young people to ascertain views on safeguarding themes. Practical solutions have been produced for children by children including a

communications tool, a Beacon Radio broadcast and a refresh of the LSCB website.

6.2. Further examples are listed at Appendix 1.

Barriers To Achievement

6.3. Whilst operation safeguarding arrangements remain robust, organisational change and restructuring within key partners' agencies both nationally and locally has impacted on the momentum for local delivery of the strategic objectives in some areas. For example, these have affected the comprehensive development of the local missing children and pre-birth pathways. However, partner agencies have continued to monitor the effectiveness of operational child protection services through a range of mechanisms; supervision of staff, internal meetings with leads and less formal discussion with staff and young people, management and performance information, managers signing off assessments, care plans and statements for court, and case file and theme audits, sometimes on a multi-agency basis. Relationships between frontline professionals remain strong, and energy is being put into redeveloping them where changes in personnel require it. Where any professional disagreements cannot be resolved informally on a day to day basis, the role of the Designated and Named professionals and Safeguarding Advisory Service is well known.

Involvement of children and young people in the work of the LSCB

6.4. Key to the effectiveness of the LSCB is the involvement and engagement of children and young people throughout the Borough, particularly vulnerable groups. These activities have included:

- Anti-bullying consultations with the Care Council, Youth Play and Activity Groups, Disabled Children's Groups and Youth Projects.
- Consultations involving 4 Primary Schools and 1 Infants School with the purpose of the children producing an anti-cyber bullying and domestic violence tactile communications tool for all primary school children in the borough.
- Beacon Radio Broadcast. The focus of which was anti-bullying. The script was created and performed by the children of Holmer Lake School and was transmitted 62 times during the last two weeks of November to coincide with national anti-bullying week.

Other examples of activities and those planned for the future are summarised at Appendix 2.

What difference have we made to children, young people, parents and carers?

- Significant differences include:

- The raised awareness of children in terms of their own safeguarding environment; anecdotal evidence suggests children are questioning their own environment and how this reflects on their wellbeing
 - Child deaths have reduced since 2008
 - The role of significant men in children's lives and the impact is better taken into account in assessment and care planning
 - Hospital paediatric staff are better able to identify potential safeguarding issues within Apparent Life Threatening Events
- Further outcomes are set out at Appendix 3.

The future

6.5. The Munro Report set challenges for improvements in service delivery especially early intervention and the quality of social work practice and the role of the LSCB in driving these improvements across all partner agencies. Our LSCB is committed to meet these challenges in order to ensure children and young people in Telford and Wrekin stay safe. How partners collectively will continue to achieve this will be considered as part of the discussions to develop our next Annual report and the 2012-13 LSCB business plan

7. PREVIOUS MINUTES

N/A

Report prepared by Kris Woodcock,
Safeguarding Children Partnership Development Officer
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LSCB Business Plan
Appendix 1: Summary of Achievements

Sub-Group/Work Stream	LSCB Achievements
Priority Areas	
Children Abused Through Exploitation (CATE) Priority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of the draft 5 steps model for identifying potential CATE issues in an area. This is part of the launch of the Regional Missing Children Joint Protocol. 2. Implementation of Independent Sexual Violence Advisory Service. In the first 7 months, the service has supported 30 clients, 2 full time ISVAs and 2 Sexual Violence Support Workers. Service available throughout Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. Key agencies have received referral packs. 3. Support for Chalice victims and their families.
Getting The Right Help At The Right Time Priority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Relevant recruitment to begin the new Family Connect Service. 2. Information sharing of Early Intervention Teams data with Social Care Data Team. 3. CAF Performance Information Framework completed and ready to use, which will enable patterns and trends to be identified.
Missing Children Priority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Better understanding of what is working well and what is not. 2. Regional Joint Protocol completed which will enable better support to be provided to the client group.
Children & Young People Feeling Safe Priority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Produced creative outcomes whilst navigating around financial constraints. 2. Anti - bullying consultations with young people: Care Council, Youth Activity & Play Groups, Disabled Children's Groups & Youth Projects. 3. 'Chatterbox' Communication Tool consultations with children: representatives from Apley Wood, Holmer Lake, Newdale, Newport Infants & Juniors plus multicultural schools input. A chatterbox will be presented to every primary aged child throughout the borough and supported with curriculum enrichment lesson plans. 4. Staying Safe and cyber safety work in primary & secondary schools. 6. Parents Protect Event: 72 people attended September's events. 7. Primary School mentoring by West Mercia Police Cadets for Years 4 – 6 – positive role models. 8. Trial of voluntary sector NSPCC accreditation.
Functions with Sub-groups	
Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. CDOP Lead Nurse appointment and is now qualified in Rapid Response for child deaths. 2. Submitted CDOP national data prior to deadline (May 2011). 3. Increased partnership working with coroner.
Performance Management	Ratified: Performance Management Framework and Calendar of Reports to LSCB.

Policies & Procedures	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Missing Children Joint Protocol has been agreed by Council and LSCB. 2. Refresh of the Schools Safeguarding and Child Protection Policies agreed by LSCB.
Serious Case Review	SCR action plan submitted to Ofsted and deemed satisfactory
Training Sub- Group	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Chair and Action Plan Lead of Training Sub Group retained giving the sub-group continuity. 2. Inter-agency membership of training pool increasing. 3. Expectations of statutory agencies clearly defined and progress report process in place.
Work Streams	
Communication Strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Progress of C&YP friendly products: chatterbox communication tool. 2. Development and functioning of LSCB Members E -Site. 3. Refresh of the LSCB Website with a significant input by children and young people. 4. Beacon Radio Anti-bullying Broadcast – Holmer Lake School: By Children For Children.
Munro Report Response	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Summary report produced which incorporated government's response to the Munro Report. 2. Implications for T&W identified. 3. DCS held an interagency scoping meeting to define responsibilities.
Structure and Membership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Induction of Community Board Members. 2. Organisational change has become a standard agenda item at both LSCB and Executive Group Meetings. 3. Membership of LSCB and the Executive Group is being monitored and maintained through organisational change.
Professional Practice Themes	
Cultural Competence	Theme incorporated into the LSCB Performance Management Framework.
'Invisible Men' The role of men in children's lives	Theme incorporated into the LSCB Performance Management Framework.

LSCB Business Plan

Appendix 2: Summary of Involvement of children and young people

Sub-Group/Work Stream	LSCB Involvement of children and young people
Priority Areas	
Children & Young People Feeling Safe Priority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anti-bullying consultations with the Care Council, Youth Play & Activity Groups, Disabled Children’s Groups, Youth Project. 2. Cyber – safety awareness sessions in Borough Primary and Secondary Schools. 3. Police cadets ‘positive role model mentoring scheme with Years 4-6.
Work Streams	
Communication Strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communications Tool ‘Chatterbox’ Consultations with 24 child representatives from 4 Primary and 1 Infants School. 2. C&YP consultations regarding the new LSCB website. 3. Beacon Radio Anti-bullying Broadcast – enabled the views, thoughts and feelings of children to be heard, created into a cohesive radio broadcast which will be transmitted 62 times during the last 2 weeks of November to coincide with anti-bullying week commencing 14.11.11.

LSCB Business Plan

Appendix 3: Summary of what difference have we made to children, young people, parents and carers?

Sub-Group/Work Stream	LSCB What difference have we made to children, young people, parents and carers?
Priority Areas	
Children Abused Through Exploitation (CATE) Priority	Victims of sexual assault and their families are better able to cope with their abuse and criminal proceedings.
Getting The Right Help At The Right Time Priority	Identified the need to create an improved information sharing spreadsheet for CAF/TAC which will improve interventions from safeguarding.
Missing Children Priority	Needs of missing children and problems addressing them better understood by key stakeholders
Children & Young People Feeling Safe Priority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raising the awareness of children in terms of their safeguarding environment. They are questioning their own environment and how this reflects on their wellbeing. 2. Raised awareness of cyber -Safety in schools. 3. Picking up more disclosures in schools. 4. Raising awareness across multi agency professionals, carers and parents.
Functions with Sub-groups	
Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Child deaths have reduced since 2008. 2. Bereavement midwife post developed by SaTH – to commence September 2011.
Policies & Procedures	Designated teachers are more informed and therefore better equipped to undertake their safeguarding roles
Serious Case Review	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The role of significant men in children’s lives and the impact on their lives is better taken into account in assessment and care planning 2. Hospital paediatric staff better able to identify potential safeguarding issues within Apparent Life Threatening Events 3. Reduction in multiple episodes of missing YPs from single establishments
Training Sub- Group	Raised awareness of Child Protection issues through the use of Child Protection Procedures across the Telford & Wrekin area with practitioners both in statutory organisations and the voluntary sector.
Work Streams	
Communication Strategy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raised awareness of safeguarding issues and the role and aims of the LSCB amongst children and young people. 2. Demonstrated the LSCBs desire to listen to the views of children and support their ideas and solutions through practical projects: communications tool and the Beacon Radio broadcast.

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

Proposals for Welfare Benefit Reform and Localised Support for Council Tax - Impact on LA Services

Cabinet - 8th December 2011

REPORT OF: Head of Customer Services, Leisure & Libraries

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To update Cabinet on the Government's proposals for welfare reform and the potential impact that they may have on residents and business of the Council

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 **That Cabinet note the content of this report and the significant impact that the changes will have on the residents of the borough and on the business of the Council;**
- 2.2 **The Head of Customer Services, Leisure and Libraries provides Cabinet with a regular update report on the progress of the proposals at least every six months, or whenever key decision are required to be made;**
- 2.3 **Cabinet acknowledge the concerns outlined in 4.10 and 6.3 of this report which have subsequently been highlighted in a letter from the Leader to the Department for Work and Pensions with copies to respective MP's outlined in *Appendix 1*;**
- 2.4 **To set up a members information seminar to include Town and Parish Councils as well as Ward Members to allow the Benefits Manager to present the Government's proposed changes in detail to aid further understanding of the implications and impact for residents within our Borough due to the complex nature of the changes being proposed**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 On 11th November 2010, the Government published its white paper on the introduction of the Universal Credit (UC). The Universal Credit proposal aims to radically simplify the system to make work pay and combat worklessness and poverty. The White Paper has implications for the future delivery of Housing Benefit (HB) and makes proposals for Council Tax Benefit (CTB) to become a local rebate.
- 3.2 In September 2011, Communities and Local Government produced their consultation document on the localisation of support for council tax, which sets out their ideas for the creation of a local rebate for Council Tax, with much greater discretion for local authorities to determine how it should be awarded, at present it is prescribed by Government. The move towards a local rebate will no doubt result in Councils having to take the difficult decisions around levels of rebate and communicating that to residents.

- 3.3 In October 2010 Her Majesty's Revenues and Customs and the Department for Work and Pensions produced a strategy document, 'Tackling fraud and error in the benefit and tax credits systems', which sets out the proposals to reduce the £5.2 billion of taxpayers' money lost through fraud and error.
- 3.4 In September 2011 the Department for Work and Pensions issued a consultation on the future of benefit fraud investigation including a number of proposals how local authority fraud investigation should be administered in the future.

4. UNIVERSAL CREDIT

- 4.1 Universal Credit is an integrated working-age credit that will provide a basic allowance with additional elements for children, disability, housing and caring. It will support people both in and out of work, replacing Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and income-related Employment and Support Allowance.
- 4.2 Universal Credit will merge out-of-work benefits and in-work support. The intention is that people will no longer have to take a risk in moving from one system to another. For those in employment, Universal Credit will be calculated and delivered electronically, automatically adjusting credit payments according to monthly income reported through an upgraded version of the Pay As You Earn tax system. The system aims to be simpler and to respond more quickly to changes in earnings so that people will not face the same complexities as they do now, particularly at the end of a tax year. As a result people should be much clearer about their entitlements and the beneficial effects of increasing their earnings by taking on more hours or doing some overtime.
- 4.3 The financial incentive provided by Universal Credit will be backed up by a strong system of conditionality; unemployed people who can work will be required to take all reasonable steps to find and move into employment. Conditionality will be responsive to an individual's circumstances – reflecting, for example, that whilst the majority should move into full-time work, for some people there may be temporary periods when part-time work is appropriate (for example, for some lone parents).
- 4.4 Overall administration of the new benefit will be initially managed by one Government department; the Department for Work and Pensions; as opposed to the delivery of current benefits through a mix of the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue & Customs and Local Authorities. The latter are currently responsible for the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.
- 4.5 The Government introduced a Welfare Reform Bill in February 2011 to give effect to these changes. There will be a phased approach to the introduction of Universal Credit with the first individuals expected to enter the new system from 2013, followed by the gradual closure of existing benefits, including Housing Benefit & Council Tax Benefit, and Tax Credits claims and their transfer to the new system. This transfer is expected to be completed for all customers by 2017.
- 4.6 The government's aim is for people to claim Universal Credit on-line, with subsequent contact with the DWP to be made by telephone. There is an intention to provide some face-to-face support for customers, but it is not clear what the level of service will be, or who will deliver it.

- 4.7 Universal Credit only applies to working-age claimants. Pensioners, who make up about 50% of the council's benefits caseload, will have their housing costs met by a housing credit, which will be administered by the Pension, Disability and Carers Service. The government has not issued any details on how this change will be put in place, but it is expected that councils will be processing new claims from pensioners until 2014.
- 4.8 However, the Government consider that Local Authorities may still have some part to play in administering non-mainstream Housing Benefit cases (for example, people living in supported or temporary accommodation). The government are currently consulting on this aspect of the reforms. Local Authorities may also have a role to play in delivering face-to-face contact for those who cannot use other channels to claim and manage their Universal Credit.
- 4.9 The Department for Work and Pensions have recently announced that they intend to defer a decision on the final delivery model for Universal Credits, and in particular, what role may be played by Local Authorities until 2015 and as a Council we continue to lobby Government to ensure that the final arrangements fully meet the needs of our local residents.

4.10 **CONCERNS**

There are a number of concerns about the proposals:

- Local Authorities have an excellent track record of delivering benefit services that far exceed the performance or quality of service that have been delivered by HMRC or Job Centre. If Local Authorities are not part of the delivery model for Universal Credit there is a real likelihood of an increase in processing times, a lack of local knowledge and a reduction in accuracy, which will frustrate the ambitions of Universal Credit regarding removing the barriers to work.
- The move away from face to face services to automated services will cause problems for the most vulnerable residents. The Department for Work and Pensions ambition is to have 80% of its claims made online. For this to be successful it would require a significant channel shift if it is to be in place by 2013, which for many of our customers would be unachievable.
- The proposals do not allow for housing benefit to be paid straight to a landlord as can happen now in many circumstances. If tenants don't pay their housing benefit to the landlord they could become homeless putting further strain on our homeless service. Locally, our landlords are already voicing their concerns about the commercial viability of renting out homes to benefit claimants in the future, as they predict that the levels and incidents of rent arrears will spiral under Universal Credits.
- The proposals include Universal Credits being administered through a national ICT system. By their own admission, the timescales that the Department for Work and Pensions have set for the introduction of Universal Credit are ambitious and aggressive. The likelihood of an ICT system being up and running and fully functional by 2013 is virtually impossible and this has already been voiced by the main ICT suppliers Northgate and Capita. Unfortunately the Government's track record of putting these large scale ICT systems in place is poor and many systems, such as Tax Credits are still plagued by problems many years after it has been implemented.
- There are 20,000 staff employed by Local Authorities nationally involved in the administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefit. Locally we are already beginning to see experienced benefit staff start to leave the service as their

concerns about the long-term future of their role grow. We may soon face the very real prospect of there being a significant skills and knowledge gap in our service as we carry vacant posts and struggle to recruit to on a permanent basis pending the final decision on the long term delivery model for Universal Credit in 2015. This loss of expertise will of course most greatly affect our vulnerable customers at the time when they are most likely to need the support of their Local Authority to assist them with the migration to the new benefit systems.

- 4.11 A letter expressing these concerns has been issued from The Leader of the Council to the Department for Works and Pensions in November 2011 with copies to the respective Members of Parliament. **See Appendix 1**

5. LOCALISED SUPPORT FOR COUNCIL TAX

- 5.1 Council Tax Benefit will not form part of the Universal Credit. Rather, Local Authorities will be given scope to take account of the priorities of their own local communities when determining the amount of support for vulnerable and low income households to meet their Council Tax bills. It is expected that Local Authorities will be better able to provide a joined-up system of support for people on low incomes that dovetails with the various rebate and discount schemes which are already part of the Council Tax regime, while at the same time protecting vulnerable groups.

- 5.2 The Government issued a consultation document – "Localising support for council tax in England" on 4th August 2011 and propose that the following principles should underpin local schemes:

- Local authorities will have a duty to run a scheme to provide support for council tax in their area
- For pensioners there should be no change in the current level of awards
- Local authorities should also consider ensuring support for other vulnerable groups
- Local schemes should support work incentives, and in particular avoid disincentives to move into work.

CONCERNS

- 5.3 There are four main concerns over this proposed replacement to Council Tax, they are:

- Scheme design
- Funding & Impact on claimants
- Timescales
- The interaction with Universal Credit

5.4 Scheme Design

From the information currently available, it is not clear to what extent local authorities will be able to design their own local CTB scheme. Information released during the Spending Review 2010 suggested that local authorities will need to devise, assess and implement local CTB schemes by April 2013 - '*local authorities will be given flexibility to tailor the scheme to meet local priorities and to manage spending within lower limits...*'

Despite the intention to localise CTB, the government is also clear that its aims are to ‘...*protect the most vulnerable, particularly pensioners...*’ DWP has also indicated that any reforms to CTB should not undermine the incentive to work and so, some form of protection will also be required for working claimants.

It is reasonable to assume that as more protection is provided to certain target groups, it becomes more difficult for local authorities to control costs. Given the government indications about needing to protect certain groups, local authorities will have to manage these pressures, whilst also delivering a 10% reduction in funding.

5.5 Funding and impact on claimants

The reforms to the Welfare System, and particularly the introduction of the Universal Credit, have focused on the principle of a single benefit/single entry system. There is a view that the concept of a local council tax benefit scheme is at odds with this principle. Were local authorities to be given full discretion over CTB, one of the potential consequences could be that each local authority develops a slightly different scheme.

This could potentially confuse claimants wishing to claim CTB. This is particularly true for customers who may find their entitlement to CTB changes if they move into a different local authority area. In extreme cases, different local schemes could lead to ‘benefit chasing’ as claimants move between authorities to access a more ‘generous’ CTB scheme. As CIPFA (Chartered Institute) have noted, if the Government implements a fixed cash grant for CTB, ‘***Where it looks as if the cash limit will be reached before the end of the financial year, a local authority may have to tighten its rules in-year or otherwise reduce awards or refuse to make any further awards.***’ This will not only lead to confusion for claimants, but could result in unequal benefit provision to similar households *within* local authorities. Should such a situation arise, this would compound the fact that there is less funding available nationally. The 10% funding reduction has clear implications for the amount of CTB paid in local areas; it is certain that some CTB claimants (existing and new) will see a reduction in the amount of benefit that they are paid.

5.6 Timescales

At present, it is difficult to comment on how realistic the timescale for change is. Much will depend on the progress of the Welfare Reform Bill and the outcome of the DCLG’s consultation. The government envisage the following timescale:

Summer 2011

- Consultation begins.
- Government begins working with local authorities, representative organisations and suppliers on delivery requirements for localisation.
- Basis for model schemes considered.

Autumn/winter 2011-12

- Government publishes a response to the consultation.

- Introduction of Local Government Finance Bill (included provisions for localisation of council tax support).
- Central and local government begin working on model schemes.

Spring 2012

- Primary legislation passage through Parliament
- Government preparing and publishing draft secondary legislation

Summer 2012

- Primary legislation passed.
- Secondary legislation prepared
- Local authorities designing and consulting on local schemes

Autumn/winter 2012-13

- Local authorities establishing local schemes – putting place systems, notifying claimants of changes.
- Local authorities setting budgets.

Spring 2013

- Local scheme in operation.

As the secondary legislation will only be in the preparation stages during the summer of 2012, it will be extremely challenging for local authorities to design, consult on and have a fully tested system in place by the time annual billing takes place in February 2013. This is a major risk and has been highlighted as part of Service and Financial Planning to budget for a £1.5m loss in 2013 whilst we run the current scheme and move to a new scheme in 2014.

5.7 Interaction with Universal Credit

A further concern is that the proposals from Communities and Local Government regarding the move towards a localised council tax rebate seem to be contradictory to the intentions of the Universal Credit. Whereas Universal Credit will see Housing Benefit transferred into a single assessment process which will be common nationwide, localised council tax rebate will potentially grant every local authority in the Country the powers to design their own awarding criteria and scheme. This will not only cause significant confusion and uncertainty for customers and therefore likely to act as a new barrier to employment, but it will also be inefficient to administer as local authorities will no longer have the ability to assess Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit as a single transaction, as happens now. This will no doubt lead to a post-code lottery; where by customers in two neighbouring local authorities could find themselves receiving significantly different levels of state assistance dependant on their respective council's scheme.

6. FRAUD INVESTIGATION

- 6.1 The Government currently pays out around £190 billion in benefits, tax credits and child benefit administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). The most recent estimates put annual

revenue losses due to fraud and error in the welfare system at £5.2 billion, or almost 3% of total expenditure. This is made up of £3.1bn in DWP administered benefits (2.1% of total expenditure) and £2.1bn in HMRC (8.9% of expenditure).

6.2 The new strategy is built around five key elements: Prevent, Detect, Correct, Punish and Deter.

6.3 The proposals include:

- Creating a single fraud investigation service
- Employing over 200 new anti-fraud officers
- Setting up a mobile regional taskforce to investigate each and every claim in high fraud areas
- Abolishing cautions as a penalty for fraud
- Increasing asset seizure
- New tougher one-strike, two-strike and three-strike rules, including three years loss of benefit for people with multiple convictions
- Deducting money owed directly through PAYE
- Civil penalties of £50 for more minor offences
- Closer working with Crimestoppers
- Naming and shaming fraudsters in local areas
- Stepping up the Check First, then Pay approach to stop fraud and error entering the system

6.4 The implication for the Council is that housing benefit fraud will, in future, be dealt with by the DWP, not an in-house fraud team, although it is suggested in the DCLG consultation document that local authorities retain responsibility for investigating incidences of fraud in the replacement scheme for council tax benefit. The aim was to have the single fraud investigation service operational from April 2013.

6.5 The consultation on the future of Local Authority Fraud investigation set out the 4 preferred options from the Department for Works and Pensions regarding the transfer of Local Authority staff into a Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS). The proposals are intended to be an interim measure, through to 2015, when the future of SFIS, and the arrangements for Local Authority Fraud Investigation will be reconsidered alongside the decision on the future delivery model for Universal Credit. The four options are:

- **Option 1.** LA staff remain employed by LAs, but operate under SFIS powers, policies, processes and priorities. This brings LA investigation staff into SFIS under a procedural change. By leaving employment and location unchanged this option would allow LAs the flexibility to redeploy resource to meet other LA priorities if required.
- **Option 2.** LA staff remain employed by LAs in LA estate but are seconded to the DWP - this option means all LA investigation staff remain LA employees based in LA estate under formal secondment to DWP and operate under SFIS powers, policies, processes and priorities. This brings LA investigation staff into SFIS under both management and procedural changes. This option would allow LAs a degree of flexibility to recall and redeploy resource to meet other LA priorities, under the terms of the secondment agreement if required.
- **Option 3.** LA staff become DWP employees but deliver investigation locally from the LA estate - this option means all LA investigation staff become DWP employees based in LA estate and operate under SFIS powers, policies, processes

and priorities. This brings LA investigation staff into SFIS under both management and procedural changes.

- **Option 4.** LA staff become part of the DWP working within DWP estate as employees - this option means all LA investigation staff become DWP employees based in DWP estate and operate under SFIS powers, policies, processes and priorities. This brings LA investigation staff into SFIS under both management and procedural changes.

6.6 Responses to the consultation have been overwhelmingly in support of option 1. It was felt that this option provided the most flexibility, especially in allowing LA staff to consider other types of fraud, and in developing piloting and testing ways of working. Several LA's reflected that this option allowed for closer working with HMRC and FIS, thus developing new skills. Most significantly it was felt that, as this option did not require changes to the LA Admin grant, it was therefore the most affordable option.

7. SUMMARY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

7.1 Financial Implications

In 2010/11 the Council paid out a total of £61.6million in housing benefit and £16.4million in council tax benefit. The Council currently claim the majority of this expenditure back through a subsidy paid by the government which is based on actual expenditure incurred. The subsidy totalled £60.8million for housing benefit and £14.1million for council tax benefit in 2010/11.

7.1.2 The Council also receive a specific grant from the government for the administration of housing and council tax benefit which is £1.6million for 2011/12. This supports the cost of the housing and council tax benefit assessments team within Revenues and Benefits. This grant is being cut by £0.1million in 2012/13

7.1.3 With the move to universal credit the costs of housing benefit would transfer to the new body administering the scheme. This also suggests that some staff would also transfer to the new body under TUPE. There is not sufficient detail available yet to quantify the financial implications to the Council of the move to universal credit.

7.1.4 The consultation paper on Localising Council Tax made it clear that funding for council tax benefit would be paid to Local Authorities through a fixed grant. The paper also stated that the grant would be 10% less than current amounts paid to Councils. This would result in a cut of £1.4million if this was based upon 2010/11 actual subsidy received. It would then be up to local Councils to deliver a council tax benefit scheme within the funding available.

7.1.5 Clearly there are significant financial implications as a result of welfare reform, however there is not enough detail around some of the proposals at this point in time to be able to calculate the full impact. The 2012/13 budget model does include an allowance for the £0.1m reduction in administration grant and £1.4m for the one-off impact of the cut in council tax benefit funding, which is likely to impact in 2013/14 while the new local scheme is designed and implemented to meet the 10% reduction. As government proposals are firmed up and financial implications become clearer they will be reported back to Cabinet as part of the Head of Customer Services, Leisure and Libraries update and will be considered as part of future budget strategies.

MLB 10.11.11

7.2 **Legal**

The full legal implications of the changes to the benefits system can only be addressed once the final proposals are made definitive. Future reports will detail legal implications as these become known.

7.3 **Equalities**

The Department for Work and Pensions has carried out an initial equality impact assessment on the proposal to introduce Universal Credit (and consequential reforms) to meet the requirements of equality legislation. At this stage there are still some detailed policy decisions to be taken and so the Equality Impact Assessment provides an indicative high level assessment of impacts. Final conclusions cannot be drawn until policy development is complete. The DWP will carry out a more detailed Equality Impact Assessment with the introduction of the Welfare Reform Bill.

The proposal to reduce Council Tax Benefit expenditure by 10% is likely to lead to increased pressure for those who rely on benefits to help them pay their Council Tax. This will be exacerbated for those who will also be affected by the proposed change to the levels of Housing Benefit.

Appendix 1

Fax: 01952 383991

Benefit Reform Division
Department for Work and Pensions
1st Floor
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

Dear Sir/Madam

Local Authority role in the future of Universal Credit

In recent months senior officers of Telford & Wrekin Council have been briefing members about the proposal in the Welfare Reform Bill to introduce a Universal Credit, which will encompass the payment of housing related support, a benefit which is currently administered by local authorities in the form of Housing Benefit.

Whilst I understand the underlying principals of the proposal and fully support the simplification of the welfare system and some of the aspirations to ensure that the barriers to employment are removed, I am writing to you to express my concerns about the planned means of its implementation and the proposed delivery model for the new benefit. In particular I believe that any proposal to remove the administration of housing support away from local authorities will put these aspirations at risk.

Local Authorities have an excellent track record of delivering benefit services that far exceed the performance or quality of service that has been delivered through any of the centrally administered benefits and administered through HMRC, Job Centre Plus, etc. There is a concern that if local authorities are not part of the delivery system there will be an increase in processing times and accuracy of payments, which will in fact compound the issue of the welfare state acting as a barrier to employment.

The move away from face to face services to automated services will cause problems for the most vulnerable residents. I understand that the plan for Universal Credit is that it will be a benefit which by default is claimed online. I believe that the DWP estimate that 80% of customers will be able to access Universal Credit via the web is highly inaccurate, and would require a significant channel shift of customers from face-to-face contact to reliance on online services; something that I believe to be overly ambitious and unrealistic particularly if it is to be in place in time for the introduction of Universal Credit in 2013/14.

Although I agree that as many people as possible should be encouraged to access services via the web, a large percentage of vulnerable people will not have the skills or access to be able to do this.

The Government have stated that combating benefit fraud is one of its major priorities, yet it is through the provision of face-to-face services that local authorities have been so successful at protecting the gate-way to the benefit system and reducing the opportunity for fraud to be committed. I would be interested to know what research has been undertaken by the DWP into the risk of fraud increasing if the majority of claims are able to be submitted online.

The proposals do not allow for housing benefit to be paid straight to a landlord as can happen now in some circumstances. The automated system will pay the Universal Credit entitlements to one person in a household via direct debit. The household will then have to manage their entitlement to pay for all household expenditure, including food, heating, and other utilities and their rent. I believe this will have a significant impact on homelessness as well as the availability of housing. If tenants don't pay their housing benefit to the landlord they could become homeless putting further strain on our homeless service. Locally, our landlords are already voicing their concerns about the commercial viability of renting out homes to benefit claimants in the future, as they predict that the levels and incidents of rent arrears will spiral under Universal Credits. For the most part this will not be because of any wilful decision of the claimant not to pass their benefit onto their landlord, but because whilst struggling to make ends meet, including paying for increased fuel, food and utility costs, there will be times when payment of the rent will simply not be the priority.

The new proposals include Universal Credits being administered by a national ICT system. I have concerns around the Government's ability to deliver this by 2013. The tendering for a system of this size and complexity will need to begin in the next few months and there is still a lack of clarity around many aspects of the proposals that will need to be confirmed before any design or tendering can take place. The likelihood of an ICT system being up and running and fully functional by 2013 seems highly unlikely. The Government's track record of putting these kinds of large ICT systems in place is poor and many systems, such as Tax Credits are still plagued by problems many years after it has been implemented.

A further concern is that the proposals from Communities and Local Government regarding the move towards a localised council tax rebate seem to be contradictory to the intentions of the Universal Credit. Whereas Universal Credit will see Housing Benefit transferred into a single assessment process which will be common nationwide, localised council tax rebate will potentially grant every local authority in the Country the powers to design their own awarding criteria and scheme. This will not only cause significant confusion and uncertainty for customers and therefore likely to act as a new barrier to employment, but I also believe this will be grossly inefficient to administer as local authorities will no longer have the ability to assess Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit as a single transaction, as happens now. This will lead to a post-code lottery; where by customers in two neighbouring local authorities could find themselves receiving significantly different levels of state assistance dependant on their respective council's scheme.

The timescales that have been proposed for the implementation of the localised council tax rebate are extremely unrealistic. The consultation only closed within

the last month, yet it is intended that Councils will have the scheme operational by April 2013. This does not allow sufficient time for a response to the consultation to be issued, relevant legislation to be passed, local schemes to be designed by Councils, IT systems to be developed and the local community consulted with in time for the start of the annual billing process for Council Tax, which is usually well underway by January. I fear that many Councils will simply not have had sufficient time to develop and implement robust schemes in that timeframe and may have to fund the 10% grant reduction themselves for at least part of the first year to ensure vulnerable customers are protected.

Communities and Local Government are promoting the localised council tax rebate as being a step towards empowering Councils as part of the localism agenda. However the reality is that there will be considerable restrictions on the design of the scheme, with protections being imposed for customers who are pension age and the low paid employed. This means that the 10% reduction in funding will largely hit the customers who have the least ability to make a contribution to their Council Tax, such as the working age unemployed. This will take Councils back to a similar position that they were in with Community Charge, whereby they are attempting to collect small amounts of revenue from a large number of customer who can least afford to pay. This is clearly inefficient and will require Councils to increase their Council Tax collection resources.

Our concerns regarding the localised council tax support proposals have been made to Communities and Local Government through their formal consultation.

I understand that on 13th October 2011, the Parliamentary Committee for Communities and Local Government made a number of key recommendations about the future of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. The committee, which is comprised of 11 backbench Members of Parliament, with a majority from the coalition parties, echoed many of the concerns that I have raised and are shared amongst colleagues across the local government community. In particular I understand that they suggest that the administration of housing support costs should remain with local authorities. That is where the expertise is and the links with homelessness and local housing provision are obvious. They also believe that the split between the proposed arrangements for the reformed Council Tax Benefit and Housing Benefit will be a major cause of confusion.

Finally, I am greatly concerned at the lack of information that has been made available as yet regarding the futures of the 20,000 local authority employees who are engaged in Housing Benefit administration nationally. This highly skilled, high performing workforce of benefit experts has a level of local knowledge and face-to-face advisory skills that are second to none across the field of welfare benefit provision. I firmly believe that this localised, face to face service, undertaken by highly committed local staff must be the service delivery model on which any major welfare reforms are based if there is to be any hope of the ambitions of Universal Credit becoming a reality.

We are already beginning to see experienced benefit staff start to leave our service as their concerns about the long-term future of their role grow. We may soon face the very real prospect of there being a significant skills and knowledge

gap in our service as we carry vacant posts that we will struggle to recruit to on a permanent basis pending the final decision on the long term delivery model for Universal Credit. This loss of expertise will of course most greatly effect our vulnerable customers at the time when they are most likely to need the support of their Local Authority to assist them with the migration to the new benefit systems.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Kuldip Sahota
Leader – Telford & Wrekin Council

C.c. Mr David Wright, MP for the Telford Borough Constituency
Mr Mark Pritchard, MP for Wrekin Constituency
Mr Richard Partington, Interim Chief Executive, Telford & Wrekin Council