

**Report of ENE Area Leader**

**Report to Outer North East Area Committee**

**Date: 22 October 2012**

**Subject: East North East Welfare Reform Project Team Update**

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): Chapel Allerton Moortown Roundhay		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:		

**Summary of main issues**

1. Progress is being made by the East North East Welfare Reform Project Team to respond to the changes within the Welfare Reform Act and to mitigate the impact for residents within east north east Leeds.
2. This report provides members with an update on progress made since the last update in June 2012.
3. Information is included on the numbers engaging on the Get IT Together project assisting in digital access.
4. The report also highlights next steps to link together workstreams such as worklessness and digital access.

**Recommendations**

5. Members are asked to note the content of this report and comment on the work ongoing to mitigate the impact in the east north east.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 This reports provides members with an update of the work undertaken in the East North East to support the work of the citywide welfare reform strategy.
- 1.2 The report sets out the actions developed focussing on the East North East ensuring that customers, service providers and stakeholders are prepared for, and are able to respond to, the issues and requirements arising from the welfare reform programme.

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 A report was presented to Area Committee in December 2011 which set out the details of the Government proposals for welfare reform and the likely impact on residents in Leeds. Reports have also been presented to the Executive Board in October 2011 and February 2012 outlining a city wide strategy in response to the proposed changes.
- 2.2 At the November 2011 meeting of the East North East Area Leadership Team a discussion was held around the impact for east north east and it was requested that the Area Leader establish a project team to focus on developing actions to mitigate the impact across the area. A report was presented to the Area Committee in March 2012 to highlight action taken within east north east in response to the request made at the area leadership team.
- 2.3 The report highlighted the main changes coming in to force along with the proposed dates of the changes.

## **3 Main issues**

### **Staff briefing Sessions:**

- 3.1 Briefing sessions were held on 13th September, with over 80 people attending. The sessions provided front line staff and supervisors with information on the welfare reform changes, work being done by ENEHL to prepare tenants for the changes, details of the work of the ENE project team, information on Credit Union bank accounts, access to IT and information on the Pinnacle People project supporting people in to work.
- 3.2 Feedback from the sessions was positive, with attendees feeling that the information was relevant and useful to them in their various roles and being better informed to advise and support customers.
- 3.3 Due to the overwhelming interest in the staff briefing sessions additional sessions are being scheduled and will be held in mid to late October, these sessions will

provide staff with an overview of the changes and how they can support clients to prepare and respond.

### **Communications:**

- 3.4 Discussions have been held with colleagues from south east and west north west areas and the Chief Revenues and Benefits Officer to develop a coordinated approach across the three area teams. Through these discussions various workstreams have been identified and will be progressed. Further meetings will be held on a monthly basis to consider best practice and share ideas to support the agenda going forward. The work will include:
- Considering running employment seminars to look at engaging local employers and raising awareness of changes for part time workers along with opportunities.
  - Approaches to high interest lender and loan sharks
  - 3rd sector approaches
  - Food bank and social enterprise opportunities
- 3.5 Clearly there are crossovers to the worklessness agenda so we will ensure that this is linked and does not result in duplication.
- 3.6 Through the staff briefing sessions information on the support available in the area, including the Pinnacle People project and Get IT Together, has been provided. The impact on increased referrals will be monitored.
- 3.7 Information and support will be shared with as many front line staff as possible through the networks that have been identified from the staff briefings.
- 3.8 An information pack of relevant services and organisations in the area to help with signposting is being produced. This was identified as a need by some of the voluntary sector organisations in the area.
- 3.9 Targeted marketing of the Credit Union budget account (and the other budget bank accounts available) is being undertaken to better prepare residents for universal credit. Information on accounts to be provided as part of briefings for front line staff to share with clients. Some voluntary organisations (such as Archway and GIPSIL) are actively promoting the use of budget bank accounts and encouraging uptake.
- 3.10 There will be continuing promotion of the need for people to begin to use budget bank accounts. Discussions on loan sharks and debt management will identify what may be done on a local level linked to the development of citywide approaches.
- 3.11 The Pinnacle People Project is aimed at families, designed to provide support and encouragement to help overcoming barriers faced preventing people moving in to work, the scheme also provides support to cope with family issues and managing finances. Access to training and qualifications and confidence building are also

provided. People can be referred on to the scheme as long as a member of the household is receipt of a qualifying benefit.

- 3.12 The Get IT Together project, funded by BT and Leeds City Council and delivered by national charity Citizens Online, is open to anyone interested in learning more computers, technology and the internet. Project Coordinator Fahad Khan is working in partnership with Leeds City Council, community groups and schools and families in Leeds to ensure as many people as possible have the opportunity to take part in a programme of activities. The project aims to increase skills and confidence using computers and the internet. By helping to overcome barriers to learning it will strengthen community relations and help the region become more digitally included.
- 3.13 There is a need for further promotion of the Pinnacle People and Get IT Together projects and increase referrals to support in preparation for digital by default and the universal credit changes in October 2013.
- 3.14 Funding has been secured through the PCT, Inner East and Inner North East Area Committees to commission a local third sector organisation to deliver additional support to engage and support tenants (predominantly in the private sector), this will include providing drop in advice for tenants with concerns and queries about the changes and engage with vulnerable and hard to reach tenants.

#### **Data sharing:**

- 3.15 A data sharing agreement has now been developed between ENEHL and Children's Services to support the sharing of information and support residents who are effected by the under occupancy changes.
- 3.16 Information is being shared between Children's Services and Benefits to cross reference those effected by changes and the Families First client list so that additional support and joint visits may be carried out where possible.

#### **Digital Access:**

- 3.17 Meetings to review the mapping information and approaches by Jobs & Skills are planned so that where gaps in IT availability are identified consideration may be given to remedies.
- 3.18 The Get IT Together scheme is progressing well in the area with strong links having been developed with Jobs & Skills and the local housing associations, work to promote the scheme through community groups in the area is ongoing as the project is still relatively new.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 The strategy sets out proposals for preparing customers for the welfare reform and understanding the impacts at a local level. Delivery of the proposed actions will involve consultation with Area Committees, ward members and tenants groups.

4.1.2 Through the communications strategy for east north east residents will be provided with information through a variety of means at the most appropriate (and earliest) opportunity.

#### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

4.2.1 The strategy is aimed at identifying and supporting vulnerable groups and targeting help and support to ensure all groups can access Universal Credit and manage their personal responsibilities. Where policies are reviewed and revised, equality impact assessments may be required to ensure that the equality implications of any revisions are properly considered.

4.2.2 The communications plan for east north east will ensure that marginalised groups and language needs are met with advice and support. This will be met through links with groups and representatives in the local area.

#### **4.3 Council policies and City Priorities**

4.3.1 The strategy is aimed at supporting the Council's Priorities and will provide data and information relevant to the Priority Boards activities.

4.3.2 The ENE action Plan aims to deliver priorities highlighted with the Area Committee Business Plans.

#### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

4.4.1 City wide the delivery of the strategy will need to be supported by financial investment. The strategy will need to be supported by a programme manager and it is intended to meet this cost, and admin support costs, from within existing budgets. Elements of the strategy will carry cost implications. Where these cannot be met from existing budgets, it is intended to explore funding from DWP and DCLG under the new burdens arrangement.

4.4.2 Within the East North East wherever possible actions will be delivered through existing staffing resources and structures.

#### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

4.5.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

#### **4.6 Risk Management**

4.6.1 Welfare Reform is a corporate risk and the strategy is an important element in addressing the risks arising from the Welfare Reform programme

## **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1.1 The Welfare Reform programme changes the type of support provided to customers and the way that the support is provided. There are implications for both service providers and customers and a great deal of preparation is required to meet the challenges arising from the reform.
- 5.1.2 The strategy sets out an approach to ensuring that the extent of the impacts of the reform is understood and for ensuring that the appropriate support is put in place to enable customers to make the transition to a reformed welfare system. The strategy also sets out to ensure that the financial implications for the council and partners are understood and that appropriate plans are put in place to deal with these.
- 5.1.3 The ENE Project Team will provide a partnership approach to delivering actions to mitigate the impact for residents in the east north east of the Welfare Reform programme.

## **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1.1 Members are asked to note the content of this report and comment on the work ongoing to mitigate the impact in the east north east.

## **7 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- None
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