



Welfare Reform Sub-Committee

Minutes of a meeting held on Thursday 8 November 2012 at 3.00pm, Office of the Monitoring Officer, East Northamptonshire House, Thrapston

Present:

Councillors: Andy Mercer (Chairman)
 Glenvil Greenwood-Smith (Vice-Chairman)
 Richard Lewis

Officers: Lisa Hyde (LJH)
 Kelly Watson (KW)
 Lucy Hogston (LH)
 David Pope (DP)

1.0 MINUTES

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 28 August 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2.0 APOLOGIES

2.1 Councillors John Farrar, Steven North and Jeremy Taylor gave their apologies.

3.0 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no disclosures of interest.

4.0 SOCIAL FUND/CRISIS LOANS

4.1 Members considered a report which outlined changes to the Social Fund taking place from April 2013 as part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

4.2 The sub-committee heard that Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans would be abolished from April 2013, to be replaced by a local provision that would be administered by upper tier local authorities.

4.3 It was noted that the Government required local authorities to design schemes reflecting local needs and priorities. The existing national scheme had proved to be inefficient and had been open to fraud.

4.4 Members noted that a stakeholder session had taken place in September hosted by Northamptonshire County Council (NCC). It was further noted that ENC would be willing to help create contact and advice networks to support potential claimants.

4.5 Members were advised that NCC had intentions to introduce a cashless, voucher-based system to alleviate fraud and mispending. Assistance would be made with regard to utilities reconnection, provision of white goods and travel costs in

exceptional circumstances. The system would be grant-based with no loans available.

RESOLVED:

That the sub-committee

- 1) Endorse Northamptonshire County Council as the accountable body for the scheme.
- 2) Endorse the use of a voucher-based, cashless system
- 3) Agree to work with and support the local voluntary and community sector as facilitators and developers of potential schemes.

5.0 DCLG COUNCIL TAX SCHEME PROPOSALS - TRANSITION GRANT

5.1 The sub-committee were presented with a report by the Head of Customer and Community Services which sought to inform members of the recent announcement from the DCLG on a transition grant for Local Council Tax Support schemes.

5.2 Members were advised that on 16 October 2012 the DCLG announced a new £100 million transition grant the would be made available to billing and major precepting authorities who choose to design their Council Tax Support schemes with specific criteria. These criteria included local schemes that state

- Those that would be on 100% support under current Council tax benefit arrangements pay between zero and no more than 8.5% of their council tax liability;
- The taper rate does not increase above 25%; and there is no sharp reduction in support for those entering work - for claimants currently entitled to less than 100% support, the taper will be applied to an amount at least equal to their maximum eligible award.

5.3 Applications for grant funding would be available from 31 January 2013, with payments to be made in March 2013. It was suggested that this would be a one-off payment, with the exact figure available to ENC unclear at this stage.

5.4 At this stage, members stated an inclination not to take the transition grant, as it was only for one year, would not meet the funding gap created by the 10% loss of grant and could create a cliff edge in the scheme in future years.

RESOLVED:

That the sub-committee note the change made by DCLG for future reference when determining a final East Northamptonshire Local Council Tax Scheme at the next meeting of Welfare Reform on 11 December 2012.

6.0 PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENTS

6.1 The members received a report which sought to outline the changes to disability benefits that would occur from April 2013 as part of the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

- 6.2 It was noted that the current Disability Living Allowance (DLA) had been in place for over 20 years, remaining largely unchanged during that period. The total number of DLA claimants has risen from 2.5 million in 2003 to 3.3 million at present, with an estimated expenditure for 2012 standing at £13 billion.
- 6.3 Personal Independence Payments (PIP) was a new benefit that would be rolled out nationally from June 2013, with existing DLA claimants being migrated to the new benefit from October 2013.
- 6.4 Councillor Andy Mercer wished to know the impact of the change in regulations on disabled facilities adaptations. The Head of Service advised a response to the question would be supplied as an email appended to the minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the report be noted

7.0 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

- 7.1 Members received a verbal update from the Head of Customer and Community Services on the current status of the Council Tax Support Scheme.
- 7.2 Members noted that the consultation was live and would be running until 23 November 2012. It was further noted that up until 6 November 2012, 99 electronic responses had been received from consultees.
- 7.3 The sub-committee were advised that a stakeholder event had taken place, with positive feedback received from attendees regarding the working relationship with ENC.
- 7.4 An update of ENC's "Struggling to Pay Bills" leaflet would be undertaken to ensure that the list of organisations available to provide help and support was accurate.
- 7.5 SPIRE Homes had now become a member of the East Midlands Credit Union and could assist in providing basic bank accounts with Direct Debit facilities.
- 7.6 A letter had been received from the Royal British Legion which request continuance of the 100% disregard for those in receipt of War Disablement Pension, War Widows Pension or Armed Forces Compensation Scheme payments as outlined in the Armed Forces Covenant .

8.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.3

- 8.1 No questions had been received from members.