

Report to Housing Scrutiny Panel

Date of meeting: 22 January 2014

Portfolio: Housing – Cllr D. Stallan

**Subject: Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan
Quarterly Progress Report**

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Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (01992 56 4607)



Recommendations:

- (1) That the position with the latest Quarterly Progress Report on the Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan, as at 1st January 2014 be noted; and**
- (2) That no further progress reports be made to the Scrutiny Panel until such time as preparations need to be made for the Government's introduction of Universal Credit and Direct Payments.**

Background

1. As previously reported to the Scrutiny Panel, a Welfare Reform Mitigation Project Team was formed in September 2012, chaired by the Director of Housing and comprising officers from across the Housing Directorate and the Benefits Division, to consider and implement ways that the effects of the Government's Welfare Reforms could be minimised – or at least reduced.
2. The Project Team formulated a Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan, which was adopted by the Cabinet in October 2012. The Action Plan identified around 60 separate actions, with lead officers and target dates provided for each action, under 7 themes.
3. In addition to progress with the Action Plan being monitored at officer level by the Project Team, the Cabinet also asked the Housing Scrutiny Panel to monitor progress with the delivery of the Action Plan at its quarterly meetings, which it has done since January 2013.

Progress to date

4. As reported to the Scrutiny Panel at its last two meetings, and as expected, after a period of intense activity by the Project Team and individual officers, there has been very little further progress with the Action Plan over the last six months. This is because most of the remaining actions relate to issues on which the Government still needs to make decisions, or issues which the Government needs to implement – particularly the proposed introduction of Universal Credit and the direct payment of housing benefit to Council tenants.
5. For this reason, the latest Quarterly Progress Report (as at 1st January 2014), has again not been attached, since there is little difference from the Progress Report considered by the Scrutiny Panel in June 2013.
6. However, the table below gives the usual summary of the overall progress to date with the delivery of the Mitigation Action Plan, compared with the position reported to the Housing

Scrutiny Panel at its last meeting in October 2013.

Summary of Progress				
Progress	Position reported to Housing Scrutiny Panel – Oct 2013		Current Position	
	No.	%	No.	%
Achieved	38	64 %	41	70 %
Almost Achieved	0	-	0	-
Good progress made	3	5 %	1	2 %
Limited progress made	0	-	0	-
Actions not yet required	11	19 %	10	17 %
Actions no longer required	7	12 %	7	12 %
Totals	59		59	

7. As can be seen:

- A further 3 tasks have been achieved since the last report;
- 70% of all the tasks have been achieved; and
- Only 1 task that is able to be undertaken now, has not yet been achieved

8. The outstanding task relates to a longer-term ambition to work with the Council's Preferred Housing Association Partners to secure and provide private-rented housing as part of the non-affordable housing provision on new developments or through acquisition from the open market.

9. Although the Director of Housing has raised this issue with the Council's Preferred Partners, due to the long lead-in times for such projects, it will be some time until this task will be able to be achieved.

Future reporting arrangements

10. As explained above, most of the remaining actions relate to issues on which the Government still needs to make decisions or issues which the Government needs to implement – particularly the proposed introduction of Universal Credit and the direct payment of housing benefit to Council tenants. Therefore, there is little more the Council can do in terms of delivering the Action Plan, until the Government implements these proposed elements.

11. Consequently, the Officer Project Team has decided not to meet any more, until such time as the remaining actions can be undertaken. Similarly, it is suggested that no further progress reports be made to the Scrutiny Panel, until such time as preparations need to be made by the Council for the introduction of Universal Credit and Direct Payments, when quarterly reports would resume.