

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES AND TACKLING INEQUALITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	Agenda Item No. 9
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Report of the Head of Legal Services

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SCRUTINY IN A DAY: UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING THE IMPACTS OF WELFARE REFORM ON COMMUNITIES IN PETERBOROUGH

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report provides an update to all Scrutiny Committees and Commissions on the progress being made towards organising the Scrutiny in a Day event on 17th January 2014.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Scrutiny Members are asked to:
- review the progress being made, especially the plans for the day itself, and suggest other content that is relevant to their own Scrutiny Committee or Commission
 - suggest a small number of key themes relevant to their Scrutiny Committee or Commission that they would especially like to focus on during the combined Scrutiny event

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1 The welfare reform programme will present both opportunities and risks for many aspects of our work, and each of the priorities set out in the Sustainable Community Strategy could be impacted upon by these changes.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 All of the Council's Scrutiny Committees and Commissions, when they met during the summer, agreed to hold a Scrutiny in a Day combined scrutiny event focusing on the impacts of welfare reform on communities in Peterborough.
- 4.2 The 2012 Welfare Reform Act is making the biggest change to the welfare benefits system since the 1940's. These changes will have a direct impact for most benefit claimants, which for some will be significant. There may also be a number of indirect and unintended consequences, some negative (such as overcrowding) and some positive (such as greater innovation leading to new employment schemes).
- 4.3 Welfare Reform will have an impact in how the Council and its partners deliver support, advice and services to the public. The council will need to work even more closely with local partners across the public and civil society sectors and with businesses in delivering the changes that Welfare Reform brings. Key to the successful implementation of Welfare Reform will be ensuring that the council and local partners have an agreed strategy and understanding of the issues and how they can be addressed.

- 4.4 A working group has been formed comprising representatives from all Scrutiny Committees and Commissions to lead the development of the Scrutiny in a Day event. Members of this working group are Cllr Nick Arculus and Cllr Judy Fox (Sustainable Growth and Environment Capital), Cllr Sue Day and Al Kingsley – Co-opted Member (Creating Opportunities and Tackling Inequalities), Cllr Lisa Forbes and Cllr John Fox (Strong and Supportive Communities), Cllr David Over (Rural Communities), and Cllr Ann Sylvester (Health Issues).
- 4.5 The Council has also secured the advice of the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) to help ensure the event is a successful one. CfPS are the national experts in matters associated with good scrutiny and governance, and we have secured three days of free advice from one of their Expert Advisers, Brenda Cook.
- 4.6 The Scrutiny in a Day event will be organised using the principles of the CfPS Return on Investment Model. This is a tool developed by CfPS that provides focus for intensive scrutiny of a single issue, whilst at the same time enabling the Council to determine the impact of and return on its investment from the scrutiny process. For example, it is anticipated that the event in January will produce a range of ideas, proposals, recommendations and actions; the Return on Investment model will ensure that the outcomes associated with these are properly understood and assessed and any consequential savings, efficiencies and other returns can be calculated.

5. KEY ISSUES

- 5.1 The working group has developed a draft programme for the day, and this is attached at appendix 1. It is proposed that the day is organised in two halves – the morning sessions will be development sessions and therefore closed to the public and media, whilst much of the afternoon sessions will be held in public.
- 5.2 The working group has been keen to develop an interactive and participatory programme which combines learning and experiential opportunities, as well as opportunities to engage direct with those already affected by the reforms.
- 5.3 Ahead of the event, further information will be issued to all Scrutiny Members setting out evidence, data and other information that will help inform the day itself. It will be vital that Members receive this in a timely manner in order to provide ample opportunity to read and absorb it, and to ask any questions ahead of the day. This evidence and information will be used to define the focus of the scrutiny discussions throughout the day.
- 5.4 In addition, Members are also now asked to suggest key themes relevant to their Committee or Commission, or that are drawn from their own experiences of their work in wards, that can be part of the focus of the day. The welfare reform agenda is extremely wide ranging and its impacts are cross-cutting. The working group have therefore recommended that each Committee or Commission, during the afternoon sessions, focus on two or three key lines of enquiry to retain focus and to achieve the best possible outcomes.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Focussing on a single cross-cutting theme in this way will ensure that the council's response to the opportunities and challenges presented by welfare reform is completely joined-up and has the highest possible impact.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 The planning process for the Scrutiny in a Day event is being overseen by the working group described above. In addition, a number of key agencies from the wider public sector and the voluntary, community and faith sectors have also been consulted with a large number committing resource and time to the event. A small cross-departmental officer working group has also been formed to take any actions forward and to plan and implement the necessary detail.

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 The working group will continue to plan the event, and will also consider all of the combined evidence, information and data alongside suggestions for key themes made from this committee or commission meeting.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 9.1 None

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Appendix 1: Draft Programme

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