

SCRUTINY COMMISSION FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES	Agenda Item No. 4
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Report of the Joint Scrutiny Committee

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

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide the Commission with the overview report (attached at Appendix 1) detailing the outcomes from the Joint Scrutiny in a Day event held on 17 January 2014 which looked at understanding and managing the impacts of welfare reform on communities in Peterborough.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The recommendations from the Joint Scrutiny in a Day event are detailed in the attached report at Appendix 1.

3. LINKS TO THE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY

- 3.1 The issues of welfare reform and tackling poverty affect the entire Sustainable Community Strategy. The Strategy is developed to build a bigger and better Peterborough and it is essential that our communities are supported and given the right opportunities to help achieve this.

It is hoped that, by adopting some of the core principles of the Strategy, we can holistically address some of the risks and harness some of the opportunities identified during the Scrutiny in a Day event. These principles include:

- A focus on outcomes, not organisations
- Addressing the root cause of issues by adopting a preventative approach
- Doing things differently for less through innovation
- Ensuring we prioritise and maintain a clear focus

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 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 in housing) and some positive (such as greater innovation leading to new employment schemes).

Between 2012 and 2018, a number of important changes will come into effect on a range of welfare benefits such as housing benefit, council tax benefit, tax credits, disability living allowance and incapacity benefit amongst others. Welfare Reform will affect people both in and out of work.

The Act will also see the introduction of Universal Credit, which aims to simplify the current benefits system by bringing together a range of separate benefit payments into one single streamlined payment process.

Welfare Reform will have an impact on how the Council and its partners deliver support, advice and services to the public.

In July 2013 each Scrutiny Committee and Commission agreed to participate in a ground-breaking joint 'Scrutiny in a Day' event, entitled 'Understanding and Managing the Impacts of Welfare Reform on Communities in Peterborough', to develop an in-depth understanding of the issues and opportunities and to scrutinise responses on this cross-cutting agenda. The event, held on January 17th 2014, provided all Scrutiny Councillors and other participants with a chance to understand the Government's strategy on Welfare Reform, and how it affects Peterborough.

This report provides an overview of the event and its consequential outcomes.

5. KEY ISSUES

- 5.1 A series of key issues and recommendations for further debate and exploration by each Committee or Commission are set out in the attached report.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The attached report provides an overview of the outcomes from the event. It is likely that, as work is developed and actions taken forward following discussion at committee, there will be implications across the Council and within our partner organisations, but at this stage these implications are not known. As each recommendation and line of enquiry is taken forward, separate and more detailed reports will be presented to committee identifying these implications in more depth.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 None

8. NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 The attached report will be presented to each of the Council's five Scrutiny Committees and Commissions during March and April 2014. Members will be asked to discuss, debate, refine and finalise their key lines of enquiry and recommendations in order that they can be added to the relevant meeting schedules for the 2014/15 municipal year.

Officers will also continue to work with the Centre for Public Scrutiny to define and calculate the return on investment achieved as a result of this intensive scrutiny approach, and will support the CfPS who wish to produce a case study based on our experience of the event which can be shared nationally.

9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 9.1 None

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Appendix 1 - Scrutiny in a Day: Understanding and Managing the Impacts of Welfare Reform on Communities in Peterborough – Overview Report