

| Report of | Meeting | Date |
|-----------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Chief Executive | Overview and Scrutiny Performance Panel | 3 rd December 2015 |

PERFORMANCE FOCUS: WELFARE REFORMS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- To provide contextual information and initial questions for focus to the Overview and Scrutiny performance panel in respect of activity to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform changes.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

- That the context and questions be discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny performance panel, with a view to understanding performance.

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| Confidential report Please bold as appropriate | Yes | No |
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CORPORATE PRIORITIES

- This report relates to the following Strategic Objectives:

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| Involving residents in improving their local area and equality of access for all | | A strong local economy | |
| Clean, safe and healthy communities | | An ambitious council that does more to meet the needs of residents and the local area | ✓ |

BACKGROUND

- In its terms of reference, the overview and scrutiny performance panel agreed that at each meeting, as well as considering performance reports, the panel have the opportunity to focus in on any specific area of service delivery. For the December meeting the panel selected performance in relation to Welfare Reforms.
- This report provides contextual information and suggests some initial questions to initiate discussions. This will enable the panel and relevant officers and Members to prepare in advance of the meeting.

PERFORMANCE CONTEXT

Welfare Reform Action Plan

6. The Welfare Reform agenda aims to reform the welfare and pensions system to ensure that it pays to work while protecting the most vulnerable members of society. Reforms to date include:
 - Housing Benefit Spare Room subsidy reduction
 - Replacement of Council Tax benefit with local schemes
 - Introduction of the benefit cap to limit the amount that an individual can receive
 - Personal Independence payments to replace Disability Living Allowance
 - Roll out of Universal Credit as a single means tested benefit
7. The Welfare Reform action plan was established in November 2013 as the Council's main approach to managing activity locally and mitigating any potentially negative impact for residents. The action plan is delivered through the Welfare Reform Partnership which includes representatives from local Registered Providers, DWP and local employers.
8. The action plan identified four areas for focus:
 - Creating and Sustaining Affordable Homes;
 - Tackling Worklessness and Removing Barriers to Employment;
 - Promoting Social and Financial inclusion; and
 - Promoting Digital Inclusion.
9. The plan includes a range of activity to identify and target key groups, raise awareness of changes and implement a partnership approach to interventions. The detailed action plan is provided as an appendix to this report and shows all key actions as complete at the end of quarter 4 2014/15.

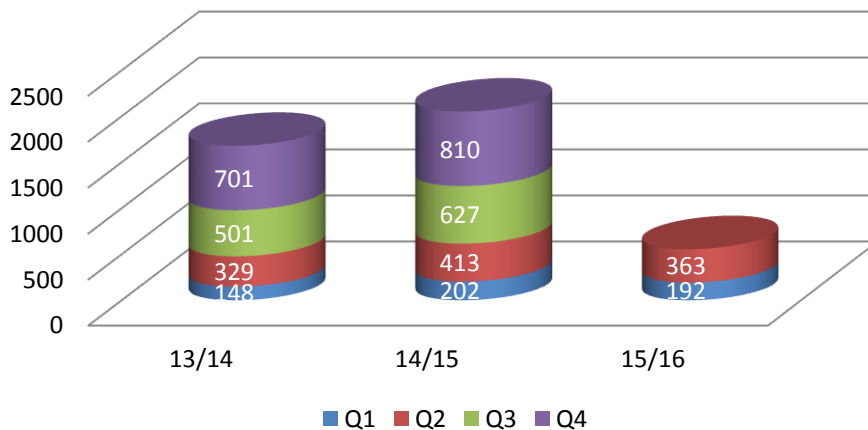
DWP delivery partnership agreement

10. One of the main elements of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 is the introduction of Universal Credit. Universal Credit is a new benefit for people of working age that is being introduced in stages between 2013 and 2017 across the UK. Universal Credit will replace housing benefit, income support, employment and support allowance, job seekers allowance and some tax credits. A single Universal Credit payment will be made to a household rather than an individual and it will be paid monthly in arrears. Claims for Universal Credit will be made on line and will be assessed by the DWP.
11. The roll-out of Universal Credit to the job centres in the North West commenced at the end of June 2014 and work to roll-out Universal Credit in Chorley's job centre commenced on 24th November 2014.
12. In response, the Council have established a Delivery Partnership Agreement (DPA) with the DWP to ensure that claimants of Universal Credit can readily obtain the support they need to access universal credit services. As part of the DPA, Chorley Council will provide a number of services for which they will be reimbursed by the DWP including: assisting DWP staff with complex housing issues; processing Council Tax Support claims; facilitating and promoting digital access; and providing additional budgeting support for individuals.

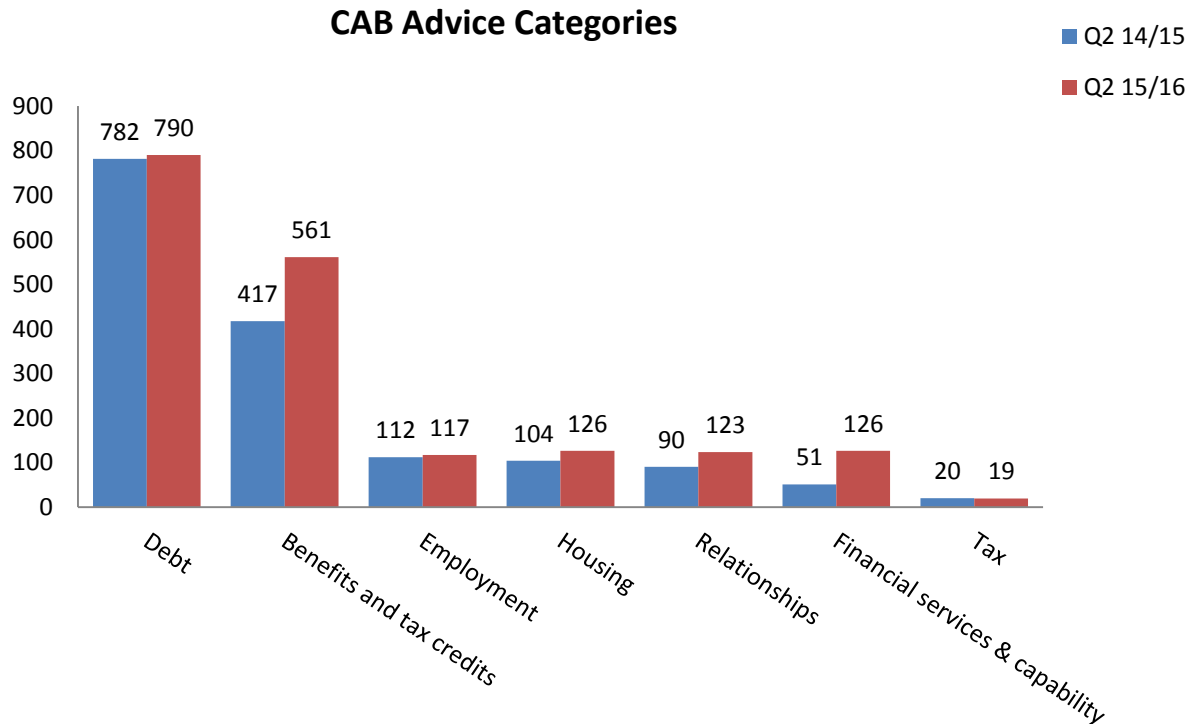
Performance Indicators

13. A number of corporate and local measures provide an indication of the impact of welfare reform activity with performance suggesting positive outcomes.
14. One of the key risks of reduced financial assistance for individuals and families is failure to meet rent or mortgage commitments resulting in homelessness. The chart below shows that the level of homelessness preventions and reliefs remains fairly consistent with a small increase in 2014/15 of 14.2% returning to lower levels at the start of 2015/16.

Homeslessness Preventions and Reliefs - Annual totals



15. The demand for advice services has increased since the introduction of Welfare Reform changes, particularly in relation to a number of specific categories captured by the CAB. Performance at quarter 2 shows an increase of 34.5% for advice on benefits and tax credits and a 147% increase in requests for support with financial services and capability in comparison to the same time last year.



QUESTIONS:

1. The report provides a summary of the Welfare Reform changes and related local activity.
 - What were the key objectives for Chorley with regard to welfare reforms and have they been met?
 - What do you consider to be the biggest challenges presented by welfare reforms for the organisations involved and how have these been addressed?
2. The Council's welfare reform action plan was successfully completed at the end of 2014/15.
 - What has the welfare reform partnership delivered so far in 2015/16 since the completion of the actions in the original plan?
3. A number of performance measures are identified in the report.
 - Are any other performance indicators in place to measure the impact of Welfare Reform changes and success of local interventions?
4. What are the future planned Welfare Reform changes and what will be the Council's approach to managing these changes?

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

16. This report has implications in the following areas and the relevant Directors' comments are included:

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| Finance | | Customer Services | |
| Human Resources | | Equality and Diversity | |
| Legal | | Integrated Impact Assessment required? | |
| No significant implications in this area | ✓ | Policy and Communications | |

COMMENTS OF THE STATUTORY FINANCE OFFICER

17. No comments

COMMENTS OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

18. No comments

GARY HALL
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

There are no background papers to this report.

| Report Author | Ext | Date | Doc ID |
|----------------------|------------|-------------|------------------------|
| Victoria Willett | 5248 | 17/11/2015 | Welfare Reform Context |

Welfare Reforms Operational Action Plan - December 13 to April 15

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| <p>Creating and sustaining affordable homes in Chorley</p> | <p>Local Support Framework and Universal Credit (UC) – Meet with neighbouring pilot authorities, Wigan and Tameside, to understand changes in working practises and the use of third sector organisations.</p> | <p>June 2014 Completed</p> |
| | <p>Welfare Reform Officer recruited and court desk advocacy in place including marketing of the service.</p> | <p>March 2014 Completed</p> |
| | <p>Under-occupancy tenants non engagement - Information request from registered providers. Work undertaken in conjunction with providers to reach tenants who are in arrears.</p> | <p>February 2014 Completed</p> |
| <p>Tackling worklessness and removing barriers to promote employment and training</p> | <p>Identify potential applicants for the Chorley Work programme and monitor success of the subsidy potential for employers.</p> | <p>September 2014 Completed</p> |
| | <p>Implement referral system for Employability Officer and promote the service with partners and throughout the borough.</p> | <p>February 2014 Completed</p> |
| | <p>Individual action plans delivered for each applicant referred.</p> | <p>January 2015 Completed</p> |
| | <p>Maintain monthly contact with DWP to discuss any changes and monitor the success of the project.</p> | <p>January 2015 Completed</p> |

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Promote Social and Financial Inclusion</p> | <p>Conduct advice day for all practitioners - voluntary and statutory within the Chorley Borough. To map all existing services, identifying specialist services, cross over and duplication.</p> <p>Advise and promote awareness of any changes in UC implementation. Work with all front line practitioners to prepare for UC– implementing a triage process to sign post to relevant supporting agencies – avoiding customer exclusion.</p> <p>Increase awareness of the major changes delivered by front line practitioners internally and externally. Concentrating on empowering residents to be self-reliant and seek advice and support to prevent crisis.</p> <p>Welfare Reform Local impacts – overview of good practise locally and nationally: Identify what we do well as a borough, what we can learn from others.</p> <p>Work with the Living Waters food bank to understand presenting issues of households in financial difficulty and experiencing crisis to understand the overriding issues of households seeking food parcels.</p> | <p>September 2014 Completed</p> <p>Autumn 2014 Completed</p> <p>January 2015 Completed</p> <p>January 2015 Completed</p> <p>March 2014 Completed</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Promote Digital Inclusion</p> | <p>Produce Digital Inclusion paper to supplement the Council Digital Strategy - detailing the enablement of individuals and disadvantaged groups to have access and the skills to use, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and are therefore able to participate and benefit from the Council's drive to digitally enhanced services.</p> <p>Work with Citizen Advice Bureau to identify digital champions in the voluntary sector.</p> <p>Work with the voluntary sector including Help the Homeless to gather intelligence to understand presenting issues, for example, no IT access or unable to use IT base systems, helping to inform future services.</p> | <p>July 2014 Completed</p> <p>April 2014 Completed</p> <p>September 2014 Completed</p> |

