



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE

LOCAL CONFERENCE ON WELFARE REFORM

HEAD OF AREA SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To present to Council Executive an outline proposal for the development and implementation of a local conference on the impact of the UK Coalition Government Welfare Reform Bill 2011.

B. RECOMMENDATION

For Council Executive to approve the outline proposal to enable officers to coordinate the event.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I Council Values	Promoting equality of opportunity; working in partnership; focusing on our customers needs.
II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	<p>Welfare Reform Bill 2011; Local Government Scotland Act 2003.</p> <p>Equality impact assessment on conference implementation to be facilitated following approval.</p>
III Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	<p>Costs for event coordination required, at present undefined. Costs will be managed within existing budgets. All efforts to ensure efficiency and minimise spend will be advanced within project management.</p> <p>Staffing resources from within Corporate Equality, Advice Shop and Revenue and Benefits.</p>
IV Consultations	Corporate Working Group on Equality; Advice Shop and Revenue and Benefits Management Teams. Proposal discussed and endorsed at P&R PDSP 13 May 2011.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

On 16 February 2011 the Welfare Reform Bill was introduced to the Westminster Parliament. The Bill legislates for the most significant change to the UK welfare system for over 60 years. It introduces a wide range of changes, the key elements of which are outlined below:

- The introduction of a system of Universal Credit to provide a single streamlined benefit;
- An amended approach to management of fraud reduction and error with stronger penalties for serious offences;
- The creation of a new “claimant commitment” outlining the expectations of claimants while within the benefit system;
- Replacement of Disability Living Allowance with a new Personal Independence Payment for people with disabilities;
- Significant amendment to entitlement and assessment for housing benefit;
- Reviewed management arrangements for the Social Fund system to provide more flexibility for local authorities;
- Change to Employment and Support Allowance with the intention of shifting resources to those identified as in greatest need; and
- Significant change of the child benefit system.

Each individual change outlined above is anticipated to impact significantly on thousands of West Lothian citizens. Under the council’s power to advance well-being, sections 20-22 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 and statutory guidance under section 21, it is proposed that the council host a public conference in order to provide citizens with information about how the changes are likely to impact.

As well as being open to all members of the public, with targeted marketing to those most likely to be affected by the changes, the event will be aimed at practitioners from across the community planning partnership in order to ensure that our employees and partners are fully informed about how these changes are likely to impact upon their work and priorities going forward.

Project managed by the council Equality Officer, it is proposed that the event be coordinated via collaboration between Corporate Equality, the Advice Shop and the Revenue and Benefits Team in order to ensure a diversity of perspectives have input to the design, facilitation and content of the event. The changes are likely to have direct impact on equality of opportunity in West Lothian across many sections of the community, with particular emphasis on disability and gender equality.

The specific practical details of the event have yet to be confirmed, and will be clarified following agreement of this outline proposal. However the key aims of the conference will be to:

- Act as an additional mechanism to raise awareness amongst the West Lothian community of the potential impact of the implementation of the Welfare Reform Bill;
- Raise awareness amongst council employees and community planning partners with regard to how the Bill will impact upon their work, and the communities that they serve;
- Provide an overview analysis of the cumulative impact of the measures contained within the Welfare Reform Bill, with a particular focus on the demographic situation within West Lothian;

- Focus specifically on provision of information regarding the impact of the changes within the equality protected characteristics of gender equality and disability (as a result of early evidence regarding specific equality groups most likely to be impacted by the proposals); and
- Act as an additional mechanism to engage employees, partners and the community within the development of the West Lothian Anti-Poverty Strategy.

In relation to timescale, the Bill is currently passing through the Parliamentary scrutiny process and it remains unclear when the Bill will become an Act. In addition, the range of changes are anticipated to be implemented on a phased basis. Officers propose that a conference hosted towards end September 2011 will provide sufficient time for both citizens and practitioners to consider the detail of the Bill and to act upon this information as appropriate.

Following agreement that the council will host the event, it is intended that community planning partners in West Lothian will be invited to participate as appropriate.

E. CONCLUSION

Council Executive is asked to approve the outline proposal to enable officers to coordinate a local conference on the impact of the UK Coalition Government Welfare Reform Bill 2011.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

UK Coalition Government Welfare Reform Bill 2011:
[Welfare Reform Bill 2011](#)

Appendices/Attachments: None.

Contact Person(s): Kenny Selbie, Equality Officer/ Alan Cunningham, Welfare Advice Manager

Email: kenny.selbie@westlothian.gov.uk/ alan.cunningham@westlothian.gov.uk

Tel: 01506 281072/ 775120

Alistair Shaw
 Head of Area Services

14 June 2011