

16. LOCAL CONFERENCE ON WELFARE REFORM

The Council Executive considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Area Services which provided details of an outline proposal for the development and implementation of a local conference on the impact of the UK Coalition Government Welfare Reform Bill 2011.

The report advised that the Welfare Reform Bill was introduced to Westminster Parliament on 16th February 2011. The Bill included a wide range of changes to the UK welfare system for over 60 years, the key elements of which were:

- 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.

It was noted that each individual change outlined would have a significant impact on thousands of West Lothian citizens. It was proposed that the council would host a public conference in order to provide citizens with information about how the changes would affect them. The event would also be aimed at practitioners from across the community planning partnership in order to ensure that employees and partners were fully informed about how these changes would impact upon their work and priorities going forward.

Officers proposed that a conference hosted towards the end of September 2011 would provide sufficient time for both citizens and practitioners to consider the detail of the Bill and to act upon the information as appropriate.

It was recommended that the Council Executive approve the hosting of a conference on Welfare Reform.

DATA LABEL: Public

Decision

To approve the terms of the report.