

**CORPORATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 4 DECEMBER 2014**

BRIEFING NOTE PREPARED BY THE TRANSFORMATION MANAGER

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider a way forward following a request from Council to establish an agenda item entitled 'Welfare Reform Report.'

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That a Members' Update article is produced, not less than twice a year, on Welfare Reform with a focus on Universal Credit.
- 2.2 That an all Member presentation on the impact of Welfare Reform/Universal Credit within West Lancashire be arranged and delivered by the Director of Revenues and Benefits, BT Lancashire Service with input and attendance by a representative from the Department of Works & Pensions (DWP), early in the New Year.

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 As set down in Minute 43 of Council (15 October 2014) the Committee has been asked to establish a standing agenda item entitled 'Welfare Reform Report'.
- 3.2 However, following the meeting of Council, the Member Briefing on 23 October and consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, I am proposing an alternative approach for consideration which may prove more valuable for Members' information and understanding of the topic.
- 3.3 The Member Briefing that took place on Welfare Reform/Universal Credit in October 2014 highlighted that Members have a wide range of concerns around the potential/direct impact of Welfare Reform on their constituents and this alternative may be more beneficial.
- 3.4 A Members' Update will provide an opportunity for all Councillors to be updated on matters in respect of Welfare Reform with a focus on Universal Credit and provide an established route to allow the item to be placed on the Corporate and Environmental Overview and Scrutiny Committee agenda, should there be specific concerns.
- 3.5 The data will be principally taken from LG Inform (a web-based tool managed by the LGA which provides up-to-date published data about the performance of the council including a wide range of local and national Welfare Reform data and allows

comparison with other authorities) and will be supplemented by West Lancs data around rent arrears thus providing all Members with information around Welfare Reform, together with a comparison of impacts against other districts.

- 3.6 A further presentation to all Members including representation from DWP will enable Members to obtain a more rounded view of the position as Universal Credit is rolled out, as well as being able to ask external colleagues directly about process; the impact on customers; together with any other wide-ranging questions they are likely to have.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The recommendations as to the approach going forward are detailed at 2.1 and 2.2 above. If the Committee's view is to establish a standing agenda item then the scope and process will be as agreed at Council on 15 October, as set down at page 202 of the Committee's papers.