

Policy Review Committee

Venue: Committee Room

Date: Tuesday 13 June 2017

Time: 5.00pm

Present: Councillors J Deans (Chair), M Hobson, K Arthur, J Cattanach, M McCartney, Mrs J Shaw-Wright.

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Hutchinson.

Officers Present: Tammy Fox, Benefits and Debt Team Leader, Drew Fussey, Customer, Business and Revenues Services Manager, Janine Jenkinson - Democratic Services Officer.

1. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. TIMING OF MEETINGS

The Committee considered the start time for meetings for the forthcoming municipal year.

RESOLVED:

To agree that the meetings of the Policy Review Committee would commence at 5pm for the forthcoming Municipal Year.

3. MINUTES

The Committee considered the minutes of the meeting held on 18 April 2017.

RESOLVED:

To approve the minutes of the Policy Review Committee held on 18 April 2017, for signature by the Chair.

4. CHAIR'S ADDRESS

The Chair welcomed Councillor M McCartney to her first meeting of the Policy Review Committee.

5. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

The Customer, Business and Revenues Services Manager introduced the report and explained that the report provided a review of the impact of the Welfare Reform changes in Selby District and highlighted future developments.

The report provided members with a summary of each section of the report. It was noted that forty households in Selby District were currently affected by the Benefit Cap, and this had increased from nine households in May 2016.

With regard to Universal Credit (UC), members were informed that UC had been rolled-out on a trial basis in the Selby area from November 2015 for single, working age claimants who would otherwise have made a claim for Jobseekers Allowance. The Customer, Business and Revenues Services Manager reported that neighbouring authorities including Harrogate, Ryedale, Richmondshire, Craven and Hambleton were now live with the UC full service. Selby was due to go live with complete UC full service in February 2018. York City Council was due to go live with UC full service in July 2017. Selby had some postcodes that fell under the York Jobs Centre area and therefore these postcodes were planned to go live in July 2017. Members were informed that the proposed date had now been revised by the DWP and would go live on 13 September 2017.

Feedback from other North Yorkshire authorities who were fully UC service had indicated that there had been a large volume of changes coming through for UC claimants and this had caused a strain on the benefits service as each one had to be recalculated for Council Tax Support purposes. HUGE Task for staff – undertake.

Members were informed that the Lead Officer and Supervisors were preparing for UC rollout, to ensure that were in regular contact with the DWP and other North Yorkshire authorities were rollout had taken place.

In response to a query regarding the number of tenants in arrears, the Customer, Business and Revenues Services Manager advised that although he did not currently have figures to hand, these could be circulated to the Committee.

In response to a query regarding the UC application process, the Taxation, Benefits and Debt Team Leader advised that all applications had to be made on-line. Members were advised that support and assistance could be accessed at the Contact Centre.

The Committee was advised that the number of people affected by the Spare Room Deduction showed a reduction to the position in May 2016. The Taxation, Benefits and Debt Team Leader advised that it was difficult to state how many people had moved as a direct result of Welfare Reform and although it may have been a contributing factor, it was not necessarily the sole factor and the Council had worked with those residents wishing to move to a smaller property, so they were no longer subject to the Spare Room Deduction.

The Customer, Business and Revenues Services Manager reported that the reduced welfare spending on DWP and HMRC benefits will potentially see an increased award of Council Tax Support reducing Council Tax income and affecting the Council Tax Base. The new changes being introduced from April 16 to April 18 would see potentially large numbers of households being affected by multiple changes.

In response to a query regarding how people in need are identified, the Customer, Business and Revenues Services Manager advised that the Council's Neighbourhood Officers worked to support tenants and when required Neighbourhood Officers visited tenants to help them with their welfare reform queries and offer advice. In addition, if necessary claimants were signposted to Citizen's Advice Bureau and other voluntary sector partners, if claimants required budgeting assistance due to the benefit cap.

The Chair thanked the Lead Officer (Benefits and Taxation) for a comprehensive report.

RESOLVED:

- I. **To note the report.**
- II. **To ask the Taxation, Benefits and Debt Team Leader to provide an update report to the Policy Review Committee in 12 months time.**

6. POLICY REVIEW WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

The Committee considered the items for inclusion on the Committee Work Programme 2017/18.

The Democratic Services Officer circulated a copy of a revised document that included additional items.

RESOLVED:

To agree the revised Policy Review Work Programme, as circulated at the meeting, attached as Appendix A to these minutes.

The meeting closed at 5.45 p.m.