



# Scrutiny Board

27 January 2015

<b>Report title</b>	Welfare Reform Communications Progress Report	
<b>Cabinet member with lead responsibility</b>	Councillor Paul Sweet Governance and Performance	
<b>Wards affected</b>	All	
<b>Accountable director</b>	Keith Ireland, Managing Director	
<b>Originating service</b>	Delivery	
<b>Accountable employee(s)</b>	Ian Fegan	Head of Communications
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<b>Report to be/has been considered by</b>		

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## Recommendations

The Scrutiny Board is requested to note the report and offer comments.

## **1.0 Purpose**

- 1.1 The purpose of this cover report is to provide an account of progress on the implementation of recommendations resulting from the Welfare Reform – Communications’ Scrutiny Review undertaken in 2012-13, and seek sign off of the review.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 has introduced major changes to the benefits system, particularly for people of working age. It was enacted in March 2012, although implementation of the reforms specified in the Act did not start until April 2013.
- 2.2 A welfare reform programme was established to address the implementation and impact of welfare reform. Its programme brief was deliver the Council’s legal obligations under the Welfare Reform Act, to promote resilient households and communities in Wolverhampton in response to welfare reform changes and to ensure that the impact upon individuals, Council services and other providers was identified and managed.

## **3.0 Update on Progress – marketing communications**

- 3.1 The welfare reform programme had a communications strategy and plan that underpinned the programme projects. A budget of £15,000 was allocated to the communications plan. This budget was fully utilised.
- 3.2 The communications strategy set four objectives. These were to explain:
- what the key welfare reform measures were
  - when they would come into effect
  - what their actual or likely impact would be
  - what individuals could do to mitigate this

These communications objectives were common to all audiences, including employees of the Council and its partner organisations. However, the messaging differed in that communications targeted at benefit recipients emphasised action (what to do, where to call), while those intended for professionals encouraged preparation of appropriate responses.

- 3.3 Here is a summary of the work carried out under the communications action plan:
- A central point of reference was established by updating the welfare reform page on the Council’s website (<http://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/welfarereform>). This provided contacts for the welfare reform and benefits helpline, a list of important dates and downloadable documents for both the general public and professional advisers.

- Arrangements were made for a 'Benefits Bus' to visit various locations around the city carrying professionals to offer help and advice, plus a 'pop-up' advice shop in the city centre. The latter opened on Friday 30 August 2013
- The Benefits Bus and the pop-up shop were promoted through a leaflet distributed by Local Neighbourhood Partnerships (LNPs) and Wolverhampton Homes. A two-week radio advertising campaign promoting the Benefits Bus was also commissioned from Free Radio, beginning on 12 August. In the first week a general promotional message was carried, while the second week featured daily updates on the bus's location.
- New promotional literature was also commissioned, including a general information leaflet explaining the benefits changes; a leaflet identifying locations where internet access is provided free-of-charge; and a guide and application form for the local discretionary grants scheme. The literature was distributed through third sector partners, LNPs, GPs' surgeries, libraries, the Benefits Bus and the pop-up shop.
- Promotion of the welfare reform and benefits helpline for 12 months was guaranteed through using the patient information screens in local hospitals and health centres.
- Pocket guides were produced for frontline service providers, professionals and Councillors containing signposting information and a fast-track telephone number. A guide for local residents outlining the key changes and their implementation dates was also created.
- The Corporate Communications Team made extensive use of social media:
  - Daily promotions were carried on the Wolverhampton Today Facebook page.
  - @wolvescouncil made daily tweets
  - A Youtube video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i975pn0Pahc&feature=c4-overview&list=UUKp66DY9XI5yk4socqPYEog>) promoting the Welfare Reform and Benefits Helpline and the Benefits Bus was also made in-house.

#### **4.0 Financial implications**

- 4.1 The £15,000 communications strategy was funded from an existing marketing budget within the Delivery directorate.

GE/20012015/C

#### **5.0 Legal implications**

- 5.1 Whilst there are legal issues involving the delivery options in respect of the Welfare Reform legislation, there are no legal implications arising from this report.

RB/08012015/Q.

## **6.0 Equalities implications**

6.1 The original work was supported by an Equality Analysis and as this report is an update for noting, there are no further equality implications..

## **7.0 Environmental implications**

7.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

## **8.0 Human resources implications**

8.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

## **9.0 Corporate landlord implications**

9.1 There are no corporate landlord implications arising from this report.

## **10.0 Schedule of background papers**

10.1 There are no background papers to this report.