



RESOURCES SCRUTINY AND PERFORMANCE PANEL

DATE: 16 December 2004

Agenda
Item No.

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF WELFARE BENEFITS

Ward(s) All

Portfolio: Councillor J G O'Hare - Deputy Leader

Service: Finance

Summary of report:

This report details the resolutions of Cabinet on 1st December 2004 following the report of the resources Scrutiny Panel.

Background papers:

Independent Review of Welfare Benefits report to resources and performance management scrutiny and performance panel 7 October 2004.

Report to Resources Scrutiny Panel 4 November 2004

Report to Cabinet 1 December 2004

Reason for Scrutiny

After considering a report on the independent review of welfare benefits on the 7 October, the panel made formal recommendations to cabinet at its last meeting on 4 November. The cabinet has now considered the conclusions of the panel and members may wish to consider next steps.

Signed:

Executive Director: Carole Evans

Date: 8 December 2004

Resource and legal considerations:

The medium term financial plan assumes savings of £250,000 on 2006/7 from within the wider welfare benefits and fairer charging functions. These are currently 'in scope' for the Putting the Citizen First project and the potential strategic partners will be expected to deliver these savings from a range of efficiency, productivity and customer service improvements.

Citizen impact

Implementation of the recommendations will produce a more joined up seamless and proactive service, offering effective targeting of support and advice to our citizens.

Environment impact

Reduction in the use of paper and transportation through use of digital technology and the development of joint visits and generic working methods.

Performance management

Implementation will improve performance against national targets on speed and accuracy of processing (BVPI 78 & BVPI 79): customer satisfaction (BVPI 81): and welfare benefits maximisation for joint team working (BVPI 31)

It will ensure the commitment to and delivery of an agreed anti poverty strategy to meet quality of life outcomes as part of the proposed criteria for the revised comprehensive performance assessment.

Contact Officers

Andy Burns – Assistant Director of Finance
01922 653554
burnsa@walsall.gov.uk

Elizabeth Kennedy – Head of Revenues and Benefits
01922 658004
kennedaye@walsall.gov.uk

1. RESOURCES SCRUTINY PANEL DECISION

1.1 At the meeting of the panel on 4 November it was resolved that

The panel, having considered the report on the independent review of welfare benefits, request the Cabinet be advised as follows:

a.

(i) That it supports the need for an anti-poverty strategy as this links into the following priorities of the Council's vision for 2008:

- (5) make Walsall a healthy and caring place
- (7) make it easier to access local services
- (8) strengthen the local economy
- (10) transform Walsall into an excellent Council

(ii) That it supports the continuation of the placement of the anti-poverty Unit within the Council's welfare benefits service structure beyond 31 March 2005

b. That cabinet having considered a (i) and (ii) above, be requested to approve on-going mainstream funding for 7 permanent staff within the anti – poverty unit at an annual cost of £227,000 from the financial year 2005/2006 onwards, as this would

- Maintain an appropriate balance between mainstream and external funding
- Contribute to meeting the council's priorities
- Improve staff morale

2. CABINET DECISION 1 DECEMBER 2004

2.1 At the meeting of cabinet on 1st December 2004 the report from the Resources Scrutiny and Performance Panel was considered. It was resolved that:

a. The valuable work of the Resources and Performance Scrutiny and Performance Panel in respect of its scrutiny of the report arising from the recent independent review of welfare benefits be noted.

b. That the Cabinet supports in principle a corporate, borough-wide and comprehensive approach to alleviating poverty within the Borough, and requests that officers bring forward a draft anti-poverty strategy document to a future meeting.

c. That the Cabinet notes the views of the scrutiny panel in respect of funding levels, sources and budgets in respect of the team working to maximise welfare rights, and advises that this will be considered as an integral part of the work towards setting the 2005/6 medium term revenue budget

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

2.1 It is recommended that

- a. The resolution of cabinet be considered.