

BRIEFING NOTE

TO: Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel

DATE: 21 July 2009

RE: Welfare Advice Working Group

The Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel previously resolved to establish a working group to look holistically at the provision of welfare advice across the borough from the statutory, community and voluntary sectors. Due to the cross cutting nature of this work they also resolved to invite members from the Regeneration, Community Services, and Social Care and Inclusion Scrutiny and Performance Panels all of whom agreed and appointed a representative to the group.

The Welfare Advice Working Group held its first meeting on Wednesday 8 July 2009 at which it drafted a terms of reference scoping out its proposed work. A copy of this document is attached, as the lead Panel for the working group the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel are required to approve this terms of reference. A copy of this draft has also been circulated to members of the working group to confirm it is in line with what they agreed at the meeting; any further feedback will be verbally updated at the Panel meeting.

Recommendations

That, subject to any comments Members may wish to make, the terms of reference for the Welfare Advice Working Group are agreed.

Author

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Walsall Council Scrutiny and Performance Panel Work Group
Initiation Document

Work Group Name:	Welfare Advice
Panel:	Corporate, Community Services and Regeneration Scrutiny and Performance Panels
Municipal Year:	2009/10
Lead Member:	Councillor J. Rochelle
Lead Officer:	Julie Gethin
Support Officer:	Ian Jones – Welfare Advice Manager Louise Powell – Economic Development Manager Craig Goodall – Acting Principal Scrutiny Officer
Councillor Membership:	Councillor J. Rochelle Councillor D. Turner Councillor T. Oliver Councillor D. Shires Councillor D. Pitt Councillor L. Harrison
Co-opted Membership:	TBC – Department for Work and Pensions TBC – Walsall Voluntary Action

1.	Context
	<p>It is anticipated that in the current economic downturn there will be an upsurge in demand for welfare advice and the provision of this advice can play a valuable role in supporting vulnerable citizens in Walsall as well as helping stimulate the local economy.</p> <p>Whilst the Corporate Panel have previously taken an interest in the work of the Council's own welfare rights service and of a possible amalgamation with the fairer charging team, February's full Council meeting resulted in a referral to look at the level of funding given to the Citizens advice bureau. With this in mind, and in the knowledge that there are also other organisations in the borough providing similar advice it was recommended that a holistic review of welfare advice provision within the borough was undertaken, incorporating the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.</p>
2.	Objectives
	<p>Improve welfare advice provision by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify the types and level of support with welfare advice currently provided in the borough and how these are funded; 2. identify the types and level of support with welfare advice needed in the borough and how they can be funded; 3. scrutinise current formal and ad hoc partnership working arrangements in place for welfare advice; 4. Understand how residents are signposted to welfare advice; 5. Improve Member understanding of how claims are made including reviewing claim forms; 6. investigate use of working neighbourhoods fund;

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	<p>7. investigate the scope for shared services;</p> <p>8. develop recommendations for the report to Council on required funding levels and partnership working arrangements.</p>
3.	Scope
	Provision of welfare advice by the statutory, community and voluntary sectors. Wider issues such as worklessness or incapacity should be considered only as to their implications on the requirements for welfare advice.
6.	Equalities Implications
	<p>The take-up of welfare advice services by different groups from different organisations will need to be considered.</p> <p>If statistics reveal any higher or lower than expected levels of take up from any particular group (eg ethnic, religious, disability, age, gender or sexual orientation) then further investigations as to the reasons why should be undertaken.</p>
4.	Who else will you want to take part?
	<p>Welfare Rights Service</p> <p>Citizens Advice Bureau</p> <p>Fairer Charging Team</p> <p>Economic Development Team</p> <p>Department for Work and Pensions including Jobcentre Plus and Pensions Service</p> <p>Walsall Voluntary Action</p> <p>Walsall Partnership</p> <p>Disability Groups</p> <p>Primary Care Trust</p>
5.	Timescales & Reporting Schedule
	In order to feed into the budget and resource planning process for 2010/11 the working group will report to the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance on 12 November 2009.
6.	Risk factors
	<p>Lack of engagement from the voluntary and community sector</p> <p>Detrimental Impact of Service Level Agreements</p> <p>Not completing investigations before 12 November 2009</p>

Date Agreed:		Date Updated:	
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Timetable:

July	Map existing welfare advice provision
August	Review existing welfare provision and hold first witness

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	interviews
September	Complete further witness interviews
October	Review evidence, formulate recommendations and draft final report
November	Report to Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel