

Welfare Reform Update

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This report updates Members on the latest welfare reform developments, on issues including: the Universal Credit Local Support Services Update and Trialling Plan; the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS); Local Welfare Support; the Work and Pensions Select Committee; and an LGA conference on Welfare Reform on 12 December.

Recommendation

That the Finance Pane note progress and offer any further steer on the issues covered.

Action

Officers to take forward in line with Members' direction.

Contact officer: Paul Raynes
Position: Head of Programmes
Phone no: 020 7664 3037
Email: paul.raynes@local.gov.uk

Welfare Reform Update

Universal Credit Local Support Services Update and Trialling Plan

1. The latest iteration of the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP) Local Support Services Framework (LSSF) is almost complete. Thanks to all Finance Panel members who provided comments and sign-off on the draft. The LGA will continue to lobby for core long-term role for local government in commissioning and / or delivering these services in partnership with Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and other local providers. The trialling dimension of the latest update gives welcome scope for local partners to develop and demonstrate the value of locally tailored support for claimants.

Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

2. Following Sir Merrick Cockell's meeting with Lord Freud on 14 October, the LGA and DWP have been working in partnership to develop further the options appraisal of the potential delivery options for SFIS. This was in response to our central concern that the local partnership approach had not been part of the options appraisal, which recommended a single organisation as the way forward. This work will help us to develop a shared understanding of what the evidence says about the options for the future model. Political conversations are continuing apace and officers will update Members at the Panel.
3. The LGA has also responded to the Audit Commission's report on local fraud, which found that £178 million of fraud was detected by local government in the last year, by highlighting councils' good work. Our response also said that we were concerned councils' ability to tackle non-benefit fraud could be compromised if government plans to transfer fraud staff to a proposed national benefits fraud agency are realised.

Local Welfare Support

4. The LGA hosted a successful round table on the design and delivery of local welfare schemes at Smith Square on the 7 November. Policy and Finance colleagues are now working with attendees to develop a proposed position on future funding and delivery to put to Finance Panel members for further discussion and agreement.

Select Committees

5. On 16 October Cllr Sharon Taylor gave oral evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee hearing on welfare reform and Jobcentre Plus. The session was an opportunity to highlight the need for sustained employment outcomes, the benefits of a partnership approach, and the role of councils in bringing agencies together with a local understanding of the clients' support needs and the labour market. Cllr Taylor also emphasised the need for Jobcentre Plus to extend good practice on partnership working so it is more consistent across the country, and how improved data sharing will help to support clients.
6. The LGA has submitted written evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry into housing costs in the reformed welfare system. We said that councils are best placed to bring the partners together who have an understanding of the local area,

existing relationships with individuals and families, and an established track record of working together to meet complex or multiple needs. However, to make the scale of savings projected by Government, and avoid the risk that those savings are transferred to councils in arrears and increased homelessness, we need real changes to funding for affordable, appropriately sized housing and local commissioning and delivery of support for skills, work readiness and employment.

7. The date for the oral evidence session, at which the LGA will be represented by Cllr Taylor, has now been confirmed as 18 December.

12 December Conference – Welfare Reform – local impacts and implementation

8. The LGA is hosting a welfare reform impact and implementation conference on the 12 December. Cllr Sharon Taylor has kindly agreed to be involved in. Lord Freud has been confirmed as keynote speaker and we have agreed with DWP that they will use the conference as a platform to launch the revised Local Support Services Framework and to give local government an update on the roll-out of Universal Credit.