



Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee
30 January 2014

Executive Summary to the Interim Report of the Welfare Reform Task Group

This is an executive summary of the key concerns of the Welfare Reform Task Group, which they have identified so far in their investigation of the impacts of welfare reform in Surrey. Further information about these and other concerns is contained in the attached interim report and annexes.

1. Low income working families and the disabled: Evidence gathered by the Task Group has highlighted a number of different groups in Surrey who are being significantly affected by the reforms. Of these groups, the Task Group is particularly concerned about low-income working families who are harder to reach because they tend not to have any/regular contact with support services. They are also particularly concerned about disabled people and those with mental health issues, a vulnerable group who are having to understand and respond to a major shake-up of their support system.

2. Employment and Support Allowance (ESA): Following the introduction of a work capability assessment for ESA, there has been a high number of decisions overturned at appeal. Under the new system, DWP must re-consider disputed decisions before an appeal can be lodged. During this indeterminate re-consideration stage claimants do not receive ESA. The Task Group are concerned about the ESA process and intend to investigate this issue further.

3. The Local Assistance Scheme (LAS): The Task Group is concerned about the differential take-up across Surrey of the County Council's emergency support (the LAS) and the low take up of this fund to date. The Task Group intend to meet with Shared Services who are responsible for this scheme, to discuss their concerns.

Budget recommendation: Any LAS funding left unallocated at the end of 2013/14 is rolled over into 2014/15 and continues to be committed to supporting severely affected residents to manage the impact of welfare reform changes. The Task Group will present proposals for allocating this funding in their final report in April 2014, but would recommend that a proportion of it is targeted towards early intervention support, particularly aimed at improving money management skills and general financial awareness.

4. Universal Credit (UC) money management support and digital inclusion: Surrey is unlikely to see the direct impacts of Universal Credit for some time as the implementation for new claims has been delayed until at least April 2016. Councils are being encouraged to use this intervening period to work with partners to establish what support services will be required and how they can be delivered. The Task Group is concerned about the level of support which will be required to ensure digital inclusion and assist claimants with their new money management responsibilities.

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