

Question to Overview and Budget Scrutiny Committee – 16 November 2017

Question received from Councillor Jonathan Essex:

“The Council Overview Board set up a Welfare Reform Task Group in 2014 to look at and consider changes in welfare and benefits, and effect upon Surrey residents at that time.

Given the challenges around the introduction of Universal Credit and the effect its implementation may have on vulnerable Surrey residents, what evidence does the County Council intend to gather on the introduction of Universal Credit and its effects in Surrey, including pressures on County Council budgets?”

Response

The Member Welfare Reform Task Group highlighted the important work done by the Council and partners to ensure a coordinated response to the Government’s welfare reforms, and their potential impact on residents, across Surrey. The Task Group produced its final report and recommendations to Cabinet in April 2014, with the Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee (and its successor the Council Overview Board) deciding to monitor the impacts of the reforms regularly until April 2016, when Members then agreed that the group should be deactivated.

Officer work on welfare reform in Surrey is coordinated by a Welfare Coordination Group comprising representatives from the County, Districts & Boroughs, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Surrey Citizens Advice Bureaux and housing associations.

The Group – which reports periodically to Surrey Chief Executives - shares information and good practice, considers gaps in service provision across Surrey, and is reviewing preparations for the full introduction of Universal Credit in Surrey from July 2018. This includes:

- working with the DWP and Jobcentre Plus to understand their timetable and plans for rollout;
- how partners can best support residents for the further extension of Universal Credit, drawing on experiences of other areas where it has already been implemented; and
- the experience of implementing the first stage of Universal Credit in Surrey in 2015/16 (for new claimants, who were single, unemployed and without children).

The Group will continue to consider the impact of Universal Credit – and any changes to national policy or the timetable for rollout – on residents and the

services and support that partners provide to them. For County Council officers, these considerations form part of normal service planning.

Kay Hammond

Chairman – Overview and Budget Scrutiny Committee