

## **EX20. TOWARDS A FAIRER FALKIRK – UPDATE REPORT**

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services providing an update on work being undertaken to tackle poverty and to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform.

The report set out the background to Welfare Reform and highlighted key changes to the welfare system as a consequence of the programme. This included the introduction of Universal Credit, the introduction of housing benefit size criteria restrictions and the creation of a single fraud investigation service within the Department for Work and Pensions. The impact of the changes was set out together with actions taken by Falkirk Council to provide support to its citizens. Two sources of funding were available to citizens to mitigate against the impacts of Welfare Reform - the Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). The Scottish Welfare Fund is delivered through local authorities to support those citizens affected by Welfare Reform. DHP is a discretionary scheme administered by the Council on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions, augmented by funding from the Scottish Government, to provide extra money to those who need financial help to meet a shortfall in their rent.

The funding arrangements for both funds were summarised together with details on the allocation of each fund in 2013/14. Clarity was currently being sought from the Department of Work and Pensions and the Scottish Ministers in regard to DHP, to allow the Council to mitigate the impact of size criteria restrictions.

A third fund, the Fairer Falkirk Fund, had been established by Council to support projects aimed at tackling poverty. The report provided an update on the various projects and set out a proposed allocation of funds from the Fairer Falkirk budget for 2014/15.

### **Decision**

**The Executive agreed:-**

- (1) to note the update provided in the report of what the Council is doing to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform on people and services;**
- (2) to confirm its continued support with regard to the statement on non-eviction for tenants affected by under occupancy restrictions as described in section 3.3 of the report;**
- (3) the approach suggested at paragraph 6.8 of the report with regard to those affected by the establishment of the Single Fraud Investigation Service;**
- (4) to note the imminent decisions expected from the Scottish Government/ Department of Work and Pensions that are needed to enable the Council to utilise the Discretionary Housing Payment budget and to implement a scheme, as appropriate, for the mitigation of size criteria for 2014/15;**
- (5) the use of the Fairer Falkirk Fund as described in section 7 of the report, and**

- (6) that officers will report back to the Executive later this year following a review of the Council's poverty strategy and its current focus.