

EX13. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services on Welfare Reform changes and the work being undertaken to support those affected by the changes.

The report provided the background to and implications of:-

- the introduction of Universal Credit in May 2015 in the Falkirk Council area;
- funding for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP); and
- the roll out of Personal Independence Payments in the FK postcode area from 30 March 2015.

In regard to size criteria mitigation for 2014/15, the DWP and the Scottish Government provided £1,213,695 to Falkirk Council. However, in 2014/15 £1,335,274 was committed. The Council will apply for further funding in May 2015 for reimbursement of the additional costs (£121,579.32).

In 2015/16 Falkirk Council will receive £1,184,794. As in 2014/15 Council will commit more than the allocated budget and will be able to seek reimbursement in May 2016.

It was proposed that the DHP policy in non-size criteria cases is reviewed in light of a successful appeal in England against the inclusion of disability related benefits in the assessment of income.

Councillor C Martin, seconded by Councillor G Goldie, moved that Executive agrees:-

- (1) to enter into a Delivery Partnership Agreement with the Department of Work and Pensions in support of the roll out of Universal Credit;
- (2) to a Member specific awareness session on Universal Credit; and
- (3) that the Discretionary Housing Payments policy should be reviewed as a consequence of Disability Benefits not being included as income in the non-size criteria cases where a financial assessment is carried out.

As an amendment, Councillor Alexander, seconded by Councillor Coleman, moved clauses (1) and (2) of the motion and that, in addition:-

- (3) Council should make direct contact with the relevant Ministers outlining the damage done to the lives and well-being of some of the most vulnerable people in Falkirk district and pointing out that our people voted decisively for an end to austerity on 7 May; and
- (4) that Council was informed at the time that Disability Benefits should be excluded as it is not income assessed but chose to ignore that advice resulting in applicants who should have received DHP being denied that benefit. The Executive therefore agrees to request a report as soon as possible outlining the steps to be taken to review and rectify each claimant wrongly refused for this reason.

Following discussion, Councillor Martin, with the consent of Councillor G Goldie, as his seconder, adjusted the terms of his motion as follows:-

- (1) to enter into a Delivery Partnership Agreement with the Department of Work and Pensions in support of the roll out of Universal Credit;
- (2) to a Member specific awareness session on Universal Credit;
- (3) to make direct contact with the relevant Ministers outlining the damage done to the lives and well-being of some of the most vulnerable people in Falkirk district and pointing out that our people voted decisively for an end to austerity on 7 May; and
- (4) that the Discretionary Housing Payments policy should be reviewed in light of the recent judgement that Disability Benefits should not be included as income in the non-size criteria cases where a financial assessment is carried out, the report to be submitted to the Executive and to include information about the impact on those who have not received Discretionary Housing Payments as a consequence of Council's policy and any action that may be taken thereon.

Councillor Alexander, with the consent of Councillor Martin, as Convener, and Councillor Coleman as his seconder, agreed, having heard the terms of the adjusted motion, to withdraw his amendment.

Decision

The Executive agreed the adjusted motion.