

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

STRATEGY/ACTION: Reduction in Welfare Rights Service	Department: Services for People
Person responsible for assessment: Sarah Andrews	Date of assessment: 24/01/12
Person responsible for strategy where different from above:	

Brief description of strategy, partners and those who will be affected by its delivery:

Background

Government grants have previously funded one of the posts in this small team. As an interim measure, in 2011/12 additional funding was gained from the Primary Care Trust but this finishes in April 2012. The Council is not in a position to pick up this cost pressure; hence the saving to the Council is small.

Financial Savings Identified

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000

As part of this EIA and the DEIA work undertaken, in addition to specific community group consultation sessions to identify any arising impacts, the corporate consultation sessions and the online budget forum. Data regarding individuals supported through the welfare rights service has been reviewed, in addition a sample of service users utilising the service were contained to ascertain any arising impacts from the proposal. This was undertaken through 20 questionnaires.

Reduction of WR service

- currently receives referrals/deals with clients of Adult Social Care, Children's Services & Housing including the Customer Contact Centre & Duty Teams.
- provides information to Members, Council staff & voluntary agencies

Individuals in vulnerable situations will be affected by the reduction in the service. When a disabled person or their carer lose or have a reduction in their benefit entitlement they often suffer from increased levels of stress and financial insecurity. It can have a negative

impact on their health, their ability to remain independent and increased reactive costs to the Council through increased assistance and decreased revenue.

Council staff are affected as many clients of WR are already known to another service within the Council. This will increase their work if they still have a duty (eg Local Government Act 2000 which gives a local authority the "duty of well being", "promoting inclusive communities" is a key theme within the Community Strategy and "narrowing the inequalities gap" a key objective) to assist clients who are disabled, carers etc. A number of referrals are received from Children's and Adults Social and Housing Services for people in crisis, the operational impact from service reduction will fall to Care Management and Housing Officers.

By reducing capacity of WR and thereby increasing the likelihood that people will be missing out on their full benefit entitlement will reduce the amount of charges received by the Council where people are receiving chargeable services. Supporting people around unclaimed benefits has previously been a priority area. Maximising a person's legitimate benefit income in a timely manner can directly increase the revenue received by the Council.

Losing one caseworker will have a significant effect on the local economy – approximately £440,000 in benefits is worth an estimated £778,000 to Darlington. People in receipt of benefits will spend most of their money locally – every pound received will circulate and re-circulate within the local economy and so be worth even more than if it were being spent (for instance) on foreign holidays. The New Economics Foundation has devised a Local Multiplier (known as LM3), which in the case of welfare benefits is a ratio of 1:1.77.

Costs to the Council, such as emergency Section 17 payments by Children's Services, can be reduced or avoided with emergency appointments to WR for assistance with the relevant benefit claims. Reducing the capacity of the service will lead to longer waiting times for appointments and potentially increase the cost of supporting vulnerable families/individuals in crisis.

By reducing capacity of WR there will be a significant reduction tribunal representation at social security appeals in Darlington. The success rate of the current postholder is 70% - nationally the success rate of an unrepresented appellant is 35%. Those disabled people who are unable to adequately represent themselves, particularly those with LD, will not receive the support that they require as there is not the capacity anywhere else in Darlington. Therefore there is no alternative provision for these individuals to receive similar support.

Should the reduction in welfare rights service occur this would mean that 40 people per year would not receive support about benefit appeals and up to 150 clients would either receive no assistance or have a longer time to wait for assistance from another organisation. Those who are currently being supported who do not have their appeal hearing before the member of staff is made redundant will not be guaranteed representation by another member of staff as the capacity of staff is already limited. Waiting times for appeals has risen significantly over the past two years, with most appeals taking in excess of nine months to be heard therefore no new appeals are being taken on by the member of staff under threat of redundancy to ensure all staff can deal with their current caseload.

From the impact information obtained as part of the assessment there were a number of headline negative impacts which have been further detailed on Pg 5 and original impact information submitted has been attached at Appendix 1 pg 11

- Alternative provisions such as CAB have waiting lists which will increase as demand exceeds capacity; the removal of capacity could have possible devastating financial impacts for many people.
- Potential impact for the Council in picking up costs for people in crisis elsewhere.
- Some people would be unable to complete benefit applications without tailored support.
- Loss of Tribunal Support. Including Open Case implications
- Valuable support for individuals who would be unable to sort out benefits without assistance
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Extract Comment Received from Age UK (Darlington) 27.01.12

We agree wholeheartedly with the arguments you make above regarding the 'clear cost benefit to investment in this type of activity' and understand that whilst this service may be a 'cost pressure' we would recommend that the council does all it can to support the continuation of the service.

Introduction

Q.1 Is your strategy and the actions it proposes accessible to everyone within the community? Bear in mind any economic, social, environmental, physical, intellectual, cultural, linguistic, technological or other barriers.

Please note the responses given below relate to the Welfare Rights service as a whole, and are not constrained to the proposal which will see a service reduction. Potential Negative impacts arising from the proposal have detailed on pages 5 to 8.

The impact of reducing the service is most likely to affect the above highlighted characteristics – age, disability, race, sex, carers, unemployed/low income users of the service.

Issue	Yes	No	If yes, what evidence do you have to demonstrate this?	If no, what do you plan to do to remove barriers to access?
Equality Act 2010 Protected characteristics:				
Age	Y		62 (in 2011) children aged 16 or under 246 people under 50	
Disability	Y		55% clients are sick/disabled	
Gender reassignment	Y			
Pregnancy and Maternity	Y			
Race	Y		5% clients are from the BME community, which is slightly higher than the culturally diverse community group profile for Darlington.	
Religion or belief	Y			
Sex	Y		59% are female	
Sexual orientation	Y			
Marriage and Civil Partnership	Y			
Local Priorities:				
Geographical impacts	Y			
Carers	Y		See disability. Many carers are directly & indirectly affected by a loss/reduction of benefits of the disabled person.	
Young People leaving care	Y			
Gypsies & Travellers	Y			

Issue	Yes	No	If yes, what evidence do you have to demonstrate this?	If no, what do you plan to do to remove barriers to access?
Refugees & Asylum Seekers	Y			
Unemployed or low income	Y		Families with disabled children face a risk of over 30% of living in poverty – over 50% of disabled children in Darlington could be under-claiming their full benefit entitlement.	
People with spent criminal convictions	Y			

Q.2 (a) For whatever reason, does your strategy and the actions it proposes treat any group differently from others?

Yes	Y
No	

The welfare Rights service is accessible for everyone, however, is tailored towards people in vulnerable situations.

If you have answered 'yes', please specify those individuals or groups affected and whether the impact has the potential to be adverse.

The impact of reducing the service is most likely to affect the above highlighted characteristics – age, disability, race, sex, carers, unemployed/low income users of the service.

Negative Impacts on the Welfare Rights Proposal received via the comments box.

I want to express how important this welfare service is as only people like us can appreciate it. The Government spends millions on bombs why can't it spare a few thousand on needy people. This service has been invaluable to us. Look at your priorities - you waste too much money on unnecessary jobs which are not important. Please keep this welfare service going as we wouldn't know what to do without these ladies. We had to go to a panel and they helped us prepare our case and we did well. They have helped us fill forms in, given us advice on the phone not just for me but also to my friends who needed help. How much more do you want us to write - we can't praise them enough.

Longer waiting times impact and tribunal support

The proposal to reduce the welfare rights service must not be allowed to go ahead. To reduce staff would mean longer waiting time to see a member of staff for help, also this will make their work much harder. As the basic group, my money will not cover this, the welfare rights service help is most important. Without their help I would have gone under. Form filling in is not easy for me, so given their help I know I have someone who understands and can help. without their help the powers that be would have put me on the scrap heap. Welfare rights service have shown them that I am a person not a number. I have to eat well, to keep warm and be able to get out and about so I can keep my independence longer

Valuable support for individuals who would be unable to sort out benefits without assistance.

The proposal to reduce the Welfare rights Service is a disaster. The Welfare Rights Officer helps me to sort out my benefits after they have been stopped after I have been in hospital. She helps so much more than Citizens Advice. She knows everything and sorts it out asap. This helps me as there are times I am so vulnerable and can't do it myself.

Negative Impacts on the Welfare Rights Proposal received via Email

Open Case implications

02/12/11 - I am currently an open case with the Welfare Rights Unit and understand (via my daughter), that the Welfare Rights Officer that is currently supporting me is under threat of redundancy next year. Without the service of this officer and the unit I would not be making any progress myself in applying and appealing for benefits, I am physically disabled and am experiencing mental health problems. I feel that the Welfare Rights Unit provides a valuable service for vulnerable people in Darlington and should be saved from cuts.

14/12/2011 - I am writing about the proposed cut to funding for the disabled, i.e. DAD Carers Support Service. I am full time carer for a gentleman of 42 years old who suffers from Downs Syndrome he attends Tec works day centre. I understand the items up for consultation include reduction of welfare rights. review of supported bus service. and of dad itself. If these services were closed down it would be just about the end of him as it is his only way of feeling like he means something to society, it is his be all and end all to everything. I can't drive so the bus service for him to get to his work would be the end of his happiness, it might seem over the top to you but not to him. And DAD has been a great help if we run into any problems. Welfare rights are a big help to in helping you through all the red tape of benefits and entitlements regards.

Negative Impacts on the Welfare Rights Proposal received via Letter

27/01/12 I am writing about the proposed cut to funding for the disabled, i.e. DAD Carers Support Service. I am full time carer for a gentleman of 42 years old who suffers from Downs Syndrome he attends Tec works day centre. I understand the items up for consultation include reduction of welfare rights. review of supported bus service. and of dad itself. If these services were closed down it would be just about the end of him as it is his only way of feeling like he means something to society, it is his be all and end all to everything. I can't drive so the bus service for him to get to his work would be the end of his happiness, it might seem over the top to you but not to him. And DAD has been a great help if we run into any problems. Welfare rights are a big help to in helping you through all the red tape of benefits and entitlements regards.

Received a lot of help and support from the Welfare Rights Officer. Has become very anxious since receiving a letter about the possible loss of the Welfare Rights Service and the possible loss of this support. Losing this support would have a highly detrimental effect.

Specific Negative Impact Area Identified: Alternative provisions such as CAB have long waiting lists, the removal of capacity could have possible devastating financial impacts for many people.

"If Welfare Rights service is reduced then only CAB left. It can take a long time to get an appointment with CAB because of their workloads. My son has been placed on Job Seekers Allowance now instead of Incapacity Benefit. Consequences of not having the correct support could mean a change in loss of income which could affect his independence. He needs (as we do) good timely advice and support".

"Reducing the team by one member means longer waiting times for the customer, when I require quick and speedy information and help it will take longer thus resulting in a longer waiting time to receive entitlements".

Comment " I feel that this service is vital within Darlington. I also realise that the waiting time to get an appointment with an adviser, how many people are rely on the help and support offered by Welfare rights".

Potential Impact for the Council in picking up costs for people in crisis elsewhere – Identified at the Males Carers Group 18/01/12

" If the benefits you can get are decreased it has a knock on effect to the Council, it could be false economy".

Specific Negative Impact Area Identified: Loss of Tribunal Support, some people would be unable to complete benefit applications without tailored support

"I am opposed to the idea of reducing the Welfare Rights staff because there are too few staff and the service is overstretched already, the service is vital to me. I needed the help of this member of staff to help me appeal my DLA decision following a stroke. As the service is already overstretched I was fortunate to be referred by my Clinical Psychologist otherwise I may not have been eligible for help as there are too few staff to cope with demand present. In my opinion more staff are needed not less "

"It is nice to have some on your side when things are difficult with help to fill in forms and support with appeals because you feel so alone especially if you feel you don't understand the welfare system"

Comment "Welfare Rights service is invaluable unfortunately not enough availability, should be getting more staff not less"
"Please do not reduce staff levels"

(b) What needs to be done to prevent any potentially adverse impact?

Not reduce the service. There is unlikely to be capacity within existing services to absorb the caseload of the member of staff at risk of redundancy.

Q.3 (a) Does your strategy promote equality? (e.g. does it contain actions that demonstrate a consideration of community cohesion and the needs of the members of Darlington's diverse communities)

The proposal relates to the reduction of a service provision.

Yes	
No	

If you have answered 'yes', please give examples of how equality is promoted.

Q.4 In the past three years, have you consulted with any of the following groups regarding the development of your strategy?

Group	Yes	No	If yes, please summarise evidence (Who? When? What were the outcomes?)	If no, are you satisfied that the strategy has no impact on this group?
Age	Y		<p>This specific proposal was part of the corporate consultation undertaken on the Medium Term Financial Plan: Consultation events have taken place as part of the 2011/2012 MTFP budget consultation events, these include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public consultation events specifically targeted for disabled, young people and older people • Town Crier publications • Online forums • Talking Together Events • Attendance at local community groups and action groups 	
Disability	Y		There have been 20 questionnaires sent out to a sample of service users-feedback has been negative to the proposal to reduce the service	
Gender reassignment			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	
Pregnancy and Maternity			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	
Race			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	
Religion or belief			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	
Sex			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	
Sexual orientation			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	

Group	Yes	No	If yes, please summarise evidence (Who? When? What were the outcomes?)	If no, are you satisfied that the strategy has no impact on this group?
Marriage and Civil Partnership			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	
Geographical impacts			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	
Carers			Comments received from the male Carers Group – feedback negative to the proposal to reduce the service	
Young people leaving care			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	
Gypsies & Travellers			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	
Refugees & asylum seekers			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	
Unemployed or low waged			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	
People with spent criminal convictions			Please refer to information above relating to the wider consultation and impact assessment work undertaken on the MTFP (as detailed in the age criteria above)	

14	<p>If Welfare Rights service reduced/ended then only C.A.B. left. Can take a long time to get appointment with C.A.B. because of their workloads.</p>	<p>☞ Son has been placed on Jobseekers Allowance now instead of Incapacity Benefit. Consequences of not have correct support could mean a change or loss of income which could affect his independence. He needs (as we do) good timely advice and support.</p>
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<p>I feel that this service is vital within Dartington area. I also realise from the waiting time to get an appointment with an adviser how many people rely on the help & support offered by welfare rights. Recommend this service continues as it would be greatly missed & have possible overstating & financial implications for many people.</p>	<p>As some of the benefit forms are very complex, I feel that without the help & support I have received over the last four years from the welfare rights service, & not being in the best of health or state of mind, when having to fill these forms in that I would not have received any benefits because forms would have been filled out incorrectly with out the valued help I have received each year from this service.</p>
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Welfare Rights proposals

If the benefits you can get are decreased it has a knock on effect to the Council. "It could be a false economy". May be paying more money out to remedy a situation. (Male Carers Group, 18th January 2012)

What is your view?	How will you be affected?
any thing that changes things for the old, and help we can get will make a difference to me.	at this moment in time it won't affect me, but in the future I will need all the help I can get, for shopping and getting a bus to be able to get about.

What is your view?	How will you be affected?
REDUCING THE TEAM BY ONE MEMBER MEANS LONGER WAITING TIME FOR THE CUSTOMER.	WHEN I REQUIRE QUICK SPEEDY INFORMATION AND HELP IT WILL TAKE LONGER THUS RESULTING IN LONGER WAITING TIME TO RECEIVE ENTITLEMENTS

What is your view?	How will you be affected?
<p>I am opposed to the idea of reducing welfare rights staff because there are too few staff and the service is overstretched already.</p>	<p>The service is vital to me as I needed the help of Zena Braithwaite to help me to appeal my D.L.A decision following a stroke. As the service is already overstretched I was fortunate to be referred by my clinical psychologist otherwise I may not have been eligible for help as there are too few staff to cope with demand at present. In my opinion more staff are needed rather than less.</p>

What is your view?	How will you be affected?
<p>Welfare Rights Service is Invaluable unfortunately Not enough availability Should be getting more not less staff.</p>	<p>Its nice to have someone on your side when things are difficult with help to fill in forms and support with appeals because you feel so alone especially if you don't understand the welfare system - please do not reduce staff levels</p>