

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO LOCAL COMMUNITY IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM

UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS – OCTOBER 2019

Below is an overview of actions taken to date following implementation of the recommendations agreed by the Executive with regard to the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee's Scrutiny Review into the local community impact of welfare reform:

Recommendation	Action undertaken
<p>(1) That the Council, as part of the refresh of the City Centre Masterplan and associated work already underway, seeks to increase the vibrancy of the city centre and undertake a review of empty commercial units, particularly units above shops, to ascertain whether there are any opportunities to convert them to residential use.</p>	<p>The desire to achieve more upper floor residential accommodation dovetails with one of the aims of the Council's recently approved Heritage Action Zone, as this is one of the areas that the authority can offer some potential grant assistance through. The Heritage Action Zone project will officially launch in April 2020 so it will not be possible to deliver on this aspect until that scheme is well underway and it will of course rely on the willingness of private land owners to engage. However, officers will do everything they can to achieve this. In the meantime, and running concurrently, officers will continue to take every opportunity to engage with land owners as part of their regular contact as Planning Authority to encourage and support them to pursue this.</p>
<p>(2) In view of the fact that the Welfare Advice Team, Universal Credit Team, Customer Services Team, Tenancy Services Team and Citizens Advice all currently work independently to provide support to Universal Credit claimants and customers and in light of the national decision to withdraw funding from local authorities and reallocate this to Citizens Advice, that the Council undertakes a comprehensive review of the areas within its service delivery that supports welfare advice to the city's residents.</p>	<p>A Universal Credit advice review is underway, with a report outlining conclusions to be presented to Executive on 25 November 2019. The in-house local authority Universal Credit Support Team function has been extended to 30 November 2019, pending the outcome of this review.</p>

<p>(3) That the Council agrees to lobby local and regional Department for Work and Pensions representatives to better understand why there continues to be a delay in the payment of Universal Credit payments, which causes significant issues for the Council's tenants as well as tenants in the private rental sector.</p>	<p>The Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits has met with a local Department for Work and Pensions representative to discuss this matter. Mitigations and improvements have been made to the Universal Credit claim process and the promotion of advance payments of Universal Credit to mitigate such delays is now more prevalent. Also, an arrangement of an additional two weeks Housing Benefit to certain customers moving on to Universal Credit helps to bridge the gap during a claim for Universal Credit. The Head of Shared Revenues and Benefits meets with the central Department for Work and Pensions in London on a quarterly basis, with a standing agenda item being to feedback any issues and concerns regarding Universal Credit, as well as receiving updates on any improvements to the Universal Credit scheme.</p>
<p>(4) That the Council's Housing Directorate undertakes a review of housing allocations and tenant services in order to increase and improve the sustainability of Council tenants.</p>	<p>A review of housing allocations and tenant services was currently underway.</p>
<p>(5) That the Council reviews the provision and considers a re-launch of a scheme with the Acts Trust, which had previously been set up under a Service Level Agreement regarding the re-use and distribution of abandoned furniture to Council tenants, and identifies any further opportunities to work with other charities or organisations to improve access to free furniture or white goods for those tenants struggling to furnish their homes.</p>	<p>The Acts Trust had previously decided that it no longer wished to deal with white goods for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They required storage and had originally decided upon a container, however this required planning consent; - There was a national provider already recycling similar goods in the area; - There were difficulties regarding a change in legislation and liability. <p>The Council at that time also had concerns regarding the legal impact of doing this from a liability perspective.</p>

A new proposal being considered by the Acts Trust to combine their current operations is 'The Store of Stories which, although does not include the provision of white goods, does look at providing food, furniture and other household goods that were not necessarily electrical items that carried less liability risk. The Council's Reducing Inequality Vision 2020 Group is in the process of looking into supporting this project.

A white goods service is already provided in Lincoln by the British Heart Foundation.