

Report of:	Meeting	Date	Item No.
Cllr Hodgkinson and Cllr M Vincent, Joint Chairmen of the Impact of Welfare Reform Task Group and Philippa Davies, Corporate Director of Resources	Cabinet	3 December 2014	5

<b>Impact of Welfare Reform Task Group – final report</b>
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## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report the work of the Impact of Welfare Reform Task Group to Cabinet.

## 2. Outcomes

- 2.1 Residents able to cope better with the impact of recent welfare reforms, in the knowledge that the council is fulfilling its responsibility in implementing those changes effectively.

## 3. Recommendation

- 3.1 That officers be commended on the way on which the council has successfully and effectively implemented the recent welfare reforms.

Particular reference should be made to:

(i) The way in which the Head of Contact Centre has ensured that the changes have been implemented in a way that makes Wyre Council a 'beacon' within Lancashire, and ensures that the council is always 'one step ahead of the game', and

(ii) The debt advisors who provide an essential and invaluable service by dealing so positively with members of the public who are often seen at a time of personal crisis.

## 4. Background

- 4.1 The Welfare Reform Act (2012) has been seen as the biggest change to the welfare benefit system in 60 years. The reforms pave the way for the

introduction of Universal Credit, which will eventually replace means-tested benefits for people of working age.

- 4.2** The Act also brings changes to the way in which benefits are administered by local authorities. Council Tax Benefit (CTB) was abolished in April 2013 and all local authorities have had to devise and implement a new scheme for working age customers who apply for assistance with council tax payments. Housing Benefit will be gradually replaced by the introduction of Universal Credit.
- 4.3** The welfare reforms may benefit some residents, but there are others who may experience reductions in support and increased financial hardship. It is important that Wyre Council considers the changes and ensures that it is doing all that it is required to do, in a way that does not further disadvantage those in our community who are likely to be most adversely affected.
- 4.4** The task group took the view that as many of the changes have been implemented nationally there is little scope for local discretion. That being the case, the review would be limited to scrutinising the way in which the council is fulfilling its responsibilities for the delivery of the reforms.
- 4.5** As included in the scoping document, the review aimed:
1. To consider the numbers of people affected by the welfare reforms for which the council has a responsibility to implement (e.g Benefit Cap, Local Council Tax Support, Social Size Criteria Reductions)
  2. To consider the numbers of people in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payments and debt advice pre- and post-implementation
  3. To identify and recommend ways that the council could go further to support those affected by the reforms within the statutory remit that the council holds in such regard.

## **5. Key Issues**

- 5.1** There are a number of examples of actions taken by Wyre Council to support those in our community most adversely affected by the welfare reforms. For example, Wyre is one of only 40% of all councils in the UK that has spent its entire award for Discretionary Housing Payments, to the benefit of the neediest claimants. Other examples are detailed in the task group's report (see page 8).
- 5.2** In 2010 the council anticipated some of the ramifications of the welfare reforms and, in order to be one step ahead, appointed a debt advisor from within the current Contact Centre resources. With the requisite training the debt advisor was able to handle debt advice cases through to completion. There are now two debt advisors who deal with a large

caseload, for which there is a three-week waiting list. Members of the task group met with the debt advisors and were highly impressed by the informed and professional service provided.

- 5.3** The task group was very clear about the limits of this review. Councillors made the point that the council's scope for discretion is small, within the inevitable restrictions of national implementation. The focus was on ensuring that the council has been doing all that it is required to do when implementing the reforms.
- 5.4** The task group has been very impressed indeed by the steps that have been taken by officers in effectively implementing the reforms. The depth of knowledge, the attention to detail shown and all-round expertise of officers is highly reassuring.

<b>FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>	
Finance	<i>There are no financial implications associated with this report.</i>
Legal	<i>There are no financial implications associated with this report.</i>

### **OTHER RISKS/IMPLICATIONS: CHECKLIST**

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There are no significant implications arising directly from this report, for those issues marked with a x.

<b>Implications</b>	<b>✓ / x</b>
Community Safety	<b>x</b>
Equality and Diversity	<b>✓</b>
Sustainability	<b>x</b>
Health and Safety	<b>x</b>

<b>Risks/Implications</b>	<b>✓ / x</b>
Asset Management	<b>x</b>
Climate Change	<b>x</b>
Data Protection	<b>x</b>

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### **LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A Impact of Welfare Reform Task Group – Final Report

arm/ex/cab/cr/14/0312pf1



## **Impact of Welfare Reform Task Group**

### **- Final Report -**

#### **Joint Chairmen:**

Councillor John Hodgkinson  
Councillor Michael Vincent

#### **Task Group Members:**

Councillor Colette Birch  
Councillor Rita Hewitt  
Councillor Kerry Jones  
Councillor Terry Lees  
Councillor Patsy Ormrod  
Councillor Dave Walmsley

**Overview & Scrutiny Committee**  
**Chairman: Councillor May Gandhi**

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## Introduction

The Business Plan 2013/14 included the implementation of welfare reforms. This short scrutiny review was included in the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme 2014/15 as part of scrutiny's role in checking performance against the Business Plan.

The Welfare Reform Act (2012) has been seen as the biggest change to the Welfare Benefit system in 60 years. It has been stated by Ministers that the reforms seek to create a simpler and fairer system which provide the right incentives to assist more people into work. They also aim to reduce the welfare bill nationally by £18bn by the end of 2015. The reforms pave the way for the introduction of Universal Credit, which will eventually replace means-tested benefits for people of working age.

The Act also brings changes to the way in which benefits are administered by Local Authorities. Council Tax Benefit (CTB) was abolished in April 2013 and all Local Authorities have had to devise and implement a new scheme for working age customers who apply for assistance with Council Tax payments. Housing Benefit will be gradually replaced by the introduction of Universal Credit.

The Welfare Reforms may benefit some residents, but there are others who may experience reductions in support and increased financial hardship. It is important that Wyre Council considers the changes and ensures that it is doing all that it is required to do, in a way that does not further disadvantage those in our community who are likely to be most adversely affected.

The task group took the view that as many of the changes have been implemented nationally there is little scope for local discretion. That being the case, the review would be limited to scrutinising the way in which the council is fulfilling its responsibilities for the delivery of the reforms.

## **Aims of Review**

The aims of the review, as specified in the Scoping Document, were as follows:

1. To consider the numbers of people affected by the welfare reforms for which the Council has a responsibility to implement (e.g Benefit Cap, Local Council Tax Support, Social Size Criteria Reductions)
2. To consider the numbers of people in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payments and Debt Advice pre- and post-implementation
3. To identify and recommend ways that the Council could go further to support those affected by the reforms within the statutory remit that the Council holds in such regard.

## **The Review Process**

Prior to the review commencing, three councillors and the Scrutiny Officer attended a North West Employers' workshop on 'Scrutinising the Impact of Welfare Reform'.

The task group was given a full briefing about the council's implementation of the recent welfare reforms by the Corporate Director of Resources and the Contact Centre Manager. Three councillors also spent time with the council's two Debt Advisors to get a better understanding of some of the issues that they help to resolve on a daily basis.

## **Summary of Evidence provided by Philippa Davies (Corporate Director of Resources) and Pete Mason (Head of Contact Centre)**

### **Part 1 - The Welfare Reforms**

#### Context

Philippa Davies referred to the implementation of welfare reforms within the context of the Business Plan 2013/14. She reminded members that the purpose of the review, as included in the scoping document, had come directly from the Business Plan and stated:

“To review the actions taken by the council to support those in our community most adversely affected by the welfare reforms and to identify any further steps that should be taken.”

The task group agreed that the subject of welfare reform was so extensive that it was important to focus upon what the council was directly responsible for delivering, a view supported by Councillor Roger Berry, Neighbourhood Services Portfolio Holder, who also attended the task group’s first meeting.

#### Welfare Changes

Mr Mason presented a report to the task group which summarised the work that had been undertaken by the council in relation to welfare reform over the past three years.

The first part of the report summarised the welfare changes and the council’s response to them and the second part detailed the actions taken by the council to support those in our community most adversely affected by the welfare reforms.

#### 1 Reductions to the maximum amount of Housing Benefit (HB) that can be claimed by single under 35’s living in privately rented accommodation

The regulations governing HB entitlement for single under 35’s living in privately rented accommodation were changed from 1 January 2012, at which point the maximum eligible rent the claim could be based on was restricted to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) “shared room” rate instead of the “one bedroom” rate. This meant that claims in payment prior to 1 January 2012 which had been calculated using the LHA one bedroom rate of approximately £86 HB per week, were subsequently recalculated from their anniversary date using the shared room rate of around £56. This equated to a reduction of approximately £30 per week in the claimant’s benefit entitlement.

In early December 2011, in order to maximise the delay before the reduction came into force, letters were sent to each of the 221 claimants affected by this change advising them of the change, and asking them to contact the council in order to delay the reduction to their entitlement. Of the 221 claimants contacted only 6 responded. Those who did subsequently had their claims extended so that the claim continued to attract the LHA single room rate through to its next yearly anniversary date in

December 2013. It is estimated that in assisting these claimants in this way the council helped them claim up to £1,500 each in HB that they would otherwise have lost.

Anecdotal evidence from conversations with private landlords and the housing team, plus evidence from benefits records, shows that the reduction in HB entitlement for single under 35's living in privately rented accommodation did not result in large scale homelessness problems in the borough, with a majority of landlords either adjusting their rents to reflect the changes, or not pursuing the rent arrears subsequently owed by their tenants.

## 2 Social Size Criteria Reductions

From 1 April 2013 the amount of maximum eligible rent used to calculate HB entitlement for those claimants whose homes are rented from a social landlord was reduced by 14% where the claimant has one bedroom more than required by their household, and 25% when the claimant has two or more bedrooms more than required. For HB purposes the way the number of bedrooms required by a household is calculated is detailed below:

The following are expected to share:

- an adult couple
- 2 children under 16 of the same sex
- 2 children under 10 (regardless of sex)

The following can have their own bedroom:

- a single adult (16 or over)
- a child that would normally share, but shared bedrooms are already taken, for example a household with three children, but two already share
- children who cannot share because of a disability or medical condition
- a non-resident overnight carer for the claimant or partner (but only if they must stay overnight)

One spare bedroom is allowed for:

- an approved foster carer who is between placements but only for up to 52 weeks from the end of the last placement
- a newly approved foster carer for up to 52 weeks from the date of approval even if no child is placed with them during that time

Rooms used by students are not counted as 'spare' if they are away and intend to return home.

Rooms used by a member of the armed or reserve forces are also not counted as spare if the forces member was a non-dependant prior to leaving home to go on operations, and intends to return home after operations.

On 1 April 2013 354 claimants had one bedroom more than required by their household, whilst a further 73 had two or more bedrooms more.

### 3 Benefits cap

The benefits cap was introduced in Wyre from July 2013. The cap is designed to prevent any claimant from receiving more than £500 per week in benefits. The way the cap works is that the Department of Work and Pensions notifies the council of any claimants who are receiving over £500 per week in social benefits. The council then reduces the amount of HB in payment to the claimant by the amount of benefit over £500 per week they are receiving.

Legislation dictates that the council must leave a minimum balance of 50p in HB payable each week. This minimum payment is maintained in order that the claimant can make application for a Discretionary Housing Payment if they choose (see page 8).

To date the council has administered the cap in 33 cases, 13 of which are current live claims. The highest cap administered to date is £155.27. The highest cap requested by the DWP to date is £297 per week.

### 4 Localised Council Tax Support (LCTS)

The Wyre LCTS scheme came into force on 1 April 2013 as a replacement for the national Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme, which was decommissioned from that date. Under the CTB scheme claimants in receipt of a 'passported' social benefit (Income Support, Income based Job-Seekers Allowance, or Guaranteed Pension Credit) were entitled to receive maximum CTB, and therefore did not have any council tax to pay. Under LCTS however, with the exception of pensioners in receipt of Guaranteed Pension Credit, who still receive maximum benefit, working-age claimants now have a minimum of 8.5% of the council tax to pay themselves. This change means that the minimum council tax payable in Wyre is around £64 per year (a single adult in receipt of a 'passported' benefit living in a council tax Band A rated property in an area of the borough with no parish precept, e.g. Poulton).

There are 50,844 properties (the figure on 30 June 2014) registered for payment of council tax in Wyre, and 10,347 LCTS claims in payment, which means that approximately 20% of households residing in the borough claim LCTS.

Following the introduction of LCTS the workload associated with the collection of council tax increased significantly. The number of council tax reminders issued in 2013/14 increased to 14,326 from 7,945 in 2012/13 (an increase of 80.3%), whilst the numbers of summonses for non-payment issued increased from 3,850 in 2012/13 to 7,046 in 2013/14 (an increase of 83%). A large part of this increase can be attributed to the introduction of LCTS and the requirement for all working-age claimants to pay a minimum of 8.5% of their council tax.

The council has implemented the Local Council Tax Support Scheme in a way that mirrors the previous system. This means that implementation has been relatively inexpensive. The new system has resulted in more people being in arrears with Council Tax payments, although the council has continued to offer them support, should they want it, throughout the recovery process.

**Summary of Evidence provided by Philippa Davies (Corporate Director of Resources) and Pete Mason (Head of Contact Centre)**

**Part 2 - The Actions Taken by Wyre Council to support those in our community most adversely affected by the welfare reforms**

(a) The Debt Advice Service

In 2010, partly in anticipation of the welfare reforms, the Contact Centre introduced a Debt Adviser into its structure. This post was created and funded from existing Contact Centre resources. The post holder was given full training to enable them to handle debt advice cases through to completion. At the time there was a shortage in Wyre of access to organisations who would provide a full (rather than a signposting) service to the residents of the borough. There are now two fully trained debt advisers in the Contact Centre. There are fifty-eight current cases and a waiting list of three weeks.

(b) Discretionary Housing Payments

Each year the council receives a sum of money from the Department of Work and Pensions to be used for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs). This money can be awarded to individual claimants suffering from financial hardship to enable them to take action to meet the requirements of the welfare reforms. For example, the council may make a weekly award for a limited period to cover the amount of benefit lost each week by a claimant affected by the Social Size Criteria reductions, or may award a lump sum to enable the claimant to pay a deposit and/or bond in order to move to a smaller property.

During the 2013/14 financial year the council received an initial DHP award of £168,131, then a further award of £11,090. Both of these awards were spent in full, ensuring that Wyre is not one of the 60% of councils in the UK identified as failing to spend their DHP awards. In order to ensure that the council spent its full DHP allocation the main Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) in the borough (for example Regenda) were encouraged to refer appropriate cases to the council for consideration. This co-ordinated approach ensured not only that the DHP money was all allocated, but also that many of the most appropriate cases were picked up, that otherwise may not have been.

A breakdown of the awards of DHP made during 2013/14 is provided below:

- The total number of DHP requests received was 802
  - 26 of these requests were made by claimants affected by the benefit CAP
  - 18 were requested by persons affected by the under 35's LHA reductions
  - 306 were requested by those affected by the Social Size Criteria reductions
  - 452 requests were not linked to any specific reform
- The total number of DHP awards made was 508, with 294 applications refused

- One-off DHP requests totalled 266, of which 91 were refused (34.2%) and 175 agreed (65.8%) amounting to £86,627.51
- On-going DHP requests totalled 536, of which 203 refused (37.9%) and 333 agreed (62.1%) amounting to £98,789.89
- Due to changes in DHP recipients' circumstances, a total of £6196.40 in on-going DHPs was subsequently found to have been overpaid. This amount is being recovered from those who were overpaid and has been re-allocated to other applicants.

Whilst in some cases the award of a DHP can be enough to prompt a claimant to sort out their own financial affairs, the majority of the time that isn't the case. Making an award of DHP to someone suffering from severe financial hardship may give them a temporary respite from their financial problems. It is not necessarily a long-term solution, however. With this in mind any DHP award is usually tied to the applicant being required to undertake debt advice from the Debt Advisers. The adviser will establish the customer's financial position before negotiating with creditors on their behalf in order to come to an arrangement which will allow the customer to better manage their financial affairs. The Debt Advisers are also qualified to administer Debt Relief Orders in appropriate circumstances, and will support the claimant through the bankruptcy process if necessary. The advisers will also make applications on behalf of customers to various funds available to meet the costs associated with bankruptcy proceedings, or to reduce their outstanding utility bills.

#### (c) Provision of Financial Management Training (FMT)

In response to each of the welfare reforms affecting Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit the council has written to every person affected offering them support in the form of debt advice, or Financial Management Training (FMT). In 2012 the council received £23,000 in funding to cover some of its costs in supporting those affected by the welfare reforms. This money was used to procure the provision of FMT from the Chorley and South Ribble Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). A referral system was set-up allowing any of the boroughs' residents affected by the reforms to express an interest in receiving training. In addition, the CAB was to pro-actively seek out potential recipients for FMT. Due to a lack of numbers expressing interest in undertaking such training the CAB subsequently offered to provide more support in the form of the provision of a debt advice service. To date, there has been only limited evidence provided as to the success of this initiative.

#### (d) Support for those affected by the Localised Council Tax Support reductions

The council's Localised Council Tax Support (LCTS) scheme requires claimants to make a minimum contribution of 8.5% towards the cost of their council tax. Whilst some councils have sought significant additional contributions (for example Blackpool, 27.11%) Wyre decided to adopt a scheme which limits the amount to 8.5% in order to protect the poorest in the community. The council tax collection process is prescribed by law, and includes the requirement to issue a reminder notice when an instalment payment is missed, followed by a summons for non-payment if the payment remains outstanding. The council includes information leaflets with reminders and summonses

explaining the collection process and offering debt advice for customers who cannot meet their financial obligations.

In the later stages of the council tax collection process non-paying customers may find that the council has passed responsibility for collection of the outstanding debt to an Enforcement Agent (formerly known as a bailiff). The council currently uses three Enforcement Agents and each is instructed to refer any customers it deals with who indicate they have severe financial problems to the council's debt advisers, who will attempt to resolve those problems before agreeing a payment arrangement in respect of the outstanding council tax.

The council also has an exceptional hardship scheme under which those council tax payers who are struggling to pay their council tax can make an application for exceptional hardship in order to reduce the amount they owe.

(e) Support for those affected by the introduction of Universal Credit

When the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) was first announced, it was assumed by the DWP that all UC claimants would be knowledgeable about the Internet and be able to apply on-line. The DWP has subsequently accepted that many claimants do not have access to, or the ability to use, the Internet. To address this issue, they have introduced a Localised Support Services Framework (LSSF) covering, amongst other things, the provision of support and advice from Local Authorities (or their partners) to those struggling through vulnerability, or inability, to access UC via the internet. Latest DWP planning assumptions anticipate that Local Authorities will be required to provide support to vulnerable UC claimants until at least 2020.

Prior to the introduction of the LSSF (the contents of which have still to be agreed with the DWP in respect of Wyre) the Contact Centre had already put into place plans to assist customers migrating from HB to UC. When required to help, officers working in the Civic Centre reception area or the Benefits Mobile Advice Centre, will simply complete a UC application form on behalf of the customer who is present with them, or assist them in making their own claim using a council PC. It is envisaged that, should there be a customer demand for its provision, a member of the Contact Centre team will give training to customers who require it prior to completing their UC claim "on-line". Alternatively, a Benefits Visiting Officer will assist vulnerable claimants in making a claim in their own home if they have internet access.

Another part of the LSSF requirement placed upon Local Authorities by the DWP is to give claimants access to Personal Budgeting Support (PBS). This is because under UC, claimants are paid a lump sum each month in arrears (including their housing costs if appropriate) to get them used to being paid a monthly salary when back in work. As many claimants are used to weekly benefit payments however, and often have their rent paid directly to their landlord, it is recognised that they will need support in managing their financial affairs on a monthly basis.

It is likely that the introduction of Universal Credit in November 2014 will result in a significant increase in work. Whilst many Local Authorities are planning to recruit an outside provider to provide PBS, Wyre will simply use its own debt advisers to provide this service. This will enable the council to retain control of the situation and ensure

that the appropriate advice is provided at the right time. The workload of the team will be monitored closely and additional resources will be allocated as required.

(f) Data-sharing with LCC in respect of families with children

In December 2013 agreement was reached with Lancashire County Council (LCC) regarding data-sharing to ensure that claimants with children received all the benefits and other support they were entitled to in order to minimise the impact of the welfare reforms on them. To date however, LCC have not requested any information regarding any claimants with families. This is more than likely due to issues between LCC and BT One Connect Limited, who were responsible for providing the Welfare Benefits Service at county prior to their demise.

(g) Support from the Housing Team

In November 2011, prior to the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance reductions for under-35s the Benefits Team held a meeting with local private landlords to explain how the forthcoming change would impact on them. Officers from the Housing Options team attended the meeting and offered their support in assisting tenants to apply for discretionary payments through the DHP scheme whilst alternative accommodation was secured.

Also in respect of the under-35s, the Housing Options team has utilised grant money to procure tenders for support for clients aged 16-35 to provide an accommodation finding service and enhanced rent bond scheme, shared house scheme, and pre-tenancy training. These services will be delivered in the near future across North Lancashire working with Lancashire City Council and Fylde Council.

The team has also assisted tenants affected by the Benefit Cap, by helping them to make applications for DHP's, and where appropriate, seeking accommodation considered more affordable.

Officers from the Housing Options team were also present at meetings held between the Benefits Team and local Registered Social Landlords to discuss opportunities for joint working to assist those affected by the welfare reforms, and particularly the Social Size Criteria Reductions (SSCR). The Housing Team subsequently put arrangements in place to ensure tenants affected by the SSCR are placed on the transfer list as soon as possible if they wish to move to smaller accommodation.

## Summary of Evidence from Debt Advisors

Three representatives of the task group met with the council's two Debt Advisors, Linda Stringer and Kim Matley. The councillors were advised that the confidential debt advice service that was offered was free to all residents of Wyre.

The Debt Advisors described their roles and responsibilities. If customers were in danger of losing their home or had debts that they were unable to manage the Debt Advisors would:

- Contact creditors and negotiate payments
- Help customers plan and budget their expenditure
- Look at each customer's situation and advise if they are not getting their full benefits entitlement - lots of people are in debt because they don't receive all the money they are entitled to
- Advise on free debt management - if the customer is already with a debt management company they may be paying fees that could be going to creditors
- Advise on how to respond if the customer has received a county court letter
- Advise how to proceed and negotiate with bailiffs, often making suitable, affordable arrangements
- Advise on bankruptcy and Debt Relief Orders (DRO)
- Obtain fees when applicable to assist the customer in filing for DROs/Bankruptcy
- Assist customer to file for DROs/Bankruptcy
- Take all creditor letters from the customer so that they no longer have to deal with them

The task group representatives were very impressed indeed by the way in which the Debt Advisors worked. They are experienced and wise officers, who are appropriately compassionate and sympathetic. They strike a good balance in the advice given, and try their best to offer objective and constructive advice to anyone who asks for it, to good effect.

The Debt Advice Service clearly plays a very significant role in supporting those residents of Wyre who are most adversely affected by the welfare reforms.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

The task group was very clear about the limits of this review. Councillors made the point that the council's scope for discretion was small, within the inevitable restrictions of national implementation. The focus has been on ensuring that the council has been doing all that it is required to do when implementing the reforms.

The task group has been very impressed indeed by the steps that have been taken by officers in effectively implementing the reforms. The depth of knowledge, the attention to detail shown and all-round expertise of officers has been highly reassuring.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

**That officers be commended on the way on which the council has successfully and effectively implemented the recent welfare reforms.**

**Particular reference should be made to:**

**(i) The way in which the Head of Contact Centre has ensured that the changes have been implemented in a way that makes Wyre Council a 'beacon' within Lancashire, and ensures that the council is always 'one step ahead of the game', and**

**(ii) The Debt Advisors who provide an essential and invaluable service by dealing so positively with members of the public who are often seen at a time of personal crisis.**

## Councillors' Attendances

There were three meetings of the task group.

Councillors were also invited to spend time with the council's two Debt Advisors and the councillors who did this have been credited with one further 'attendance'.

Name	Meetings Attended (including meeting with Debt Advisors) Maximum 3
Councillor C Birch	3
Councillor Hewitt	2
Councillor Hodgkinson	2
Councillor Jones	1
Councillor Lees	3
Councillor Ormrod	1
Councillor M Vincent	1
Councillor Walmsley	2

## Glossary of Abbreviations

CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
CTB	Council Tax Benefit
DHP	Discretionary Housing Payment
DRO	Debt Relief Order
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
FMT	Financial Management Training
HB	Housing Benefit
LCTS	Local Council Tax Support
LHA	Local Housing Allowance
LSSF	Localised Support Services Framework
PBS	Personalised Budgeting Support
RSL	Registered Social Landlord
SSCR	Social Size Criteria Reductions
UC	Universal Credit

## **Acknowledgements**

The task group would like to thank those officers who have spent time assisting members of the task group with their work, either by attending a meeting of the group or by explaining to councillors about their work as Debt Advisors.

## List of Appendices

APPENDIX 1      The Impact of Welfare Reform Task Group – Scoping Document

16 September 2014  
arm/ex/cab/cr/14/0312pf1 appendix A

## The Impact of Welfare Reform - Task Group

### Scoping Document – Final

<b>Review Topic</b>	The Impact of Welfare Reform
<b>Chair</b>	Cllr M Vincent
<b>Group Membership</b>	Cllrs Anderson, C Birch, Hewitt, Hodgkinson (Vice Chairman), Jones, Lees, Martin, Ormrod and Walmsley
<b>Officer Support</b>	Peter Foulsham (Scrutiny Officer)
<b>Purpose of the Review</b>	To review the actions taken by the council to support those in our community most adversely affected by the welfare reforms and to identify any further steps that should be taken
<b>Objective of Review</b>	To identify any ways the Council could further assist those affected by the reforms and improve on any services currently offered
<b>Aims of Review</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. To consider the numbers of people affected by the welfare reforms for which the Council has a responsibility to implement (e.g Benefit Cap, Local Council Tax Support, Social Size Criteria Reductions)</li> <li>5. To consider the numbers of people in receipt of Discretionary Housing Payments and Debt Advice pre- and post-implementation</li> <li>6. To identify and recommend ways that the Council could go further to support those affected by the reforms within the statutory remit that the Council holds in such regard.</li> </ol>
<b>Methodology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review any previous reports and documentation (see below)</li> <li>• Consult with relevant portfolio holder and council officers</li> <li>• Review of number of people awarded Discretionary Housing Payments to assist them in managing the impact of the welfare reforms and how these numbers have risen or fallen over time</li> <li>• Review and compare number of people provided with debt advice by the council and others prior to the implementation of the reforms and compare that with the number of people receiving such advice after the implementation</li> <li>• Interview witnesses at task group meetings (e.g CAB, Regenda)</li> <li>• Consider practical examples of the council's work with people affected by the welfare reforms by meeting with Debt Advisors</li> </ul>
<b>Scope of Review</b>	The review is limited by the role and responsibilities of the council in implementing the welfare reforms

<b>Potential Witnesses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevant Portfolio Holder</li> <li>• Corporate Director of Resources</li> <li>• Head of Contact Centre</li> <li>• Head of Housing Services</li> <li>• Wyre Council's Debt Advisors</li> <li>• Representative from Citizens Advice Bureau</li> <li>• Representative from Regenda</li> </ul>
<b>Documents to be considered</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Plan - Project Brief</li> <li>• Business Plan - End of Project Report</li> <li>• North West Employers Organisation documentation in relation to training workshop on Scrutiny's role in measuring the Impact of Welfare Reform (19 June 2014)</li> </ul>
<b>Risks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Straying into areas that are beyond the council's responsibility and over which it has little or no influence</li> </ul>
<b>Level of Publicity</b>	Low
<b>Indicators of a Successful Review</b>	
<b>Intended Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unforeseen or adverse impact of welfare reforms on Wyre residents minimised</li> </ul>
<b>Approximate Timeframe</b>	2 months
<b>Projected Start Date</b>	23 July 2014

arm/ex/cab/cr/14/0312pf1 appendix A