

COUNCILLOR ANDY KAY**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: DENISE PARK****DATE: 1st NOVEMBER 2012****Welfare Reform****Council Tax Support Scheme**

A number of key milestones have already been achieved within this project. The public consultation has been very successful with over 1,000 completed questionnaires already received at the time of writing this report. The consultation period has now closed and the results will now be analysed in detail. Full briefings will be arranged for all Elected Members before a final preferred scheme is drawn up and recommended to Council.

A detailed draft Equalities Impact Assessment is also being completed. The impact of the Council Tax Support Scheme will be assessed against a number of different groups including; single claimants, couples, families with children, disabled individuals/families etc. The assessment also includes income and family variations with each grouping.

Council will be required to approve a Local Council Tax Support scheme for 2013/14 by the end of January.

**Welfare Cap and under occupation - Registered Social Landlords
("Bedroom tax")**

Information supplied by the DWP indicates that the potential number of families who could be affected by the Welfare Cap in BwD is currently estimated at 55. Further information is expected to be provided by the DWP in the coming weeks and we will be assessing the potential impact on these families further.

An initial meeting has taken place with Housing Associations regarding the under occupation of properties. A separate working group has now been agreed to identify the households affected. This group includes the main Housing Associations in the borough and key contacts from Revenues & Benefits, Housing, Adults and Children's Social Care depts. This only applies to housing benefit claimants of working age.

The government has recently announced that potentially a further £10bn savings will be required from welfare reforms from 2015/16. Further updates will be provided as these proposals become clearer.

Budget

We are currently reviewing our medium term financial forecasts in light of recent government consultations on local government funding and announcements made during the party conference season. In light of the significant uncertainty and a delayed settlement there is a report elsewhere on this agenda recommending that any early budget decisions are taken at Council Forum in January.

HR and Payroll Services

Following a joint partnership agreement the HR and Payroll service for the Council transferred from Capita HR Solutions to the council on the 1st October 2012. These changes included the transfer of 46 employees to the Council. Capita will continue to provide services to schools in the borough under direct agreements with individual schools.

Website

The IT Department has continued working on the Council's new internet web site with colleagues from Policy and Communications and from across the Council. Phase 1 has delivered a new look website with refreshed content. Phase 2, commencing now, will develop more online transactional functionality and look to improve ease of use and take up of online services together with a refreshed Council intranet. This encouragement to channel shift should deliver improved customer services and cost savings over time.