

CENTRAL SERVICES CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 42
Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject: Potential In and Out of Work Pilot
Date of Meeting: 13 October 2008
Report of: Director of Finance & Resources
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Key Decision: No Information Only
Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 'In and Out of Work' is a joint pilot project between the Department of Work & Pensions (DWP), HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and some Local Authorities (LA), which aims to improve the access to in and out of work benefits and services to customers who move frequently in and out of work, pending national rollout.
- 1.2 Following an initial trial within North Tyneside in 2006 and pilots across six Local Authority areas, the DWP are seeking Local Authorities to volunteer to take part in the next wave of pilot schemes. This report informs the cabinet member of the scheme and seeks approval to take part, if accepted, in the pilot. The findings of which are likely to shape the national rollout of the scheme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Cabinet Member for Central Services is requested to:

- 2.1 Note the In and Out of Work Project; and
- 2.2 Agree in principle to Brighton & Hove becoming a pilot, if selected by DWP to take part, subject to satisfactory financial and resource arrangements.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The In and Out of Work Pilots have been running since September 2007 in six Local Authority areas; Lambeth; Liverpool; Merthyr Tydfil; Sedgemoor; West Lothian and West Somerset.

- 3.2 The pilot areas have been testing new processes which involve Job Centre Plus acting as a single point of contact for customers who are claiming Housing (HB) & Council Tax (CTB) Benefit and/or tax credits along with their Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) or Income Support (IS). The pilots have demonstrated that closer working between JobCentre Plus, LAs and the Tax Office delivers a range of benefits including
- Significant improvements to the customer experience
 - Paying customers more quickly – end to end 15% faster
 - Leading to increased customer confidence to take up short-term work
- 3.3 Feedback from Liverpool City Council indicates that relationships between Job Centre Plus and the local authorities have greatly improved; customers liked the 'joined up' Government approach and 84% of HB/CTB customers were clearer on what evidence was required to support their claim. The quality of data collected by Job Centre Plus staff improved by at least 50% which reduced the need for Local authority staff to contact customers for further information improving processing times and reducing debt.
- 3.4 In addition, liaison with HMRC who process tax credits, and electronic transfer to data on Tax Credits has enabled in work claims to be processed more speedily. Transferring claims electronically from Job Centre Plus to Local Authorities has also reduced the loss of forms and as claims are received within a day of verification at Job Centre Plus processing times are further improved.
- 3.5 For Brighton & Hove, this pilot would potentially help reduce the time taken to process changes of circumstances and could therefore potentially minimise this type of HB overpayments. There are 24413 HB and 25200 CTB claimants within Brighton & Hove. Of these 70% of HB claimants and 58% of CTB claimants are of working age (although these figures do not take account of those who are of working age but are unable to work due to disability).
- 3.6 The In and Out of Work Project is now looking to establish pathfinder areas in the regions which do not yet have a pilot. It is anticipated that the pilot would last between 6-12 months and full roll out will take place by December 2009. Further details of the pilot can be found in appendix 1.
- 3.7 Brighton & Hove would ensure that in any agreed pilot, any changes to processes regarding the sharing of information in order to deliver service improvements, are compliant with the Data Protection Act.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The Benefits service has held discussions with the ICT division within Brighton & Hove as the pilot is reliant upon Brighton & Hove having a Government Connect secure connection. The work towards this is on target and due to be completed by 31st October. The Government Connect connection is a requirement for all local authorities and Brighton & Hove would be required to implement this work regardless of whether the authority is selected as a pilot for the In/Out of Work project.

- 4.2 The Benefits service has also discussed the benefits of the scheme with Liverpool City Council who are currently acting as a pilot.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 It is difficult at this stage to assess the full financial implications of the project. Having Job Centre Plus acting as the chief point of contact, should reduce the workload for the council in processing the benefit payments for those claimants affected and should increase the accuracy and speed of payments. This should also lead to a reduction in the number overpayments. If the council is chosen to take part in the pilot, the affect on workloads and the amount of subsidy receivable will be closely monitored.

Finance Officer Consulted: Patrick Rice

Date: 17/09/2008

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 If agencies are sharing customer data it will be important to ensure that this is done with the consent of the individual and that appropriate checks are in place to obtain this consent in every case.

Lawyer Consulted: Elizabeth Culbert

Date: 10/09/2008

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment would be carried out if Brighton & Hove is selected as one of the pilot areas.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 There are no sustainability implications.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 There are no implications on crime and disorder.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 There are no Risk and Opportunity Management Implications

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 None.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 Brighton & Hove could opt to wait until the full roll out in December 2009.
- 6.2 However, if selected to take part in the scheme, there would be the opportunity to help develop an implementation model and influence the wider roll out. Brighton

& Hove would also be able to take advantage of the benefits of the new processes including improved customer service and clearance times.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The recommended proposals will enable the City Council to provide a better service to citizens, providing better use of public money and reducing inequality by increasing opportunity. (Council Priorities 2008-11)

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Briefing – In and Out of Work Project

Background Documents

1. Housing & Council Tax Benefit – General Information Bulletin G10/2008