

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 27

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Council Tax Support Scheme scrutiny review		
	OSC 5 November 2012		
	Policy and Resources Committee 29 November 2012		
Report of:	The Monitoring Officer		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report summarises the findings of the Scrutiny Panel established to consider the Council's proposed council tax support scheme. The full scrutiny review is included as Appendix 1 to this report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That Members endorse the report of the Scrutiny Panel on the Council Tax Support Scheme and agree to refer it to Policy and Resources Committee.
- 2.2 That Members agree to a further scrutiny review of the impact of wider welfare reforms once implemented.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Panel was set up to consider a draft Council Tax Support scheme at the request of the Council Leader Councillor Jason Kitcat, by 16 July 2012 Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It comprised Councillor Alex Phillips (Chair), and Councillors Graham Cox and Anne Pissaridou plus independent co-optee Rosemary Friggens, President of the East Sussex Credit Union.
- 3.2 The Scrutiny Review was originally scheduled as a one-day event but following legislative delays a second Panel meeting was arranged to hear from further witnesses. The scrutiny report is being referred to 29 November 2012 Policy and Resources Committee (not 11 October P&R as originally planned.)
- 3.3 Panel meetings on 17 September and 1 October heard evidence from representatives of Brighton Housing Trust, Brighton's Women's Centre, Brighton Unemployed Families Centre Families Project, Community and Voluntary Sector Forum, Job Centre Plus, Southern Landlords Association and Council Officers. Written information was submitted by YMCA and the Fed Centre for Independent Living and the Sussex Deaf Association arranged a meeting about the scrutiny review.

- 3.4 The Panel considered the draft Equality Impact Assessment, replies submitted to the Council's on-line consultation and the approach being taken by different local authorities. The Panel welcomed the involvement of CVSF in the consultation and engagement process.
- 3.5 Members acknowledged that within the current constraints of budget, time and emerging legislation, the proposed scheme itself cannot be significantly improved. However the Panel was concerned about the impact that the proposals would have on vulnerable residents.
- 3.6 After a debate it was agreed to ask the administration to reconsider the overall funding arrangements so that the full costs of the changes would be absorbed by the Council.
- 3.7 Other recommendations referred to: localisation of the whole council tax system; providing information and advice, including to people who are hard to reach; monitoring the impact of the scheme during implementation in Year 1; the annual review; progressing financial and digital inclusion measures; and - in the context of wider welfare reforms – working closer in partnership to address the needs of individual residents.
- 3.8 A scrutiny review of wider welfare reforms at a suitable time is also recommended.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 4.1 The Panel heard details of the consultation programme to date. The list of witnesses speaking to the Panel and minutes of the meetings are included in Volume 2 of the Panel's report.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 Financial Implications:
The financial implications from the reports recommendations will be highlighted when reported through to Policy and Resources Committee.
- 5.2 Legal Implications:
In accordance with the Overview & Scrutiny Procedure Rules, once OSC has agreed the Panel's recommendations it will prepare a report and submit it to the Chief Executive for consideration at the relevant policy committee.
- 5.3 Equalities Implications:
The Panel has considered the draft Equality Impact Assessment. In responding to each of the recommendations, equalities implications should be addressed.
- 5.4 Sustainability Implications:
None directly in relation to this report.
- 5.5 Crime & Disorder Implications:
None directly in relation to this report.
- 5.6 Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:
None directly in relation to this report.

5.7 Public Health Implications:
None directly in relation to this report.

5.8 Corporate / Citywide Implications:
None directly in relation to this report.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendix 1:

1. Report of the Scrutiny Panel

Background Documents

Background Documents are included in Volume 2 of the scrutiny panel report.

