

## **Portfolio Holder Report – Council 19 February 2014**

**By Cllr Jackie Branson – Governance and Logistics**

---

### **Elections**

Individual Electoral Registration is coming into effect 10th June 2014. It will involve a set of processes which will involve individuals making their own applications to register - no more household registration.

Electors will need to give their national insurance numbers and dates of births at the time of registering, applications can be made online through Government Digital Services as well as paper format and checks will be made with DWP to verify every elector that applies. This will give greater confidence as to the identity of electors.

Voter registration forms and household canvass forms will be a thing of the past making HEF's (Household Enquiry Forms) and ITR's (Invitation to Register) the way forward.

All forms sent will require reminders and a door knock throughout the year if no response is received.

A major challenge for the electoral community!

### **Seminars**

The current method of holding seminars has recently been reviewed in order to try and increase attendance at these events. Whilst traditionally seminars have been held on Mondays, these will be replaced by four 'seminar days' held throughout the year where councillors can attend an all day event consisting of various seminars.

The following dates have been identified:

23 June 2014

22 September 2014

8 December 2014

30 March 2015

Seminar topics for each day and their scheduled timings will be confirmed nearer the time.

### **Audit & Governance**

The Southern Internal Audit Partnership have drafted our audit plan for 2014/15 based on discussions with senior managers, a meeting with the Joint Executive Board and a review of our Corporate Risk Register. The partnership are progressing well with the internal audit plan for 2013/14. The audit plan and the progress report will go to the Governance & Audit Committee on 5 March.

## **Revenues and Benefits**

### **Welfare Reform**

#### **Removal of the spare room subsidy**

On 8 January 2014, the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) advised all Councils of a drafting error in the legislation. This means that despite the policy intention, certain claimants should not have had the removal of the spare room subsidy rules applied to their claims and should not, therefore, have had a reduction in Housing Benefit.

The error applies to claimants who have been receiving Housing Benefit continuously since 1 January 1996 and have also occupied the same dwelling since that date. The DWP have advised that affected claims should be re-assessed and arrears of Housing Benefit paid back to 1 April 2013.

Lord Freud has stated to the House of Lords that the legislation will be amended in March to restore the original policy intention.

We are working on identifying those claims that are affected so that they can be re-assessed. The changes are likely to affect around 30-35 claimants.

#### **Universal Credit**

Commencement of the full national roll-out of Universal Credit has been delayed while the DWP adopt a slower, pathfinder approach.

To date there are 7 pathfinders based on the following Job Centres, Ashton-under-Lyne, Wigan, Warrington, Oldham, Hammersmith & Fulham, Rugby and Inverness with 3 more (Harrogate, Bath and Shotton) planned by the Spring of 2014. In these pathfinder areas Universal Credit is being paid to all newly unemployed single people. This represents a very limited pilot in terms of scope and the number of claims.

Further information on how the national roll-out will be managed was announced on 5 December 2013 alongside the Chancellor's Autumn Statement.

Over the next 2 years (2014 – 2016) the roll-out in the pathfinder areas will be expanded in scope to include claims from couples (from Summer 2014) and families (from Autumn 2014) and will then start to also expand to cover more of the North West.

Current plans also see new claims to existing benefits closed across all of the country during 2016 with customers claiming Universal Credit instead. At the same time, during 2016 and 2017, existing benefit claimants will also be moved over to Universal Credit. However, final decisions on the later stages of the roll-out will be informed by the completion of the enhanced digital IT system which is currently being specified. The current plan represents a considerable risk with a mass

migration of existing cases at the back end of the project. Current DWP estimates show that in the 14 months leading up to the deadline at the end of 2017, more than 200,000 people will need to be migrated from legacy benefits to Universal Credit every month.