

Disability Equality Impact Assessment Questionnaire

Policy/Service/Change being assessed: Reduction to Welfare Rights service	Department: Services for People
Person Responsible for Assessment: Sarah Andrews	Date of assessment: 24/01/2012

Brief description of service and to whom provided/available:

Welfare Rights (WR) provides free, confidential advice & representation on social security benefits & tax credits to residents of Darlington. WR also provides advice & support to social care, health & housing staff as well as the voluntary sector.

Background

Government grants have previously funded one of the posts in this small team. As an interim measure, in 2011/12 additional funding was gained from the Primary Care Trust but this finishes in April 2012. The Council is not in a position to pick up this cost pressure; hence the saving to the Council is small.

Financial Savings Identified

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
£10,000	£10,000	£10,000	£10,000

As part of this EIA and the DEIA work undertaken, in addition to specific community group consultation sessions to identify any arising impacts, the corporate consultation sessions and the online budget forum. Data regarding individuals supported through the welfare rights service has been reviewed, in addition a sample of service users utilising the service were contained to ascertain any arising impacts from the proposal. This was undertaken through 20 questionnaires.

Reduction of WR service

- currently receives referrals/deals with clients of Adult Social Care, Children’s Services & Housing including the Customer Contact Centre & Duty Teams.

- provides information to Members, Council staff & voluntary agencies

Individuals in vulnerable situations will be affected by the reduction in the service. When a disabled person or their carer lose or have a reduction in their benefit entitlement they often suffer from increased levels of stress and financial insecurity. It can have a negative impact on their health, their ability to remain independent and increased reactive costs to the Council through increased assistance and decreased revenue.

Council staff are affected as many clients of WR are already known to another service within the Council. This will increase their work if they still have a duty (eg Local Government Act 2000 which gives a local authority the "duty of well being", "promoting inclusive communities" is a key theme within the Community Strategy and "narrowing the inequalities gap "a key objective) to assist clients who are disabled, carers etc. A number of referrals are received from Children's and Adults Social and Housing Services for people in crisis, the operational impact from service reduction will fall to Care Management and Housing Officers.

By reducing capacity of WR and thereby increasing the likelihood that people will be missing out on their full benefit entitlement will reduce the amount of charges received by the Council where people are receiving chargeable services. Supporting people around unclaimed benefits has previously been a priority area. Maximising a person's legitimate benefit income in a timely manner can directly increase the revenue received by the Council.

Losing one caseworker will have a significant effect on the local economy – approximately £440,000 in benefits is worth an estimated £778,000 to Darlington. People in receipt of benefits will spend most of their money locally – every pound received will circulate and re-circulate within the local economy and so be worth even more than if it were being spent (for instance) on foreign holidays. The New Economics Foundation has devised a Local Multiplier (known as LM3), which in the case of welfare benefits is a ratio of 1:1.77.

Costs to the Council, such as emergency Section 17 payments by Children's Services, can be reduced or avoided with emergency appointments to WR for assistance with the relevant benefit claims. Reducing the capacity of the service will lead to longer waiting times for appointments and potentially increase the cost of supporting vulnerable families/individuals in crisis.

By reducing capacity of WR there will be a significant reduction tribunal representation at social security appeals in Darlington. The success rate of the current post holder is 70% - nationally the success rate of an unrepresented appellant is 35%. Those disabled people who are unable to adequately represent themselves, particularly those with LD, will not receive the support that they require as there is not the capacity anywhere else in Darlington. Therefore there is no alternative

provision for these individuals to receive similar support.

Should the reduction in welfare rights service occur this would mean that 40 people per year would not receive support about benefit appeals and up to 150 clients would either receive no assistance or have a longer time to wait for assistance from other organisations. Those who are currently being supported who do not have their appeal hearing before the member of staff is made redundant will not be guaranteed representation by another member of staff as the capacity of staff is already limited. Waiting times for appeals has risen significantly over the past two years, with most appeals taking in excess of nine months to be heard therefore no new appeals are being taken on by the member of staff under threat of redundancy to ensure all staff can deal with their current caseload.

From the impact information obtained as part of the assessment there were a number of headline negative impacts which have been further detailed on Pg 5 and original impact information submitted has been attached at Appendix 1 pg 11

- Alternative provisions such as CAB have waiting lists which will increase as demand exceeds capacity; the removal of capacity could have possible devastating financial impacts for many people.
- Potential impact for the Council in picking up costs for people in crisis elsewhere.
- Some people would be unable to complete benefit applications without tailored support.
- Loss of Tribunal Support.

Extract Comment Received from Age UK (Darlington) 27.01.12

We agree wholeheartedly with the arguments you make above regarding the 'clear cost benefit to investment in this type of activity' and understand that whilst this service may be a 'cost pressure' we would recommend that the council does all it can to support the continuation of the service.

Introduction

This template should be used with the Disability Equality Scheme 2006-2009. Completing this template without following the rest of the disability equality impact assessment process outlined in the Scheme does not comprise a disability equality impact assessment.

Q.1 Is your service/policy/change accessible to all disabled people? Bear in mind any economic, social, environmental, physical, intellectual, cultural, linguistic, technological or other barriers.

Please note the responses below relate to the Welfare Rights Service delivery as a whole, the specific proposal contained within the MTFP relates to the reduction in the Welfare Rights Service. Potential negative impacts identified resulting from the proposal have been identified on page 5

Issue	Yes	No	If yes, what evidence do you have to demonstrate this?	If no, what do you plan to do to remove barriers to access?
Physical or mobility impairment	Y		Referrals are made via social care & health professionals. Home visits can be made and joint visits with social care staff/family members are regularly made.	
Sensory impairment	Y		Referrals are made via Vane House/ Visual Impairment team.	
Learning disability or mental impairment	Y		Referrals are made via LD & MH teams	
Other disabilities and health conditions covered by the Equality Act 2010 (eg. diabetes, HIV, multiple sclerosis, depression and cancer)	Y		Referrals are made via social care & health professionals.	
Any other disability issue (e.g. frail/vulnerable people, people with mild impairments who do not perceive themselves as disabled, people with multiple impairment)	Y		Referrals are made via social care & health care professionals	

Negative Impacts on the Welfare Rights Proposal received via Email

Open Case implications

02/12/11 - I am currently an open case with the Welfare Rights Unit and understand (via my daughter), that the Welfare Rights Officer that is currently supporting me is under threat of redundancy next year. Without the service of this officer and the unit I would not be making any progress myself in applying and appealing for benefits, I am physically disabled and am experiencing mental health problems. I feel that the Welfare Rights Unit provides a valuable service for vulnerable people in Darlington and should be saved from cuts.

14/12/2011 - I am writing about the proposed cut to funding for the disabled, i.e. DAD Carers Support Service. I am full time carer for a gentleman of 42 years old who suffers from Downs Syndrome he attends Tec works day centre. I understand the items up for consultation include reduction of welfare rights. review of supported bus service. and of dad itself. If these services were closed down it would be just about the end of him as it is his only way of feeling like he means something to society, it is his be all and end all to everything. I can't drive so the bus service for him to get to his work would be the end of his happiness, it might seem over the top to you but not to him. And DAD has been a great help if we run into any problems. Welfare rights are a big help to in helping you through all the red tape of benefits and entitlements regards.

Negative Impacts on the Welfare Rights Proposal received via Letter

27/01/12 I am writing about the proposed cut to funding for the disabled, i.e. DAD Carers Support Service. I am full time carer for a gentleman of 42 years old who suffers from Downs Syndrome he attends Tec works day centre. I understand the items up for consultation include reduction of welfare rights. review of supported bus service. and of dad itself. If these services were closed down it would be just about the end of him as it is his only way of feeling like he means something to society, it is his be all and end all to everything. I can't drive so the bus service for him to get to his work would be the end of his happiness, it might seem over the top to you but not to him. And DAD has been a great help if we run into any problems. Welfare rights are a big help to in helping you through all the red tape of benefits and entitlements regards.

Received a lot of help and support from the Welfare Rights Officer. Has become very anxious since receiving a letter about the possible loss of the Welfare Rights Service and the possible loss of this support. Losing this support would have a highly detrimental effect.

Specific Negative Impact Area Identified: Alternative provisions such as CAB have long waiting lists, the removal of capacity could have possible devastating financial impacts for many people.

"If Welfare Rights service is reduced then only CAB left. It can take a long time to get an appointment with CAB because of their workloads. My son has been placed on Job Seekers Allowance now instead of Incapacity Benefit. Consequences of not having the correct support could mean a change in loss of income which could affect his independence. He needs (as we do) good timely advice and support".

Longer waiting times impact and tribunal support

The proposal to reduce the welfare rights service must not be allowed to go ahead. To reduce staff would mean longer waiting time to see a member of staff for help, also this will make their work much harder. As the basic group, my money will not cover this, the welfare rights service help is most important. Without their help I would have gone under. Form filling in is not easy for me, so given their help I know I have someone who understands and can help. without their help the powers that be would have put me on the scrap heap. Welfare rights service have shown them that I am a person not a number. I have to eat well, to keep warm and be able to get out and about so I can keep my independence longer

“Reducing the team by one member means longer waiting times for the customer, when I require quick and speedy information and help it will take longer thus resulting in a longer waiting time to receive entitlements”.

Comment “ I feel that this service is vital within Darlington. I also realise that the waiting time to get an appointment with an adviser, how many people are rely on the help and support offered by Welfare rights”.

Specific Negative Impact Area Identified: Loss of Tribunal Support, some people would be unable to complete benefit applications without tailored support

“I am opposed to the idea of reducing the Welfare Rights staff because there are too few staff and the service is overstretched already, the service is vital to me. I needed the help of this member of staff to help me appeal my DLA decision following a stroke. As the service is already overstretched I was fortunate to be referred by my Clinical Psychologist otherwise I may not have been eligible for help as there are too few staff to cope with demand present. In my opinion more staff are needed not less “

Q.2 (a) For whatever reason, does your service treat any group of disabled people differently from its other service users?

Yes

Y

No

If you have answered ‘yes’, please specify those individuals or groups affected and whether the impact has the potential to be adverse.

Home visits are available to disabled people where appropriate to ensure that they are able to access the service. Reducing the service will cause disabled people greater difficulty compared to the wider population accessing timely advice.

(b) What needs to be done to prevent any potentially adverse impact?

Not reduce the service. Should the reduction in welfare rights service occur this would mean that 40 people per year would not receive support about benefit appeals and up to 150 clients would either receive no assistance or have a longer time to wait for assistance from other organisations. Those who are currently being supported who do not have their appeal hearing before the member of staff is made redundant will not be guaranteed representation by another member of staff as the capacity of staff is already limited. Waiting times for appeals has risen significantly over the past two years, with most appeals taking in excess of nine months to be heard therefore no new appeals are being taken on by the member of staff under threat of redundancy to ensure all staff can deal with their current caseload.

Q.3 (a) Do you promote disability equality within your service? (e.g. through departmental equalities group, innovative marketing or community engagement techniques)

Yes
No

Y

If you have answered 'yes', please give examples of how equality is promoted.

The service is proactive in order to promote disability equality. To ensure that disabled people are not under-claiming, referrals are made from relevant organisations & professionals. Using existing information held within the Local Authority, that is not accessible by outside organisations, promotes the service to disabled people who may not be able to access traditional high street advice providers.

(b) Do you promote positive attitudes towards disabled people? (e.g. through customer care training, cultural issues awareness training, the use of images of disabled people in your publicity material)

Yes

Y

No

If you have answered 'yes', please give examples.

Training & publicity materials where relevant.

Q.4 Are there any plans in place within your Service to promote disability equality more effectively?

Yes
No

If yes, please outline what you intend to do (including details, if known, of timescales and areas to be covered, etc.)

Not known – dependent upon proposal to reduce service in this specific area.