

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 20 NOVEMBER 2014

REFERENCE FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 NOVEMBER 2014

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME CHALLENGE PANEL

The Committee received the report of the Divisional Director, Partnership Development and Performance, which set out the findings and recommendations of the Council Tax Support Scheme Challenge Panel.

The Panel Chair introduced the report and described the background and rationale for the focus and work of the Panel. He thanked all those who had taken part in the review and in particular the policy officer who had supported the Panel and drafted the report.

The Panel Chair stated that the Panel had considered a broad range of impacts, direct and indirect, resulting from welfare reforms, and had discovered many cost issues for claimants. He also noted that the proposed changes to the Council Tax Support Scheme had since been withdrawn.

Members commented and asked questions as follows:

The Chair suggested that if the Panel's recommendations were referred to Cabinet, the video evidence should be shown in support as it was a powerful piece of work. He observed that the report had demonstrated how severe the current scheme was across the board, from the amount people received and the taper they paid, to the court summons fees. He also welcomed the withdrawal of the proposed changes.

A Member queried if reducing staff numbers would mean that their ability to provide support and a good service to claimants would be compromised.

A Member said that working on the Challenge Panel had been a positive experience and the report was a document the Panel could be proud of. With regard to negative impacts, she had been made aware that residents could only contact the department by telephone, but for many this was an impractical and expensive method, which exacerbated their difficulties and distress.

In conclusion the Chair expressed his gratitude to the Challenge Panel and noted that the report and their recommendations had been taken seriously.

Resolved to RECOMMEND: (to Cabinet) That

- (1) the Council Tax Support Scheme Challenge Panel's findings and recommendations be referred to Cabinet for consideration;
- (2) the report author be commended and thanked for his work on the review

Background Documents:

Draft minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 18 November 2014

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