



Report to: Development Committee

Subject: Consultation: DSD Maximising Incomes and Outcomes – A Plan For Improving The Uptake Of Benefits

Date: 5 February 2013

Reporting Officer: John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470

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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Council has been asked to respond to the Social Development Minister's three year plan to improve the uptake of benefits. This plan sets a target of generating over £30million in additional social security benefits for at least 10,000 people across the region by 2016. Views are sought on four key areas:
1.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – access and delivery of benefits; – better targeting of those with potential to claim more benefits; – responding to the needs of people at key life changes; and – strengthening partnerships and encouraging innovation in order to improve the uptake of benefits.
1.3	<p>The specific questions for the consultation are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do you believe that the Department should continue to invest in proactive approaches to encouraging benefit uptake? – Do you [believe] that people in all circumstance (in and out of work) are in scope for improved awareness and information with higher investment and priority being given to those groups identified as needing more direct intervention in order to take up benefits they are entitled to? – Do you agree that referral to a wider range of services and supports should be a key part of benefit uptake programmes? – Do you agree with the vision and aims of the strategy? – Do you believe that the 6 strategic priorities are right? Are there others that you would have expected to see? – Do you agree that the main barriers to benefit uptake are listed?

	<p>Are there other factors that may have a bearing on decisions about having an entitlement check or making a claim?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In addition to those better targeting commitments set out are there others that you believe should be considered by the Department? – In addition to those access and delivery commitments set out are there other improvements that you believe should be explored by the Department? – What additional steps do you believe the Department could take to ensure that, at critical points of change in people’s lives, they are aware of their entitlements to benefits, services and supports? – How do you believe the Department could improve uptake of benefits through enhanced partnerships working with community level organisations? – How do you believe the Department could improve uptake of benefits through innovation? – Are there additional targets that you would like to propose? – Any further comments, recommendations or suggestions you would like to make in relation to this plan. <p>1.4 The Full proposal is attached in Appendix 1 and is also available online: http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/consultations/consultations-maximising-incomes-and-outcomes.htm</p> <p>1.5 We were made aware of the consultation on 2 January 2013 and comments are required to be returned by the 26 February 2013.</p> <p>1.6 The consultations document was distributed to Officers across Council and their responses have been included in the provisional draft response attached as Appendix 2.</p>
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2	Key Issues
2.1	Most of the proposals seem sensible and in line with Council’s current initiatives in the area of benefit awareness (particularly our work with older people and through our advice services).
2.2	<p>However there are some aspects of the draft proposal that could be improved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – There needs to be a balance between targeting efforts at the most vulnerable while still meeting the needs of all people who are entitled to benefits. We are not currently clear as to where the emphasis will be but there may need to be more on careers and those in care. – Some of the barriers to accessing benefits are not explicit in the document. For example there is no reference to barriers caused by frailty; physical difficulties and feeling of vulnerability; the impact of medical conditions such as depression; and low literacy levels. – There could be more emphasis and awareness of opportunities for working in partnership with other agencies. – There is a realisation that the department needs to be innovative in finding solutions to the problem of people not claiming benefits. However there needs to be some caution so that the system is not made more complicated, which is a major barrier in its own right. – There should be more emphasis on converting awareness about benefits to the actual take up of benefits.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – There should be some recognition of the potential impact of the recession in terms of putting further strain on the system.
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3	Resource Implications
3.1	There are no resource implications attached to this report.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations implications attached to this report.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to approve the draft BCC response to the consultation and raise any additional issues, relating to the consultation document, that they would like to be included.

6	Decision Tracking
Timeline:	26 February 2013
Reporting Officer:	David Purchase

7	Documents Attached
Appendix 1 "Maximising Incomes and Outcomes - A Plan For Improving The Uptake Of Benefits." DSD. December 2012.	
Appendix 2 "Consultation: Draft Response DSD Increasing The Uptake Of Benefits."	