



## Report of: Executive Member for Finance and Performance

| Meeting of                    | Date         | Agenda Item | Ward(s) |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------|
| Policy & Performance Scrutiny | 21 July 2014 |             | All     |
| Delete as appropriate         | Exempt       | Non-exempt  |         |

## SUBJECT: IMPACTS OF WELFARE REFORM: SCRUTINY UPDATE

### 1. Synopsis

- 1.1 In 2012-13 the Communities Review Committee undertook a scrutiny of the impacts of the government's welfare reforms on Islington residents. The aim of the review was to identify what, if anything, the Council could do to mitigate the impacts on the significant numbers of residents who would be adversely affected. The Committee published its findings and recommendations in April 2013. These were endorsed by the Council in October 2013.
- 1.2 This report provides an update on the Council's response to welfare reforms, including progress against the specific scrutiny recommendations.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note Council activity over the past year in responding to welfare reform (Section 4) and progress against the scrutiny recommendations (Section 5 and Appendix B)
- 2.2 To note next steps in terms of testing out new ways of engaging with and supporting residents (Section 6), particularly the shift of emphasis to focus on employment outcomes

### 3. Background

- 3.1 The government's programme of welfare reforms has affected, and will continue to affect, a large number of Islington residents. A summary of the changes to the welfare benefit system is set out at Appendix A. The complexity of the benefits system, and the wide-ranging nature of the changes, means that a household may face some or all of the following:
  - A loss or reduction of disability and / or out of work sickness benefit
  - Penalties for under-occupation of social housing
  - Unsustainable reductions in income due to limiting the annual up-rating of benefits to 1%
  - A benefit cap on the total amount a household can claim per week (£350 for a single person and £500 for lone parents and couples)

- 3.2 Changes relating to local housing allowance (LHA), council tax, bedroom tax and the introduction of the benefit cap are now fully implemented and we are starting to see the impacts. Analysis of our data tells us that in Islington:
- Around 30,000 residents in receipt of benefits have seen a reduction in their income
  - 20,000 residents were charged council tax for the first time or were liable to pay more than they had done prior to April 2013
  - 1,500 tenants are affected by the Bedroom Tax, losing either £14 or £25 on their housing benefit per week because they are deemed to have one or more spare bedrooms
  - Latest figures (June 2014) indicate over 450 council house tenants affected by the bedroom tax are now falling into arrears. The majority (over 330) wish to 'stay and pay' rather than have to move to more affordable homes outside of Islington or London
  - Around 300 households are affected by the Household Benefit Cap, the majority facing a shortfall of over £50 a week
  - As for bedroom tax, families affected by the benefit cap are also struggling to pay their rent. 112 households with 369 children currently have shortfalls of over £50 per week. 91 of these have been classified as having a significant risk to the sustainability of their tenancy
- 3.3 As a result, there are more people seeking support from council and partner services. Examples include advice on debt, requests to GPs to provide information for work capability assessments and requests for financial assistance to meet basic needs. According to the Trussell Trust over 913,138 people received emergency food in 2013/14 compared with 346,992 in 2012/13.
- 3.4 There are still three major reforms in the process of being implemented and for which we have yet to see the full impacts: the migration from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance; the introduction of Personal Independence Payments which replace Disability Living Allowance; and the introduction of Universal Credit, a single monthly payment to a household replacing the current range of means tested benefits.

## **4. Update on Council's activity**

- 4.1 Over the past year the Council has continued efforts to:
- a) Raise awareness of welfare reform amongst residents, staff and partners
  - b) Deliver practical support to vulnerable residents affected by changes to benefits
  - c) Challenge individual decisions and national policy
  - d) Support residents into employment

### **a) Raising awareness**

- 4.2 Over the past two years the Council has delivered an intensive publicity campaign to raise awareness amongst residents, partners and frontline services. This has included a borough-wide poster campaign, briefings for staff and partners on impacts for specific groups, and a series of roadshows and workshops for residents in community hubs, schools, and other frontline services.
- 4.3 Many of those affected by the changes to benefits live in social housing – a factor recognised by the scrutiny committee and reflected in its recommendations. Information has been cascaded through Tenants and Residents Associations, Tenant Management Organisations, community hubs, caretakers conferences and 'Help on Your Doorstep' to help raise awareness amongst social housing tenants.

## b) Delivering practical support

4.4 Support has been delivered through:

- **Welfare Reform Response Team:** a joint Council / Jobcentre Plus team working with those families affected by the benefit cap – helping residents to explore options for more affordable renting and to work towards employment
- **Housing Mobility Team:** the team has written to all tenants affected by the bedroom tax, with follow up calls and visits, offering support to address the shortfall in rent, including exploring options for alternative housing or sub-letting the spare room to bring in additional income. Even where tenants have failed to respond to initial offers of support and the Council has been required to seek re-possession due to rent arrears, the team has continued to offer support and alternative property options right up until the last minute. To date residents have eventually engaged, thus avoiding eviction (NB: *The Council's policy is that where tenants fall into arrears solely due to bedroom tax and there is no suitable alternative property to offer them, the Council will not pursue eviction as long as the tenant engages with the support on offer to find a sustainable solution*).
- **Income Maximisation Team:** providing advice on benefit entitlements
- **Residents Support Scheme:** provides one off crisis payments to residents who are struggling to meet essential costs, often as a result of cuts to their benefit. The scheme brings together a range of funding streams, including Local Welfare Provision Grant (or social fund), Discretionary Housing Payment, and crisis funding administered by Cripplegate Foundation. DHP has been used to make up shortfalls in rent whilst the WRRT works with residents to find sustainable housing
- **Independent advice:** the Council has provided additional funding to the Citizen's Advice Bureau and Advice Alliance to advise and support residents impacted by welfare reforms
- **Tackling debt:** The Debt Coalition has led the work to raise awareness of the risks of using payday lenders, through poster campaigns, Oyster card holders, etc. The Planning Department is using a planning clause known as 'Article 4' to help control the number of new payday lending companies setting up in the borough. And the Council has provided financial support to the Credit Union to help it develop its business model and provide an affordable alternative to payday loans for vulnerable residents.

## c) Challenge and campaigning

- 4.5 **Challenging individual decisions:** The Council has, where necessary, challenged benefits decisions relating to residents. The Welfare Reform Response Team has contacted all resident identified by DWP as being subject to the benefit cap to not only offer them support, but to also identify any change of circumstance which might affect application of the cap. As a result a number of families have been excluded from the cap. The Council's Income Maximisation Team has challenged the outcome of Work Capability Assessments, in cases where residents with serious health issues have been deemed fit to work - 87% of these appeals against ESA decisions have been successful.
- 4.6 **Challenging the poor quality of Work Capability Assessments:** The high rate of successful appeals against ESA decisions in Islington and across the country has highlighted issues with the quality of decision making by ATOS, the company contracted by Government to undertake WCAs. In October 2013, in response to one of the scrutiny recommendations, the Leader wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Iain Duncan-Smith) expressing a 'vote of no confidence' in Atos and urgently requested information on what measures would be put in place to address the serious concerns raised

4.7 *In March 2014, the government announced that the contract with Atos to administer fit-for-work tests for sick and disabled people was ending early, due to serious concerns around quality. A new contractor is expected to be in place by April 2015.*

4.8 **Challenging the decision to axe the Social Fund:** The Government has announced that the Local Welfare Provision Grant (Social Fund) used by councils to provide goods and cash payments to residents in crisis, will be abolished from 2015-16. This amounts to a loss of around £1.2m pa for Islington and will reduce the funding we have available for crisis support through the Residents Support Scheme. The Council has made representations to the government and has contributed towards an article in *The Guardian* highlighting the impacts of the loss of this funding. The Council is also an 'interested party' in a judicial review of the Government's decision and has forwarded a submission to the High Court setting out the rationale for its support of the Claimant's challenge to the decision to abolish the Local Welfare Provision Grant

4.9 *We are awaiting further news of whether the government is prepared to reverse its decision in the light of challenge from councils and charities, and for the outcome of the judicial review.*

#### **d) Supporting residents into employment**

4.10 Over the past year, the Council has intensified efforts to help residents into work, through its own programme of employment support, and also through exercising leadership in coordinating existing employment support across partners, and stimulating fresh thinking and new ideas.

4.11 **Practical employment related support** has included:

- Targeted support for parents, through Islington Working for Parents and through the Parental Employment Partnership with Jobcentre Plus which involves joint working and co-location between the Council and JCP
- A Learning Disability pilot to help young people with learning difficulties into paid work, and a self-employment project delivered by CENTRA to support those impacted by the benefit cap for whom self-employment may be a viable option
- Reviewing our adult learning and skills offer to increase the focus on employment related skills and qualifications and to complement and offer progression to the provision offered through City & Islington College
- Engagement with employers, through the Business and Employment Support Team (BEST), to source apprenticeships and employment opportunities for local residents
- Working with schools through the Education and Pathways to Employment Project to identify and support those young people who are at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training)

4.12 **At a strategic level**, the main mechanisms for improving employment outcomes are through:

- A new Employment Services Board set up in July 2013 to oversee and ensure effective delivery of a coordinated programme of employment support across Islington. The Board is chaired by the Leader and brings together the council, business representatives and key partners involved in delivery of employment support (Jobcentre Plus, Work Programme providers and City & Islington College)
- An independent Employment Commission also set up in 2013, co-chaired by leading educationalist and entrepreneur Maggie Semple OBE and Cllr Robert Khan, to tackle persistently high levels of worklessness in Islington and to and make recommendations around what more we can do, or do differently, to achieve a real step change

## 5. Progress against scrutiny recommendations

- 5.1 Appendix B provides an update on progress against the eleven recommendations put forward by the Communities Review Committee. Most have been completed or are ongoing.
- 5.2 However, limited progress has been made around data sharing with Jobcentre Plus. A combination of legal and practical barriers have meant that, to date, we have been unable to access and cross-refer data held by JCP and our own services, other than on a case by case basis. This makes it difficult for us to identify and target employment and other support, and to check whether those whom we have supported into employment have remained in work. The Council, along with other London boroughs, is continuing to put pressure on DWP to enable and encourage greater data sharing at local level to improve employment outcomes.

## 6. Next steps: piloting new ways of working

- 6.1 The work around supporting residents affected by welfare reforms is part of a larger customer transformation programme aimed at achieving the right balance between promoting customer independence and providing support. The aim is to encourage and enable as many residents as possible to 'self-serve' in routine transactions and enquiries to achieve efficiency savings, whilst ensuring that more intensive targeted support is available for those who really need it.
- 6.2 This is reflected in the response to welfare reforms. Going forward, the Council is looking to enable residents to become less reliant on support and more empowered to be self-sufficient and resilient. To this end the Council is now shifting the emphasis of its response to welfare reforms – from supporting residents to challenge or mitigate changes to their benefit towards a real focus on getting people into work. There are a number of other factors which underpin the importance of this increased emphasis to employment:
  - *Child poverty is largely associated with workless households:* Islington's Child Poverty Needs Assessment (October 2013) and Strategy (March 2014) make a clear and compelling case for supporting parents into work. Islington has the second highest rate of child poverty in the country: 39% of children are living below the poverty line, 87% of these live in workless households dependent on out of work benefits
  - *Work is good for health and wellbeing:* Our Health and Wellbeing Strategy reflects the evidence that being in work is good for your wellbeing, and that most disabled people want to work but are prevented from doing so because of practical barriers and attitudes.
  - *The continued squeeze on welfare benefits,* regardless of which political party wins the general election next year, will place increased pressure on claimants to get a job. We need to help them to find the right job – one which pays a decent wage and allows progression to avoid residents moving from out of work poverty to in work poverty.
- 6.3 In addition to the employment related activity set out above, the Council is pursuing a number of new initiatives to test out new approaches to engage with and support residents and to influence / inform future commissioning and delivery of employment support at a local level:

### **New Customer Centre at 222:**

- 6.4 The new Customer Centre at 222 Upper Street and the Contact Islington call centre brings together support services into one single location whilst promoting and signposting as many those who can manage it to self-serve. The Customer Centre undertakes a 'Progressive Entry Assessment' – in effect a triaging of customers on arrival to refer to the appropriate route:
  - *Transactional and Self Service* where quick single issues can be handled with some initial assistance

- *Connected Direct Services* providing resolution of a specific issue relating to housing, council tax or housing benefit
- *Employment and Financial Opportunities Service (see below)* where an underlying need is identified and a person can be supported further with a particular emphasis on employment
- *Advice and Advocacy* on a range of issues provided by the CAB, LBI's direct partners, and the funded advice alliance contracts

### **iWork – the new employment and financial opportunities team**

- 6.5 The new iWork team has been set up to pilot new ways of working with residents facing multiple barriers to employment. The team is based at 222 Upper Street as part of the new Customer Services Centre, and is a joint venture between the Council and JCP. Key features of the team include:
- Triage or 'progressive entry' to identify support needs
  - Face to face advice and intensive one to one support:
  - Solving problems not just tackling presenting symptoms – using a coaching and mentoring methodology
  - Organised around people not services and organisations
  - Focused on getting people into work
  - Strong links to third sector and other partners for seamless referrals for other support needs
- 6.6 The team will pilot the new approach with two specific cohorts:
- 'Top 200' (200 residents who have been claiming benefits for longest time)
  - Area / estate based approach – working with benefit claimants on the Bemerton Estate

### **Local Support Services Framework (LSSF) pilot**

- 6.7 Islington has submitted an expression of interest to be part of the government's Local Support Services Framework pilot. The LSSF pilot will test out arrangements for offering support at a local level to vulnerable residents who may struggle with the implementation of Universal Credit. The new regime will change the way people access benefits, with a move from various means tested benefits paid on a weekly basis, to a single monthly payment to one named householder, with an expectation that the claim will be applied for and managed online. DWP has asked for expressions of interest (EOI) to conduct a 12 month robust trial of LSSF, testing out arrangements for providing local support, personal budgeting support and digital support. Islington's bid is based on what we already have in place – a new Customer Centre for channelling and assessing customer support needs and the new iWork team who will work with cohorts of benefit claimants who face multiple barriers to work.
- 6.8 If selected, the trial would start on 1 September 2014. DWP will provide a contribution towards our administration costs (£200,000 has been requested) and will commission external evaluation which will feed into the Universal Credit programme. A formal announcement on successful pilot bids is expected to be made on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2014.

### **City Growth Deal: ESA pilot**

- 6.9 The government has made available significant funding through its City Growth Deal programme to support economic growth in major cities across the country. Central London Forward, a partnership of eight central London boroughs, including Islington<sup>1</sup>, has been awarded £10m to pilot a locally led approach to help those furthest from work move into the

---

<sup>1</sup> Other boroughs which make up the Central London Forward partnership are Camden, City of London, City of Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth

labour market. The focus of the pilot will be on those who have been unsuccessful at finding work through the Work Programme. The initiative will see each job seeker working with a single, multi-skilled support worker to help them implement an individual plan of action. Working closely with council, health and voluntary sector services, support workers will bring in specialist support and skills training as and when needed to guide the individual forward.

- 6.10 The pilot will enable London boroughs to work directly with government to help design the next generation of employment support services. Most importantly, it will provide us with the opportunity to demonstrate that locally commissioned, locally led employment support can achieve improved outcomes for our residents.

## **7. Implications**

### **Financial Implications**

- 7.1 If successful the LSSF pilot bid will secure around £200,000 DWP funding to administer the pilot and undertake evaluation.
- 7.2 The ESA pilot which forms part of the City Growth Deal will be funded through European Social Fund (ESF).

### **Legal and Equality Implications**

- 7.3 The council has a duty under the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act, advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and foster good relations across all characteristics - between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic, take steps to meet their needs, including (but not only) steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities and encourage people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life.
- 7.4 The welfare reforms will particularly affect those groups who are more likely to be dependent on benefits – female lone parents, disabled people and those with long term health conditions, and those from BME backgrounds. The Council is working with partners to reduce the impact on these groups through targeted support to find sustainable housing and employment.

### **Environmental implications**

- 7.5 None.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 The work undertaken to date, and the new direction set out in section 6 will position the Council to be able to provide a more holistic approach to supporting residents, thus achieving better outcomes for residents themselves whilst achieving savings in the longer term through reducing reliance on support services. The pilot bids, if successful, will enable the Council to influence and have greater control over how employment and welfare support is delivered at a local level.

### **Report Author:**

Annette Hobart

Strategy & Community Partnerships, Chief Executive's Department

Tel: 020 7527 3244

E-mail: Annette.hobart@islington.gov.uk

## **Appendices**

- A** Changes to the benefits system between 2011 and 2013
- B** Summary of progress against Communities Review Committee's scrutiny recommendations

## **Background papers:**

The Impact of Welfare Reforms on Islington and its People: Report of the Communities Review Committee (April 2013)

The Impact of Welfare Reforms on Islington and its People: Council Response (report to Executive – 17 October 2013)

Final report clearance:

**Signed by:**

Date

**Received  
by:**

Date



## Changes to the benefit system between 2011 and 2013

| Change  | Who will it affect  | Date of implementation  |
|---|---|---|
| Migration from Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance   | Incapacity Benefit claimants  | Migration started in October 2008, planned to end in March 2014 (but now delayed)   |
| Increases in non-dependant deductions   | All housing benefit claimants with non-dependants living with them                              | In April 2011 and again in April 2012 and 2013  |
| National caps on Local Housing Allowance, depending on property size  | Housing Benefit claimants subject to Local Housing Allowance                                    | From April 2011 to April 2012 for new claimants. For existing claimants, on the anniversary of their claim. Nine months' transitional protection available to most claimants. |
| Removing the £15 excess that Housing Benefit claimants can keep if their rent is below Local Housing Allowance rates                                | Housing Benefit claimants subject to Local Housing Allowance                                    | April 2011  |
| Setting local housing allowance rates at the 30th percentile of rents in each broad rental market area rather than the median                       | Housing Benefit claimants subject to Local Housing Allowance                                    | April 2011  |
| Uprating local housing allowance by the Consumer Prices Index rather than by increases in rents   | Housing Benefit claimants subject to Local Housing Allowance                                    | April 2012 (and by 1 per cent from September 2013)  |
| Shared accommodation rate to apply to single tenants without dependent children up to 35 years old (rather than as previously those up to 25 years) | Housing Benefit claimants subject to Local Housing Allowance                                    | January 2012  |
| Introduction of under-occupation penalties in the social rented sector ('bedroom tax')  | Housing Benefit claimants in the social rented sector   | April 2013  |
| Increasing the number of hours to be worked for couples claiming working tax credit from 16 to 24 hours a week                                      | Couples claiming working tax credit   | April 2012  |
| Localisation of the discretionary social fund   | All local residents   | April 2013  |
| Localisation of council tax benefit   | All local residents   | April 2013  |
| The benefit cap   | Benefit claimants receiving over £350 (single people) or £500 (lone parents and couples) a week | April 2013  |
| Introduction of personal independence payment (replacing disability living allowance)   | Working-age disabled people receiving disability living allowance                               | April 2013  |
| Introduction of universal credit (replacing means-tested benefits)  | Working-age claimants   | Originally planned for October 2013 but has been delayed until at least 2017  |

## Summary of progress against scrutiny recommendations

| Recommendation   |
|--|
| <p><b>1. Call on the Government to introduce legislation to allow Job Centre Plus to share personal data about the phased roll out of DLA withdrawals with Local Authorities, so that advice and assistance can be provided to these most vulnerable residents at the earliest stage of the assessment process, rather than at the appeal stage</b></p> <p>UNRESOLVED. Data sharing between JCP and local authorities continues to be an issue. The law prevents sharing of data without the claimants consent other than in specified circumstances. Even where these have been met and a data sharing protocol is in place, practical difficulties remain. Local authorities across London have raised this as an issue and will continue to press the government to find ways to address this.</p>  |
| <p><b>2. Write to the Government expressing concerns in relation to the administration of the Work Capability Assessment process by ATOS and DWP (including a strong expression of “no confidence” in ATOS) and request that measures should be put in place to address their concerns, particularly prior to the introduction of Personal Independence Payments</b></p> <p>ACTION COMPLETE – objective achieved. Letter from the Leader sent to Secretary of State for Work &amp; Pensions in October 2013. In March 2014 the government announced that the Atos contract would be terminating early and a new provider is to be commissioned.</p>  |
| <p><b>3. Call on the Government to introduce legislation to allow Job Centre Plus to share with Local Authorities personal data about people of working age on out of work benefits to facilitate good partnership working to support the most disadvantaged (particularly women and black and ethnic minorities, who are being hardest hit by the Government’s welfare reforms) into employment, as exemplified by Islington’s Parental Employment Partnership.</b></p> <p>UNRESOLVED: See Recommendation 1 above</p>   |
| <p><b>4. We will build on the good work of Family Mosaic in supporting residents affected by the bedroom tax to take in lodgers</b></p> <p>ACTION EMBEDDED as part of advice and support on options offered to those affected by the bedroom tax</p>   |
| <p><b>5. Call on the Local Government Association to make representations to the Government to remove foster carers from the scope of the ‘bedroom tax’, in a similar way that those in supported accommodation were removed from the effect of the General Benefit Cap</b></p> <p>N/A Foster carers are now entitled to an extra room. The Council is also supporting foster carers who have a second foster child and require a further additional room through DHP payments</p>   |
| <p><b>6. In the event of legislation not being amended, call on London Councils to co-ordinate a common, London-wide protocol on the use of Discretionary Housing Payments to ensure that foster carers are not penalised by the ‘bedroom tax’ and have a clear expectation of the support they can expect for carrying out this important responsibility.</b></p> <p>N/A See Recommendation 6 above</p>   |
| <p><b>7. We will engage with Tenants and Residents Associations, Tenant Management Organisations and Tenant Management Co-operatives and Help on your Doorstep to enable them to promote greater awareness of the implications of welfare cuts, confidence in raising issues with local residents and improved access to services that can assist those adversely affected. This could include the promotion of pop up advice surgeries on welfare reform, which could be attended by Council officers in order to explain the reforms and offer assistance</b></p> <p>ONGOING: A wide range of activity has been delivered through Council services and advice agencies to brief TMOs, TRAs, community hubs, caretaker conferences, Housing Associations. We’ve also engaged with local voluntary sector organisations such as the. Pilion Trust, Elfrida Society, Hillside Clubhouse, Cranstound Drugs Programme, St Mungos, Centre 404 and others who support and engage our most vulnerable residents.</p> |

## Recommendation

**8. We will increase the number of people designated as “parent champions” to promote the childcare on offer in the borough to other parents in the borough, to enable parents to seek employment and or/training**

DECISION TAKEN NOT to increase parent champions but, instead, to promote childcare through other existing services which engage with parents including support workers in schools, bilingual advisers, and through a new factsheet on childcare options. There has also been a shift in the way we advertise childcare e.g. holiday activities are now being promoted as part of the childcare offer rather than just simply ‘things to do’. And childminders are being promoted as a flexible and (in some cases) more affordable option to nursery places.

**9. We will adopt a service user perspective to support the planning of Islington childcare, and to ensure a flexible childcare offer, which can support working parents, as well as promote the co-location of childcare and education and training.**

ACHIEVED BUT WILL CONTINUE TO REVIEW AND RESPOND TO NEED. The Childcare Coalition has taken into account feedback from parents, young people, council services such as Islington Learning and Working, Families First and BEST, Jobcentre Plus and the voluntary sector when developing its Childcare Sufficiency Action plan 2011-14. This has resulted in an increased awareness of the need for affordable flexible childcare. The Family Information Service is currently identifying a demand for places for two year olds and for childminders, and the Short Breaks Service is in the process of consulting with parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities. These findings will be fed into the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment due in Autumn 2014.

The Council has been able to use New Homes Bonus to fund a range of options to meet the need for flexible childcare. This includes:

- A new formula funded scheme from summer holidays 2014 for after school and holiday provision in primary schools
- Additional holiday provision through voluntary sector schemes to allow them to offer extended hours in the morning and early evening for working parents
- Funding to children’s centres to offer extra holiday playscheme places to siblings or returners. Take up by children’s centres has been variable so this offer will be reviewed in the autumn

**10. The council proposes to enhance its understanding of the impact of the changes by undertaking or commissioning qualitative research to see how the welfare reforms are impacting on Islington people. This will include case studies and will be published**

ONGOING: The Council undertakes regular monitoring and analysis of our own data and of residents’ experiences to monitor the impacts of welfare reforms. We have also sought feedback from statutory sector partners through the Islington Partnership Board and from grass roots voluntary and community sector organisations through a VCS Round Table discussion in 2013. The Employment Commission has actively engaged with residents and partners to explore barriers to securing employment and the feedback will be reflected in its findings and recommendations, which will be published later this year.

**11. Our Islington Learning and Working service is already providing free courses to support residents with digital inclusion in advance of Universal Credit. We will ensure that relevant staff in libraries and community centres are trained to be able to assist residents with how to set up email accounts and complete online forms.**

ONGOING: The Council’s Resident Engagement Team has established the IT Volunteer Mentor Programme to support volunteers to coach residents to learn basic IT skills. The programme is based in and supported by community centres. Our libraries are also offering digital support to residents.