

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM 4

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

2 APRIL 2013

WELFARE REFORMS – EMPLOYMENT & SUPPORT ALLOWANCE TERMS OF REFERENCE & LINES OF ENQUIRY

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To outline possible DRAFT terms of reference and possible lines of enquiry, to direct an investigation into the topic of Employment & Support Allowance in Middlesbrough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That the Overview & Scrutiny Board consider the DRAFT Terms of Reference and following any amendments felt necessary, approves the DRAFT Terms of Reference.
3. That the Overview & Scrutiny Board considers and discusses evidence sources it wants to pursue.

Consideration

4. The Overview & Scrutiny Board will recall that at its previous meeting (15th March 2013), it received evidence from a number of local authority officers around the local operation of Employment & Support Allowance and considered a paper covering the topic.
5. Following an initial discussion on the matter, the Board expressed a strong interest in considering the matter in further detail. As such, based on the discussion at the last meeting, the following DRAFT Terms of Reference have been prepared for the Overview & Scrutiny Board to consider, amend where appropriate and ultimately approve.
6. **DRAFT Terms of reference**
 - 6.1 To develop a detailed understanding of the Employment & Support Allowance and to receive advice from whomever the Board feels appropriate to assist in this.
 - 6.2 To establish the aims of the policy

- 6.3 To investigate & establish what the Employment & Support Allowance and the associated processes around it, mean for demand on local authority services.
- 6.4 To investigate & establish the nature of the contractual relationships in place, to deliver the Employment & Support Allowance policy
- 6.5 To investigate & establish how the performance in those contracts will be judged
- 6.6 To investigate & establish how the medical & appeal process is provided and managed
- 6.7 To investigate & consider the impact of the policy on Middlesbrough and its residents
- 6.8 To prepare conclusions & recommendations as the Board sees as appropriate.
7. In addition to the consideration of the DRAFT terms of reference outlined above, the Panel is asked to consider which agencies/representatives it would like to speak to. As a starting point, the Overview & Scrutiny Board is asked to note that senior representatives of the local team from the Department of Work & Pensions, will be in attendance at the Overview & Scrutiny Board meeting, scheduled for 30 April. The purpose of this briefing is to hear directly from the relevant government department about the policy and some of the wider issues pertaining to Welfare Reform. This briefing will be a good opportunity for Members to ask any questions, although the Board is asked to note that civil servants are not permitted to enter into a debate on the merits of government policy per se.
8. At the meeting today, the Board is asked to note the attendance of senior Department of Work & Pensions at the next meeting. In addition, the Board is asked to consider which other agencies it would like to speak with. It is suggested to the Board that it may wish to approach the contracted provider of the medical assessments, ATOS, the Independent Tribunal representatives, as well as gaining additional evidence from relevant local authority officers. The Board may also wish to approach the Citizens Advice Bureau about its experience of providing advice on this subject.
9. The Board is asked to consider the above and discuss any other avenues of evidence it would like to pursue and ultimately provide some direction to support officers on the next steps it would like to take.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Please see the paper from the Overview & Scrutiny Board on 15 March 2013. Contact Officer:

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