

# MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

## AGENDA ITEM 3

### OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

7 NOVEMBER 2013

<b>THE IMPACT OF WELFARE REFORM IN MIDDLESBROUGH</b>
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#### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To introduce a number of senior representatives in attendance at the meeting to discuss Workplace Assessments.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That the Overview & Scrutiny Board notes the findings and considers how it would like to progress consideration of this topic.

#### CONSIDERATION

##### Previous Evidence Received

3. The Overview and Scrutiny Board began to look at the topic of the impact of welfare reform in Middlesbrough in March 2013. An aspect of that review was to consider the emerging issues in connection with Work Capability Assessments.
4. The Board began by considering the work that had been done by the Council and its partners to mitigate the effects of the changes to the welfare benefits system. The Board learnt about the action plan and communications strategy that had been devised by the Middlesbrough Partnership in order to deal with the impact of the welfare reforms in Middlesbrough.
5. The Board heard about the following in a briefing paper prepared by Nigel Sayer, Partnership Manager, Middlesbrough Partnership
  - 1) ESA and its 2 elements – contributory and income-related.
  - 2) The amount of ESA that would be received dependant on certain factors.
  - 3) Work Capability Assessments
6. The Board then heard from the following
  - J English – Partner Development Manager – DWP
  - B Lambert – Partner Support Manager –DWP
  - L Wood – Customer Service Operations Manager – Job Centre Plus
7. The representatives kindly gave the Board a generic update on Welfare Reforms, including the structure of the ESA, Work Capability Assessments, an overview of the Personal Independence Payment.

8. It was at this point the Board agreed that they would like to speak to someone who represented Atos Healthcare.

### **Work Capability Assessments**

9. As the Board wants gain an understanding of how the assessment process works, the qualifications of the staff undertaking the assessments and how the appeals system operates. Therefore representatives from the Department of Work and Pensions and Atos Healthcare have been invited to today's meeting.

10. The following representatives will be in attendance

- Chris Livingstone – Senior Operations and Partnership Manager, Teesside Area – Department for Work and Pensions
- Dr Paul Clasper – Clinical Manager, North East – Atos Healthcare Medical Services

### **General Questions about the Process**

11. The following questions are not exhaustive, it is suggested that they are used as a guide for the discussion at the meeting:

- (a) Do clients need access to a computer and have the appropriate IT skills in order to make a claim?
- (b) What quality of advice is offered to DWP claimants to help them through the process?
- (c) Are people with possible mental health conditions being provided with the necessary support to help them through the assessment process?
- (d) What happens if someone with a serious health condition is assessed as being fit for work?
- (e) How are the medical and appeal processes provided and managed?
- (f) How is the company's management of the contract performance managed, what reviews of standards are undertaken?

### **Questions specifically about the assessment**

11. General Questions around the assessment process
- (a) Where do assessments take place, are wheelchair accessible facilities available?
  - (b) What if a person really can't make the assessment due to health reasons?
  - (c) Is there a time limit taken to complete the assessment?
  - (d) What form does the interview take?
  - (e) Does everyone with a disability have to attend an assessment?
  - (f) What are the qualifications of the staff undertaking the assessment?
  - (g) Do you feel it gives an accurate answer of a person's condition?
  - (h) In the light of experience, is there anything about the process that could be improved upon?

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- a) No background papers were used in the report.

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