

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FROM ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

Background

Aberdeen City Council's response to the introduction of the U.K. Government's Welfare Reform changes given the wide ranging implications as they are rolled out has been to work in partnership with our community planning partners to ensure that the implications for services are managed and that citizens affected by the changes are supported to adjust as far as possible to these changes.

Under the auspices of Community Planning Aberdeen, a Welfare Reform Board has been formed to manage the CPA's collective response to Welfare Reform. The partnership consists of Aberdeen City Council, the Department of Work and Pensions, Aberdeen Council for Voluntary Organisations, NHS Grampian, the Scottish Police Service, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Food Bank Partnership Aberdeen.

To date partnership projects delivered includes:

- The implementation of Scottish Welfare Fund arrangements.
- A local brand "Welfare Matters" which is being publicised and promoted.
- A Welfare Matters website which signposts to further support and information.
- Creation of a Welfare Matters partnership for frontline services to share information and joined up support in tandem with the well established "Cash in Your Pocket" Partnership in the city.
- Establishment of a HUB and Satellite bases where front line services can offer "one stop" triage support to citizens.
- Ongoing information and training support for a range of services including G.P's.
- Development of an on-line learning portal(OIL) for staff across all sectors.
- Coordination of a number of external applications for funding to provide front line services eg Big Lottery and Scottish Legal Aid Board Making Advice Work schemes has enabled additional money advice resources and employment support services for a number of organisations including Aberdeen Foyer, Aberdeen Cyrenians, Grampian Women's Aid, Grampian Housing Association.
- Continuation and assessment of existing mainstream resources including Fairer Aberdeen Fund (previously Fairer Scotland Fund) investment.

- Additional investment from Fairer Aberdeen Fund on preventative measures i.e. start up Credit Union accounts for school pupils at Northfield Academy, Torry Academy and St Machar Academy (based on Glasgow City Council model) and funding support £ 52,800 per annum towards the Food Bank partnership Aberdeen.

Food Bank Partnership Aberdeen

As Dave Simmers, Chief Executive of Community Food Initiatives North East, provided evidence to a previous Welfare Committee meeting I will not repeat the information here other than to endorse the statistics provided previously in terms of usage and the breadth of the Food Bank Partnerships membership which is connected into the city's most disadvantaged communities via working with well established community based organisations.

From the outset the financial support of the Fairer Aberdeen Board and Welfare Reform Board has been based on the need to ensure that Food Banks, whilst inevitably concerned with supplying food relief for those most in need, need to be part of a holistic approach that focuses on building resilience and preventing the long term causes of poverty. This includes promotion of employment opportunities, tackling debt, improving household budgeting and ensuring that key issues that cause poverty are at best prevented and at least alleviated.

The Welfare Reform Board and the Fairer Aberdeen Boards support for the Food Bank Partnerships work is therefore not about creating food dependency. As part of the Fairer Aberdeen Boards existing funding agreement with the Food Bank Partnership we don't just require information on the quantities of food distributed and the numbers of beneficiaries but we receive monitoring returns that provide information on referrals being made to other agencies; information on people accessing other services eg health, financial support, credit union membership and referrals to employability support agencies.

In addition to the organisations participating in the Food Bank Partnership Aberdeen there are a number of other organisations providing food banks and distributing food in areas of Aberdeen. This includes the Trussell Trust operating in the Seaton area of the city. They have not joined the Food Bank Partnership, which is disappointing, although I understand discussion is being progressed which will hopefully lead to them joining the Partnership.

Part of the issues relate to the conditions around how Trussell Trust Food Banks are set up which require referral from an agency and limited access to repeat requests. It is fair to say that many people using Food Banks in the city are coming back to use these on more than three occasions.

Through the Council's Scottish Welfare Fund arrangements some initial applicants were being directed to the Trussell Trust Food bank, and still continue to some extent, but given the Council now have a partnership agreement with the Food Bank Partnership, we are encouraging applicants to use the Food Bank Partnership outlets whereby successful crisis grant applicants who elect to receive vouchers for the Food Bank Partnership will receive more goods for their award than using alternative supermarket vouchers. Unsuccessful applicants are also being made aware and directed to the Partnership where they will receive a food parcel albeit based on what outlets have available.

As part of our partnership arrangements we are also using the city's Accord smart card technology i.e pre – loaded payment cards where staff dealing with the Scottish Welfare Fund load the card with a monetary amount and when the applicant goes to the partnership outlet to do their shop the items they have scanned reduces the balance on their card. This means they don't have to use the card all at once and they can return another time to purchase more shopping if they wish.

The agreement we have between the Scottish Welfare Fund and the Food Bank Partnership is based on ensuring the food provided by the food bank is to the value of the voucher awarded, that each parcel will contain a "balanced diet" in particular including the staples of fruit, vegetables, pulses, bread and milk. As far as possible beneficiaries will be given a choice on the contents of the parcel. Also, where a beneficiary has mobility problems the partnership makes every effort to come to an acceptable agreement for food parcel delivery/collection.

Finally, as part of the Council's own Corporate Social Responsibility collections of food from staff have been undertaken to support the Partnership and further food drives are planned.

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April 2014