

Bill Sargent Trust Seminar, Wednesday 11th December 2013

WHAT DO THE BENEFIT AND WIDER WELFARE CHANGES MEAN FOR PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES IN HAMPSHIRE, PORTSMOUTH AND SOUTHAMPTON?

WORKSHOP RECOMMENDATIONS

What should we doing in Hampshire on awareness raising and/or mitigating the impact of these changes?

These are the results of discussions from five workshops following the presentation by Dr. Christina Beatty of the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research on the impact of welfare reforms on Hampshire.

Over 80 people attended the hour long workshops with good representation from Local Authorities revenue, policy and advice services; advice agencies including Citizens Advice, specialist advice services for people with disabilities, The Big Lottery and other 3rd sector agencies.

The workshops were lively and creative and this summary can only reflect key points raised from the main workshop questions.

1. How do we build awareness of the impact among those most affected by the changes?

Awareness of changes is still low. Paper communications do not work except with older demographic who are often not affected, people ignore until the last moment.

Key messages on awareness:

Establish a local coordination network in each area, working across silos and organisations to ensure people are working together and avoid duplication or gaps. Involve DWP, LA & third sector – too often we plan independently or leave out key partners.

Messages through PEOPLE NOT PAPER

Trusted local and agency contacts are the way forward – use scarce resources to engage and support those people deliver messages as local communicators
The message must include positive ideas and tips – solely negative information is a turn off

Look at style of communication – social media for younger people, idea of Supporting community champions in low income communities

2. How do we build awareness of the impact in the wider community and with policy makers ?

...in the wider community we need local media stories showing:

- People in work impacted
- Impact on local economies
- Real data and case studies

We should focus on 4 or 5 key messages/facts 'mythbusters'.

- I.e. People in work claim benefits
- I.e. Low income doing important work-Carers

...with policy makers

Engage with MPs (Hampshire)

- Event
- Case studies
- Highlight individual impact on constituents

Councillors

- Share different policies: Southampton, no evictions policy and Basingstoke, eviction due to arrears
- Use of sanctions by DWP: what does it mean for Las
- Encourage residents to raise awareness with their local councillors.
- Economic impact on their ward ?

Businesses

- Economic impact on business

Action now...

Take responsibility to disseminate the report to the 'decision makers' in local Council etc. & colleagues in orgs.

All of us email 10 people/MPs etc. 'you will like this report'.

3. How do we mitigate the impact of the changes ?

Likely impacts and possible actions:

Individuals and families go hungry...

Impact

- Children hungry

Action

- Staff briefed to consider lack of attention/changed behaviour + resources
- Family Intervention Partnerships and Troubled Families projects

Impact

- Impact on food banks

Action

- Tackling 'Dependency'
- Building relationships
- Resources

Impact

- Difficulty/role of foodbanks re providing additional/signposting support

Action

- Training issues?
- More communication between Las & Foodbanks

People can't afford their rent....

Impact

Private landlords withdrawing from rental market: evictions/less supply
Limited stock of one bedroom and shared homes for under 35s in social housing

Action

Research scale of problem
Work with Private Landlords Ass/Forum: address concerns,
Longer term increase smaller stock
Publicise costs of eviction, on costs to Las, Health etc. services – is this a “saving”
DHP and welfare support options

People need more income or resources....

Impact

Possible increase in crime, impact on individual employability + community impact
Local businesses affected in low income areas

Mental & physical health suffers
Evictions
Debt leading to CCJs, negative credit rating
No resources to travel to look for work, clothing, training
No internet access – unable to claim benefits
Other costs increasing eg fuel

Action on benefits and money management...

Challenge barriers in the benefits system to taking on additional hours
Highlight impacts of sanctions
Money management training
Good quality accessible advice services targeted at those most in need and can be helped
Disabled people (inc Mental Health)

- Support when gaps in claiming/decision process.
- Support through appeal process.

Sharing the information within own organisations (feed into development plans).
Direct line for organisations into DWP/Las
Practically skilling up front line workers working with household/individuals on all the changes. (CAB could play a part here), delivering training in areas.
Peer educating in communities
HCC libraries considering blocking access to payday loans or providing messages re advice agencies

Actions on employment and training...

Support funds to help get people back into work: bus fares/clothing
Provide quality and appropriate volunteering and work experience opportunities for those looking for work but some distance from the labour market.
Local business informed about: Apprenticeships, Traineeships.
City deal (Southampton & Portsmouth) direct to support least well off
Address lack of IT skills/access re: seeking employment

Actions in communities...

Timebanks, Bulk purchases, Childcare bank and other sharing resources, time and skills projects
Support residents/community groups – positive role of local action and support”
LAs, RSLs

Actions on health...

Clinical Commissioning Groups: How can we work together to mitigate impacts – local health & well-being partnerships.

Issue of medical evidence in appeal cases – CCG/DWP

Other issues and points....

Impact

- Capacity of Voluntary and Community Sector re inputting into partnership work/meetings.

Action

- Finding those orgs/individuals that can help (needs to be a 2 way thing)
- Not 'chasing the funding'/altering purpose.
(but have balance/flexibility)

Impact

- Loss of basic welfare provision

Action

- Research – would be useful to look at Discretionary Housing Payments
- Impact of withdrawal of welfare fund support in 2015