

Devon Strategic Partnership Welfare Task Group

Draft Terms of Reference January 2019

Background

A number of reforms have been introduced following the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Several national reports have revealed that these changes are having detrimental effects, with the poorest people and places being disproportionately affected. Particularly significant are two 2018 reports:

- The report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) on the [Cumulative impact of tax and welfare reforms](#). This revealed that the largest negative impacts of changes to taxes, benefits, tax credits and UC will be felt by those with lower incomes. The poorest 20% will lose, on average, approximately 10% of net income, with the changes having a disproportionately negative impact on several protected groups, including disabled people, certain ethnic minorities, and women.
- The [Statement on Visit to the United Kingdom](#), by Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. The Special Rapporteur's report documented the growth of poverty in the UK, with 14 million people, a fifth of the population, living in poverty. The implementation of Universal Credit was identified as a cause of hardship, with detrimental effects on many claimants' mental health, finances, and work prospects.

Universal Credit, the most significant reform, is now being rolled out in Devon with a potential total of 109,000 claimants by 2023. Universal Credit aims to bring positive changes including stronger work incentives, increased employment support and an easier transition into work. However it is recognised that the delivery of this new benefit is causing hardship. Many vulnerable customers are finding the transition to Universal Credit difficult and have a wide range of support needs. As the roll out continues, we need to understand the local picture and how best to adapt our priorities and provision to alleviate the detrimental effects.

The Task group has been established initially to focus on East Devon and Exeter, to understand:

- the impacts of welfare reform at local level,
- the actions we can take to alleviate the effects of poverty on individuals and communities.

Objectives:

To develop a good understanding of the implications of Universal Credit and other associated reforms for communities and public services, initially for East Devon and Exeter. The aim will be to widen this out to the other Local Authority areas in Devon. The task group will do this by:

1. Developing an assessment covering the following impacts on people of working age:
 - i. Poverty analysis (in particular how Universal Credit affects people across different housing tenures),
 - ii. Employment and earnings (including employment rates, income levels, numbers of people in work, in/out of work poverty)
 - iii. Homelessness (including increases in homelessness and the causes)

- iv. Debt and financial vulnerability (including reliance on foodbanks, payday loans, rent and Council Tax arrears, general indebtedness and budgeting abilities).
 - v. Health & Wellbeing (including mental and physical health and health inequalities).
 - vi. Social (including crime and anti-social behaviour).
2. Modelling the future extent of these impacts,
 3. Mapping existing policies and means of support available to welfare claimants,
 4. Using this analysis to inform policy or operational changes that may be needed and make recommendations on how we can help to alleviate the impacts.

Breaking this analysis down to geographic areas that best reflect the makeup of each Authority.

Membership:

Represented on the Task Group will be:

- Citizens Advice Devon
- Department of Work and Pensions
- Devon County Council
- East Devon Council
- Exeter City Council
- Devon Voluntary and Community Sector
- Devon and Cornwall Police
- Public Health

With other organisations engaged as necessary.

Governance

- The Task Group has been established under the umbrella of the Devon Strategic Partnership. The DSP brings together public, private and voluntary and community sector organisations, to address issues that require a multi sector approach. The Task Group will report progress to the Annual DSP Conference.
- The Task Group's main link will be with the Devon Benefits and Revenues Officer Group. The Task Group will report progress to DBROG each month. DBROG will guide the work of the task group and DBROG members will implement Task Group recommendations within their own organisations as necessary.

Timeline

February 2019:	First meeting of task group to agree Terms of Reference, determine datasets and assign roles and responsibilities,
April 2019:	Completed analysis of data,
May 2019:	Completed map of policies and provisions,
June 2019:	Completed analysis and outcomes with suggested recommendations.

Areas covered

Initially:

- East Devon District Council
- Exeter City Council

Once the initial analysis is established, to be extended to:

- Mid Devon District Council
- North Devon District Council
- Plymouth City Council
- South Hams District Council
- Teignbridge District Council
- Torbay Council
- Torridge District Council
- West Devon Borough Council