

Impact of Welfare Reform: the sector responds
Workshop Strand 1
Brave New World Revisited 2016 – VCSE Conference

Workshop Speakers:

Tom Togher, Salford CAB

Dave Ormsby, Salford Foodshare Network

Catherine Connor, Salford City Council

Alec McFadden, Salford Unemployed and Community Resource Centre

Facilitator: Louise Murray, Deputy CEO, Salford CVS

Tom Togher, Chief Officer, Salford CAB

- Tom provided an overview of recent developments with regard to 'welfare reform', including:
 - bedroom tax
 - the benefit cap of £20,000 p.a. per household
 - changes to ESA provision and appeals process
 - replacement of council tax benefit with support schemes
 - the change from DLA to PIPs
 - changes to the social fund which covers crisis loans
 - implementation of Universal Credit
 - increased in-work conditionality
 - changes to bereavement benefit
 - changes to pension age
 - increase in benefit sanctions



David Ormsby, Development Worker, Salford Foodshare Network

- Salford Foodshare Network aims to ensure adequate food provision for those in need. Its role includes facilitating inter-agency partnership, linking provision to need, and providing training and support to food providers. The organisation works to tackle the underlying causes of food poverty, as well as responding to immediate need.



- David highlighted the fact that food poverty is increasing, largely due to recent welfare reforms.

Catherine Connor, Commissioning Manager at Salford City Council



- Benefits sanctions and conditionality have been extended and intensified in recent years. Often sanctions will be made in response to relatively minor misdemeanours, and the appeals process is complex and protracted.
- The benefits most commonly affected are JSA, ESA, Income Support and Universal Credit.
- The impact of sanctions on individuals and communities is extremely broad, leading to increases in food poverty, debt, crime, domestic abuse and homelessness, as well as affecting education, employability, health and wellbeing.
- Services are also impacted, due to greater demand, additional costs, and possibly a changing client group which may require broader expertise.
- Catherine made the following recommendations in response to the above:
 - Support individuals and services to understand conditionality
 - Develop common recording systems across services in order to demonstrate the impact of welfare reforms
 - Work with JCP staff on identifying and working with vulnerability
 - Hold the Work Programme and GMCA accountable
 - Promote protection and resourcing of relevant support and advice services
 - Deliver awareness campaigns around loan sharks

Alec McFadden, Centre Manager, Salford Unemployed and Community Resource Centre

- The use of loan sharks is increasing, largely as a result of recent welfare reforms.
- Individuals and households with a lower income are more likely to use the services of a loan shark, as they are less likely to be granted a loan from established organisations such as banks. They are also less likely to be able to pay back a loan.
- The use of loan sharks has been shown to lead to an increase in crime, violence, and prostitution, due to the need to repay loans, as well as an overall increase in debt.



- Credit Unions are a much safer option for those needing to borrow money, and therefore should be promoted and made more accessible to a greater number of people.

Responses from workshop participants:

- One participant highlighted the need for individuals and services to work together in speaking out against welfare reform.
- One participant raised the issue of the difficulties faced by those with disabilities who are accessing benefits but would also like to take up employment to the extent that they feel able to do so. A person may benefit from part-time work in a number of ways, but there is a risk that this may then make it difficult for them to access benefits, even if their condition deteriorates at a later date. JCP staff do have use of a vulnerability marker in order to effectively deal with these clients, but may not always do so appropriately.
- One participant pointed out that in the longer term, welfare reform is likely to have a significant impact on the older population, which will place additional pressure on services.

Themes

- The impact of welfare reform is extensive, impacting on many aspects of the lives of individuals and communities in Salford.
- Those with a lower income are disproportionately affected.
- Collaboration between public and third sector organisations is vital in response to this, particularly in campaigning for a more measured implementation of welfare reform. Services should also work to raise awareness within communities about relevant issues e.g. use of Credit Unions, enabling people to better protect themselves from the risks arising from welfare reform .