

Partnership Council for Wales: 25 November 2024

Agenda item 3: Update on Simplifying the Welsh Benefits System and Phase One Route Map - Led by Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip and Cllr Hunt WLGA spokesperson supported by Fran Targett, Chair of the Streamlining Welsh Benefits Steering Group

Purpose:

1. To give an update on progress towards Streamlining the Welsh Benefits system and present the Phase One route map developed by the Steering Group

Decision needed:

2. The Partnership Council for Wales is asked to:
 - Note the progress since the publication of the Welsh Benefits Charter
 - Agree and formally endorse the Streamlining Welsh Benefits Phase One Route Map

Background and progress to date:

3. At the Partnership Council meeting in November last year, the proposed approach to Streamlining Welsh Benefits programme was shared and the following were agreed:
 - Agree the final draft of the Charter for delivery of Welsh Benefits (Annex A) and formally endorse.
 - Agree to the establishment of an external steering group to develop an implementation plan.
 - Nominate representatives for the external steering group. Nominations (including contact details) to be sent to secretariat.
4. Since the formal endorsement of the Welsh Benefits Charter at the Partnership Council for Wales meeting last November, there has been significant progress in determining a way forward. The Charter was formally launched in February this year with joint visits by Councillor Hunt and Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip taking place in Torfaen, Carmarthenshire and Ynys Môn local authorities.
5. A Steering Group led by independent Chair, Fran Targett has met regularly since February to discuss the complex nature of this work and build a programme of work to reach the end goal. Members of the Steering Group were selected carefully to ensure a balance of local authority membership and third sector involvement. This is in recognition of the need to ensure the voice of the individuals claiming financial support are kept in focus in line with the spirit of the Welsh Benefits Charter.

6. Six workstreams were identified by the Steering Group and commissioned to start work in June 2024 to define priority actions that would be required to ensure the Phase One benefits (i.e. Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Free School Meals and Schools Essentials Grant) will be delivered coherently by April 2026.
7. All minutes and TOR for the Steering Group are published on the Welsh Government website [Streamlining Welsh Benefits Steering Group | GOV.WALES](#)
8. All local authorities have nominated a Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) who is responsible for driving this work forward within their local authority. The SRO Group is providing vital expertise and guidance to the Steering Group and plays a key advisory role to both the Steering Group and workstreams. This group has met bi-monthly since it was set up in May 2024.

Phase One Route Map

9. The Steering Group has developed a route map for Phase One of the programme. The route map relates to Phase One only (up to April 2026) - where we focus on three key local authority benefits (Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Free School Meals and Schools Essentials Grant) to improve access to these benefits as a significant first step before we move on to future phases which will include other Welsh Benefits.
10. The route map translates the commitments in the Charter into strategic objectives and outlines high level priority actions and outputs against those objectives. The intention is for it to be an agile document that is built upon as work progresses. The target date for completion of Phase One is **April 2026**.
11. It must be noted that the aim of the route map is not to prescribe all the activities to be undertaken as part of the programme but rather to provide high level direction with the aim of shifting delivery of Welsh Benefits further along to the end goal. There is recognition that the route map will evolve, and the priorities and outputs are subject to refinement as the work progresses.
12. The route map has been reviewed by members of the SRO group and workstreams.
13. Once endorsed the Phase One Route Map will be published and work will commence immediately on the outputs in the plan.

Issues for Partnership Council Consideration:

14. The views of Partnership Council are invited on:
 - I. The contents of the Streamlining Welsh Benefits Phase One Route Map:
 - II. and how Welsh Government and other partners can support local authorities to successfully achieve the Phase One aim.