

Item No. 3.3	Classification: Open	Date: 10 July 2013	Meeting Name: Council Assembly
Report title:		Motions on the Theme – Welfare Reform	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Proper Constitutional Officer	

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

During the themed debate, council assembly may debate motions. Members' motions on the theme will use present principles to allow sufficient political balance and for political groups to hold cabinet to account.¹

Members are limited to moving one motion and seconding one motion in the themed section of the meeting.

All motions shall be relevant to the topic under discussion and shall be conducted under the existing rules for members' motions. Normal deadlines shall apply for the submission of members' motions.

The order in which motions are debated and timings shall be determined by the Mayor.²

1. **MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR TIM McNALLY** (Seconded by Councillor Adele Morris)

Putting Residents' Welfare First

Council assembly:

1. Recognises that the annual welfare benefits bill in the UK is £116.1bn, equivalent to 17% of all government expenditure.
2. Understands that reform of the nation's welfare system is overdue, and would be a necessary element of any government's agenda in the current economic climate.
3. However, recognises that many Southwark residents are being affected by the welfare reforms, and believes that the council has a vital role to play in protecting particularly its most vulnerable residents from excessive financial burdens through effective use of its discretionary powers and funding.
4. Also believes it is vital that residents are properly informed about the extent of the reforms, who they will affect, and what support is available to them, and regrets the fact that there has been a certain amount of misunderstanding and misinformation about some of the reforms.

¹ Council assembly procedure rule 2.7 (3)

² Council assembly procedure rule 2.7 (9) and (10)

5. Therefore calls on cabinet to establish a cross-party welfare reform working group as soon as possible, including opposition councillors and relevant council officers, through which the council can objectively assess the effects of welfare changes in Southwark, ensure that the council is using its staff and resources to help the most vulnerable, and collectively lobby the government.

Note: If the motion is agreed, any proposals will be submitted to the cabinet for consideration.

2. MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR NEIL COYLE (Seconded by Councillor Cleo Soanes)

Welfare Reform

Council assembly:

1. Is gravely concerned by the impact the Tory Liberal Democrat government's welfare reforms is having on Southwark's most vulnerable residents.
2. Notes that more than 10% of Southwark's population are affected by the range of welfare cuts. More than 4,000 by the bedroom tax, over 24,000 by the government's £2.8m council tax benefit cut (including over 16,000 who are in work), thousands by changes to DLA beginning this year and hundreds more by the benefit cap from later this year.
3. Notes that local advice and support organisations are seeing a steep rise in demand for help. Over 500 people were fed by foodbanks in Southwark in April alone (compared with 100 in April 2012) and the provider estimates 30 tons of food will need to be distributed to meet demand this year. 10% of the recipients are in work. Southwark's Citizen Advice Bureaus saw a 40% jump in demand for help this year but legal aid cuts mean the loss of the equivalent of 4 full time advisors across Southwark Legal Advice Network.
4. Notes the action taken by the council to deal with these changes including:
 - Labour's £800,000 Hardship Fund; £400k of which is targeted towards local disabled people and carers
 - An extra £400,000 went into helping people downsize homes to avoid the bedroom tax
 - The Social Fund replacement scheme (the Southwark Emergency Support Scheme)
 - More than 700 people have been supported face to face at the partnership events – Southwark's partnership work is being held up by (national) Citizens Advice as an example of good practice and a model for other councils to adopt.
5. Regrets Simon Hughes's unequivocal support for the government's welfare reforms despite claiming the benefits cap would "drive families apart". It also regrets that Simon Hughes has dismissed reports of a fivefold increase in people claiming discretionary housing payments as "alarmist". It regrets that he has refused to meet with local organisation such as Cooltan Arts to discuss the impact of the reforms and that he missed the "Frontline Welfare" event despite being specifically asked to attend.

6. Calls on cabinet to:

- Continue to work constructively with advocacy groups in the borough to ensure we are able to continue to support our most vulnerable residents
- Lobby the Department of Work and Pensions for increased funding for discretionary housing payments
- Continue to challenge Simon Hughes and the Liberal Democrats regarding their role in enabling the Government's welfare changes.

Note: If the motion is agreed, any proposals will be submitted to the cabinet for consideration.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Member Motions	Constitutional Team 160 Tooley Street London SE1 2QH	Andrew Weir 020 7525 7222

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Alexa Coates, Principal Constitutional Officer
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