

**Subject:**  
Benefit Take Up Strategy

**Status:** For Publication

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date:** 20th February 2008

**Report of:** Head of Customer Services and ICT

**Portfolio**

**Holder:** Quality Services to Customers

**Key Decision:** Yes

Forward Plan  General Exception  Special Urgency

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 Promoting financial inclusion and boosting the financial security for people who are on a low incomes is a key priority in the Governments campaign to tackle poverty. This strategy sets out Rossendale Borough Council's commitment to Benefit Take Up and the action proposed to improve the take-up of all Welfare Benefits by residents. The strategy goes beyond solely raising awareness of the benefits available and covers those issues of customer service that will enable eligible customers to make successful claims. The Strategy provides a framework within which the Council can work in order to deliver its objectives.

**2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities and associated corporate objective.

- Delivering Quality Services to Customers (Customers, Improvement)
- Delivering Regeneration across the Borough (Economy, Housing)
- Keeping Our Borough Clean and Green (Environment)
- Promoting Rossendale as a cracking place to live and visit (Economy)
- Improving health and well being across the Borough (Health, Housing)

**3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 There are no specific risk issues for members to consider arising from this report.

#### **4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS**

- 4.1 Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility for improving awareness of entitlement to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit under section 123(4) of the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992.
- 4.2 Rossendale Borough Council is committed to encouraging take-up of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and all other welfare benefits, not only to meet its statutory responsibility but also to meet its corporate priorities.
- 4.3 The Government is concerned that take-up of Council Tax Benefit in particular is not as high as it should be and has conducted take-up campaigns to raise awareness on a national level
- 4.4 By actively promoting the take-up of Housing and Council Tax Benefit it is hoped that this will increase the income of some of our most vulnerable residents, which will also help the local economy. Promoting the take-up of Benefits and increasing household income falls in line with the Government's "every child matters" campaign by reducing child poverty.
- 4.5 By working with our partners and actively targeting resources it is hoped to achieve the best possible results.

#### **COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:**

#### **5. SECTION 151 OFFICER**

- 5.1 There are no direct additional financial implications arising from the report.
- 5.2 The cost of the various promotional initiatives will be met from existing budget.

#### **6. MONITORING OFFICER**

- 6.1 No Comments.

#### **7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)**

- 7.1 There are no HR implications.

#### **8. CONCLUSION**

- 8.1 The Cabinet is asked to note that the introduction of a Benefit Take Up Strategy will help provide the framework within which the Council and its partners can work within, to actively improve the take-up of all welfare benefits.

**9. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

9.1 That Cabinet approves the Rossendale Borough Council's Take Up Strategy.

**10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT**

10.1 Various discussions with other Local Authorities and advice given. Rossendale Borough Council has also consulted with local representatives from Welfare Rights, Citizens Advice Bureau, Age Concern and other partners.

**11. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Is an Equality Impact Assessment required Yes

Is an Equality Impact Assessment attached Yes

**12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required No

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached No

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Background Papers	
Document	Place of Inspection
Take Up Strategy- Appendix 1	Attached
Equality Impact Assessment- Appendix 2	Attached