

Report Title: **Progress Report on Benefit Take-Up**

Report of: **Assistant Chief Executive (Policy, Performance, Partnerships and Communications)**

Ward(s) affected: **All**

1. Purpose

1.1 To provide Overview & Scrutiny Committee with the requested update on progress so far in the implementation of agreed recommendations of their Review of Benefit Take-Up (July 2005).

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the progress in the report be noted.

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3. Executive Summary

3.1 In March 2006, after the Scrutiny Review of Benefit Take-Up, an independent review of advice services in Haringey was published. This made another set of recommendations which are being combined with those from the Scrutiny Review, and are now being taken forward through the development of a single income maximisation strategy and action plan scheduled to be agreed by late Spring 2007.

3.2 Achievements to date, as set out in the appended table, include a successful Council-run benefit take-up campaign in March 2006, and the funding of several benefit take-up projects with 2006/07 NRF monies.

4. Reasons for any change in policy or for new policy development (if applicable)

4.1 This stream of work follows the agreed recommendations of the Scrutiny Review of Benefit Take-Up published in July 2005.

5. Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

5.1 Review of Advice Funding, March 2006 (abridged version) – for a copy contact Susan Humphries, Head of the Council's Voluntary Sector Team (susan.humphries@haringey.gov.uk, 020 8489 6902).

6. Background

6.1 A Review of Advice Funding commissioned by the Council's Voluntary Sector Team and published in March 2006 found that there is "a huge and unmet need" for advice in Haringey. It made a number of recommendations to improve provision, including that consideration should be given to:

- developing an advice strategy with partner organisations;
- developing a strategic planning and commissioning body with partner organisations;
- providing greater support for voluntary sector capacity-building;
- providing welfare rights training to appropriate Council staff; and
- tightening the Council's commissioning criteria to ensure value for money and to minimise capacity and competence issues amongst voluntary organisations commissioned to provide advice.

7. Progress

7.1 The respective sets of recommendations from the Scrutiny Review of Benefit Take-Up and this Review of Advice Funding are now being taken forward through the development of a single 'income maximisation' strategy and action plan, currently underway and to be agreed by late Spring 2007. This approach was agreed by the Executive on 21 November 2006.

7.2 This is fulfilling the decision of the Executive in September 2005 that a strategy on anti-poverty issues should be "strongly focused on practical action the Council can deliver organisationally and practically". It is believed that this approach has the potential to make a significant impact on financial hardship in Haringey over the first three years of the lifespan of the new Sustainable Community Strategy.

7.3 The appended table further shows that:

- a successful benefit take-up campaign was run by Haringey Council in March 2006;
- there are several projects being funded by 2006/07 NRF monies specifically targeting increases in benefit take-up rates in some of the borough's most deprived areas;
- Haringey Council's strategy to improve the quality of life for older people, *Experience Counts*, is already providing an initial strategic response to promote holistic services to promote benefit take-up for older people; and
- a position on data sharing issues has been agreed which will facilitate the sharing of data between agencies for benefit outreach work to the maximum extent allowed by the "well-being power" in the Local Government Act 2000.