

Maidstone Borough Council

Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 8 September 2009

Benefit Uptake in Maidstone Borough

Report of: Acting Overview and Scrutiny Manager

1. Introduction

1.1 At the meeting of the Committee on 9 June 2009, Members interviewed the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services with regard to his plans and priorities for the Municipal Year 2009/10.

1.2 One of the issues discussed was the increase in benefit uptake due to the recession. The relevant extract from the minutes of the meeting is as follows:

"The Committee was informed that the benefit service was currently strained as a consequence of increased uptake and that this was causing delays in the time between residents claiming and receiving the assistance they were entitled to. The Cabinet had therefore agreed to employ 2 further staff members to assist in processing claims to prevent delays. Councillor Ash advised that recent reports had asserted that benefits were nationally under-claimed by 25-40% and he was therefore focusing on improving benefit uptake by those entitled in Maidstone. He felt that this was particularly important in light of the current economic situation and was considering the 'Quids for Kids' initiative that promoted benefit uptake amongst parents. The Committee requested that the Cabinet Member provide an update on this at its meeting in September."

1.3 The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Councillor Ash, and the Head of Revenues and Benefits and Community Safety, Steve McGinnes, will be in attendance to provide an update on benefits.

2. Recommendation

2.1 Members are recommended to consider the update on benefit uptake and make recommendations as they see fit. Areas to consider could include, but are not limited to:

- Whether the employment of 2 further staff members has alleviated the difficulties within the benefits service;
- The future staffing requirements for the service; and
- The Council's actions in ensuring that Maidstone residents were claiming those benefits to which they were entitled.