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WI/WG

14 November 2012

Rt Hon Iain Duncan Smith MP
Secretary of State
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9DA

Email: ministers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Dear Mr Duncan Smith

WELFARE REFORM

On 13 January 2012, East Lothian Council's then-Provost and then-Leader wrote to you to express the Council's concerns about the likely impact of welfare reform measures on the people of East Lothian. Although the Council's Administration has changed since the local government elections in May 2012, concerns about this issue very much remain.

Council officials have been keeping us up-to-date with developments on this issue. I attach a report which came to full Council at the end of August.

To summarise that report:

The impact of welfare reform in East Lothian presents a number of challenges for the Council. These include an increase in demand for some services including adult and children's wellbeing services, housing and homelessness services, free school meals and others. The Council expects also to be impacted by reduced levels of grant funding and a reduction of revenue income through increasing rent and rate arrears, and other more broad impacts arising from the loss of income into the local economy.

East Lothian Council has agreed:

- i. to promote awareness and understanding of the impact of the welfare reform agenda on East Lothian communities;
- ii. to take action to try to minimise any potentially negative impacts of welfare reform by ensuring that Council service areas are optimally configured to continue to deliver high quality services to East Lothian residents;
- iii. to note the potential impact of welfare reform on individuals and families when taking decisions about service development and to consider as part of budget deliberations the potential impact of welfare reform on the Council's revenues and Council house rental income; and
- iv. to write to the relevant UK ministers regarding the ongoing effects of welfare reform in East Lothian and state its opposition to further welfare budget reductions.

Your agenda is causing significant hardship for individuals and families who, by definition, are deprived and vulnerable. As a Council we are having to prepare to ensure that we minimise, as far as we can, the damaging impact of the welfare reform agenda over the coming years.

Now further anxiety has been caused by the Chancellor's comments at the recent Conservative party conference about the prospect of slashing another £10 billion from the welfare budget.

No-one in democratic life can be unaware of the economic challenges facing us all, at all levels of government. However, central government has other levers available to it to balance the country's necessary expenditure with income: for example through taxation. I do consider welfare benefits to be necessary expenditure and I am concerned at the level of cuts ongoing and envisaged.

Further welfare cuts need not be inevitable and the Council would urge you not to continue on a road which will cause so much additional hardship for vulnerable people.

A copy of this letter goes to East Lothian's MP Fiona O'Donnell, who is currently working hard to set up food banks in East Lothian.

Yours sincerely



WILLIE INNES
Council Leader

Encl.