

Request for consideration of an issue by Overview and Scrutiny

Guidance on the use of this form:

This form is for use by councillors and members of the public who want to request that an item joins an Overview and Scrutiny agenda. Any issue may be suggested, provided it affects the BCP area or the inhabitants of the area in some way. Scrutiny of the issue can only be requested once in a 12 month period.

The form may also be used for the reporting of a referral item to Overview and Scrutiny by another body of the council, such as Cabinet or Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee receiving the request will make an assessment of the issue using the detail provided in this form and determine whether to add it to its forward plan of work.

They may take a variety of steps to progress the issue, including requesting more information on it from officers of the council, asking for a member of the overview and scrutiny committee to 'champion' the issue and report back, or establishing a small working group of councillors to look at the issue in more detail.

If the Committee does not agree to progress the issue it will set out reasons for this and they will be provided to the person submitting this form.

More information can be found at Part 4.C of the BCP Council Constitution
<https://democracy.bcpCouncil.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CommitteeID=151&Info=1&bcr=1>

Please complete all sections as fully as possible

1. Issue requested for scrutiny

The impact of the UK government's proposed £5bn cuts to disability and sickness benefits on BCP Council residents, particularly those reliant on Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Universal Credit.

2. Desired outcome resulting from Overview and Scrutiny engagement, including the value to be added to the Council, the BCP area or its inhabitants.

The scrutiny should aim to:

- Assess the number of BCP residents likely to be affected by the proposed cuts.

- Evaluate the potential increase in demand for local authority services, such as adult social care, housing support, and mental health services, due to reduced financial support for disabled residents.
- Identify specific risks of increased poverty, homelessness, and mental health crises within the community.
- Ensure committee members engage directly with disabled residents and carers to understand the real-world impact of the changes.
- Develop a response plan to mitigate the impact on vulnerable residents.

This scrutiny would ensure BCP Council is prepared for the potential consequences of these policy changes and can advocate for necessary support from central government.

3. Background to the issue

The government's proposed welfare changes will see between 800,000 and 1.2 million people nationwide lose between £4,200 and £6,300 per year in benefits. The Resolution Foundation and the Institute for Fiscal Studies warn that:

- Tighter eligibility for PIP will significantly reduce financial support for disabled people.
- Young people under 22 will no longer qualify for the health-related Universal Credit top-up.
- The scrapping of the Work Capability Assessment will lead to further benefit reductions for 600,000 claimants.
- These cuts are likely to increase child poverty, homelessness, and mental health crises.

As BCP Council already faces challenges in supporting vulnerable residents, it is crucial to assess the local impact of these cuts.

4. Proposed method of scrutiny - (for example, a committee report or a working group investigation)

- A committee report reviewing how many residents in BCP are currently claiming PIP and related benefits and estimating the financial impact of the proposed cuts.
- A consultation with local disability groups, mental health charities, and housing services to assess the potential demand on council resources.
- A requirement for committee members to hold direct face-to-face engagement with disabled residents and carers to understand their lived experiences and the challenges they will face.

- If significant risks are identified, a working group could develop an action plan to support affected residents.

5. Key dates and anticipated timescale for the scrutiny work

- Initial report within three months to align with the government's spring budget announcements.
- A follow-up assessment after six months to monitor the actual impact as changes are implemented.

6. Notes/ additional guidance

- The scrutiny should consider whether BCP Council needs to lobby the government for additional funding to support residents affected by the cuts.
- It should also assess whether local voluntary sector organisations will require extra support to help those losing financial assistance.
- A direct engagement session with affected residents should be scheduled as part of the process to ensure their voices are heard.

Document last reviewed – January 2022

Contact – democratic.services@bcpcouncil.gov.uk