

**To:** Finance and Resources Policy Board

**On:** 11 March 2015

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**Report by:** Director of Finance and Resources

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**Heading: BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION – WELFARE  
REFORM AND PERFORMANCE STATEMENT**

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**1. Summary**

- 1.1. This report details the processing performance in relation to Housing Benefit and the Scottish Welfare Fund, as the end of January 2015. The report provides an update on the funding and expenditure position in relation to Discretionary Housing Payments and the Scottish Welfare Fund.

**2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Finance and Resources Board considers the content of this report.
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**3. Background**

**3.1 Service Information**

- 3.1.1 As previously reported to Members, the Service continues to successfully balance a significant increase in work load as a result of the ongoing changes arising from the welfare reform agenda.

- 3.1.2 The Service continues to make use of temporary short term resource to create flexible capacity to support the increased workload described above.

**3.2 Speed of Processing – Housing/Council Tax Benefit**

- 3.2.1 As detailed in Table 1 below, processing speed for New Claims remains well within target. In relation to New Claims processed within 14 days of all information received, this result is slightly behind target for the period; directly affected by the annual festive closure.

3.2.2 Processing of Changes in Circumstance (CIC), is behind target for the period, however remains within target year to date. As previously reported, CIC work types are where the most significant increase in volumes continue to be experienced by the service and this is reflected in the associated processing times.

*(Supplementary processing information is attached in Appendix 1 for member's reference)*

**Table 1 – Performance Summary**

<b>Performance measure</b>	<b>4 Week Reporting Period 5 December 2014 to 15 January 2015</b>	<b>Year to date position</b>	<b>Annual Target</b>
New Claims – processing time	25.35 days	25.82 days	29 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	88.17%	90.71%	91%
Changes in Circumstance – processing time	15.20 days	8.94 days	10 days

### **3.3 Discretionary Housing Payments**

3.3.1 The allocation of DHP funds for 2014/15 remains unchanged from the last report considered on 21 January 2015. The Council awaits notification with regards to a share from the £3m balance potentially being receivable from the Scottish Government. The Benefits Services has already started to utilise the additional funds of £250,000 approved by the Board at the last cycle.

3.3.2 The Benefits Service continues to work closely with Development & Housing Services, and other local housing providers to ensure that all those eligible to receive DHP support in relation to the Spare Room Subsidy (known as 'the bedroom tax') make an application. As at 18 February 2015 96% of those currently affected had made an application.

3.3.3 The Council received confirmation from DWP at the end of January 2015 that its allocation of DHP funding for 2015/16, from the UK government would be £366,294 this represents a decrease compared with the allocation of £369,000 for 2014/15.

There is an overall reduction in DHP funding for Scotland of £1.9M (14%) compared with 2014/15. Renfrewshire's reduction is not as significant due to the volume of claimants affected by the 'the bedroom tax'; DHP funding provided by DWP for that purpose has remained level. The Council awaits confirmation of DHP funding from the Scottish Government for 2015/16. Depending on the amount awarded and the spending guidance/restriction of these funds, the Benefits Service may face challenges during 2015/16 as demand for DHP from claimants not affected by the bedroom tax increases.

**Table 2 – DHP Performance Summary**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>1 April 2014 to 31 January 2015</b>
Volume of DHP applications received	4,410 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	5,658 decisions
Number of DHP awards	5,619 awards (3,092 customers)
Average processing time (target 29 days)	20.59 days
<b>Total amount committed/paid</b>	£1,381,020 (85.7% of the original budget and 74% of the revised budget following Council contribution on 21 January 2015)

### **3.4 The Scottish Welfare Fund**

- 3.4.1 The Service had spent/committed 85% of its original budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of January 2015. The performance data relating to the fund is presented in table 3 below.
- 3.4.2 Table 3 has been adjusted to reflect the additional Council resources of £100,000 allocated to the SWF by the Finance and Resources Board on 22 January 2015. Based on the adjusted budget figure the Service has spent/committed 79% of the available funds
- 3.4.3 The Service continues to make awards in 2014/15, in line with Scottish Government guidance. Due to the budgetary position, the service has throughout 2014/15 been making awards for “high” priority applications only.
- 3.4.4 The revised total budget available in 2014/15 is £1,270,969 being £1,148,857 funded by the Scottish Government (the same level as in 2013/14) plus £100,000 mentioned in 3.4.2 above and £22,112 carried forward from 2013/14 to fund applications processed but not paid in 2013/14.

**Table 3 – SWF Performance Summary**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>1 April 2014 to 28 January 2015</b>
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	7,037
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	5,981
<b>Total amount paid for Crisis Grants</b>	<b>£369,445.53</b>
<b>Average Processing time (2 working days target)</b>	<b>1 day</b>
Number of Community Care Grant applications received	1,886
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	1,303
<b>Total amount paid for Community Care Grant</b>	<b>£629,321.78</b>
<b>Average processing time (15 working days target)</b>	<b>10 Days</b>
<b>Total amount paid/committed from the fund</b>	<b>£998,767.31</b>
<b>Total budget for 2014/15</b>	<b>£1,170,969</b>
<b>Adjusted Budget following additional resources approved by FRPB on 21 January 2015</b>	<b>£1,270,969</b>

\*Note that figures are adjusted each month to reflect awards previously made, but not fulfilled.

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## Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** - an efficient, effective Benefit Service assists council tenants meet their financial obligations in terms of rent and council tax and ensures overpayments are minimised and DWP subsidy maximised
2. **HR & Organisational Development** - None
3. **Community Planning –**  
**Community Care, Health & Well-being** – An effective Benefits service is vital to the quality of life of many of our citizens as it provides vital support for low income households in order to sustain tenancies and meet their rent obligations
4. **Legal** – None
5. **Property/Assets** – None
6. **Information Technology** - None
7. **Equality & Human Rights**- The recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required, following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety** - None
9. **Procurement** - None
10. **Risk** - None
11. **Privacy Impact** - None.

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# Housing Benefit Statement – Appendix

## Supplementary KPIs – Finance & Resources Policy Board

### APPEALS

Where a claimant disputes a Benefits decision and also disputes a revision decision they can formally make an Appeal. The Benefits Service will prepare a detailed submission which is then considered by the Independent Tribunals Service. Preparation of a submission is a very involved process and requires significant data gathering.

**Target processing speed  
(number of days)**

60

**Result: last 3 months (days)**

Nov: 47 days

Dec: 37 days

Jan: 44 days

**Average (12 months to date)**

49 days

**Average Appeals Completed  
(12 months to date)**

9 Appeals per  
month

**Comment:-**

The Service continues to manage Appeals processing well. The service is well within the target

### REVISIONS

Where a claimant disputes a benefits decision in the first instance they can request for it to be looked at again. This is known as a Revision. The process involves a Senior Benefit Assessor reviewing the decision thoroughly to decide whether the decision should stand.

**Target**

30 days

**Result last report**

July: 27

August: 26

Sept: 25

**Result Last 3 months**

Nov: 26

December: 30

January: 27

**Comment:-**

The service continues to improve the speed with which it considers revisions,

### ACCURACY

The Service proactively monitors the accuracy of benefits decisions made through a robust audit checking programme. The Service targets to audit 3% of all calculations and measures the percentage where correct benefit has been paid to the customer

**Volume of Audits**

**Target %**

3%

**Actual %**

10.8%

**Accuracy – Jan 15**

90%

93.94%

**Accuracy – Year to Date**

90%

94.01%

**Comment:-**

The Service has maintained a higher level of checking than target owing to the number of new staff who have recently been trained.