



To: Finance and Resources Policy Board

On: 16 March 2016

Report by: Director of Finance and Resources

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

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report details the processing performance in relation to Housing Benefit and the Scottish Welfare Fund, as at the end of March 2016. 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 note the content of this report.

3. Background

3.1 Service Information

- 3.1.1 The Service continues to successfully balance a significant work load along with managing the impact of the ongoing effect from the welfare reform agenda.

3.2 Speed of Processing – Housing/Council Tax Benefit

- 3.2.1 As detailed in Table 1 below, processing speed for New Claims is within target for the period and year to date. In relation to New Claims processed within 14 days of all information received, this measure is also within target for the period and year to date.
- 3.2.2 Processing of Changes in Circumstance (CIC) is within target for the period, and year to date.

(Supplementary processing information is attached in Appendix 1 for members' reference)

Table 1 – Performance Summary

Performance measure	4 Week Reporting Period 12 February 2016 to 10 March 2016	Year to date position	Annual Target
New Claims – processing time	21.80 days	22.36 days	24 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	94.49%	94.17%	92%
Changes in Circumstance – processing time	6.27 days	6.88 days	10 days

3.3 Discretionary Housing Payments

- 3.3.1 The total budget for Discretionary Housing Payments is shown in table 2 below. The budget position has been adjusted to reflect the additional resources of £180,000 provided by the Council, approved at the Finance and Resources Board on 26 August 2015, with the additional Council resources exhausted by the end of March 2016.
- 3.3.2 Members may wish to note the application and award details shown in table 3 below. The table shows a larger proportion of decisions made compared with application volumes. This effect is due to the process put in place by the Service this year that; customers affected by the bedroom tax do not have to reapply for a DHP if they had made an application last year.
- 3.3.4 The DHP budget has been calculated to include the full Scottish Government estimate of the amount of funding required to fully mitigate the effect of the Bedroom Tax. This estimate included a 20% reserve allocation which would be paid in May 2016, if required. The balance of £123k is effectively reserve funding which is not required. In line with DHP policy and DHP Regulations, the Service has made awards to fully mitigate the effect of the Bedroom Tax and has maximised spend within the year.

Table 2 – DHP Budget

Funding Source	amount
DWP	£366,294
Scottish Government	£1,526,331
Renfrewshire Council	£180,000
Total budget for the year	£2,072,625

Table 3 – DHP Performance Summary

Measure	1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016
Volume of DHP applications received	2,664 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	6,773 decisions
Number of DHP awards	6,245 awards (3,966 customers)
Average processing time (target 29 days)	17.78 days
Total amount committed/paid	£1,949,245

3.4 The Scottish Welfare Fund

- 3.4.1 The Service continued to make awards in 2015/16, in line with Scottish Government guidance and had spent/committed 100% of its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of March 2016.
- 3.4.2 The performance data relating to the fund is presented in table 4 below. The table has been updated to reflect the budget position, to include the additional resources of £100,000 provided by the Council, approved at the Finance and Resources Board on 26 August 2015

Table 4 – SWF Performance Summary

Measure	1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	8,410
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	7,133
Total amount paid for Crisis Grants	£462,549
Average Processing time (2 working days target)	1 day
Number of Community Care Grant applications received	2,127
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	1,475
Total amount paid for Community Care Grant	£786,308
Average processing time (15 working days target)	10 Days
Total amount paid/committed from the fund	£1,248,857
Funding from Scottish Government	£1,148,857
Funding from Renfrewshire Council	£100,000
Total Budget	£1,248,857

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

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)	Jan: 79 days	Feb: 45 days	Mar: 35 days
Average (12 months to date)	53 days		
Average Appeals Completed (12 months to date)	9 Appeals per month		

Comment:-

The Service continues to manage Appeals processing well within 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	28 days		
Result last report	November: 28	December: 31	January: 41
Result Last 3 months	January: 41	February: 39	March: 35

Comment:- The service continues to recover the processing time for Revisions and aims to be within target by the next reporting period.

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

	Target %	Actual %
Volume of Audits	3%	15%
Accuracy – March 16	95%	95%
Accuracy – Year to Date	95%	96%

Comment:-

The Service has set a stretching target for Accuracy this year and is achieving this year to date.

Overpayments

The value of overpayments reported at the last board was £6,712,842 the current value is £6,951,064 Levels are increasing due to the ongoing receipt of real time information from HMRC which has resulted in changes in circumstances identified, not reported directly by customers.

	Target %	Actual %
% recovery of debt raised	73%	83.5%
14/15: % recovery of debt raised	n/a	72.9%

Comment:-

The Service has more than achieved the target recovery rate for 15/16