



To: Finance and Resources Policy Board

On: 27 January 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 November 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 note the content of this report.
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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 remains well within target. 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 member's reference)

Table 1 – Performance Summary

Performance measure	4 Week Reporting Period 9 October 2015 to 5 November 2015	Year to date position	Annual Target
New Claims – processing time	19.49 days	21.95 days	24 days
New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received	95.65%	94.20%	92%
Changes in Circumstance – processing time	10.45 days	6.35 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

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 Service will continue to carefully monitor all DHP expenditure and will make awards in line with the Council's policy and supporting guidance.

Table 2 – DHP Budget

Funding Source	amount
DWP	£366,294
Scottish Government	£1,532,060
Renfrewshire Council	£180,000
Total budget for the year	£2,078,354

Table 3 – DHP Performance Summary

Measure	1 April 2015 to 30 November 2015
Volume of DHP applications received	1,563 applications
Volume of DHP decisions made	3,606 decisions
Number of DHP awards	3,295 awards (3,174 customers)
Average processing time (target 29 days)	21.5 days
Total amount committed/paid	£1,195,962

3.4 The Scottish Welfare Fund

- 3.4.1 The Service had spent/committed 60% of its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of November 2015, this equates to 65% of the funding provided by Scottish Government.
- 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, including the additional resources of £100,000 provided by the Council, approved at the Finance and Resources Board on 26 August 2015
- 3.4.3 The Service continues to make awards in 2015/16, in line with Scottish Government guidance.
- 3.4.4 The Service will continue to monitor all SWF expenditure and anticipates that the full budget will be exhausted by year end.

Table 4 – SWF Performance Summary

Measure	1 April 2015 to 30 November 2015
Number of Crisis Grant applications received	5,388
Number of Crisis Grant Awards	4,552
Total amount paid for Crisis Grants	£292,592
Average Processing time (2 working days target)	1 day
Number of Community Care Grant applications received	1,458
Number of Community Care Grant Awards	959
Total amount paid for Community Care Grant	£457,354
Average processing time (15 working days target)	10 Days
Total amount paid/committed from the fund	£749,946
Funding from Scottish Government	£1,148,857
Funding from Renfrewshire Council	£100,000
Total Budget	£1,248,857

The table above reflects expenditure in 2015/16 for applications received in that year. 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)

Sept: 56 days

Oct: 51 days

Nov: 42 days

Average (12 months to date)

55 days

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

11 Appeals per
month

Comment:-

The Service continues to manage Appeals processing 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

July: 24

August: 34

September: 28

Result Last 3 months

September: 28

October: 29

November: 28

Comment:- The service continues to process Revisions within target.

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 %

7%

Accuracy – November 15

95%

94%

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.