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**To:** Finance and Resources Policy Board

**On:** 16 March 2016

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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 at the end of January 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.
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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 within target. In relation to New Claims processed within 14 days of all information received, this measure is out of target for the period. This delay in processing is due to the two week festive closure of the Council. Resources have been deployed to ensure affected claims have been prioritised. The year to date position remains within target.
- 3.2.2 Processing of Changes in Circumstance (CIC) not within target for the period, again due to the festive closure described in section 3.2.1 above. The year to date position remains within target
- 3.2.3 Members may wish to note for comparative purposes that the position following the festive closure is significantly better than the same point last year when, processing time for New Claims and Changes was 25 days and 15 days respectively and 88% of New Claims were processed within 14 days of all information received.

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

**Table 1 – Performance Summary**

| <b>Performance measure</b>  | <b>6 Week Reporting Period<br/>4 December 2015<br/>to<br/>14 January 2016</b> | <b>Year to date position</b> | <b>Annual Target</b> |
|---|---|------------------------------|----------------------|
| New Claims – processing time  | 24 days   | 22 days                      | 24 days              |
| New Claims - % processed within 14 days of all information received | 91%   | 94%                          | 92%                  |
| Changes in Circumstance – processing time                           | 11 days   | 7 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, 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**

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

**Table 3 – DHP Performance Summary**

| <b>Measure</b>                           | <b>1 April 2015 to 31 January 2016</b> |
|--|--|
| Volume of DHP applications received      | 2,006 applications                     |
| Volume of DHP decisions made             | 4,120 decisions                        |
| Number of DHP awards                     | 3,689 awards (3,505 customers)         |
| Average processing time (target 29 days) | 23.3 days                              |
| <b>Total amount committed/paid</b>       | <b>£1,566,998</b>                      |

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

3.4.1 The Service had spent/committed 74% of its total budget for the Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) by the end of November 2015, this equates to 80% 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, to include 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 and will continue to monitor all SWF expenditure. It is anticipated that the budget will be exhausted by year end.

**Table 4 – SWF Performance Summary**

| <b>Measure</b>  | <b>1 April 2015<br/>to<br/>31 January 2016</b> |
|---|--|
| Number of Crisis Grant applications received            | 6,746  |
| Number of Crisis Grant Awards                           | 5,712  |
| <b>Total amount paid for Crisis Grants</b>              | <b>£368,953</b>                                |
| <b>Average Processing time (2 working days target)</b>  | <b>1 day</b>                                   |
| Number of Community Care Grant applications received    | 1,745  |
| Number of Community Care Grant Awards                   | 1,141  |
| <b>Total amount paid for Community Care Grant</b>       | <b>£550,399</b>                                |
| <b>Average processing time (15 working days target)</b> | <b>10 Days</b>                                 |
| <b>Total amount paid/committed from the fund</b>        | <b>£919,352</b>                                |
| <b>Funding from Scottish Government</b>                 | <b>£1,148,857</b>                              |
| <b>Funding from Renfrewshire Council</b>                | <b>£100,000</b>                                |
| <b>Total Budget</b>                                     | <b>£1,248,857</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: 42 days        | Dec: 39 days | Jan: 79 days |
| Average (12 months to date)                   | 55 days             |              |              |
| Average Appeals Completed (12 months to date) | 9 Appeals per month |              |              |

**Comment:-**

The Service continues to manage Appeals processing, the high processing time is due to a low volume being completed in January and 2 cases taking an abnormal length of time to complete.

### 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   | September: 28 | October: 29  | November: 28 |
| Result Last 3 months | November: 28  | December: 31 | January: 41  |

**Comment:-** There has been a short term dip in performance due to the festive closure period, the Service anticipates that this will normalise as processing catches up during February.

### 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%       | 19%      |
| Accuracy – January 16   | 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.

### Overpayments

The value of overpayments reported at the last board was £6,415,538, the current value is £6,712,842 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%      | 85%      |
| 14/15: % recovery of debt raised | n/a      | 72.9%    |

**Comment:-**

The Service is slightly ahead target on recovery, this is largely due to less debt being raised over the Christmas period, It is anticipated that the recovery percentage will be close to target by year end.