

Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee

10.00am, Tuesday 4 August 2015

Welfare Reform - Update

Item number 7.1
Report number
Executive/routine
Wards

Executive summary

The Department for Work and Pensions implemented Universal Credit for new single claimants in Edinburgh on 9 March 2015. As predicted, there have been low numbers of citizens who have claimed the new benefit in Edinburgh to date. The Council is involved in a Delivery Partnership Agreement (DPA) to support citizens through the transition into Universal Credit.

The Council continues to engage with tenants providing advice and financial support through Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). In 2015/16 The Scottish Government allocated Edinburgh an additional £2,570,847 (initial allocation) to fully mitigate under occupancy for 2015/16, increasing our Discretionary Housing Payment fund to £3.91m. The final allocation of funding from the Scottish Government, following analysis of actual DHP spend figures of all Scottish Local Authorities will be made in May 2016.

Applications for both Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants are now being considered for medium and high priority cases. The priority levels and level of allocation to each element of the fund is reviewed on a monthly basis.

Links

Coalition pledges

Council outcomes [CO6; CO8; CO9; CO16; CO24; CO25 & CO26](#)

Single Outcome Agreement [SO2](#)

Welfare Reform – Update

Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee notes:
 - 1.1.1 the progress of Universal Credit roll out in Edinburgh;
 - 1.1.2 the Council's ongoing activities relating to Welfare Reform;
 - 1.1.3 the current projection of spend on Discretionary Housing Payments;
 - 1.1.4 the current projection of spend on Council Tax Reduction Scheme;
 - 1.1.5 the current projection of spend on Scottish Welfare Fund; and
 - 1.1.6 the new Working Group reporting structure for welfare reform actions.

Background

- 2.1 The Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee recommended on 22 January 2013 to continue to monitor the Council's actions relating to Welfare Reform and requested bi-monthly update reports.
- 2.2 Following discussions with relevant Councillors it was agreed to report the Welfare Reform update on a quarterly basis, to align with the Working Group meeting cycle. The last report was considered by Committee on 20 January 2015.

Main report

Universal Credit (UC) and Universal Support Delivered Locally

- 3.1 This phased implementation of UC commenced in Edinburgh Job Centres (JC) from 9 March 2015 for new single claimants who would previously have been eligible for Job Seekers Allowance but will now claim UC.
- 3.2 The report of [the Smith Commission](#) for further devolved powers to the Scottish Parliament was published on 27 November 2014. The Welfare Reform team continue to monitor movement towards any implementation of these powers but no legislation has yet been introduced to allow the proposals described in the report to be adopted and none is expected until 2016.
- 3.3 The Council continues to work in collaboration with the DWP over the introduction of UC, through the Delivery Partnership Agreement which came into effect 9 March 2015.

- 3.4 The corporate cross council operational team continue to work in conjunction with DWP and JC staff to support citizens in the transition to the new UC system. Edinburgh's Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and a member of the Council's Private Rented Sector team are also members of the operational board to ensure landlords outwith the Council are represented.
- 3.5 To support Edinburgh's large private landlord sector, a forum was hosted in the City Chambers on 23 June 2015. This was attended by around 40 delegates representing this sector and presentations were delivered on:
- Universal Credit and CEC
 - CEC Private Rented Sector Services
 - DWP Universal Credit
- Further events for private sector landlords will be arranged as UC expands in Edinburgh and the implications for this housing delivery group become clearer.
- 3.6 The Council's learning and development packages, created in conjunction with our DWP partner teams, continue to be distributed amongst various local authorities across Scotland and RSLs. These learning materials provide a consistent approach to delivering UC in local authorities and has been recognised by DWP nationally as best practice in DWP/ Local Government collaboration.
- 3.7 The DPA operational group meeting is also the forum used to agree processes and address any emerging issues that arise as implementation of UC progresses in Edinburgh. Escalation processes continue to be managed through the corporate Welfare Reform Team to ensure appropriate responses are made in relation to such issues, and also to collate management information and data, to share with the DWP and other partners, to monitor the impact of the transition and roll out of UC.
- 3.8 The DWP have recognised the difficulties being faced by landlords, and the serious impact that delays in processing UC claims can have on citizens facing rent collection and arrears recovery activity. A new escalation telephone line was established on 4 June which is dedicated to assisting RSLs who have urgent enquiries regarding UC cases.
- 3.9 The team continue to monitor benefit sanctions as a standing meeting agenda item. It is widely recognised that this is a challenging area and that both organisations should work together in an attempt to support citizens avoid this type of action. Further information regarding sanctions is included in point 3.74 of this report.
- 3.10 Operational support in the initial stages for claimants requiring assistance to manage UC claims and payments is being delivered through the Customer Hub at 249 High Street.

- 3.11 The Council continues to learn from the Direct Payment Demonstration project involving Dunedin Canmore Housing Association and this has proved valuable with respect to the launch of Universal Credit in the city. Dunedin Canmore are a valued member of the operational team with the DWP, sharing their experience to allow a best practice approach to rent collection involving citizens claiming UC.
- 3.12 Processes have been agreed with DWP to proactively advise UC applicants of the need to make a separate claim for Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) assistance, with this requirement being promoted through the DWP Service Centre responsible for processing UC claims.
- 3.13 Local arrangements have also been agreed to include CTRS claims online as part of the UC claim support process in Edinburgh JC+. Information is also being provided to reinforce the payment of rent for householders from the overall UC payment as full rent costs will not be met from the housing element (of UC) in all cases.
- 3.14 Leith JC+ and the Council are taking part in a pilot to improve the operational processes around tenants verifying their housing costs at their first UC interview. The trial started on 26 May 2015 and as at the end of June, 25 interviews showed that 22 of the tenants did not provide the correct information as proof of their rent. A direct telephone line has been established to enable work coaches to contact the Council who are immediately able to provide details of the rent using the standard pro-forma. This trial is not only ensuring tenants get their correct housing costs, saving staff time at job centres and the council in resolving non payment issues, but also allows the exchange of information to establish a managed payment to the landlord if the tenant has more than 8 weeks arrears at the start of their UC claim.
- 3.15 UC claimants are not entitled to the benefit for the first 7 days of their new claim with effect from 3 August 2015. This waiting period is in line with other welfare benefits. Appendix 1 provides a link to the exemptions to this.

Communications

- 3.16 Communications surrounding the roll out of Universal Credit have been developed in conjunction with council officers, the DWP, and social sector landlords.
- 3.17 A weekly bulletin continues to be issued through the Social Housing and Welfare (SHAW) group as further tranches of UC implementation progress and the membership of this distribution is now in the region of 29 Edinburgh organisations and a further 25 external organisations. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations have requested a link on their website into the Bulletin which will be available to all Scottish housing organisations, this approach contributes towards consistent advice and support for all citizens claiming UC.

Learning and Development

- 3.18 Council and DWP training teams have worked together to produce a training pack to deliver bespoke training to the small number of officers who will be involved in UC related service delivery. This pack which consists of a manual and 2 e-learning modules have been launched and are available on the Council's internet, as well as distributed to other RSLs, partners and stakeholders for their information through the SHAW group network. The production of these materials again provides consistency for citizens wherever they seek advice and has been widely welcomed.

UC in Edinburgh

- 3.19 Appendix 2 details the numbers of UC claimants in Edinburgh, from 9 March 2015 to 28 May 2015. The numbers are slightly less than anticipated volumes first indicated.

Council Housing Services

- 3.20 Single council tenants' who are in process of applying, or are on UC, now apply for an element for housing costs to be included as part of their claim. The payment goes direct to the tenant who is then responsible for paying their full rent costs for their council home from the total UC payment they receive.
- 3.21 The Income Advice Service within Services for Communities is making proactive contact with all tenants moving onto UC, to establish any support requirements they may need to manage the transition and to discuss their responsibilities for paying all of their rent due each month and also advising tenants to claim CTRS separately.
- 3.22 Arrangements are also in place to provide tenants' with specialist advice such as debt and energy advice or ongoing personal budgeting support. This phased roll out has provided an opportunity to adjust operational procedures through close working with DWP as part of their test and learn approach to UC.
- 3.23 Up until the end of June 2015, 120 council tenants' had made a claim or have been awarded UC with just over 90% (around 110) tenants' found to have some level of pre-existing rent arrears at the start of their claim.
- 3.24 Where tenants on UC have arrears equivalent to more than 8 weeks rent, a managed payment to the landlord can be requested as part of the Alternative Payment Arrangements (APAs). Under these arrangements, a landlord is able to request rent and arrears direct (up to 20% of individuals UC award). Around 65% (around 80) of tenants on UC who have pre-existing arrears, have balances that meet these criteria. All new UC cases are considered in detail and APAs requested where appropriate.

Temporary and Supported Accommodations

- 3.25 Households in temporary accommodation who are affected by the Benefit Cap and/or Under Occupation continue to be provided with advice and assistance to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments. Households are placed in temporary accommodation, which reduces the likelihood of them being affected by the Under Occupancy regulations, where this is practicable. They may on occasion be placed in a larger property to meet their emergency housing need.
- 3.26 Single people who are homeless would be exempt from moving on to UC under the current roll out if they are homeless on the date of any new claim. Once someone is established on UC they will always be a UC claimant, even if their circumstances change. This means that someone on UC may subsequently present for assistance from homeless services. In these instances detailed advice will be provided from the dedicated staff providing assistance to Council tenants and an application will be made for an Alternative Payment Arrangement (APA).

Advice Services

- 3.27 The Advice Shop has maintained its high demand welfare rights drop-in service at 249 High Street, offering citizens three sessions per week. In addition, outreach sessions are offered at all five CAB and other community based locations such as Gilmerton Community Centre, Oxfangs Neighbourhood Centre, Willow Project, Broomhouse Community One Stop Shop and the Leith Neighbourhood Office. There has been a minimum two week waiting time for Advice Shop appointments for several months so efforts are being made to spread the demand across drop-ins, outreach and in partnership with other advice services to meet demand.
- 3.28 Personal Independence Payment (PIP) claim decisions are being processed with greater consistency now with claimants waiting shorter periods for medical assessments and decisions. The number of debt advice cases where court representation is required for preventing eviction due to rent arrears, has doubled over the past year. The Advice Shop now represents an average of 6 tenants per week at court and is increasingly involved in negotiations with landlords to establish sustainable repayment plans. Close links are in place with Council housing teams to effectively address rent arrears, where possible without resorting to court action.
- 3.29 Since October 2013 there had been a significant reduction in welfare rights tribunals due to changes to the appeals process for disputes about benefit decisions, however, recent months have seen an increase in tribunals to the extent that July 2015 is set to have almost double the number compared to 2014 (45 compared to 23). This pattern is being duplicated among the other advice agencies in Edinburgh and reflects the greater throughput being achieved by

DWP partners in processing claims for Personal Independence Payments and Employment Support Allowance.

- 3.30 Voluntary sector agencies in receipt of third party grants (CHAI, Granton Information Centre and Citizens Advice Edinburgh) have all achieved their targets for 2014-15, and have reported an overall reduction in numbers receiving information and advice for welfare rights services, compared to 2013-14. Altogether there were 21,354 advice cases reported in 2014-15 compared to 27,004 in 2013-14. Debt advice cases have increased slightly while the number of information and signposting welfare rights cases has reduced sharply. casework cases have reduced slightly while advocacy and representation cases continued their decline since the introduction in October 2013 of wider ranging mandatory reconsiderations that have significantly cut the number of welfare rights tribunals across the UK. As noted above, this pattern is now being reversed.
- 3.31 Agencies have reported that whilst the number of cases may have reduced, demand on services has remained consistently high, due to the complexity of many situations. This is leading to more time having to be spent on cases, thus reducing the overall number of people whose problems have been resolved. This is particularly the case with rent arrears casework, and provision of advice to people from EU states, whose entitlements to welfare benefits have been significantly curtailed. This has been more evident since January 2015 changes to regulations.
- 3.32 Training on a range of benefit matters (Employment Support Allowance, Personal Independence Payments) was delivered by the Advice Shop to front line staff from Services for Communities (SfC), Children and Families (C&F) and Health & Social Care (H&SC). Further training is planned to assist the Scottish Welfare Fund team and teams within HSC to deliver greater awareness of Employment Support Allowance and Personal Independence Payments.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)

- 3.33 The DWP has confirmed that it will continue with the funding arrangement in place for 2015/16. This reflects the evolving nature of CTRS and that the implementation and migration of Housing Benefit to UC is being done as staged process. The related Settlement and Distribution Group continue to consider the distribution of CTRS funding and will advise Local Authorities accordingly.
- 3.34 CTRS is not part of the UC package of benefits, with the fund being independently administered by each local authority. Every effort is being made to raise awareness of this and to ensure customers make the separate CTRS claim at the point of UC claim.

3.35 The demand on the 2014/15 budget continues to be monitored monthly in line with changes to customers' circumstances. At 30 June 2015 the projected annual spend for the fund was 96.32%. (Appendix 3).

3.36 No indication of further reductions in this budget have been announced by Scottish Government to date.

Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) – Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants

3.37 The SWF budget for 2015/16 is as follows:

£2,187,628	-	Total Budget
£576,000	-	Crisis Grant
£1,611,628	-	Community Care Grant Fund.

3.38 Underspend from 2014/15 will be held in reserve to supplement higher than budgeted spend on either part of the fund. The option remains to vary the levels of either element of the fund within the total allocation.

3.39 Approximately 90% of applications for Community Care Grants are being considered within the target of 15 days.

3.40 There were 16 first tier reviews of decisions for Community Care Grants, 4 of which were upheld. There was one second tier review panel meeting during 2014 for Community Care Grants which was upheld.

3.41 The Crisis Grant fund position for 2015/16 is:

- £576,000 - Budget
- £136,881 - Spend to 30 June 2015 (21% of total budget)

3.42 The Community Care Grant fund for 2014/15 is:

- £2,027,628 - Budget
- £418,6676 - Spend to 30 June 2015 (22% of total fund)

3.43 The 2015/16 spend profile for each fund is included in Appendix 4.

3.44 Both Crisis Grant and Community Care Grant applications have been considered for medium and high priority cases since January 2015 and this will continue. It should be noted however that the month of June saw a significantly greater spend with 93% of the total monthly budget being spend on Community Care Grants, and 102% on Crisis Grants. The excess spend has been funded from the 2014/15 underspend and monitoring will continue to ensure sufficient funds in projected peak periods for the fund.

3.45 The Furnishing Service has delivered 83% of ordered goods within agreed timescales. Positive feedback has been received from the SWF team and customers.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

3.46 The remaining £3m of the original £15m of 2014/15 Scottish Government funding available to Local Authorities who do not have sufficient funds to fully mitigate Under Occupancy, has now been distributed to councils. The funding was based on the published data from April 14 to February 15. Edinburgh received an additional allocation of £278,482, increasing the DHP fund for 2014/15 to £4.798m

3.47 Edinburgh's DHP allocation for 2015/16 is as follows:

£1,343,558	-	DWP Funding
£2,570,847	-	SG Funding
£3,914,405	-	Total DHP Funding

In line with 2015/16 allocation, the funding provides every local authority with 80% of their estimated need, as agreed with COSLA. The remainder of the Scottish Government budget is being retained to be paid to local authorities according to actual expenditure at the end of the financial year.

The additional Scottish Government funding is expected to mitigate under occupancy in 2015/16.

3.48 The Council's DHP financial position to 30 June 2015 is:

- £3,914,405 (total fund)
- £1,398,646.26 (spend)
- £2,445,026.92 (additional projected spend)

3.49 In overall terms the Council has spent/projected 98% of the current allocated budget. Appendix 5 outlines the Council's DHP spend profile at 30 June 2015.

3.50 There have been 5063 DHP applications considered up to 30 June 2015. Of these applications 238 related to 2014/15 but were received within the cut off period.

3.51 For 2015/16 there have been a total of 36 refusals. The overall refusal rate is 3.6%. This unusually low refusal rate is due to the number of under occupancy renewal cases processed up to 30 June 2015. The most common reasons for refusal are in the situation where a customer's income exceeds their expenditure.

3.52 Claimants already receiving DHP who were under occupying their home, have had their award carried over into 2015/16.

Foodbanks

- 3.53 The Welfare Reform Working Group and its partners recognise that access to food is a basic human right, insufficient food is a symptom of poverty, and that emergency food aid including food banks is a crisis response which will not solve the problem of food poverty on its own. Co-ordinated preventive steps are needed to help existing and potential users avoid continuing crises and escalating needs for emergency responses.
- 3.54 The Communities and Neighbourhoods Committee agreed to a number of partnership actions to improve co-operation between emergency responses including food provision and help with housing and fuel, and to link these to longer term support for individuals and families through a co-operative “Food Bank Plus” model. The proposals were discussed and endorsed at a subsequent sub group meeting which had been agreed at the main Committee, involving elected members and agencies operating food banks and other emergency food aid in the city. A note of actions taken since the Committee discussion and the meeting on 20 May 2015 is at Appendix 6.
- 3.55 The Welfare Reform Working Group provides a key forum for city partners, including the Department of Work and Pensions and community interests, to consider the impacts of the reforms and ways to reduce hardship in the city. The Working Group has regularly considered information on the operation of benefit systems and sanctions and indicated concern at the last meeting in June 2015 at the difficulty in obtaining comparable city level or local figures from the Department of Work and Pensions, and also from city partners including Council services and community based services including food banks. Better information on the level and type of needs is crucial to guide preventive and mitigating action.
- 3.56 The map showing emergency food aid and related services such as advice agencies which has been reported to Council Committees has been updated and is included again in Appendix 6. The map will be displayed on the Council website and shared with partners and stakeholders to identify the location of foodbanks and appropriate advice points located nearby. Discussions continue with foodbanks to signpost clients to these advice points to reduce repeat visits and address the issues which have lead citizens to require this type of support.
- 3.57 Following discussions at a meeting of the NHS health promotion group looking at foodbanks, it was agreed that data would be gathered over a number of months to ascertain the usage of foodbanks by families with children, to inform the integrated plan for children and young people within the City of Edinburgh.
- 3.58 A template has been produced for Foodbanks to complete and the study will take place over a 3 month period.

Welfare Reform – Council and Partner Groups

- 3.59 New governance arrangements are being introduced to strengthen the Councils management of Welfare Reform.

Welfare Reform Working Group

- 3.60 The direction and strategic responsibilities for the group will continue.
- 3.61 Projects from the other groups in the welfare reform setup will report into this group to ensure appropriate governance, scrutiny to support delivery of key projects and provide real outcomes for citizens and council in welfare reform transition.

Welfare Reform Core Group

- 3.62 More formal arrangements to be put in place to recognise roles and responsibilities of the team.
- 3.63 This group will effectively become a virtual team for which the Corporate Welfare Reform Manager will be lead officer.
- 3.64 The Council's strategic plan, "Delivering Social Security in Edinburgh - a strategic response to Welfare Reform", will be reviewed to ensure it provides effective management of Welfare Reform in the city.
- 3.65 Projects initiated as a result of action plans will be managed by the Welfare Reform Working Group.
- 3.66 The Welfare Reform Core Group will continue to meet quarterly to agree the delivery of the key actions to achieve outcomes in terms of:
- Prevention of hardship and worsening inequality;
 - Effective response to crisis needs for housing heat and food;
 - Effective support for vulnerable individuals and families; and
 - Partnership action to sustain Edinburgh's social security.
- 3.67 The Communications Sub-Committee has been meeting regularly, particularly in the lead up to the roll out of UC to ensure key personnel, stakeholders and the public have an appropriate level of awareness.

Welfare Reform Partners Group

- 3.68 Relaunch to take place and ownership for agenda and activity will be placed with partners who attend.
- 3.69 Suggested projects as a result of this group will refer into the Core Group, and subsequently the Welfare Reform Working Group.
- 3.70 Move to six monthly meeting profile.
- 3.71 The Corporate Welfare Reform Team will maintain the risk register as part of operational activity.

The Welfare Reform Working Group - Update

- 3.72 Under the current meeting schedule, the Welfare Reform Working Group met on 23 June 2015. Agenda items included:
- Benefit Sanctions
 - Emergency Food Aid and Foodbanks
 - Referral Process for Foodbanks
 - Universal Credit Update on Visit to Edinburgh by Mike Baker, DWP Head of Operations for Universal Credit
 - Current levels of Need Across the Spectrum of Welfare
- 3.73 Actions to be taken as a result of this meeting included
- Detailed production of a reviewed process for referral to foodbanks
 - Possible extension to foodbank referral points throughout the Council
 - Update of information provided by Sheffield Hallam report published in 2012, to determine the status of predicted impacts highlighted in this report

Benefit Sanctions

- 3.74 The Council continues to work collaboratively with the DWP via the Operational Delivery Group with a view to understanding the process and working towards the prevention of sanctions for Edinburgh Citizens.
- 3.75 Appendix 7 details the position of sanctions, both nationally and locally.
- 3.76 Agreement has been made that citizens facing a potential sanction will now be given information via Edinburgh Job Centre Plus offices on what they should do in this event via the DWPs Provision tool.
- 3.77 The Provision Tool provides work coaches with links to DWP guidance and local provision, to get citizens ready and into work.
- 3.78 Specialist support contact information on Scottish Legal Aid Board services will be included in this information and citizens will be directed towards this if they are at risk of sanction.
- 3.79 An additional benefit of the DWP Provision Tool is that DWP Contact Centre staff also use the specialist support page in particular to look for signposting details for customers in urgent need of alternative welfare support such as the SWF.

Measures of success

- 4.1 The success of the programme will continue to be measured through:
- reductions in forecast loss of income; and

- customer satisfaction with advice and advocacy services relating to benefit changes, including increased benefit take up and minimises losses by ensuring people get their full entitlement under the new arrangements.

Financial impact

5.1 The increase in numbers of people experiencing hardship has led to increased demand for services across the Council and also partner advice agencies. There is a risk to Council income, particularly in relation to rent arrears, changes to subsidy levels for temporary accommodation and service charges. Known risks include:

- loss of rental income to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) arising from Housing Benefit under Occupation reforms and Direct Payment under Universal Credit;
- Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payment budget will be insufficient to meet demand longer term;
- the spend on Council Tax Reduction Scheme exceeds the available funding;
- reduced DWP Administration Subsidy due to the abolition of Council Tax Benefit, the phasing out of Housing Benefit and Central Government budget savings;
- increased demand on advice and advocacy both for the Council and Third Sector advice agencies; and
- Increase in homeless population where delays in payment of rent due to assessment periods for UC in the private sector.
- Restricted access to housing income makes providers less incentivised to release properties for temporary accommodation.

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

6.1 The financial risk to the Council as well as the risk to the Council's reputation is being monitored regularly. Actions taken to assess and mitigate these risks and ensure effective governance include:

- bi-monthly updates were provided to Corporate Policy and Strategy and Finance and Resources Committees, however, these will now be reported on a quarterly basis, to align with the Working Group meeting cycle;
- annual update to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee;
- dedicated teams introduced to provide support and assistance;
- quarterly meetings with Elected Members, Council Officers and External Partners; and
- a strategic approach and action plan for delivering Social Security in Edinburgh (A strategic response to Welfare Reform in Edinburgh).

Equalities impact

- 7.1 The UK Government has prepared Equalities and Human Rights assessments for the welfare reform proposals. The Council is planning to undertake an EHRIA in the early autumn to examine the impact of welfare reform across various segmented groups. This will be done in facilitated by the Council's Corporate Policy and Strategy Team focussing on Equalities.

Sustainability impact

- 8.1 Welfare Reform is expected to have general implications for environmental and sustainability outcomes, for example in relation to fuel poverty and financial exclusion.
- 8.2 A referral system exists between Customer Hub and Changeworks, an organisation specialising in maximising energy value to mitigate the effects of fuel poverty.

Consultation and engagement

- 9.1 Council officials continue to engage with the UK and Scottish Governments, directly and through COSLA, with the DWP, the Third Sector, the NHS and other partners. The Council is also engaging with citizens, both in and out of work, who rely on benefit income and tax credits.
- 9.2 The Council continues to participate in groups with the looking at the impacts of Welfare Reform. A restructure of DWP groups representing local authorities is underway, and Edinburgh's role in this will be clarified in the Autumn.

Background reading / external references

Recent reports to committee:

Welfare Reform – Update – Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee 20 January 2014

[Strategic Response to Welfare Reform in Edinburgh](#) – Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee 30 September 2014

[Welfare Reform – update](#) – Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee 30 September 2014

[Welfare Reform – update](#) – Finance and Resources Committee, 28 August 2014

[Discretionary Housing Payment Policy](#) – Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee, 5 August 2014

[Welfare Reform – update](#) – Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee, 5 August 2014

[Welfare Reform – update](#) – Finance and Resources Committee, 5 June 2014

[Welfare Reform – update](#) – Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee, 13 May 2014

Alastair D Maclean

Chief Operating Officer

Deputy Chief Executive

Contact: Danny Gallacher – Head of Customer Services

E-mail: danny.gallacher@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 5016

Sheila Haig – Welfare Reform Manager

E-mail: Sheila.haig@edinburgh.gov.uk | Tel: 0131 469 5088

Links

Coalition pledges

Council outcomes	CO6 – Our children’s and young people’s outcomes are not undetermined by poverty. CO8 – Edinburgh’s economy creates and sustains job opportunities. CO9 – Edinburgh residents are able to access job opportunities, CO16 – Well housed – People live in a good quality home that is affordable and meets their needs in a well managed Neighbourhood. CO24 – The Council communicates effectively internally and externally and has an excellent reputation for customer care. CO25 – The Council has efficient and effective services that deliver on objectives. CO26 – The Council engages with stakeholders and works in partnership to improve services and deliver on agreed objectives.
Single Outcome Agreement	SO2 – Edinburgh’s citizens experience improved health and wellbeing, with reduced inequalities in health

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – UC 7 day waiting period exemptions
- Appendix 2 – UC Edinburgh Claim Volumes
- Appendix 3 – Council Tax Reduction Scheme Spend
- Appendix 4 – Scottish Welfare Fund Spend
- Appendix 5 - Discretionary Housing Payment Spend
- Appendix 6 – Emergency food aid: a) map of food bank

locations and related support services; and b)
Update on recommended actions.

Appendix 7 – National Benefit Sanctions

Universal Credit (UC) – Introduction of 7 Day Waiting Period

UC claimants are not entitled to the benefit for the first 7 days with effect from 3 August 2015. The exemptions to this can be viewed [here](#).

Universal Credit in Edinburgh

1. These are the total figures for UC Claims in Edinburgh from 09/03/2015 to 28/05/2015.

March 2015

12/03/2015	-	60
19/03/2015	-	80
26/03/2015	-	70
Total	-	210 claims

April 2015

02/04/2015	-	100
09/04/2015	-	80
16/04/2015	-	90
23/04/2015	-	110
30/04/2015	-	110
Total	-	490 claims

May 2015

07/05/2015	-	120
14/05/2015	-	150
21/05/2015	-	110
28/05/2015	-	110
Total	-	490 claims

Total Number of Claims in Edinburgh Job Centres - 1190

2. These are the Total number of Claimants in each age range for April and May 2015. No figures published for March or June .

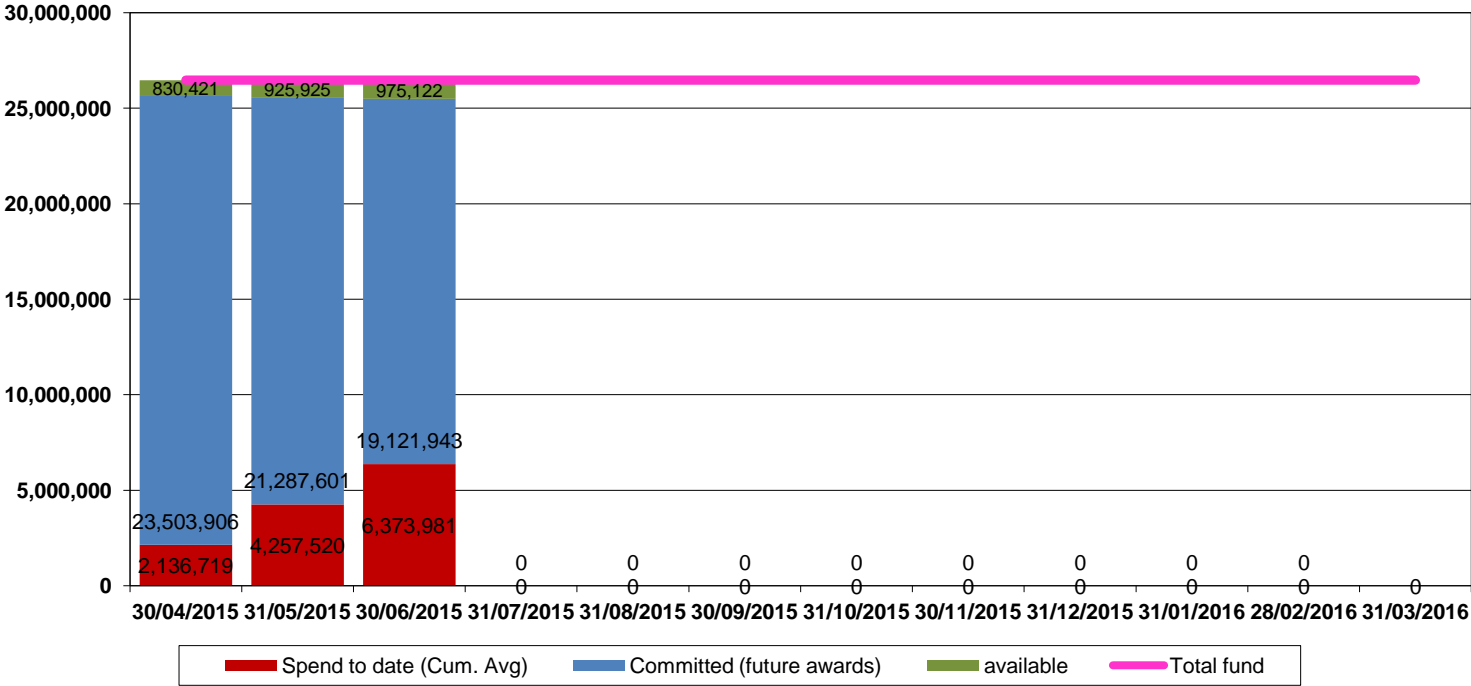
Jobcentre	Total UC Claims	16/24	25-49	50+
Edinburgh City	100	40	50	10
High Riggs	120	20	80	20
Leith	220	80	110	30
Wester Hailes	110	40	50	10
Total	550	180	290	70

3. Gender- Figures for April and May for males and females.

Jobcentre	Total UC Claims	Female	Male
Edinburgh City	100	20	80
High Riggs	120	30	90
Leith	220	60	160
Wester Hailes	110	20	90
Total	550	130	420

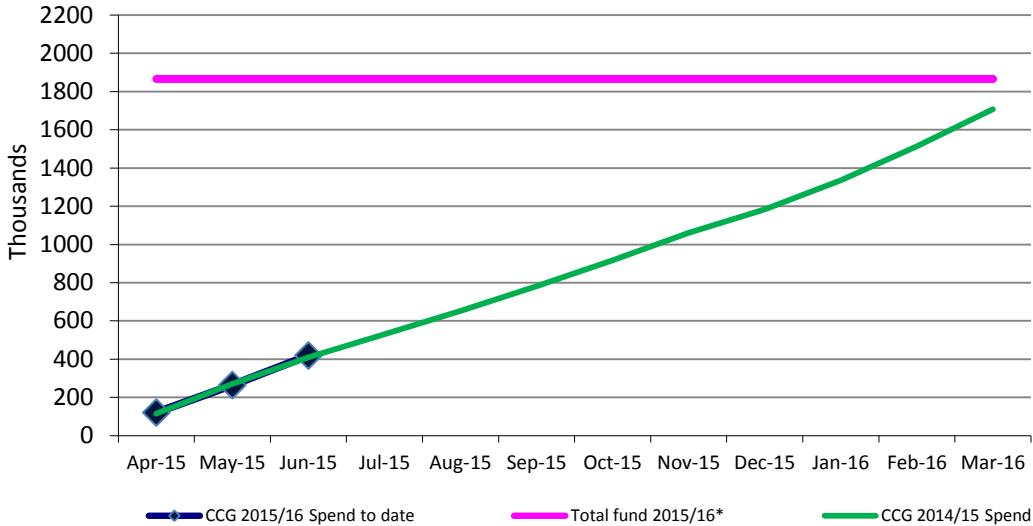
Council Tax Reduction Scheme (30 June 2015)

CTRS Distribution 2015/16

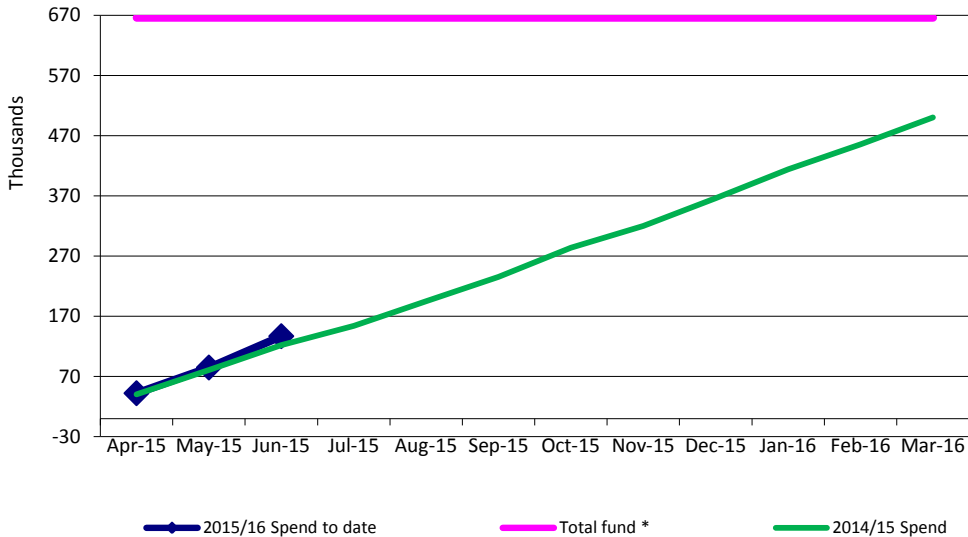


Scottish Welfare Fund (30 June 2015)

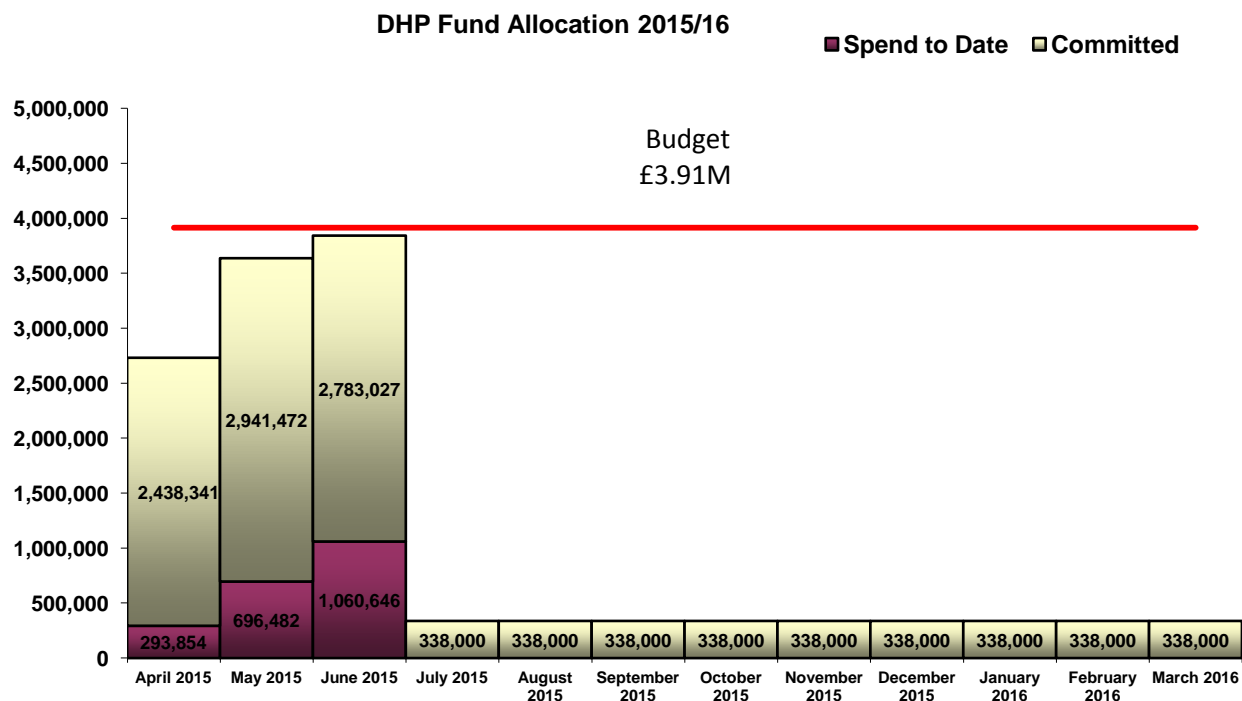
Community Care Grant Allocation 2015/16



Crisis Grant Allocation 2015/16

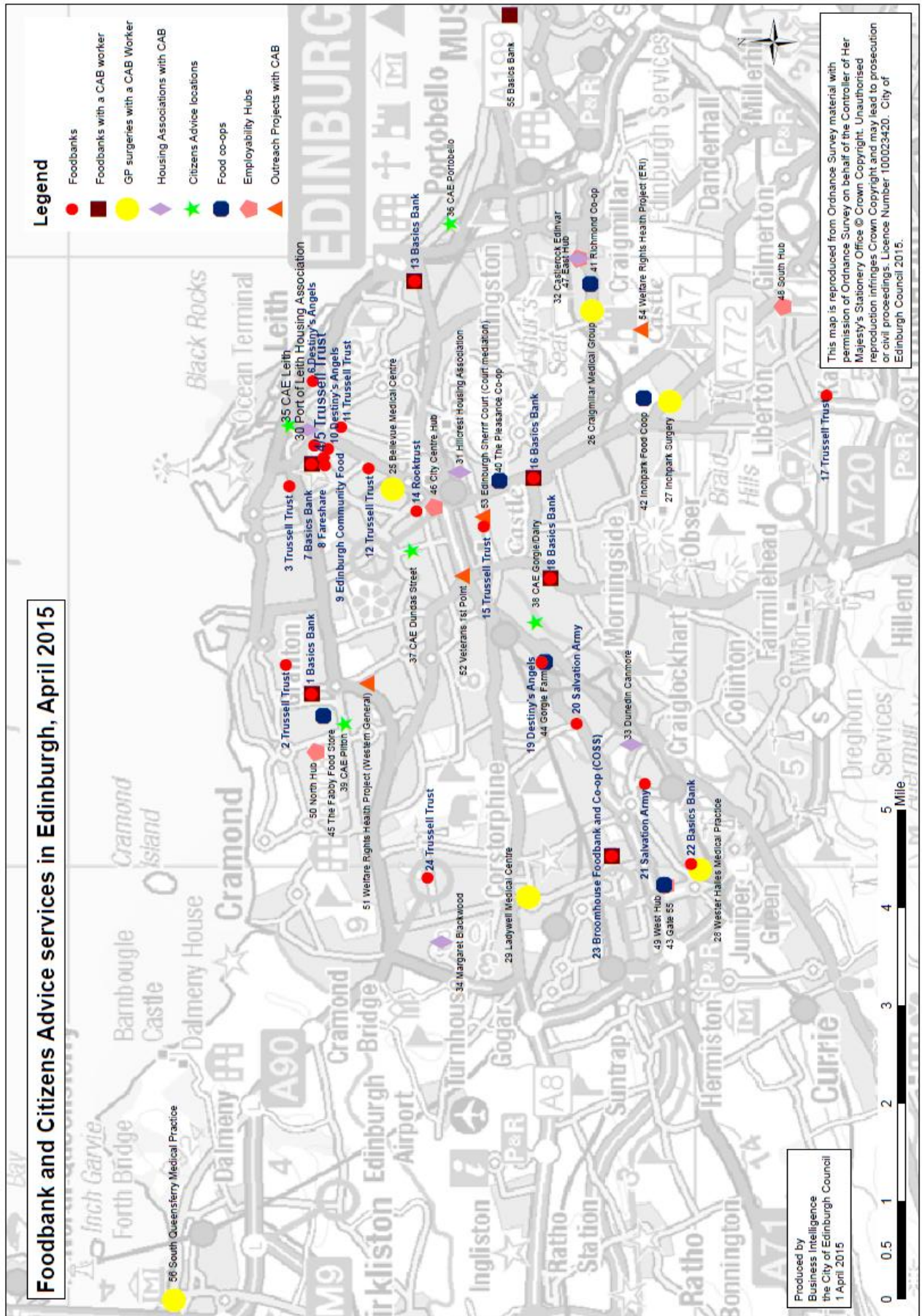


Discretionary Housing Payments (3 June 2015)



Emergency Food Aid Information

(a) Food banks/ Advice Service Map



Emergency food aid: b) Update on recommended actions

Decisions at Communities and Neighbourhoods Committee 5-5-15	Update
<p>That the voluntary and community model for intervening to provide food where local needs are identified is continued, with a co-operative approach to provide referrals of people in need and access to related services aimed to prevent crises, particularly advice and accessible emergency payments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminar for discussion between elected members and agencies providing emergency food aid/ food banks endorsed continuing development of “food bank plus” model • Consideration of referral processes through Welfare Reform Core Group • Partnership contacts agree co-operative approaches and referrals for additional help from emergency services • Links to Child Poverty Strategy have been made and relevant information gathering proposed to guide action for children
<p>That the Health Inequalities Standing Group (HISG) Food and Health Group continues to provide a forum to agree a joint approach and practical co-operation between the food banks, other crisis services and related advice and food and health services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership links through the health inequality partnership have continued to host informal meetings and involve wider contacts with relevant services • Partnership approaches to improve information on people in poverty crises needing food aid will be discussed and developed through the partnership meetings to guide work to prevent crises
<p>That the Advice and Guidance resources provided through Council and voluntary agencies receive continued support as a priority response to emergency needs, and that priority is given to co-location and easy access arrangements for food bank users, as part of the grant funding process</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice and Guidance resources have been maintained in 2015/16 • Work to develop an Advice Strategy will guide investment and service targeting for renewed funding from 2016/17
<p>That close links are built between food banks and the range of community food provision, such as food co-ops, community cafes and training resources for healthy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Food and Health task group which is the basis for partnership discussions is also the main partnership hub for this range of food

eating as part of the grant funding process	and health provision
That access to support for emotional and personal issues is linked to food banks to prevent recurring crises, including needs for emergency foods supplies, through consideration at the referral stage and ready access from food bank and advice service contacts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As noted above consideration of wider referral process linking to support and care services and agencies is under way through the Welfare Reform Core Group
That the issues raised by national recommendations on operation of the benefits system in terms of eligibility, sanctions and avoidance of crisis situations for vulnerable people are discussed through the Welfare Reform Working Group, which has engaged with the Department of Work and Pensions, city partners and community interests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Welfare Reform Working Group has considered information on the operation of benefit systems and sanctions and indicated concern at the difficulty in obtaining comparable city level or local figures from the Department of Work and Pensions, city partners and community interests
That representations are made to the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights for an urgent discussion of issues around food banks with the relevant Committee Conveners, Vice-conveners and appropriate officials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outstanding action
That the Vice-Convener lead a meeting with representatives from Edinburgh City Mission, Scottish Welfare Fund, ESCAPE and other relevant bodies to hear about the people who regularly use food banks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting held with Food Bank representatives on Wednesday 20 May 2015 at Lothian Chambers, Edinburgh Agreed eight detailed points to guide the co-operative work agreed at Committee on 5-5-15

National Benefit Sanctions

Nationally the number of benefit sanctions has gone down by a third and over **94% of JSA claimants** and **99% of Employment and Support Allowance claimants were not sanctioned over the last year.**

There is no DWP information available on the value of sanctions applied. A guide for claimants of JSA that may contains an overview of how Low or Intermediate and High Level sanctions might impact on a claimants benefit and also at Section 4 the three stages of the process should a doubt arise, which can be viewed [here](#).

Numbers of sanctions applied and percentage overturned

In the City of Edinburgh in the period 22 October 2012 to 30 September 2014, 12,308 adverse decisions (decisions to apply a sanction) were applied of which 1833 were overturned at subsequent stages, i.e. 14.9%.

More detailed information on these figures is available via <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>

Difference between adverse and non adverse decisions

A customer may have received a **sanction** if they have not met the actions in their Claimant Commitment; have not done something their Jobcentre adviser told them to; or are deemed to not be actively seeking work or not available for work and have provided a reason within five days, which is deemed to be 'not acceptable'.

Alternatively, their benefit payments may have been **suspended** pending investigation of a query about one of the following:

- 'Decision to apply a sanction (adverse). The claimant is sanctioned and their benefit is stopped for a period of time, reduced or suspended.
- 'Decision not to apply a sanction (non-adverse)'. The claimant is not sanctioned. However, it appears to be the case that their benefit will have been suspended whilst the investigation of the 'compliance doubt' takes place.
- 'Reserved decisions'. A claimant would have been sanctioned, but they have ended their JSA or ESA claim before it takes effect.

- 'Cancelled referrals'. This is where the referral was made in error, or the claimant wasn't claiming benefit at the time of their actions.

An 'adverse decision' is a decision found against the claimant, i.e. a sanction or disallowance is applied. It can be made at the original decision making point, at reconsideration, or on appeal. If an adverse decision is overturned following a reconsideration or appeal, it will appear as a 'non adverse decision'

A 'non-adverse' decision is when a case has been considered and a decision was made not to apply a sanction. The claimant is usually still in receipt of benefit when the decision is made, however on occasions they may have stopped claiming during the decision making process.

JSA Sanctions ONLY - 22nd October 2012 to 30 September 2014.

JSA Sanctions Decisions by JCP Office and District	Decision to apply a sanction	Decision not to apply a sanction (non-adverse)	Reserved Decisions	Cancelled Referrals
Edinburgh - Commercial Street	3,778	2,437	526	2,696
Edinburgh - High Riggs	3,130	1,833	356	2,543
Edinburgh - South St Andrew Street	1,600	791	171	1,021
Edinburgh - Wester Hailes	1,444	760	143	1,062
Total	9,952	5821	1196	7322