

# Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 31 October 2017

## Welfare Reform - Update

Item number	7.3
Report number	
Wards	All
Council Commitments	

### Executive summary

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The Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on 3 October 2017 considered a report which provided an update on the ongoing work to support citizens towards Universal Credit, the benefit cap and funding arrangements for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and Discretionary Housing Payment. The report is submitted to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee for scrutiny.

## Welfare Reform - Update

### Terms of referral

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- 1.1 On 3 October 2017, the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee considered a report which detailed the transition support arrangements in place for citizens moving towards Universal Credit. Information was also provided on the benefit cap which has been applied appropriately in Edinburgh since November 2016. Confirmation was received for the continued funding arrangements for the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the initial allocation for the Discretionary Housing Payment from the Scottish Government.
- 1.2 The Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee agreed:
  - 1.2.1 To note the ongoing work to support Universal Credit (UC) and Welfare Reform, in particular the extension of the benefit cap in Edinburgh.
  - 1.2.2 To note the current spend projections for DHP, Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Scottish Welfare Fund.
  - 1.2.3 To note the Members Briefing produced as Appendix 4 of the report in response to Power to the People deputation at Council on 29 June 2017.
  - 1.2.4 To agree that officers would provide Power to the People with the Homelessness and Housing Council Policy.
  - 1.2.5 To note that the Homelessness and Housing Senior Support Manager would arrange to meet with people experiencing temporary accommodation issues.
  - 1.2.6 To agree that the Customer Manager would liaise with the Advice Services Team about the restructure of the service and the impact of a reduction on resources and the capacity of the service to give advice, and whether the 70% success rate of people appealing against the benefits decisions was being fed back to the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP).
  - 1.2.7 To provide Councillors with a projection of the number of Universal Credit (UC) claimants after it was rolled out to everyone.

## For Decision/Action

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- 2.1 The report is submitted to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee for scrutiny.

## Background reading / external references

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[Minute of the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee - 3 October 2017](#)

[Webcast of the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee - 3 October 2017](#)

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## Links

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**Appendices**      Appendix 1 - report by the Executive Director of Resources

# Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee

10.00am, Tuesday 3 October 2017

## Welfare Reform - Update

Item number

Report number

Executive/routine

Wards

Council Commitments

### Executive Summary

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This update details the Council's ongoing Welfare Reform activities. This includes support for citizens that are transitioning to Universal Credit (UC), as detailed in the Council's Delivery Partnership Agreement with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

This report also addresses the benefit cap, and the limit on the amount of income from certain benefits a household can receive. UK Government's roll out of the benefit cap is complete and it has been applied to appropriate claimants within Edinburgh since November 2016.

The Council has received confirmation that the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme funding arrangements will continue in 2017/18.

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funding has now been devolved to the Scottish Government. The Council's initial allocation for 2017/18 is £4.8m with a further top up later in the year, which will be determined by demand.

## Welfare Reform - Update

### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee note:
- 1.1.1 the ongoing work to support Universal Credit (UC) and Welfare Reform, in particular the extension of the benefit cap in Edinburgh;
  - 1.1.2 the current spend projections for DHP, Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Scottish Welfare Fund; and
  - 1.1.3 the Members Briefing produced as Appendix 4 in response to Power to the People deputation at Council on 29 June 2017.

### 2. Background

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- 2.1 The Welfare Reform update is reported to the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on a quarterly basis, to align with the Working Group meeting cycle. The last report was considered by Committee on 28 February 2017.

### 3. Main report

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#### Universal Credit (UC)

- 3.1 UC in Edinburgh is available to new single claimants who would previously have been eligible for Job Seekers Allowance. As part of the ongoing rollout programme, the DWP's digital service was extended to all working age categories, supported through Musselburgh Job Centre in March 2016 and Penicuik and Dalkeith Job Centres in March 2017. These extensions may potentially apply to Edinburgh claimants that are supported by Job Centres in East and Midlothian.
- 3.2 The Council continues to work with DWP and Job Centre Plus to support the transition to the UC system and a new Delivery Partnership Agreement has been agreed with the DWP for 2017/18. Officers are also engaging with COSLA and other local authorities to learn lessons and ensure as smooth a transition as possible for Edinburgh citizens claiming Universal Credit.
- 3.3 Universal Credit continues to be rolled out nationally and Edinburgh is scheduled for full service roll out in June 2018.

## UC Caseload in Edinburgh

3.4 In July 2017 the DWP reported the following UC caseload in Edinburgh:

UC Claimants in Edinburgh	2375
UC Claimants seeking work	1,644 (69%)
UC Claimants with element of employment	731 (31%)

## Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) and UC Claims

3.5 To assess the impact of UC on alternative funding streams, information is collated on claimants citing UC as a reason for applying for a Crisis Grant from the Scottish Welfare Fund. From April 2017 to July 2017 there have been 243 Crisis Grant applications with a value of £20,044.53 where the reason was given as financial hardship related to UC. Following normal practice, citizens, in the first instance, are referred to DWP for a short-term benefit advance.

The breakdown of the 243 applications:

- Paid 161
- Refused 72
- Resolving 1
- Withdrawn 9

## Personal Budgeting Support Referrals and Assisted Digital Support and UC

3.6 The Delivery Partnership Agreement between DWP and the Council requires a personal budgeting support referral service and digital support for Universal Credit in localities. The requirement for personal budgeting support Referrals is met by co-locating the Council's Personal Budgeting Support Officer with the DWP. Both organisations continue to work together to increase take-up for this support and ensure citizens are supported throughout the UC process. Since January 2017 there have been a total of 87 referrals for PBS across Jobcentres with 45 Universal Credit claimants attending their appointment.

## Council Housing Services and UC

3.7 Currently UC still only applies to single person households making a new claim for assistance through welfare benefits. At the end of July 2017 there were 500 council tenants known to be receiving UC. The number of new cases each month currently continues to remain very low at around 10 new cases per month. The total value of rent due to be collected from tenants on UC is currently approximately £208k per month, £2.49m per annum.

- 3.8 Tenants moving onto UC in Edinburgh are generally doing so because of a change of circumstance and around 90% of tenants have a level of pre-existing arrears. The management of UC cases with housing rent arrears are progressed in accordance with the Council's standard arrears process. This includes the provision of detailed advice to help tenants understand their rent payment obligations, income maximisation advice and referrals for specialist debt advice where relevant.

### **Temporary and Supported Accommodations**

- 3.9 Households in temporary accommodation affected by the benefit cap and/or under occupation are provided with advice and assistance in applying for DHP. Where possible households are placed in temporary accommodation that reduces the likelihood of under occupancy, however, on occasion they may be placed in a larger property to meet an emergency housing need. Currently 15 out of 421 households who are under occupying are in temporary accommodation. These households are entitled to claim DHP relevant to any under occupancy.
- 3.10 A total of 502 occupants of temporary accommodation have had their benefit capped. Of these citizens, 382 have moved on from temporary accommodation.

### **Advice Services**

- 3.11 A range of Council funded debt, benefit and welfare advice continues to be provided across the city. This activity is detailed in the following tables:

#### ***Debt Advice***

Debt Advice	2017/18 Q1	2016/17	2015/16
Number of Enquiries by Funded Agencies	991	6,596	6,588
Level of Problematic Debt	£496,209	£2m	£2m
Number of People assisted by Advice Shop	334	842*	3,589
Level of Problematic Debt	£413,640	£2.66m	£11.4m

\*Restructuring of the service meant a redirection of debt advice to funded agencies.

### **Benefits Tribunals Advice**

Benefits Tribunals	2017/18 Q1	2016/17	2015/16
Number of tribunals that Advice Services have represented	241	995	738

*These figures are essentially dependent on decisions made by the DWP on benefit entitlement. The success rate for these tribunals varies depending on the benefit in dispute though overall, advice services are achieving a success rate of 70%.*

### **Welfare Rights Advice**

Welfare Rights Advice	2017/18 Q1	2016/17	2015/16
Number of enquiries dealt with by external funded agencies	2,917	12,896	15,228
Increased income gained for clients using funded agencies	£948,051	£4.8m	£5.7m
Increased income gained for clients using Advice Shop	£3.5m	£14.4m	£10.2m

- 3.12 There has been significant information, advice, and casework to resolve difficulties faced by households affected by the benefit cap, mostly around whether the Cap should be applied and how households can avoid accruing rent arrears. In some instances, agencies are reporting that homelessness is likely due to client's inability to make up the shortfall between their rent and housing benefit following the application of the benefit cap.
- 3.13 Benefit tribunals numbers have increased slightly and there is a national trend of delays in this process. It is anticipated that this increase will continue.
- 3.14 As far as possible all advice services are working to resolve benefit and debt related matters at the earliest stage as possible to prevent crises. Supporting claimants with benefit applications means that in most cases, the appropriate outcome is achieved, however, where disputes arise, casework is required to assist clients to navigate through the mandatory reconsideration and appeal stages.
- 3.15 Vulnerable people continue to be migrated from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and advice services are faced with many claimants seeking assistance due to financial loss in this process.

## Extension of Benefit Cap

- 3.16 The cap is a limit on the total amount of income from certain benefits a household can receive. If citizens receive more than the cap, then their Housing Benefit will be reduced until they are brought back within the income cap. From Autumn 2016 this was reduced to £384 for a couple or single person with children and £258 for a single person. Details of individuals facing the extension of the benefit cap were received in January 2017 and the cap was applied to these cases
- 3.17 The table below shows the number of benefit cap cases applied in each tenure type and the average weekly loss in Benefit for these citizens. The figures include benefit cap cases up to 31 July 2017.

Tenure	No of Households Affected	Average Weekly Loss in Benefit	% of all Benefit Cap Cases
Temporary Accommodation	131	£193.72	22%
Mainstream Council Tenancies	104	£49.34	17%
Private Rented Sector	155	£72.06	26%
Housing Association (RSL)	37	£44.73	6%
LINK PSL	172	£32.49	29%

- 3.18 The total number of claimants affected by the benefit cap has been less than anticipated, with a total of 599 households affected up to 31 July 2017. In advance of the extension of the benefit cap in Edinburgh, stakeholder agencies used the data provided to engage with citizens, ensuring their Benefits were appropriate and potentially moving individuals into groups protected from the cap. Citizens moving into employment of 16 hours for a single person and 24 hours for a couple are also not subject to the benefit cap provided they are also in receipt of Working Tax Credit.
- 3.19 At Council on Thursday 29 June 2017, the Power to the People group presented a deputation which focused on the impact of welfare benefit legislation changes, particularly the benefit cap. A response to the points raised by the deputation is detailed in Appendix 1.

## Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)

- 3.20 Existing CTRS funding arrangements continue in 2017/18. The national Settlement and Distribution Group continue to consider the distribution of CTRS funding and will advise local authorities when there are any significant changes in coming years.

- 3.21 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 CTRS and to ensure customers make a separate CTRS claim at the point of any UC claim. Local arrangements with Job Centres across the city are in place to support this.
- 3.22 CTRS demand continues to be monitored and whilst uptake continues to fall, Council Tax collection is improving, indicating a reduced need for assistance of this nature. Appendix 2 outlines the Council's CTRS spend profile at 31 July 2017
- 3.23 The recent changes to Council Tax charges at band E and above may result in increased demand on the fund because of more individuals qualifying for the reduction. This will be monitored and trends reported to Committee.

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

- 3.24 Crisis Grants and Community Care Grant applications continue to be considered for medium and high priority cases. Appendix 3 outlines the Council's SWF spend profile at 31 July 2017. The table below details the 2017/18 budget allocation and total spend to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2017

<b>Grant</b>	<b>Budget £ 2017/18</b>	<b>Carry Over to 2017/18</b>	<b>Total Budget £</b>	<b>2017/18 Spend April to July £</b>
Crisis Grants	£655,051.80	£0.00	£655,051.80	£251,872.74
Community Care Grants	£1,528,454.20	£330,000	£1,858,454.20	£540,972.46
<b>Total</b>	<b>£2,183,506.00</b>	<b>£330,000</b>	<b>£2,513,506.00</b>	<b>£792,845.20</b>

- 3.25 The SWF 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier Reviews are heard by the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). There has been a total of 23 2<sup>nd</sup> Tier Reviews by the SPSO between April 2017 and July 2017. Eleven reviews were upheld in favour of the SWF and 12 reviews have been overturned in favour of the applicant.

### **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)**

- 3.26 From 1 April 2017, DHP funding was devolved from the DWP to the Scottish Government. The DHP budget from the Scottish Government has been allocated in two streams: Under Occupancy Mitigation and Other DHPs.
- 3.27 The allocation for Edinburgh for 2017/18 is as follows:

- Under Occupancy mitigation - The funding will be allocated in two tranches and is based on forecasted Under Occupancy charges. The first tranche of funding is £3.1m or 80% of the expected cost.
- Other DHPs - This includes assistance for those affected by the Benefit Cap and Local Housing Allowance reforms. The funding for Other DHPS is £1.7m. This is compared to £1.45m from the DWP for 2016/17.
- The initial total of the DHP fund for 2017/18 is £4.8m, however this does not include the remaining 20% funding to fully mitigate under occupancy, which would increase the fund to around £5.6m. However existing analysis suggests this is more likely to be £5.4m given levels of under occupation in Edinburgh.

3.28 As of 31 July 2017, the Council's DHP end of year financial position was:

Total Fund for 2017/18	£4,836, 647*
Net Paid to Date	£1,574,746.90
Committed pending related benefit process	£2,459,405.06

\*exclusive of additional 20% to be allocated in 2018.

- 3.29 There have been 5014 DHP applications up to 31 July 2017 of which 257 were refused. The overall refusal rate is 5%, the most common reasons for refusal is where a customer's income exceeds their expenditure. The national average for a refusal currently sits at 10%.
- 3.30 At 31 July 2017, the number of days to process a request for a DHP was 18 days.
- 3.31 Appendix 4 outlines the Council's DHP spend profile at July 2017. The additional Scottish Government funding is expected to fully mitigate under occupancy in 2017/18.

### **Scottish Social Security**

- 3.32 A new Scottish Security Agency will be established by the Scottish Government to administer devolved benefits from Central Government. This does not include the Scottish Welfare Fund and DHP which will remain with local authorities. The Agency will have a central location but with a local presence, utilising existing public sector locations across Scotland. The enabling Social Security Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in June 2017. As work progresses further updates will be provided to Committee.
- 3.33 In August, Edinburgh was represented at an event jointly hosted by Scottish Government and COSLA regarding benefit uptake for the new suite of devolved benefits, as well as current national and local welfare benefits available to individuals. It was agreed by all parties that there was a need to ensure citizens

were maximising their income and claiming entitlements due to them. Further information will be available on the outcomes from this meeting, and Committee will be updated in due course.

### **The Welfare Reform Working Group**

3.34 The Welfare Reform Working Group met in January 2017. Items discussed included:

- Extension of the Benefit Cap;
- Advice Services review;
- Benefit Uptake Campaign;
- Financial Inclusion;
- UC Update;
- Welfare Reform Impacts on Temporary Accommodation; and
- DHP Policy.

3.35 The group reconvened on 4 September 2017 and met with representatives from Power to the People following their deputation to Council on 29 June 2017. The report in Appendix 1 formed the basis of discussion and highlights the Council's ongoing activities in this important area.

### **The Welfare Reform Core Group and Partners Forum**

3.36 The Welfare Reform Core Group met in May 2017 and items discussed included:

- Increasing Communications around Welfare Reform
- The Benefit Cap and Employability providers
- Staff Training for Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Advice Services Review
- Scottish Welfare Fund improvements to service delivery

3.37 The Welfare Reform Partners Forum includes a range of advice agencies where information is shared through a virtual forum.

## **4. Measures of success**

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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 and ensuring people get their full entitlement under the new arrangements.

## **5. Financial impact**

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- 5.1 The increase in numbers of people experiencing hardship has led to increased demand for services across the Council and 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 reforms and Direct Payment under UC;
  - Scottish Welfare Fund and DHP 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.

## **6. Risk, policy, compliance, and governance impact**

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- 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:
- updates provided to Corporate Policy and Strategy on a quarterly basis;
  - annual update to the Governance, Risk, and Best Value Committee;
  - dedicated teams introduced to provide support and assistance; and
  - quarterly meetings with Elected Members, Council Officers, and External Partners.

## **7. Equalities impact**

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- 7.1 The UK Government has prepared Equalities and Human Rights assessments for the welfare reform proposals. The Council will undertake an EHRIA when necessary for any of its proposals.

## **8. Sustainability impact**

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- 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.

## 9. Consultation and engagement

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- 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, namely COSLA's Welfare Reform Local Authority Representative Group.
- 9.3 Community engagement has resulted in plans for joint working initiatives to provide Foodbank Plus models which will address immediate crisis as well as preventative action to reduce use of such services in the future.

## 10. Background reading/external references

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[Welfare Reform – Update: report to Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee 28 February 2017](#)

[Welfare Reform – Update: report to Corporate, Policy and Strategy Committee 8 November 2016](#)

[Welfare Reform – Update: report to Corporate, Policy and Strategy Committee, 9 August 2016](#)

[Welfare Reform – Update: report to Corporate, Policy and Strategy Committee, 17 May 2016](#)

[Welfare Reform – Update report to Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee 23 February 2016](#)

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## 11. Appendices

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- Appendix 1 – Members Briefing – Welfare Reform Working Group  
Response to Power to the People Deputation
- Appendix 2 – Council Tax Reduction Scheme Spend
- Appendix 3– Scottish Welfare Fund Spend
- Appendix 4 – Discretionary Housing Payment Spend

## Members Briefing – Welfare Reform Working Group – Response to Power to the People Deputation

**Details:** Briefing note for all members

**Service Area:** Homelessness and Housing Support, Transactions, and Place Development

**Directorate:** Safer and Stronger Communities, Resources and Place

### Introduction

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At Council on Thursday 29 June 2017, the Power to the People group presented a deputation which focused on the impact of welfare benefit legislation changes, particularly the benefit cap.

In addition to this, the group referred to several families in the north of the city who may be at risk of homelessness, due to these changes and to some families who are now homeless and have been offered temporary accommodation.

### Main report

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#### 1.0 Benefit Cap

- 1.1 The Benefit Cap is a limit on the total amount of certain benefits a working age citizen can receive.
- 1.2 Where a citizen receives more weekly income than the Benefit Cap permits then their housing benefit/universal credit housing costs will be reduced until they have been brought back within the income cap. The limit a citizen can receive in total benefits per week is £384.62 for a couple or single parent, and £257.69 for single people with no children. Details on exemptions to the Benefit Cap can be found at [http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20130/welfare\\_reform/519/housing\\_benefit\\_cap](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20130/welfare_reform/519/housing_benefit_cap)
- 1.3 The Council is represented on welfare reform groups hosted by various bodies, including the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), the Department for Work and Pensions, the UK Government, and the Scottish Government. Whilst the Council contributes to welfare reform consultation, including the Benefit Cap, the decision to implement a national Benefit Cap is made by the UK Government.

#### 2.0 Local Considerations

- 2.1 The Council has been provided with a list of families at risk of homelessness in the north of the city and are actively working with them or attempting to make contact to provide advice and support. Prior to the introduction of the extended benefit cap, a number of events were held around the City, hosted by DWPs' Job Centre Plus service with multi-agency attendance from the Council and external partners. A similar offer has already been made to the identified families to hold additional events in a location of their choice and this offer remains open. In the meantime, citizens are being contacted on an individual basis to assess their specific benefits situation.
- 2.2 Members should be aware that not all of these families have completed a mandate which would allow information to be shared with some of the organisations raising concerns around their cases. Due to data protection Members and Officers are unable to share any

information they have with these groups unless a specific mandate is in place. Members and Officers are permitted to provide this information directly to the citizen concerned if contacted by them directly.

### **3.0 Discretionary Housing Payment and Scottish Welfare Fund**

- 3.1 Citizens affected can apply for Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), which is a fund available for those facing financial hardship because of rent liabilities. Awards are based on the citizen's income and expenditure and the appropriate award is made to alleviate hardship and prevent homelessness. Each application for assistance is considered on a case by case basis. In August 2017, all individuals affected by benefit cap who had previously not applied for DHP were invited to apply.
- 3.2 Discretionary Housing Payments are made from a ring fenced, limited fund provided by Scottish Government. The fund is insufficient to fully mitigate benefit cap for all citizens. In certain circumstances the fund can also support citizens meet the cost of rent deposits and/or advance rent if this involves moving to cheaper alternative accommodation that reduces reliance on DHP.
- 3.3 It is not possible to award DHP for benefit cap automatically without an application to the fund. Payments cannot be made indefinitely as funding is set on a yearly basis and its value cannot be guaranteed. The Scottish Government has made a commitment to fully mitigate under occupancy, but no such commitment has been made in relation to the benefit cap.
- 3.4 The Scottish Welfare Fund can also, where citizens qualify, provide payments for removal costs and crisis support for those who have been left in financial hardship because of meeting rent liabilities. Details of the support offered can be found at [http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20239/scottish\\_welfare\\_fund](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/info/20239/scottish_welfare_fund).

### **4.0 Homelessness Services**

- 4.1 The Council and third sector partners have a range of services which can provide advice and support to any families who are at risk of homelessness and/or affected by welfare benefit changes. Early intervention and prevention of homelessness are the primary aims of the Council. Representatives of this group highlighted a small number of cases where they believed appropriate prevention activity has not been undertaken, when individuals have presented as homeless. These cases have been reviewed and where appropriate additional guidance has been provided to officers. All officers working in this area are committed to ensuring everything possible is being done to prevent homelessness, and avoid housing crisis.
- 4.2 Advice services commissioned by the Council can be accessed in all localities, further details can be provided on request. The services will provide immediate information in a range of areas, including those which are particularly relevant to the cases raised by Power to the People: validity of notice from private sector properties, welfare benefits advice and income maximisation. In the north of the city the initial point of referral should be Granton Information Centre on 0131 551 2459 or 0131 552 0458
- 4.3 In addition to the support provided by commissioned services, the Council will provide housing advice, homeless assessment, and temporary accommodation, if required through all locality offices and 1a Parliament Square. The focus of the officers' work will be to prevent homelessness wherever possible by linking with Council colleagues, support agencies, mediating with landlords and provision of housing options.
- 4.4 It is imperative that those individuals who have been threatened with eviction engage with services at the earliest point to allow for possible mitigation of the situation and alternative solutions which could be sought.

## **5.0 Temporary Accommodation**

- 5.1 If families are homeless and require temporary accommodation this will be provided. The Council always aims to provide families with suitable accommodation, a self-contained flat or house. At the initial point of presentation this is not always possible and sometimes families are placed into bed and breakfast until suitable accommodation is available. We will always seek to meet families housing need in providing appropriate accommodation, but cannot always meet preferences in terms of location or style of property.
- 5.2 The Council has Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for all Bed & Breakfast/Shared Houses involved in the provision of temporary accommodation to meet minimum standards and protect vulnerable users. There are 3 monthly contract meetings with providers to ensure Council standards are met as well as to address any issues arising. The Council also undertakes planned and unplanned inspections, as well as weekly telephone appointments with providers to assess the wellbeing of all residents.

## **6.0 Social Housing Provision**

- 6.1 Edinburgh has a shortfall in housing of all tenures resulting in high private sector rents and house prices. In January 2016, Council approved an ambitious programme to increase the Council's housing building programme from 3,000 to 8,000 homes over the next 10 years. This target was matched by six housing associations, bringing the joint commitment up to 16,000 affordable homes. Since then, the new Council coalition has increased this commitment to 20,000 homes and further accelerated delivery by stating that half of these homes are to be delivered in the first five years.
- 6.2 Over the next two years combined the Affordable Housing Supply Programme is programmed to approve the delivery of 1,296 homes for social rent by the Council and housing association partners. This equates to 64% of the Affordable Housing Supply Programme and is a record number of planned social rent approvals. In the Pennywell/Muirhouse area over 1,000 new homes have been built or are in development with many homes being for social rent by the Council or housing associations.

## **7.0 Standard of Social Housing**

- 7.1 The Council is committed to providing safe and secure housing, which are wind, watertight and free of dampness. Where reports are made specifically surrounding dampness individual surveys are carried out, where required, by specialist contractors and any repairs carried out as soon as practicable.
- 7.2 Empty Homes are also inspected at the point of properties becoming vacant and repairs are carried out to the required standard.

## **8.0 Empty Homes**

- 8.1 The number of empty homes in Edinburgh across all tenures is in line with the Scottish average. Council homes that become vacant are repaired to the standard of let and are re-let as soon as possible thereafter. During 2015/16 Council homes were let within an average of 23 days, compared to the Scottish local authority average of 42 days. As at the end of July 2017 there were 144 homes that were being actively re-let.

## **9.0 Private Sector Rent Controls**

- 9.1 From December 2017, if a council has evidence of rents increasing disproportionately they can apply to Scottish Ministers to have that area designated as a 'rent pressure zone'.
- 9.2 This would mean that a cap (a maximum limit) is set on how much rents would be allowed to increase for existing tenants each year in that area. This would require a process of consultation and evidence to be submitted to Scottish Government before this could take place.
- 9.3 Full Council on 29 June 2017 agreed to call for a report on the steps that need to be taken to implement a city-wide Rent Pressure Zone to limit increases in high rents within the private rented sector in the City. There are no timescales confirmed for this yet.

## **10.0 Evictions because of Non-Payment of Rent**

- 10.1 There have been no tenants evicted from Council homes due to rent arrears arising from the Benefit Cap. The Councils approach to managing rent arrears is to seek engagement as soon as possible to avoid a build-up of debt. For tenants affected by the Benefit Cap, the Council provides detailed advice and information that may assist with any reduction in the housing benefit or housing element of Universal Credit that they may have received to assist with their housing costs. The decision to progress arrears cases to court and any subsequent eviction action will be dependent on the circumstances in each case and eviction remains a last resort.
- 10.2 All Landlords, including those in the private sector must adhere to the legislative process surrounding repossession of properties. The Council will work with citizens to ensure they are fully aware of their rights and provide support and advice where their tenancy is under threat with the aim of avoiding eviction.

## **11.0 Advocacy**

- 11.1 The Council will always respect the rights of individuals to be assisted by advocates, provided appropriate mandates to be represented are provided. There is no record of the incident referred to by Power to the People Group, but the Council welcomes representation and would expect all parties to demonstrate a mutual respect for each other's roles.

## **Next steps**

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The points raised by Power to the People and All About Me Groups will be the focus of the next meeting of the Welfare Reform Working Group planned for 4 September 2017. Any additional actions can be raised at this group for referral to appropriate Committee if required.

## **Contact Details**

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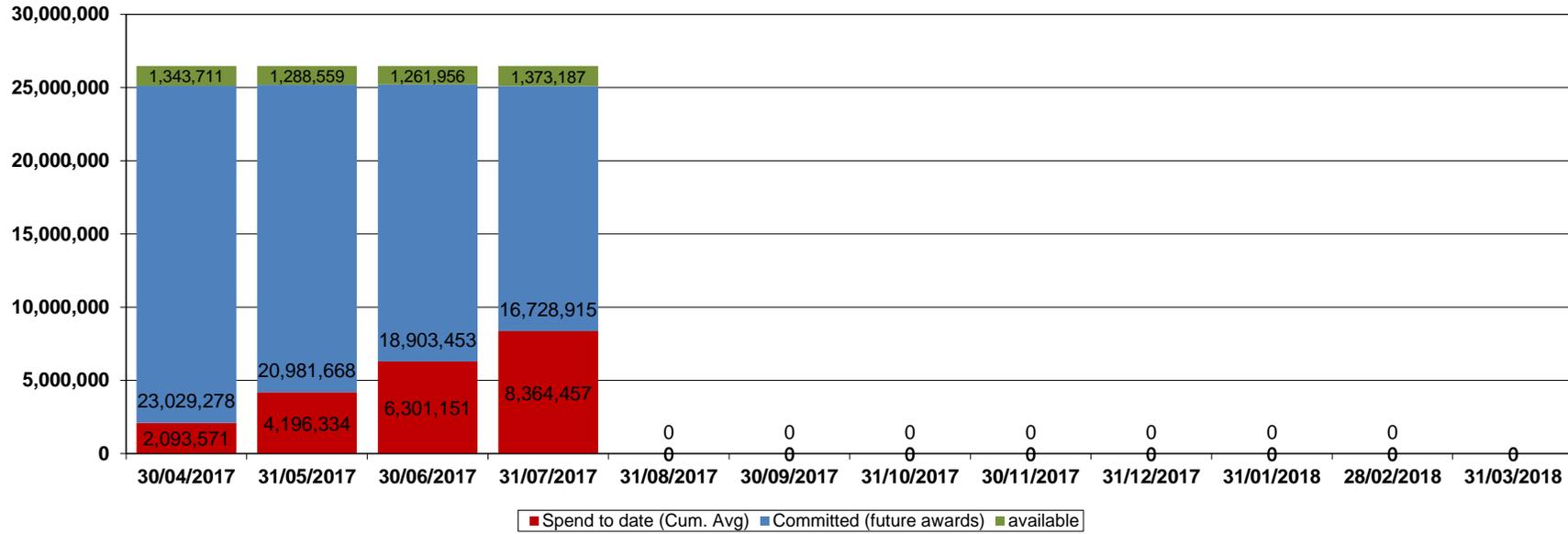
### **Nicky Brown**

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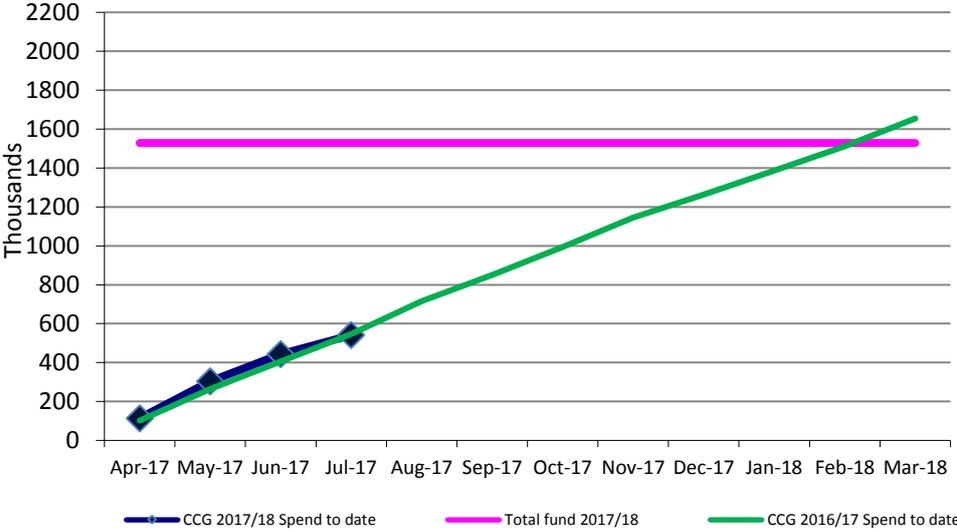
### **Sheila Haig**

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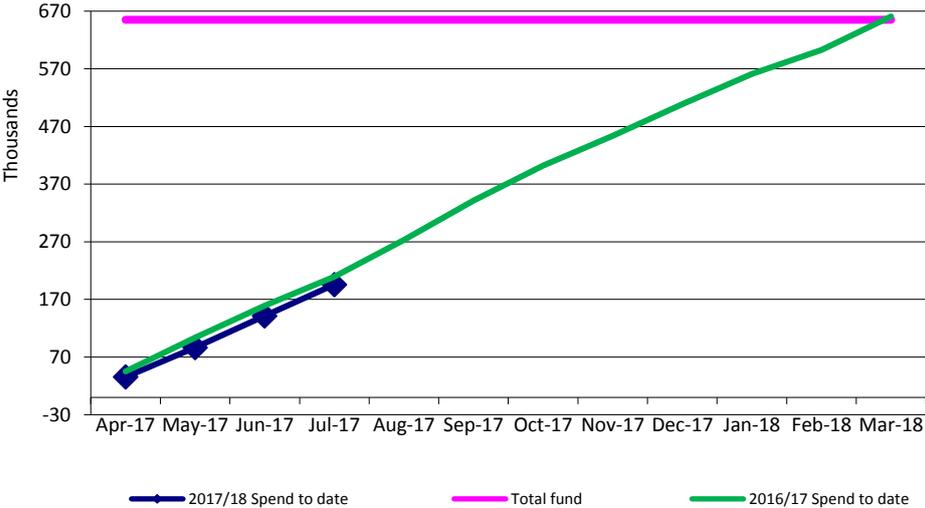
### CTRS Distribution 2017/18



**Community Care Grant Allocation 2017/18**



**Crisis Grant Allocation 2017/18**



# Appendix 4

## DHP Fund Allocation 2017/18

