

**Cabinet**

**12 February 2014**

**Welfare Reform Update**



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**Report of Corporate Management Team**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

- 1 The purpose of this report is to present our current understanding of the impacts of welfare reform and to use this understanding to further enhance the council's support to the affected households in County Durham.

### **Introduction**

- 2 The current changes to the welfare reform system are amongst the most significant for over a generation. The government believes that by amending the present system it will be able to encourage more people back into work, reducing dependency on welfare and achieving over £15 billion savings per year by 2015/16.
- 3 No overall figures are available for the UK on how many people are affected by all of the changes brought from the Welfare Reform Act, 2011. Within County Durham we estimate that approximately 95,000 households will be affected by one or more of the elements from the Welfare Reform Act.
- 4 There are over 40 changes outlined in the Act. Of the major changes proposed only the following have been implemented so far:
  - Localisation of Council Tax Support;
  - Restricting housing benefit payments due to 'under occupancy';
  - Applying a 'benefit cap' to any household receiving more than £500 a week in benefit;

- Introduction of Personal Independence Payments (PIP) for new claimants and some existing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants.
- 5 The government has now confirmed that the flagship policy change of Universal Credit which will bring together six existing benefits into a new single payment has been delayed and will not be in place within the North East before 2016.
  - 6 Mapping the impact of these welfare reform changes alongside broader economic trends is not a simple task. Many individuals and families will be affected by more than one welfare reform change or issue, and the ability or resilience of a person to respond may be variable depending on personal circumstances at the time.
  - 7 When considering all these pressures, we must reflect that all of these changes are overlaying what was a challenging position in County Durham. For example, County Durham already had high levels of child poverty<sup>1</sup>, in February 2010, 24.5% of all children in County Durham were understood to be living in poverty (Child Poverty Strategy, March 2011). In addition in 2011, there were calculated to be 19.5% of households in fuel poverty<sup>2</sup> in County Durham.

### **Council response to date**

- 8 Clearly the council's and partners' priority of 'Altogether Wealthier' to drive economic growth is a large part of our response to date. We have also built and developed shared responses with housing providers and the voluntary sector within the county to prepare, support and respond to the needs to individuals and communities.
- 9 An early decision was made by the council to maintain the existing levels of Council Tax benefits in 2013/14, which has also been extended for a further year into 2014/15.
- 10 Alongside this a key element of the council's approach has been to try to understand all of the work underway across the council which is already looking to address underlying issues or is being considered in response to the new challenges residents are facing. In doing so the council is ensuring that available resources are maximised and teams and initiatives are joined up to maximise the support available to residents.

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<sup>1</sup> **Definition of Child Poverty from DCC child poverty strategy:** 'We consider a child to be in poverty when their family resources are much lower than the national average, or their environment is not conducive to good health, personal growth and development, or their partners/carers do not have the knowledge or skills to help them to achieve their life chances or they lack the material goods to take full advantage of the opportunities available to them.'

<sup>2</sup> **Definition of fuel poverty from DCC Affordable Warmth strategy:** 'The Government's Fuel Poverty Strategy 2001 defines a fuel poor household as one which needs to spend more than 10% of its household income to achieve a satisfactory heating regime. This definition is currently under review by the Government under the Hills Review. However, affordable warmth will continue to be the solution to fuel poverty, where a household is able to affordably maintain adequate indoor temperatures to maintain health.'

- 11 The main focus of this work over the latter part of 2013 has been to consider the changes which have impacted tenants in social housing and the abolition of the Social Fund, alongside a review of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

### **Local Council Tax Support Scheme**

- 12 All local authorities were required to adopt their own new Council Tax Support Scheme, with effect from 1 April 2013. In an attempt to reduce the impact on those of working age with low incomes, the authority opted to keep council tax reductions at the same level as Council Tax Benefit had been previously. Members have agreed to maintain this for a second year with a more detailed review to be undertaken in 2014 on how the various schemes adopted by other authorities have been introduced and their impact on local communities.

### **Under occupancy**

- 13 Under the new under occupancy rules, social tenants who are deemed to have extra bedrooms (subject to certain exemptions) are required to pay 14% of their Housing Benefit entitlement for one extra room or 25% for two or more extra rooms. In response, the authority has worked with housing providers and the voluntary sector to put in place a triage process. This process assesses the financial circumstances of an individual and assists them with support from accessing Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) to employability support, to debt advice.

### **Benefit Cap**

- 14 Following the introduction of the benefit cap on 15 July 2013, restricting benefit payments to £500 per week per household, support has been provided to over 150 households originally identified as being affected. The final number affected when the cap was introduced was approximately 120 households reflecting the ongoing movement of individuals into and out of benefits. This is a lower number than first anticipated, as some individuals have lost benefits from some of the other welfare reform changes which has reduced them below the cap. Of the 110 currently affected, 19 households still receive benefits in excess of the cap as their housing benefit is less than the excess income. This will change under Universal Credit. Engagement with those affected included working with the Stronger Families programme to maximise the opportunity to join up the support required.

### **Personal Independence Payments (PIP)**

- 15 County Durham was one of the pilot areas for the roll out of PIP to new claimants. Working with our partners we have undertaken a range of activities to support those moving onto the new benefit, for example, Welfare Rights, social workers and partners have worked together to ensure that those affected are aware of the upcoming changes and apply for benefit when appropriate.
- 16 The government had planned to have a national roll out for existing claimants of DLA whose circumstances have changed to switch to PIP by November 2013. However, due to difficulties with the assessment process this has been delayed and is now being introduced in phases across the country. Initially it was introduced in Wales, the East and West Midlands, and East Anglia and from February this year the implementation has been extended to include

areas with a Darlington (DL) postcode, which includes areas within County Durham. There is currently no date for the rest of the county being brought into the national roll out.

### **Welfare Assistance Scheme**

- 17 Following the removal of the Social Fund, the council took the decision to introduce a new welfare assistance scheme. This was a discretionary step as the funding allocated was not ring fenced. Working with Civica, our housing benefits software provider, the Five Lamps voluntary organisation and the charity Family Fund we have created HAND (Help and Advice Network Durham). As well as administering the scheme this also provides a signposting service for support from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.
- 18 As part of the latest financial settlement it is understood that the specific funding from central government used to support this scheme will only be available for 2014/15 and will cease after this year. As a result work will be undertaken over the coming months to explore how support could continue to be provided for those in need, working closely with a range of partners.

### **Energy**

- 19 Energy is becoming an increasingly important cost for all households as prices continue to rise at a rate much greater than inflation and with a high proportion of properties within County Durham that are not up to standard in terms of energy efficiency. Energy cost increases can be managed to some extent through a range of mechanisms: use of tariff switching to ensure the cheapest price; insulating homes; and updating boilers, all of which ultimately reduce energy use. In addition, there are opportunities to claim a range of discounts. However, this is complex and has gone through a significant change in recent times with the advent of the Green Deal, moving away from grants. Many tenants find it difficult to access the range of opportunities or there are other barriers, such as debt to utility companies or lack of internet access or 'digital confidence'.
- 20 The proportion of estimated households in fuel poverty in the county is higher than the regional average and the national average for England. Seven Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) have a higher proportion of households in fuel poverty than the county, regional or national average, with a total of over 44,200 households being classed as being in fuel poverty (Source: Department of Energy and Climate Change). The council is delivering a range of initiatives to help address and promote energy efficiency across the county.
- 21 These initiatives are managed through the Affordable Warmth Action Plan which was recently updated in partnership with the national fuel poverty charity (NEA) to include linkages to the Home Energy Conservation Act, Green Deal and the Energy Company Obligation. Delivery of this is overseen by the County Durham Energy and Fuel Partnership comprised of local authority services and external partner organisations to ensure joined up service delivery to maximise the assistance available to local households.
- 22 As part of the Housing Strategy, the Affordable Warmth Action Plan has been developed to assist the delivery of energy efficiency programmes to County

Durham residents, including promoting the government's Warm Homes Discount Scheme and Warm Up North, via the council's Warm Homes promotion campaign.

- 23 The Warm Homes Discount scheme provides eligible residents with an allowance towards their electricity costs. This is currently £135 per year and has to be applied for between September and March. Each provider who has signed up to the scheme has different criteria and to understand the uptake across the county would require information from each provider.
- 24 Through the council's Warm Homes Campaign residents in County Durham have been assisted in securing 476 free Warm Front energy efficiency improvements in 2012/13 including gas boiler replacements to the value of £637,000. The campaign involves over 800 partners including housing associations, residents' groups, charities and health providers, who are able to circulate key information and support directly to where it is most needed. This also provides the context for shared communications to be distributed alongside other communications such as rent cards. County Durham also had the highest uptake of free insulation measures in the North East over the period 2008-2013 with over 54,000 homes being insulated as part of a British Gas funded scheme.
- 25 The Warm Up North partnership between British Gas and nine North East councils including Durham County Council was launched on 19 September 2013. The project will be the UK's largest regional energy efficiency scheme to create hundreds of jobs, investing approximately £200m and assisting up to 50,000 households in the North East to benefit from warmer homes and lower bills. Eligible residents could benefit from free measures that could be installed in their homes making them more efficient and reducing their energy consumption. Measures could include hard to treat cavity wall, solid wall and loft insulation, new A-rated boilers, and boiler repairs. The North East is the first region in the country to benefit from a scheme of this scale, as Warm Up North is the largest and most advanced regional response to the Government's Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation (ECO). The initiative will cover private and rented homes, and social housing as well as extending to publicly owned buildings, including offices, health and educational properties. The first stage will see a 12,000 target mailshot to those residents identified by revenues and benefits service as meeting the eligibility criteria. This has now commenced and a seminar for members is scheduled for 12 February 2014.
- 26 The council is also negotiating continuation of a health referral scheme which has seen over 2,000 residents benefit from energy efficiency measures following referrals from their GP, health or social workers. This makes a direct link between the health and warmth of vulnerable people in need.
- 27 Other initiatives which meet the aims and objectives of the Affordable Warmth Action Plan are currently being delivered and monitored outside of this plan e.g. energy advice and assistance for council housing tenants. Work is currently underway to ensure that the various initiatives are joined together to maximise the benefits of the good work taking place.

- 28 Information to residents on how they can reduce their energy costs has been included in Durham County News and direct to tenants through letters and leaflets from their landlords.
- 29 Dale and Valley Homes originally employed two Energy Advisors in a project that was externally funded for a 12 month period and which has had significant success in helping tenants reduce energy bills, access lower energy tariffs, access the DWP Warm Homes Discount scheme, and has also increased take up levels of benefits that tenants had not been aware of. Using funding from the Housing Revenue Account it was agreed to extend the contracts of the two Energy Advisors in Dale and Valley Homes and introduce similar teams in both East Durham Homes and Durham City Homes. These advisers are providing face to face support to tenants.

### **Child Poverty**

- 30 Addressing child poverty has been identified as a cross cutting theme for the County Durham Partnership, and as such is being taken forward by each of the county's five thematic partnerships. In particular, the council has a strong track record in supporting the provision of free school meals which we offer to children (under 19) in households in receipt of identified benefits/council tax benefits. Families in County Durham can also access the schools' benevolent fund which provides funding for shoes and winter coats for children. As at September 2013, 362 purchases were made under the scheme, compared to 506 in 2011/12 and 214 in 2010/11. Although the Stronger Families programme is not primarily targeted at addressing child poverty, the programme has achieved positive outcomes with 257 families addressing some of the underlying determinants of child poverty.

### **Partners**

- 31 The council hosted a conference on welfare reform for the County Durham Partnership at Murton in July 2013. The format contained a programme of speakers and group discussions on issues faced by communities in managing the impacts of welfare reform. The event was very well attended with 42 organisations represented by over 120 individuals. Some of the emerging issues identified included rent arrears, increased use of food banks, delays and problems with Job Centre and DWP processing and confusion over the changes being made. The event identified the need to continue to raise awareness of the changes and promote the initiatives that have been introduced both across the county and within communities. A further conference will be held on 13 February 2014 which will include examples of good practice from across the county.
- 32 A directory was established earlier this year containing the contact details for a wide range of agencies and organisations that can provide support on a wide range of issues including debt management, benefits and health advice. This was developed with representatives of the voluntary sector and is maintained on the County Durham Partnership website as well as being distributed across the county in hard copy. This directory is also used by HAND to signpost callers who need additional help and advice.

## **Area Action Partnerships**

- 33 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) have initiated a number of new projects during 2013 in response to the changes to welfare reform.
- 34 The East Durham Rural Corridor AAP has been working with the Sedgefield Area Churches Together (SACT) and the Northern Learning Trust (NLT) to develop a pilot project to contribute to the provision of learning and skills in the communities of the Trimdons, Fishburn, Sedgefield, and Bishop Middleham, including a financial inclusion engagement service. SACT worked with others to create a food bank located initially at St. Alban's Church, Trimdon Grange, but with the potential for expansion into other communities. The project also sought to engage people attending the food bank to take up a range of short, bespoke financial literacy programmes that will support budgeting and money management.
- 35 The 3 Towns AAP has provided support to the Salvation Army who run a local food bank and provide additional support as well as supporting 'Signpost' who also provide advice and support.
- 36 The Salvation Army currently helps with topping up utility prepayment meters by putting the money directly on residents' prepayment card, and is targeted to those who have children in the house. The funding will support a community fund which is used to provide assistance with gas, electric and other emergency needs. The Salvation Army provide the help which is often as result of a referral from another agency. As well as helping with energy costs, the funding will also help offset the costs of extending the hours the food bank is open.
- 37 East Durham AAP, through the East Durham Trust, has introduced 'Welfare Champions' and following the success of the first group are looking to support the project into its second phase. The existing champions will be supported in their activities to provide advice and support to local people adversely affected by welfare reform, benefit changes and spending cuts. This will include additional training and continued promotion of the service. It will also include the recruitment of six additional welfare champions. There are currently proposals being developed to extend this scheme across other AAPs.

## **Performance management**

- 38 The Welfare Reform Steering Group, chaired by the Assistant Chief Executive has also been monitoring a range of performance indicators covering the areas where the council has introduced change. In addition, a set of indicators has been identified from the council's performance management framework which may be affected by the changes to welfare reform. This information is used to review the council's response and to develop responses to welfare reform that are shared widely with Cabinet, Scrutiny and the County Durham Partnership.
- 39 The council is also working with ANEC and the Institute of Local Governance on monitoring the impacts of the changes across the region.

## **Food banks and furniture recycling schemes**

- 40 Across Durham there are at least 10 established food banks based mainly in the key towns. Some are linked to the Trussell Trust whilst others are small independent operations established by local volunteers. Food banks have seen a significant increase in demand particularly since the beginning of this year with customers being referred from Job Centre Plus, Citizens Advice Bureaux and some front line council service teams.
- 41 The council is engaged with these and has provided support through Member grants, AAPs and donation points in council buildings. Food bank representatives have been involved in developing responses to the changes to welfare reform for example the design and review of the Welfare Assistance Scheme as well as attending the partnership event in July.
- 42 Alongside food banks there are also a number of furniture recycling outlets providing support for residents. There are two large operations based in Horden and Chilton as well as smaller outlets in Newton Aycliffe, Consett and Stanley. These outlets are now being incorporated into the Welfare Assistance Scheme.

## **Financial inclusion**

- 43 A recent initiative by the council's Economic Development service with local credit unions has seen an increase in the uptake from staff in the council. A further 150 council employees joined the two local credit unions covering County Durham and Gateshead: Prince Bishops Community Bank and NE First Credit Union (formerly Durham County Credit Union).
- 44 Opening an account also means customers can take advantage of low cost weekly furniture and white goods buying schemes.
- 45 The council has also blocked access to the websites of pay day lenders from all of its computers. As a result, all staff and members of the public using council computers, such as those in libraries, will be redirected to information about the credit unions and help and advice on money matters.
- 46 A considerable amount of work has been delivered and improvements to working arrangements have been put in place across the council to ensure teams work together effectively. Further work will continue to build on this joined up approach.

## **Position to date**

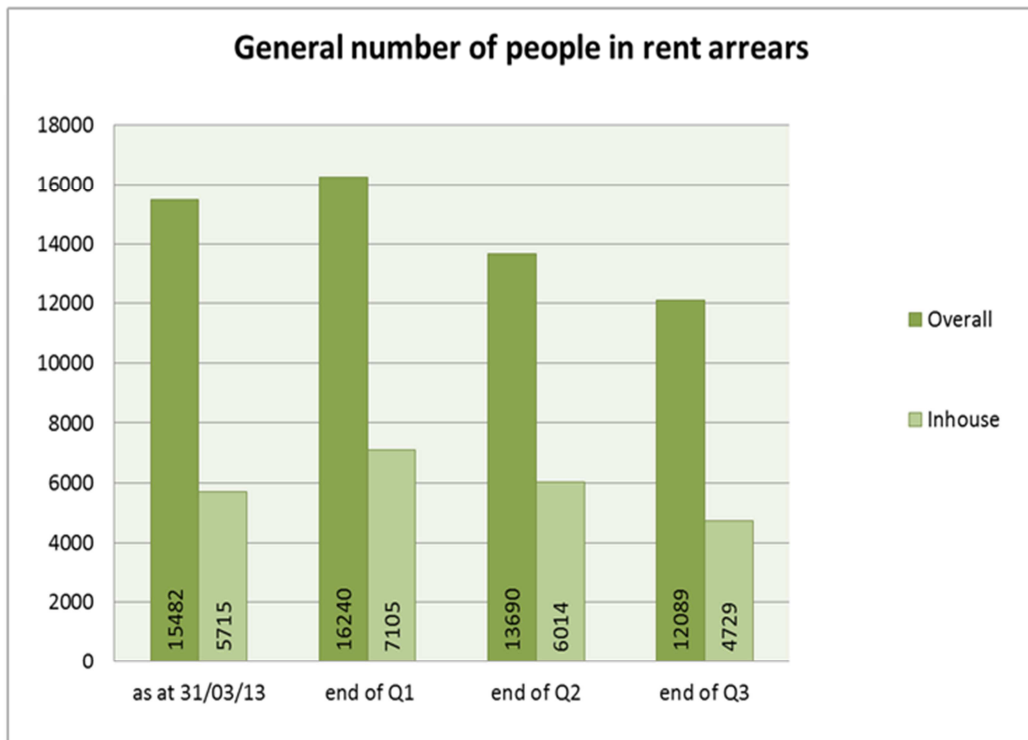
- 47 Planning for the welfare reform changes which were to be introduced in April 2013, anticipated that the demand for help and support would be significant. In part this reflected the underlying issues that many residents already face across the county, as an example the reductions in government funding had reduced the interventions available to help residents find work. As one of the key elements of government policy in changing welfare is to move claimants from benefits to employment, this was thought to be a significant challenge within the region.
- 48 The information obtained on the old Social Fund scheme which DWP used to administer and was abolished in April 2013, indicated that they had provided



financial support in excess of £2m each year, against an allocation to the council of £1.5m to set up an alternative scheme. It must be noted that the schemes are not directly comparable, for example the Social Fund scheme operated on the basis of Crisis Loans, where loans were paid back directly from receipts. Another significant difference is that our scheme does not pay cash.

- 49 In addition, the calculations on the impact of the under occupancy deduction to housing benefit, identified that tenants would receive over £5m less benefit than previously. To offset this, the council was awarded a grant for DHP of £883,089. This would only last about eight weeks if all 8,000 tenants originally affected received an award to cover their shortfall in housing benefit.
- 50 However, the expected levels of demand have not yet materialised. Housing providers are not reporting large increases in arrears through the reduction in housing benefit or introduction of the benefit cap. In fact overall, they have seen a slight fall in the number of tenants who are in arrears compared to last year. (See Figure 1).
- 51 Anecdotally tenants appear to be prioritising housing costs possibly through borrowing from friends and families and therefore the impacts expected have not yet been seen.
- 52 Demand for DHP has increased over recent months, as a result of the work undertaken throughout the year through the triage process, which has engaged with residents to understand their needs and seek long term solutions for their problems.
- 53 It has been difficult to understand the situation across the region with information on demand not being readily available. From anecdotal evidence it appears that the situation is similar with other authorities seeing an increase in demand over recent months.
- 54 Overall the number of tenants in rent arrears for Durham this year initially increased from the position in March, but has now substantially reduced as seen in the graph below:

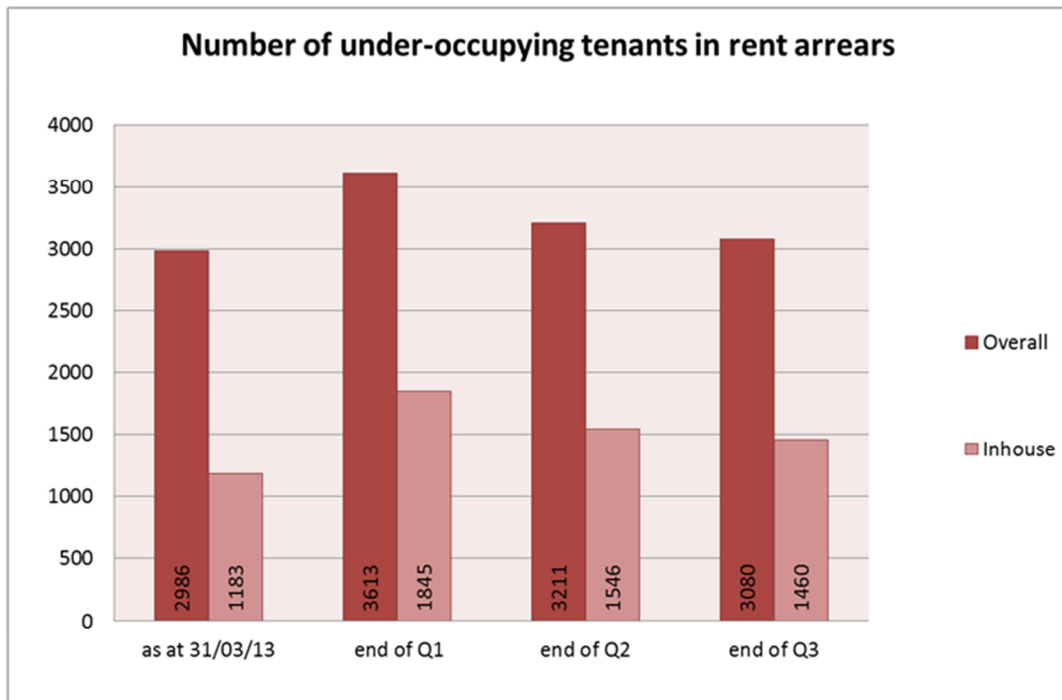
Figure 1



*Inhouse: Dale & Valley Homes, Durham City Homes, and East Durham Homes*

55 Figure 2 shows that for tenants affected by the under occupation rules, the number of tenants in arrears also increased during quarter 1 but reduced thereafter.

Figure 2



*Inhouse: Dale & Valley Homes, Durham City Homes, and East Durham Homes*

- 56 Tenants in arrears have been one of the groups housing providers have targeted through the triage work and where appropriate have applied for DHP to help alleviate the situation.
- 57 Overall Durham's DHP committed spend currently stands at just over £640,000 which amounts to over 70% of the annual budget. This reflects the increase in applications seen during the latter part of the year and the changes made during the year to the policy aimed at targeting the availability of support.
- 58 With regard to the council's Welfare Assistance Scheme the number of enquiries and awards has been lower than anticipated, although again we have seen a significant increase in awards in recent months.
- 59 As at the end of December 2013, there had been over 7,200 telephone calls to HAND. Most of these were handled by signposting the callers to other organisations who could provide help appropriate to the need identified. By way of comparison, the council's Welfare Rights Service received around 8,000 calls during 2011/12, and County Durham Citizen Advice Bureaux saw around 20,000 clients during the same period.
- 60 A large number of the calls to HAND were put in touch with DWP as they have continued to provide a number of support schemes to help those affected by delays in benefit payments, which have accounted for many of the calls received by HAND. Others have been referred to partner organisations or were put forward for an award under the council's Welfare Assistance Scheme.
- 61 As a result of the nature of the calls received, the number of awards actually made under the scheme has been significantly lower than had originally been expected. So far, approximately 760 of the telephone calls received have led to an application for an award.
- 62 As at 31 December there had been 370 awards made under the Welfare Assistance Scheme, totalling £172,792, an increase of over 78% since the end of October.
- 63 As part of the ongoing review of the Welfare Assistance Scheme, representatives from partners and service teams within the council were invited to a workshop and were asked for their feedback on the first six months of the scheme. Within the feedback several suggestions were made to extend the scheme to provide support for residents affected by benefit sanctions and delays.
- 64 As a result of this feedback, changes are being considered to the policy which look to help residents whose benefits have been delayed or where their benefits have been sanctioned.
- 65 The council has also spoken to Job Centre Plus about benefit delays and they attended the workshop in November. We are continuing to work closely with them to understand the situation and to work together to ensure residents are receiving as much help and support as possible.

- 66 There are however a number of indications that the changes being introduced to the welfare system are causing difficulty for some residents. This is particularly evident in feedback from food banks who state that the majority of requests they receive are because of benefit sanctions or delays in benefits being paid. The Consett food bank for example has seen a two fold increase in demand just in the last six months. The work with Job Centre Plus is therefore very important in understanding what is happening and what can be done to improve the situation.
- 67 Discussions with other partners involved in providing support indicate that housing costs are getting prioritised over other expenditure which is a further cause for demand for food parcels. There are also concerns that levels of debt are increasing.
- 68 The number of tenants terminating their tenancies is showing an increase and the number of applicants bidding for three bedroom properties through our choice based lettings scheme has reduced. Further research work is underway to analyse trends in the number of empty properties, turnover of stock, existing supply/demand and trends in the private sector.
- 69 The research work aims to determine and understand what is happening and if residents are choosing the private rented sector rather than the social rented sector, and the impact this will have on the housing market particularly in relation to the provision of new housing in the future.
- 70 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) are experiencing increased levels of demand for financial support from communities. For example, the Welfare Champions initiative in East Durham AAP has resulted in over 500 interventions and over 100 referrals for food parcels. A high level of demand has also been seen with the Credit Union project in East Durham, where the development officer has helped set up over 1,000 accounts.

### **Financial position**

- 71 The financial support available to the council comes in two main areas: grants for DHP and the Welfare Assistance Scheme.

### **Discretionary Housing Payments**

- 72 The latest figures on DHP spend including commitments show that 1,456 awards have been made totalling £640,381 of the budget of £883,089. Unspent monies cannot be carried forward to future years.
- 73 It is currently projected that if the recent levels of demand continue, the council's allocation will be overspent.

### **Welfare Assistance Scheme**

- 74 The position on the Welfare Assistance Scheme is much clearer in that we know now we will not spend the budget available this year. Based on current projections the anticipated spend is about £290,000 by the end of the financial year, although if the current levels of awards continued the annual spend would be around £500,000.

## **Proposal**

- 75 The original work looking at the impacts of the welfare reform changes stated that it would be very difficult to predict the outcome of the changes, in part as this would depend on the behaviour of individuals and families affected.
- 76 It is still very early to predict these impacts, even though we have robust and comprehensive management information in place. This information includes qualitative information which has been obtained through the County Durham Partnership Conference held in the summer, as well as numerous visits and workshops with a wide range of organisations and individuals across the county.
- 77 On the basis of this information, a proposal focusing on the resources available to the council at this time which aims to provide the maximum amount of support, is detailed below.

## **Discretionary Housing Payments**

- 78 Government advised councils that it would consider requests for additional funding where the budget provided would not be sufficient to cover demand.
- 79 Although during the first part of the year demand for DHP awards was lower than anticipated, latest projections indicate that the budget will be spent and that demand will exceed this. As a result a submission for additional funding has been made to government.
- 80 The government has announced the overall amount of DHP available for next year has been increased but at the time of writing we do not yet have any indication of the allocation for Durham.

## **AAP support**

- 81 All AAPs have funded projects that are linked to welfare reform. It is therefore proposed to make available to each AAP an additional grant of £10,000 which is to be used to top up an existing project or fund a new project within the AAP, according to what can best address local needs.

## **Employment**

- 82 Based on the evaluation of the Future Jobs Fund in helping individuals into work, a proposal has been developed to increase the employment support available. This proposal targets two areas, firstly young people and includes a range of actions to help this group into work including the provision of a wage subsidy for 12 months up to £3,000 per employee plus an additional £500 to help with support costs including transport and child care.
- 83 The second area of help is for those who wish to start their own business and would provide financial support up to a maximum of £2,500 per individual which would cover a range of areas including mentoring and start-up costs.
- 84 To help around 100 young people into employment and 45 to 50 individuals start their own business, requires funding of £500,000.
- 85 It is therefore proposed that £500,000 is made available from the Welfare Assistance Scheme to support this initiative.

## **Welfare Assistance Scheme**

- 86 Although demand for the Welfare Assistance Scheme has been less than expected, this is now increasing and it is likely that demand for emergency assistance will increase further over the next few years.
- 87 It is therefore proposed to develop an option to continue the scheme after March 2015 when government funding ceases for Members to consider.
- 88 In anticipation of this, any unused spend from this year would be placed into an earmarked reserve which can then be used to continue to fund the scheme, if agreed from April 2015.

## **Communication**

- 89 Alongside the proposals above, we will continue to undertake a targeted programme of communications aimed at raising awareness of the support available through the council with both residents and partners including the new schemes above.
- 90 We are also working with Job Centre Plus to understand the schemes they have available and the processes they operate for benefits including the use of sanctions. As a result, the communications we issue will include key messages from Job Centre Plus, to ensure the services and support from this organisation are better understood and we are collectively maximising the support available.

## **Recommendations and reasons**

- 91 Cabinet is recommended to:
- a) note that an application for additional funding for DHP has been made to government;
  - b) agree to transfer £140,000 from the Welfare Assistance Scheme to AAPs to support grass root projects aimed at helping residents affected by the changes to welfare;
  - c) strengthen our proactive support in line with our economic and regeneration priority by investing £500,000 of Welfare Assistance Funding on a targeted employability programme;
  - d) agree to develop an alternative proposal for the Welfare Assistance Scheme to continue from April 2015 for subsequent discussion and approval;
  - e) establish an earmarked reserve for the any funding that is unspent at the end of the 2013/14 and 2014/15 financial years in order to continue to fund the scheme from April 2015 if agreed.

## **Background papers**

Previous Cabinet papers.

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance** – The report proposes a number of initiatives that would make use of unspent budget within the Welfare Assistance Scheme. No other financial implications are contained within the report.

**Staffing** – All of the recommendations can be met with existing resources.

**Risk** – N/A

**Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty** – The council's Welfare Assistance Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments policy and bids for funding will be subject to an equality impact assessment where appropriate.

**Accommodation** – N/A

**Crime and Disorder** – N/A

**Human Rights** – N/A

**Consultation** – It is not envisaged that the proposals would require public consultation, although AAPs will be asked to fund additional projects which may result from local consultation through the boards.

**Procurement** – N/A

**Disability Issues** – N/A

**Legal Implications** – N/A