

ITEM No ...6.....

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 13 NOVEMBER 2017
REPORT ON: UPDATE ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND WELFARE REFORM
REPORT BY: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES
REPORT NO: 387-2017

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an update on the rollout of Universal Credit Full Service and the preparations being made to best prepare support services and residents in light of the changes it brings. This report highlights other elements of the UK Government's Welfare Reforms and their impact on Dundee.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee:-

Note the content of the report and consider the impact on individuals and families within Dundee.

Note that Universal Credit Full Service will be implemented within Dundee starting on 8 November 2017.

Note the Scottish Government measures to alleviate some impacts of the UK Government's Welfare Reforms.

Note the implications in terms of increased debt, potential increases in homelessness and demand for advice services from various organisations and the voluntary sector.

Note the update on the work streams which have been identified to assist in preparing for the Welfare Reform changes and Universal Credit Full Service in particular.

Note the work and progress the Council and partners within the City are taking to continue to mitigate aspects of the UK Government Welfare Reforms

Note the impact of the UK Government Welfare Reforms will result in an estimated annual loss of £94m by 2021 within Dundee.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A report published by the Scottish Government on 11 April 2013 titled "The Impact of Welfare Reform in Scotland" and carried out by Sheffield Hallam University, noted that the impact of Welfare Reform on Dundee's economy would result in an estimated annual loss of £58m.

A subsequent report by Sheffield Hallam University to the Social Security Committee of the Scottish Parliament in October 2016, noted the impacts of the Westminster Government's further round of welfare reforms initiated since the 2015 general election. The figures in this report shows that by 2020-21 the impact of these further reforms on Dundee's economy will result in an estimated annual loss of a further £36m.

4.0 BACKGROUND

This report is to provide an update to the Policy and Resources Committee on the roll out of Universal Credit (full service) and issues relating to the UK Government's Welfare Reforms, the consequential changes to Council Services and the potential impacts on Dundee City Council residents.

As a result of the UK Government's Welfare Reforms in April 2013, a Welfare Reform Group was established to consider how best to respond to the impacts of the reforms. The group, established since 2013, meets on a regular basis and membership includes Senior Council Officers, representatives from, the Voluntary Sector, Health and Social Care Partnership and the Department for Work and Pensions.

The impact of Welfare Reforms has required responses from a range of Council and Voluntary Services. The impacts of the different reforms has been varied, however the ability of Dundee residents to maintain their rent payments in respect of their private or social sector rents has been a high concern.

5.0 MAIN TEXT

5.1 UNIVERSAL CREDIT (UC)

Universal Credit is means-tested benefit for working age people on a low income and administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The DWP state that Universal Credit aims to reduce poverty by making work pay and to help customers and their families become more independent. It also aims to simplify the benefits system by providing a single payment based upon the circumstances of the household. Support for housing costs, children and childcare costs are integrated into Universal Credit. It also provides additions for disabled people and carers.

The following 'legacy' benefits will be replaced by Universal Credit:-

- Income support
- Income Based Job Seekers Allowance
- Income Based Employment Support Allowance
- Housing Benefit
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit

Universal Credit is intended to be simpler than the current system of benefits and tax credits.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT LIVE SERVICE (UCLS)

Universal Credit Live Service (UCLS) was introduced in Dundee in November 2015 for newly unemployed single customers who satisfy specific qualifying criteria.

According to the latest DWP published official Universal Credit Statistics as at 10 August 2017, 1866 individuals living in Dundee are currently claiming Universal Credit, of which 547 (approximately 30%) are in some form of employment.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT FULL SERVICE (UCFS)

From 8 November 2017, all working age residents (single, couples and families) who would have previously made a claim for any of the means tested benefits listed at 5.1 above, must now make a claim to UCFS.

The introduction of UCFS represents a significant change to the residents of Dundee. UCFS removes a number of clerical functions for customers and means that they will apply online; report changes in their circumstances online; interact with their DWP Work Coach online; and maintain their journal online – this journal records what action the customer is undertaking to search for work and to improve their work outcomes.

Working age customers who are already receiving one or more of those 'legacy' benefits will be required to claim Universal Credit if they have a change in their circumstances that would involve a claim for another 'legacy' benefit. Their existing benefits will cease and they will have to make a claim for Universal Credit. The DWP call this natural migration.

However, members should note, whether making a new claim or by going through the natural migration process to claim UCFS, some customers, depending on their personal circumstances, will be financially worse off through the loss of additional premiums or transitional protection which are not available in UCFS.

The DWP have also developed a Complex Needs Policy to ensure that vulnerable customers are supported whilst claiming Universal Credit.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT PAYMENTS

Universal Credit is paid differently to current 'legacy' benefits. In most cases it is paid as a single monthly payment, direct into a bank account. The amount a customer receives is calculated each month and depends on their circumstances, income and savings during that time. This is known as an assessment period.

Universal Credit awards are made up of allowances, these include:-

- Basic Standard Allowance
- Child Element – for each child
- Amount for each disabled child (at lower or higher rate)
- Amount for an ill or disabled adult (at lower or higher rate)
- Carer Element - to support a person who is providing a significant amount of care to someone with a disability
- Childcare Element – to help cover the costs of relevant childcare
- Housing Cost Element – to help cover relevant housing costs.

The first assessment period usually starts 7 days after a claim has been submitted. There are some circumstances where the waiting period may not apply, for example where someone has reclaimed Universal Credit within 6 months.

A customer will get their first payment around 6 weeks after they have made a claim for Universal Credit. They will receive their first payment no more than 7 days after their assessment period has ended.

For example if someone makes a claim on 1 December, the assessment period (when waiting days are applicable) will be from 8 December to 7 January, the first payday will be 14 January. Future payments will be made on the 14th day of each month.

A customer can request an advance payment of Universal Credit to help while they are waiting for their first payment or where a change of circumstances occurs. This is called a short term advance. The advance payment is a loan which has to be paid back. The repayments are automatically deducted from future Universal Credit payments until the advance is fully paid back ie reduced Universal Credit payments will be received until the loan has been repaid.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT SCOTTISH FLEXIBILITIES

The Scotland Act 2016 gave the Scottish Government powers to vary how Universal Credit is paid in Scotland.

The DWP retains responsibility for the delivery of Universal Credit as it remains a reserved benefit.

The DWP will deliver the Scottish Government's Policy.

The new Universal Credit choices have been made available from 4 October 2017 to people living in Scotland making a new Universal Credit claim, in full service areas (Dundee from 8 November 2017).

The choices are to:-

- be paid monthly or twice monthly; and
- have the relevant housing costs in the Universal Credit award paid to themselves or to their landlord.

MANAGED PAYMENTS AND HOUSING COSTS TO LANDLORDS

Universal Credit customers are expected to receive a single monthly payment which includes an element for their housing costs. It is recognised that some customers need extra support and so Alternative Payment Arrangements, including a managed payment of the housing cost to the landlord can be considered by the DWP in some cases to help protect tenancies.

A landlord can request a managed payment when a customer has accumulated one months' rent arrears due to persistent underpayment, the DWP will review the financial support the customer needs and consider making managed payments to their landlord.

If a customer has accrued two months' rent arrears, the DWP will, if requested by the landlord, consider paying the Universal Credit housing costs direct to the landlord.

TRUSTED PARTNER

In response to concerns from landlords the DWP have developed a Trusted Partner Status for Social Landlords. Dundee City Council has been approved as a Trusted Partner.

Trusted Partner landlords will:-

- be given access to the Universal Credit landlord portal. The portal allows social landlords to verify a Universal Credit customers rent and request a managed payment of housing costs where appropriate.
- all APA recommendations from Trusted Partner landlords will be implemented in good faith by the DWP.
- Trusted Partners can also suggest a "more frequent payment" for their tenants.

UNIVERSAL CREDIT – THE COUNCIL'S ROLE

Universal Credit delivery is clearly the responsibility of the DWP although such a major change has implications for Council Services and our partners such as Housing Associations and Third Sector Agencies.

Vulnerable clients in particular are likely to need advice and support as they are affected by the new arrangements. Many such individuals and families will naturally turn to the Council for assistance.

The Council and partners have an established Universal Credit Group whose membership includes Council Officers from: the Benefit Delivery Team, Advice Services, Neighbourhood Services, Employability and Adult learning alongside partner agencies such as DWP, Housing Associations and third sector agencies. The group meets on a monthly basis and has worked together to decide how best to support individuals in Dundee who are required to claim Universal Credit.

The key areas the group has focussed on in responding to Universal Credit Full Service are:-

- awareness raising; and
- provision of services to support residents to adapt to the changes.

The group has delivered Universal Credit awareness sessions to voluntary sector groups and stakeholders throughout the city. The session includes a presentation from The Department for Work and Pensions and presentations from the Council Advice Services Team and other

support agencies throughout the city. The demand for these sessions has been extremely high and six sessions have been delivered between 13 October 2017 - 30 October 2017. The final session will be filmed and used as a resource on social media and other electronic platforms to allow for the awareness sessions to be viewed more widely by customers and stakeholders across the city.

A specific session for elected members to attend is planned for Friday 10 November 2017.

The other key area of preparation is making sure residents can access the support required. We know from other LA experience that IT facilities and support are likely to be under increased demand.

An information booklet has been produced to provide advice for prospective UC customers on what they require in order to make a Universal Credit claim and also where to seek support from both Council and Voluntary Sector Agencies. This booklet will be made widely available throughout the city.

In partnership with Leisure & Culture Dundee, the Council has provided funding to support the recruitment of an additional member of staff at Central Library where customers will be directed to if they require support to make and manage their claim on line. Conversations between Central Library staff and Council Advice Services have resulted in a referral process and a checklist of the necessary Universal Credit claim documents being drawn up for clients claiming Universal Credit. A feedback mechanism will also be put in place to ensure clients have made successful, fully documented claims for Universal Credit after 8 November 2017.

The Council's CONNECT Team will continue to provide Personal Budgeting Support for customers who are finding it difficult to manage the single monthly payment.

In view of the anticipated effects of UCFS roll out, officers from Councils Benefit Delivery Team and Advice Services Team have been delivering general and specialised training to staff in the following services areas:-

- Customer Services & Benefit Delivery
- Housing Options Team
- Corporate Debt Team
- Housing support
- Lettings
- Tenancy Support and Assistance
- Homefinders
- Children & Families
- Health and Social Care Partnership
- All Staff Bulletin

The Council has a nominated Single Point of Contact to ensure a consistent and quick response to any issues identified.

Other Scottish local authorities who are already operating under UCFS have found from a Council Services perspective the following key impacts.

- A wider range of people in scope for claiming Universal Credit and significant higher volumes as a consequence.
- The reliance on Universal Credit customers to make and manage their claim online.
- Advice agency staff will require explicit consent from customers rather than implicit consent as is currently the case with UCLs and legacy benefits.
- The built in 7 day waiting period for the majority of Universal Credit claims.
- Additional demand for Scottish Welfare fund with Inverclyde Council reporting expenditure on Crisis Grants has increased by 68%
- Increased rent arrears
- Level of deductions from Universal Credit payments causing further hardship

- Increased demand on advice services
- Increased demand for Discretionary Housing Payments

UNIVERSAL CREDIT FULL SERVICE FOR FAMILIES WITH MORE THAN TWO CHILDREN

As of 6 April 2017, customers, where the household has more than two dependent children at the point of the new claim, will need to apply for Child Tax Credit and any other legacy benefits including Housing Benefit that they may be entitled to.

Customers who have been in receipt of Universal Credit within the previous six months and are making a reclaim will return to Universal Credit.

5.2 BENEFIT CAP

The Benefit Cap means there is a maximum amount of Benefit that a working age household (defined as an individual, their partner and any children they are responsible for and who live with them) can be entitled to. This applies to the combined income from the main out of work benefits plus Housing Benefit, Child Benefit and Child Tax Credits.

The initial cap was introduced in July 2013. However as part of the summer 2016 Budget, the Chancellor announced a reduction in the Cap which meant that an increased number of households are now subject to a reduction in their combined income from Benefits.

Starting from 7 November 2016 the Cap was lowered as detailed in the table below:

Rates Applicable	Original Cap levels (July 2013)	Cap from November 2016
Couples with or without children and single parents with children	£500.00 per week (£26,000 per annum)	£384.62 per week (£20,000 per annum)
Single person or a single parent whose children do not live with them	£350.00 per week (£18,200 per annum)	£257.69 per week (£13,400 per annum)

The current position is that 149 households have had their Housing Benefit reduced due to the benefit cap.

The tables below detail the breakdown of the families affected by the Benefit Cap.

Landlord Type	Housing Benefit Reduction Per Week								Total
	£0-£19.99	£20-£39.99	£40-£59.99	£60-£79.99	£80-£99.99	£100-£119.99	£120-£139.99	Over £140	
LA	13	6	12	9	7	1	0	3	51
Housing Association	12	5	11	6	3	5	0	0	42
Private Landlord	15	20	0	5	6	2	7	1	56
Total	40	31	23	20	16	8	7	4	149
Landlord Type	Family Composition							Total	
	No children	1 Child	2 Children	3 children	4 children	5+ children			
Local Authority	0	0	1	24	18	8	51		
Housing Association	0	0	1	16	14	11	42		
Private Landlord	0	0	8	29	16	3	56		
Total	0	0	10	69	48	22	149		

The Council's Benefit Delivery Team continues to work in partnership with the Employability Team and Council Advice Services to support these families back into work or to ensure the correct benefits are being claimed.

To date all those who have been affected by the Benefit Cap and have applied for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) have had any shortfall fully mitigated from the DHP fund.

5.3 DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS (DHP)

From 1 April 2017 the responsibility for DHP's transferred from the DWP to the Scottish Government.

Dundee's share of the allocation has increased from previous years' awards.

The Scottish Government's allocation has been decided in order to meet two key priorities, firstly to ensure the ongoing full mitigation of the Bedroom Tax in Scotland and secondly to ensure a smooth stable transition of the DHP powers.

The funding received was split into two streams. 1) Bedroom Tax Mitigation and 2) Other DHP's Dundee's allocation of the funding was split as follows – Bedroom Tax (estimated liability) £1,890,097, other DHP's £444,520

In addition to the Scottish Government Funding and to support more vulnerable households and mitigate the effects of the UK Government's Welfare Reform Programme, an additional £250,000 has been provided by Dundee City Council.

The number of applications received has increased considerably since the UK Government's Welfare Reform changes were introduced.

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
No of awards made	200	339	2008	3884	4499	4786
Actual Spend	£69,634	£115,076	£826,642	£2,131,308	£2,110,127	£2,297,378

Breakdown of current applications and awards for 2017/18 as at 25 September 2017

2017/18 YTD	
Number of Awards	3900
Total Amount paid or committed	£2,313,691.04
Breakdown of Spend	
Under Occupation	£1,921,522.59
Benefit Cap	£216,686.10
Local Housing Allowance	£87,765.11
Other	£87,717.24

The Council's Neighbourhood Services Committee agreed to make a budget of £250,000 available for a Local Authority Hardship Fund from April 2016. The Council are currently consulting with tenants on proposed rent levels for 2018/19, which includes increasing the Hardship Fund by £200,000.

The purpose of this fund is to support Local Authority Tenants to sustain tenancies and prevent homelessness.

In financial year 2016/17, 429 awards were made and the full budget committed.

So far in the current financial year, 138 awards have been made and over 40% of the available budget committed.

5.4 DLA TO PIP

Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is the new benefit which was introduced in April 2013, replacing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for working-age people (aged 16-64). Like DLA, PIP is a non means-tested benefit for people who need help taking part in everyday life and/or find it difficult to get around. It is made up of two components, daily living and mobility, each of which can be paid at two different levels, either the Standard Rate or the Enhanced Rate.

Since June 2013 new claims for working age disability benefits have been for PIP and not DLA. Applicants must fill in a PIP application form and are normally required to attend a medical assessment. Since 2015 existing working age DLA customers in Dundee are having to be reassessed for PIP. If they choose not to or delay in applying for a reassessment, their DLA will be suspended after 28 days and then stopped completely after a further 28 days.

As a result numbers of DLA customers of working age have declined as follows since May 2013

	Total Dundee DLA customers	Dundee DLA customers of working age	Dundee DLA customers under 16. (Not affected until age 16)	Dundee DLA customers over 65 (Not affected by the changes)
May 2013	11,850	7,290	1,080	2,980
May 2016	10,080	5,490	1,330	3,060
Feb 2017	8,550	4,380	1,340	2,830

As DLA working age customers have fallen, so have PIP working age customers begun to increase significantly.

Date	Dundee Personal Independent Payment customer numbers
October 2016	4006
July 2017	5400 (+1394 since October 2016)

Latest DWP statistics indicate that the DLA working age customer count fell by approximately 1630 in the last recorded full year in Dundee. This suggests that by October 2020 the complete DLA working age customer count will be transferred to PIP at current average rates of transfer.

Official Department for Work and Pensions UK wide statistics show that in the final 3 months of 2016, 65% of PIP appeal tribunals were overturned in favour of the appellant claiming PIP. This level of successful appeals suggests that help will continue to be required from Dundee's statutory and voluntary sector advice services to help and support challenges to PIP decisions following on from the current medical assessment process. Dundee's Council Advice Services saw their appeal caseload increase significantly in 2017, with representation provided at 288 scheduled tribunals between 1 January 2017 and 31 October 2017.

Partnership working between Council Advice Services, Adult Learning and voluntary sector advice teams has led to a promotional drive to highlight the changeover from DLA to PIP. This has involved 10 training sessions for 176 front line Council and voluntary sector staff across the city who work with clients in receipt of DLA, a text service where people can request help and assistance and promotional materials relating to the DLA to PIP process including an explanatory video.

5.5 SCOTTISH WELFARE FUND (SWF)

The Scottish Welfare Fund is a grant based fund that seeks to achieve better and more sustainable outcomes through taking a holistic approach to the processing of grant awards,

alongside other sources of assistance and services for clients. Wider forms of assistance are also provided such as white goods, access to budgeting, money advice, energy advice, housing options, income maximisation, community care assessments and employability services. All of the above are undertaken routinely in Dundee in order to fulfil the intention of a holistic approach.

The fund is intended to:-

- Provide a safety net in an emergency when there is an immediate threat to health and safety in the form of Crisis Grants (CG). Claims for assistance will meet national performance indicators of award decisions within 1 working day.
- Enable independent living or continued independent living, preventing the need for institutional care in the form of Community Care Grants (CCG). Claims for assistance will meet national performance indicators of award decisions within 15 working days.

The Welfare Funds (Scotland) Act 2015 and subsequent legislation and Regulations placed the SWF on a statutory footing from 1 April 2016.

The new Regulations require local authorities to make decisions on crisis grant applications immediately after the local authority has received all the information required to allow a decision to be made, no later than the end of the next working day. Previously this had been a 2 working day turnaround time. As a result Scottish Welfare Fund decision makers have been under more pressure to meet this new turnaround target but have succeeded in 100% of the cases where all information has been received from the applicant allowing a decision to be made.

In addition a recent test of change within the Scottish Welfare Fund organisation of staff work has successfully decreased the decision making timescales for the more complex Community Care Grants from nearly 15 working days to 4-6 working days on average. However staff are working to full capacity as the table below clearly demonstrates in terms of case volumes handled over the last 6 months.

Applications received and processed for the 6 month period April 2017 – September 2017:

	Applications received		Applications granted		Applications refused		Applications withdrawn	
	Crisis Grants	CCG	Crisis Grants	CCG	Crisis Grants	CCG	Crisis Grants	CCG
Sub total	3265	1430	2004	909	1166	601	192	111
Totals	4695		2913		1767		303	

Scottish Welfare Fund Team received 7846 calls to the service in this 6 month period.

Scottish Welfare Fund spend April 2017 – September 2017:

Crisis Grant Allocation 2017/18	Crisis Grant Spend to 31/09/17	Percentage spend to 31/09/17	Community Care Grant Allocation 2017/18	Community Care Grant Spend to 31/09/17	Percentage spend to 31/09/17
£384,000	£150,534	39%	£1,021,750	£515,440	50%

Dundee City Council's spend on crisis grants has shown a consistent decline over the last 6-12 months. Officers are currently assessing the possible reasons for this decline and whether this trend is likely to continue long term. However following on from the Council Services' key impacts of UCFS anticipated at 5.1 above, the service is anticipating a substantial increase in crisis grant applications when UCFS starts in Dundee on 8 November 2017.

The Act also provided new powers to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). People will continue to apply to the Council for SWF awards as they did before and they will

still ask the Council for a tier one review if they disagree with the decision. However, under the new scheme, people are then able to ask SPSO to independently review the Council's decision.

When the SPSO independently reviews an SWF application, they will be able to change the Council's decision and direct them to make an award if SPSO consider that the Council should have made a different decision.

Since the inception of these new powers the service has received 15 2nd tier review requests from applicants. 4 cases are currently still outstanding but of the 11 where decisions have been made, 4 were overturned in the applicant's favour, 1 was partially overturned and 6 were upheld in favour of the Council. In all cases where decisions were overturned, new information was received via the 2nd tier review process.

5.6 SANCTIONS

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) can apply sanctions to various benefits if they believe individual customers have not met the rules for claiming. A sanction means that benefit will be stopped or reduced for either a fixed or open-ended period of time.

Sanctions are used most often to enforce the work-related conditions that can be applied to benefits such as jobseeker's allowance (JSA).

JSA*	Apr 16	May 16	Jun 16	Jul 16	Aug 16	Sep 16	Oct 16	Nov 16	Dec 16	Jan 17	Feb 17	Mar 17	Total
Decision to apply	41	37	24	19	23	22	27	26	15	37	31	37	234
Decision not to	45	29	32	24	25	33	16	34	11	26	17	20	274

*Data source DWP Stat-explore

During the period April 2016 – to March 2017 there were 234 JSA sanction decisions made for residents of Dundee. This demonstrates a considerable reduction in the number of sanctions in Dundee from the periods June 2015 – June 2016 where there were 1,660 sanction decisions made.

Reductions in sanctions within Dundee City can be attributed to multiple factors including the work of highlighting the problem by the Fairness Commission, politicians and the media as well as work on the ground by local advice services, support groups and the third sector. Locally there has also been an excellent good working relationship between the DWP and various Council led partnership working groups that have led to DWP and their work programme partners reviewing the quality of sanction referrals and the consistency of decision making referrals.

Advice agencies at a local level will continue to monitor the impact of sanctions in Dundee, especially where vulnerable customers' health and wellbeing are put at risk as a result.

5.7 FOOD BANK USE IN DUNDEE

Use of foodbanks in Dundee remains high, mainly as a result of benefit delays and changes of circumstance but also as a result of general low incomes and increases in the cost of living. It is expected that foodbank use will increase significantly with the introduction of Universal Credit Full Service on 8 November 2017 and the fact that customers will only get their first payment around 6 weeks after they have made a claim for Universal Credit.

Everyone referred to a foodbank has to have been referred by a frontline professional agency such as Council Advice Services, Maxwelltown Information Centre or the Citizens Advice Bureau.

In 2016/17 Dundee's Trussell Trust Foodbank provided a total of 9,547 three day emergency food supplies to people in crisis compared to 8,354 in 2015/16. Of the 9,547 people who benefitted from a food parcel, 6,776 (71%) were adults and 2771 (29%) were children within those households.

Between April 2017 to September 2017 the Taught by Mohammed foodbank responded to 495 food parcel referrals and supplied 726 adult food parcels and 240 child food parcels to individuals and families in need.

Oxfam Scotland, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland, Nourish Scotland and The Poverty Alliance have joined forces to undertake a three year partnership project called A Menu for Change: Cash, Rights, Food. The project's overarching aim is to support a reduction in the need for emergency food aid in Scotland by encouraging national and local action to prevent food insecurity and enhance and evolve the response for those experiencing crisis. Dundee has been chosen as one of the 3 main local venues for the undertaking of this work. Menu for Change intend to work with a range of local partners and stakeholders who are well placed to understand the challenges and context for potential changes.

The project will be working intensively in Dundee through four different work streams:-

- Supporting Local Practice and Policy Development
- Research
- Influencing and Advocacy
- Building a Network for Change

In addition a Menu for Change advisory group of people with lived experience of food insecurity is being set up. This advisory group will be a valuable part of our project team's work over the next two years and will take some time to hear from those attending about their views on the main issues and priorities for responding to food insecurity in Dundee. The Menu for Change's action learning set model has since started in Dundee with participation from all statutory and voluntary partners in Dundee with an interest in ending food insecurity issues.

This project links directly with the Dundee Fairness Commission's Action Plan which seeks to organise and run an action learning pilot on the experience of foodbanks in Dundee.

5.8 DEVOLUTION OF SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS

Following on from the Smith Commission's recommendations, The Scotland Act 2016 devolves further powers to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government relating to control over a range of Welfare Powers.

The regulations set out a timetable for the devolution of Welfare Powers including the ability to:-

From 5th September 2016

- Create new benefits in devolved areas,
- Top up reserved benefits (such as Universal Credit, Tax Credits and Child Benefit)
- Make discretionary payments and assistance
- Change employment support
- Make changes to Universal Credit for the costs of rented accommodation
- Make changes to Universal Credit on the timing of payments and recipients

From 1st April 2017

- Make discretionary housing payments

The Scotland Act also embedded a principled approach within the legislation, Operational Policy and the devolved benefits (Disability Benefits, Carers Allowance, Winter Fuel and Cold

Weather Payments, Funeral Payments, Sure Start Maternity Grant, Discretionary Housing Payments, Job Grant and Universal Credit flexibilities)

The proportion of the Scottish Social Security budget that will devolve to Scotland amounts to £2.7 billion or 15% of the total £17.5 billion spent in Scotland each year.

On 18 September 2017 Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced that the new Scottish Social Security Agency will have its headquarters in Dundee. The new agency will also have a site in Glasgow with 1500 jobs split between the two sites. It is expected to be fully operational by 2021. Dundee City Council are engaging with the Scottish Government on plans for the Dundee site.

5.9 SCHOOL CLOTHING GRANTS

As part of the Council's commitment to fairness and equality in Schools, the School Clothing Grant award was increased from £81 to £100 for 2017/18.

The work of Dundee Fairness Commission highlighted the need to improve the take up of School Clothing Grants and recommendations made by the Commission have been implemented.

The Council's Benefit Delivery Team made 5722 School Clothing Grant awards in early July 2017 to ensure those in need had enough time to purchase new school uniforms for the new academic year.

A further 640 awards have been made in August & September 2017.

This is an increase of 340 School Clothing Grant awards having been made on the same time last year. This is evidence to show that integrating the School Clothing Grant awards with the Housing Benefit & Council Tax Reduction application we are reaching more families in need.

Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (CPAG) are working with fifteen schools in Dundee on the Cost of the School Day Project and have been speaking with children, school staff and family members to ask what they think of school costs and how these costs might impact on low income families. Feedback from the project highlighted that recipients of the award felt that the new higher value award allowed parents to purchase a good quality school uniform for their child and the timing of the payment meant that they had plenty choice available to them.

5.10 CO-LOCATION OF ADVICE WITHIN GP SURGERIES

In January 2015, Dundee City Council's Welfare Rights Section began testing alternative models of service delivery within Dundee GP practices aimed at engendering an early intervention approach. The model undertaken in Dundee was based on one that has successfully operated within Edinburgh City since 2002, whereby staff are co-located within GP surgeries each week. Dundee have expanded the model to include access to medical evidence in all surgeries in order to better support applications and mandatory reconsiderations for sickness and disability benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

Patients at these practices can be referred by their GP or health professional to an experienced Welfare Rights Officer or can self-refer via reception staff within each practice. Patients are given confidential appointments with their practice Welfare Rights Officer through the practice appointments booking system as standard.

Where appropriate, GP collated Welfare Rights Officers can directly access individual patient medical records to support that person's ESA, DLA or PIP application. The patient must give express permission for their records to be used in this way, overcoming any data protection issues.

Dundee City Council's Welfare Rights Officers are now co-located within 4 practices within Dundee (Taybank, Lochee, Wallacetown and Douglas) and partner agency Brooksbank Centre and Services are now co-located within The Crescent practice in Whitfield.

Early indications show that claimant benefits of up to £38 can be generated for patients in extra welfare benefits for every £1 spent on Welfare Rights Officer staff time in practice. In addition a Social Return on Investment (SROI) Report was published in January 2017 by the Improvement Service on the Co-location of Welfare Rights Advice in GP Practices. The SROI has been undertaken by the Improvement Service and has examined the impact of the service in both Dundee and Edinburgh. SROI is a method for measuring and communicating a broad concept of value that incorporates social, environmental and economic impacts. It is a way of accounting for the value created by co-locating advisors in GP practices and the contributions that made this activity possible. It is also the story of the change affected by the activity, told from the perspective of stakeholders – in this case patients, GP's, practice staff, advisors and funders. The results suggest that for every £1 invested in the project this has generated a social return of up to £50. The Improvement Service intend to have the SROI report peer reviewed by the Scottish Public Health Observatory in the near future.

In addition the project featured as one of 3 case studies in a Voluntary Health Scotland research report to the Scottish Government entitled "Gold star exemplars" highlighting positive outcomes for patients, communities and primary care and voluntary sector partners.

As of 12 September 2017 the project had successfully claimed £2,176,239 in benefit and tax credit income for patients of the service.

In October 2017 the project was honoured at the COSLA Excellence Awards with the Chairperson's Gold Award.

5.11 DUNDEE JOBCENTRE CO-LOCATION OF ADVICE STAFF

Council Advice Service staff started co-location in the Wellgate Jobcentre Dundee on 29 February 2016 in order to provide independent advice, support and assistance for jobseekers for 5 half days per week alongside the service provided by Jobcentre work coaches. As a result earlier intervention has been possible where jobseekers faced issues relating to their jobseekers agreement or claimant commitment or where there has been an underlying health issue that may attract a benefit entitlement.

The service continues to intervene and advocate on behalf of customers as well as referring on for further advice from the wider Council Advice Services Team.

There were 266 referrals during the period 1 April 2017 – 30 September 2017 which is an average of 44.5 referrals each month. Many of these clients had multiple benefit and tax credit related queries. The total number of queries over the 6 month period numbered 404 in total.

DWP staff and managers continue to be extremely positive about the service offered and there has been a steady increase in referrals from work coaches to the point that there is rarely a day where no referrals from work coaches are received by advice staff. A wide range of issues have been identified including adult learning, crisis intervention, Scottish Welfare Fund support, appeals, income maximization, budgeting, carers benefits and support, housing benefit entitlement, ESA, Food Parcel, PIP and Tax Credits

5.12 EMPLOYABILITY

The roll out of Universal Credit and the ongoing Welfare Reform agenda will result in a wider constituency of benefit recipients being required to engage in some kind of work related activity. The Employability team continues to develop integrated working with other Council services supporting the employability agenda. This includes supporting the Integrated Neighbourhood Service Pilot's work with Council Advice Services, CLD and joint delivery of Universal Credit awareness raising sessions.

A Partnership Work Group is currently gathering evidence from benefit recipients on what interventions can support in work sustainability and progression for people in work to meet the Universal Credit requirement to increase hours or hourly rate of pay.

The Scottish Government's decision to locate the Scottish Social Security Agency in Dundee will create significant employment opportunities for Dundee residents which officers will be developing with civil servants and partner organisations over the coming months.

5.13 ADULT LEARNING

Developing digital skills has remained a priority for Adult Learning with 429 people taking part in IT courses. In addition job search, guidance, CV support and IT skills have been given in community based job shops across the regeneration areas of the city, with 1,272 people having attended local job shops.

An integrated employability pilot DD4 has been in place in the North East/East End bring together a range of agencies, including Dundee City Council, NHS Tayside, Voluntary sector agencies, Housing and the Department for Work and Pensions DWP to offer a holistic support model. This is resulting in increased cross referrals, more localised support and is being evaluated and rolled out to other areas of the city.

6.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

6.1 This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact assessment and Risk Management.

Impact Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment on the Welfare Reform Act 2012 have been carried out by the Department for Work and Pensions.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-equality-impact-assessment>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/series/welfare-reform-act-2012-impact-assessments>

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/548741/welfare-reform-and-work-act-impact-assessment-for-the-benefit-cap.pdf

7.0 CONSULTATIONS

The Council Management Team have been consulted in the preparation of this report and agree with the content.

8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None