

## ITEM No ...5.....

**REPORT TO:** POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 04 JUNE 2018  
**REPORT ON:** UPDATE ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT AND WELFARE REFORM  
**REPORT BY:** EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES  
**REPORT NO:** 183-2018

### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To provide an update to Report No 387-2017 which was submitted to Policy and Resources Committee on 13 November 2017 (Article VI refers), on the rollout of Universal Credit Full Service and the latest outcomes following on from preparations made to prepare support services and residents in relation to the changes it brings. This report highlights other recent developments concerning 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 was implemented within Dundee on 8 November 2017 and has been in operation now for over 6 months;

note the implications in terms of increased debt and demand for advice services from various organisations and the voluntary sector;

note the update on the workstreams which have been in operation to assist in managing 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**

The full financial impact of Welfare Reform for the City still cannot yet be quantified. However, the two reports undertaken by Sheffield Hallam University and commissioned by the Scottish Government noted that the impact of Welfare Reform on Dundee's economy would result in a cumulative estimated annual loss of £94m.

### **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 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, 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 is 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 have been 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 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.

Dundee still has around 230 UCLS recipients residing in DCC properties whose claim is still being managed under live service. It is expected that these cases will begin migration to full service from 29 May 2018 and is expected to take approximately three months to complete.

Currently the Council's Single Point of Contact is working in partnership with their DWP counterpart to ensure that we receive early notification of those concerned in order to support them through this process.

#### **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 represented a significant change to the residents of Dundee, as all Universal Credit claims are now expected to be made and managed online.

In Partnership with Leisure & Culture Dundee, assistance to make and manage a UCFS claim online has been provided at the Central Library, within the Wellgate Centre. This is a drop in service, customers can use the computers themselves or receive assistance from staff within the library. The demand for this service has increased significantly since the introduction of full service.

<b>2017/18</b>	<b>Quarter 1- Live Service</b>	<b>Quarter 2 – Live Service</b>	<b>Quarter3 Live &amp; Full Service</b>	<b>Quarter 4 – full Service</b>
Numbers Seen	63	41	98	160

Feedback from Leisure & Culture Dundee staff has been that most claimants are able to make their claim online, however some do require assistance to manage their ongoing claim and the 'To Do' system operated by Universal Credit.

### UNIVERSAL CREDIT CHANGES

Universal Credit is paid in arrears and initially claimants were waiting around six weeks before receiving their first payment. Included within the UK Government's 2017 Autumn Budget Statement there were a number of changes to UCFS, namely:

- from January 2018, the amount of an advance payment a claimant can request was increased from 50% to 100%. All advance payments are loans which require to be repaid and are recoverable over twelve months;

from February 2018, the seven day waiting period for new claims was removed, thereby reducing the length of time claimants have to wait to receive their first full payment from six weeks to five weeks;

- from April 2018, new claimants who were previously in receipt of Housing Benefit and are transitioning onto UCFS will receive a transitional payment of two weeks Housing Benefit. This two week payment is administered by the Council's Benefit Delivery team and is made automatically and does not require to be paid back by the claimant;
- from April 2018, any person on Universal Credit and moving into temporary accommodation will have their housing costs met by Housing Benefit and not included within Universal Credit.

In addition to the above changes the Scottish Government have also introduced new regulations relating to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for UC recipients. The new regulations permit LA's to estimate a UC recipient's income where this is subject to frequent variations. This allows LA's to apply pragmatism rather than recalculating and rebilling Council Tax accounts which are subject to frequent change.

A further change introduced by the Scottish Government from 1 April 2018, is that claims for Council Tax Reduction can be backdated for six months. This was previously one month in line with the Housing Benefit Regulations.

### UNIVERSAL CREDIT SCOTTISH CHOICES

Universal Credit Scottish choices give recipients of UC in Scotland a choice to have their UC award paid either monthly or twice monthly, and have the housing costs in their award paid direct to their landlord. A person can choose either one or both choices.

Based on national statistics published in March 2018, for the period 4 October 2017 to 31 December 2017, the number of new UCFS recipients who had been offered one or both UC Scottish Choices was 5,800.

The number who have chosen to implement a choice is 2,600, as shown below.

<b>Frequent Payments</b>	<b>Paid direct to Landlord</b>	<b>Both</b>
1600 (62%)	500 (19%)	500 (19%)

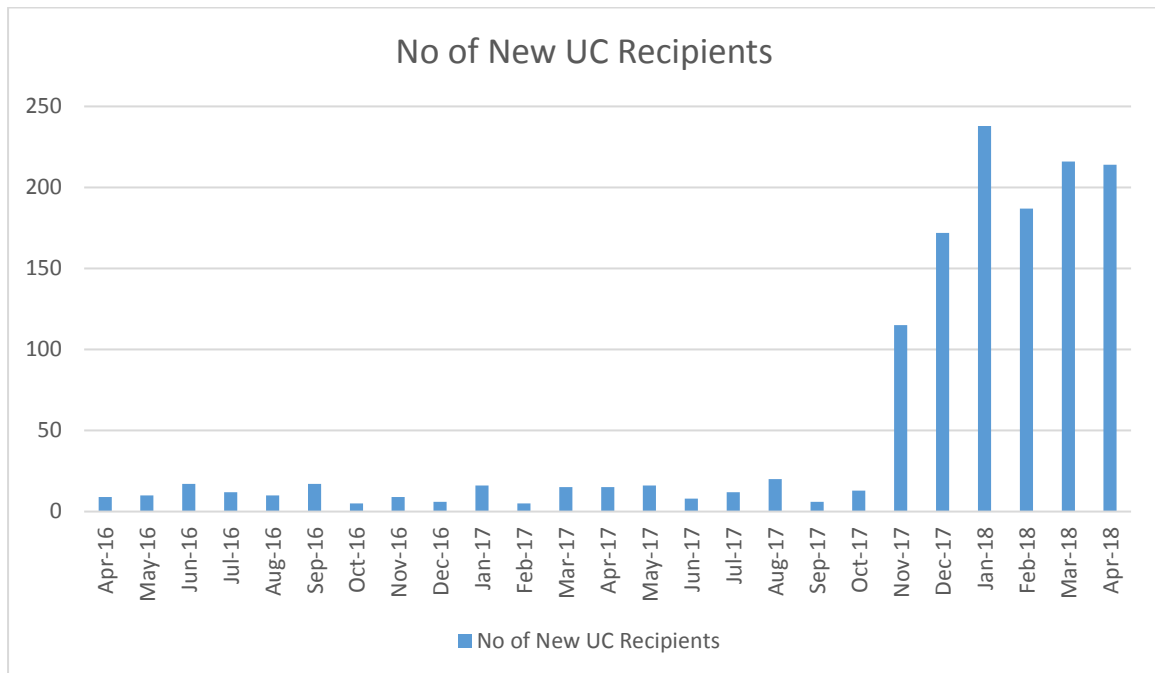
In Dundee as at 30 April 2018, the number of UCFS recipients who had opted to have their Housing Costs paid direct to DCC as their landlord via the Scottish Choices was 206. This equates to 19% of our full service caseload.

## MANAGED PAYMENTS AND HOUSING COSTS TO LANDLORDS

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

Since the roll out of UCFS in November 2017, we have seen an increase in the level of council house rent arrears.

The Corporate Debt Team have seen an increase in the number Council tenants who are now claiming UC. Currently the number of UCFS recipients is 1078. The total number of new claims, by month is shown below.



Managing the increase in claimants of UCFS has been challenging for the Corporate Debt Team, it has been important to establish early engagement with tenants moving onto UC to ensure they understand their obligation to pay their rent from their UC payment.

As UC is paid in arrears, with a five week assessment period before payment is made, significant financial pressure is placed upon tenants at this time. Corporate Debt staff suspend any rent arrears action and ensure that all forms of financial assistance have been applied for while tenants wait for their first payment, but in most cases rent arrears are accruing during this period.

Approximately 90% of LA tenants had rent arrears prior to claiming Universal Credit. The average rent arrears owed by a UC recipient is £625.15, compared to £404.26 for a non UC household.

## TRUSTED PARTNER STATUS

As a Trusted Partner of the DWP, access has been given to the UC Landlord Portal. The portal allows us to verify a UC recipient's rent and to request a managed payment of housing costs where appropriate. Managed Payments (also known as Alternative Payment Arrangements) requests from Trusted Partner landlords are implemented in good faith by the DWP.

Access to the portal has been invaluable for the Corporate Debt Team, this has meant that officers are notified of a tenant's new claim to UCFS at the earliest opportunity and allows for early engagement to support the tenant and make appropriate referrals to Council Advice Services.

## UNIVERSAL CREDIT – THE COUNCIL’S ROLE

The Universal Credit Group continues to meet on a regular basis to address any issues identified from the roll out of UCFS. The group’s membership includes Council Officers from Benefit Delivery Team, Council Advice Services, Neighbourhood Services, employability and Adult Learning alongside partner agencies such as DWP, NHS, Housing Associations and Third Sector Agencies.

The Corporate Debt, Benefit Delivery & Advice Services Team continue to work in partnership with the DWP. The Council’s Single Point of contact coordinates any issues and feedback to all partners including Housing Associations and Third Sector Agencies.

Since the roll out of UCFS further awareness sessions have been delivered to Tayside Advice Workers Forum, Financial Inclusion Strategy Group, Health & Social Care Partnership Team, Children & Families Services and frontline housing staff.

Following the awareness session delivered to Elected Members in November 2017, a second update was provided in March 2018, with presentations by DWP Local JCP Managers in partnership with Corporate Services Managers.

The information booklet produced to provide advice for prospective UC recipients on what is required to make a Universal Credit claim and also where to seek support from both Council and Voluntary Sector Agencies has been recently updated in line with the UC changes. This booklet has been made widely available throughout the city and has been extremely helpful to advice agencies and customers.

The Council’s CONNECT Team continue to provide Personal Budgeting Support for customers who are finding it difficult to manage the single monthly payment. As has been seen throughout Scotland, the demand for this has been low, with the majority of referrals coming from the Corporate Debt Team where a UC recipient has been identified as having rent arrears. The DWP are currently undertaking visits to ascertain good practice in this area and findings will be produced in due course.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Referrals Received	1	0	27	14

The Council’s Single Point of Contact continues to be proactive in addressing any issues raised via the dedicated email address.

Based on experience from other UCFS sites in Scotland who found that due to the disaggregation with Housing Benefit there was a noted drop in the number of Council Tax Reduction Claims. The Council’s Benefit Delivery Team continue to be proactive in ensuring all UC recipients receive their correct entitlement to Council Tax Reduction.

Internal Council joint working has also allowed for increased income maximisation support for citizens of Dundee. Referrals from Corporate Debt and Benefit Delivery Team for income maximisation help have increased and this, when combined with Council Advice Services improved model of working, has led to significant increases in benefits successfully claimed for customers. In 2017/18 Council Advice Services successfully claimed benefits (as at 15 May 2018) worth over £10 million, up 28% from 2016/17. Increased gains have resulted due to increased demand for income maximisation from the public, closer working between the aforementioned teams and innovative initiatives placing advice staff in new stigma free settings.

## 5.2 BENEFIT CAP

The Benefit Cap is a limit to the total amount of money a family or an individual can receive in Benefits. The Benefit Cap will only apply to those claimants in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

The cap is applied by reducing entitlement to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit. Where a tenant is still in receipt of Housing Benefit the cap is applied by the Benefit Delivery Team, who will take a proactive approach to reduce the impact on the family by assisting with the completion of a DHP application form to mitigate against the effect of the cap and also make referrals to the Employability Team.

The current position is that 141 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	9	7	14	5	8	2	0	5	50
Housing Association	9	9	3	4	4	6	0	0	35
Private Landlord	15	20	2	7	4	3	4	1	56
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>141</b>
Landlord Type	Family Composition							Total	
	No children	1 Child	2 Children	3 children	4 children	5+ children			
Local Authority	0	2	2	12	22	7	50		
Housing Association	0	0	0	12	12	11	35		
Private Landlord	0	0	5	33	14	4	56		
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>141</b>		

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.

## 5.3 DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS (DHP)

Funding for Discretionary Housing Payments was previously provided to LA's by the Department for Work and Pensions. As of April 2017, DHP's were fully devolved to Scottish Government. The Under Occupancy Charge continues to be fully mitigated by this funding.

The total spend for 2017/18 is shown below.

Benefit Cap	Bedroom Tax	Hardship (non-Benefit cap)	Total
£314,590.84	£1,957,350.84	£340,218.56	£2,612,160.24

2018/19 budget is £2,667,697.00 as shown below.

<b>Benefit Cap</b>	<b>Bedroom Tax</b>	<b>Hardship(non – benefit cap)</b>	<b>DCC Contribution</b>	<b>Total</b>
£295,857.00	£1,997,619.00	£124,221.00	£250,000.00	£2,667,697.00

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

	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14</b>	<b>2014/15</b>	<b>2015/16</b>	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
No of awards made	339	2008	3884	4499	4786	4965
Actual Spend	£115,076	£826,642	£2,131,308	£2,110,127	£2,297,378	£2,612,160.24.

#### **LOCAL AUTHORITY HARDSHIP FUND**

From April 2016, the Council agreed to make a budget available of £250,000 to assist local authority tenants who find themselves in hardship, with the aim of the fund to sustain tenancies.

The fund is administered alongside the DHP fund by the Council's Benefit Delivery Team

	<b>2016/17</b>	<b>2017/18</b>
Number of Awards	429	359
Actual Spend	£249,999.74	£249,895,.01
No of Evictions due to Rent Arrears	45	37

For financial year 2018/19 the available budget has been increased to £450,000.

#### **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.

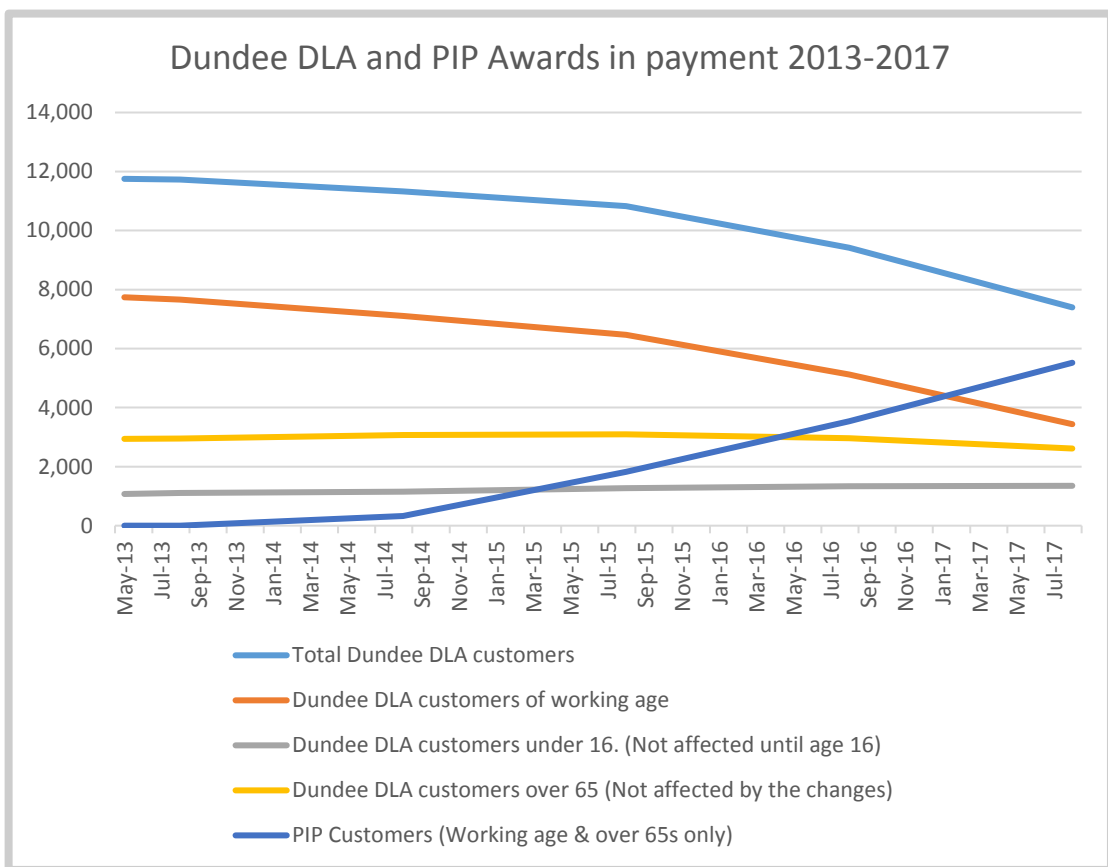
As a result numbers of DLA customers of working age have declined as follows since May 2013.

	<b>Total Dundee DLA customers</b>	<b>Dundee DLA customers of working age</b>	<b>Dundee DLA customers under 16. (Not affected until age 16)</b>	<b>Dundee DLA customers over 65 (Not affected by the changes)</b>
May 2013	11,753	7,739	1,074	2,938
Aug 2013	11,725	7,663	1,110	2,950
Aug 2014	11,332	7,102	1,155	3,071
Aug 2015	10,829	6,464	1,266	3,095
Aug 2016	9,420	5,123	1,334	2,960
Aug 2017	7,396	3,439	1,350	2,614

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

Date	Dundee Personal Independent Payment customer numbers
Aug 2014	324
Aug 2015	1,819
Aug 2016	3,535
Aug 2017	5,521
Jan 2018	6,363

Latest DWP statistics indicate that the DLA working age customer count fell by approximately 1,684 in the last recorded full year in Dundee. This suggests that current average rates of transfer have significantly increased in the last 12-18 months meaning that by October/November 2019 the complete DLA working age customer count will be transferred to PIP.



Source DWP Stat-Xplore website

Official Department for Work and Pensions UK wide statistics show that in the final 3 months of 2017, 69% of PIP appeal tribunals were overturned in favour of the appellant claiming PIP (up from 64% on the same period of 2016/17) and 61% of DLA appeal tribunals were overturned in favour of the appellant claiming DLA (no change on the same period of 2016/17). 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 have recently seen their appeal caseload increase significantly in 2017 with representation provided at 355 scheduled tribunals between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018, an average of 7 new cases per week.



## 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. (100% cleared within 1 working day where all information has been received from the applicant allowing a decision to be made).
- 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.

Changes to Scottish Welfare Fund's organisation of staff workloads has successfully reduced decision making timescales for Community Care Grants from nearly 15 working days to under 10 working days on average. Volumes handled over the last 12 months have been high as demonstrated in the tables below.

Applications received and processed for the 12 month period April 2017 – March 2018:

	Applications received		Applications granted		Applications refused		Applications withdrawn	
	Crisis Grants	CCG	Crisis Grants	CCG	Crisis Grants	CCG	Crisis Grants	CCG
Sub total	6566	2955	3841	1863	2334	1132	497	228
Totals	9521		5704		3466		725	
Total calls to Scottish Welfare Fund 2017/18							14,798	

Scottish Welfare Fund spend April 2017 – March 2018:

Crisis Grant Allocation 2017/18	Crisis Grant actual spend	CG percentage spend	Community Care Grant Allocation 2017/18	Community Care Grant actual spend	CCG percentage spend
£384,000	285,502.16	74%	£1,021,750	£1,109,505.21	108%
Total SWF Grant Allocation	£1,405,750	Total SWF Spend	£1,395,007.37	SWF Overall percentage spend	99.23%

Dundee City Council's spend on crisis grants has shown a consistent decline over the last twelve months. Officers are currently assessing the possible reasons for this decline and whether this trend is likely to continue long term.

## 5.6 DEVOLUTION OF SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS

On 25 April 2018 MSPs unanimously passed the Social Security (Scotland) bill which will establish a devolved Scottish social security system. The devolution of responsibility for these powers is being staggered, with the system due to be fully operational by 2021.

The proportion of the Scottish Social Security budget that will devolve to Scotland amounts to £3.3 billion affecting 1.4 million people annually across Scotland. Preparations continue in relation to the ongoing rollout of specific devolved benefits.

The 11 benefits which are being devolved from Westminster to Holyrood are:

- Personal Independence Payments
- Carer's Allowance
- Attendance Allowance
- Disability Living Allowance
- Winter Fuel Payments
- Cold Weather Payments
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- Industrial Injuries Disability Benefits
- Funeral Expenses Payments (to be replaced by Funeral Expense Assistance)
- Sure Start Maternity Grant (to be replaced by Best Start Grant)
- Discretionary Housing Payments

Following on from the further powers devolved to the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government under the Scotland Act 2016 the Scottish Government are currently engaged in the following preparations and activities connected with the ongoing rollout of devolved social security benefits to Scotland.

### **Spring 2017 onwards: Experience Panels**

In spring 2017, Scottish Government outlined plans to have people with direct personal experience of the current benefits system help to decide how benefits are delivered in Scotland's new social security system. More than 2,400 volunteers from across Scotland subsequently signed up to the experience panels.

In June 2017, researchers contacted panel members to understand in more detail what panel members think works well in the current system, and where there is room for improvement. Regular reports have been subsequently published on Experience Panel Activities and progress.

### **September 2017 onwards: Plans for the new Scottish Social Security Agency**

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. This has led to the establishment of temporary premises within Dundee House for the new Agency. This brings opportunities for the Council and its partners to develop links in line with the Minister for Social Security's vision of a local presence for the Agency.

Already several meetings have taken place with staff from the new agency who have met with Council managers as well as Voluntary and Third Sector agencies. Plans for how the new Agency will develop over time have been showcased at these meetings with a firm commitment to joint partnership working evident at all times.

### **Summer 2018 onwards: Benefits for Carers**

The benefit currently available for carers is Carer's Allowance, which helps certain eligible people with the expenses incurred by caring for someone with substantial caring needs. The Scottish Government have committed to increasing the level of Carer's Allowance (£64.60) to that of Jobseeker's Allowance (£73.10). The Social Security (Scotland) Bill provides a mechanism to pay the Carer's Allowance supplement at the earliest opportunity, which will be summer 2018, with payments being backdated to April 2018. Payments will be made as a six month lump sum payment on a date within each six month period specified by Scottish Ministers and agreed by DWP.

By the end of the current parliamentary term Scottish Government plan to take over full control of Carer's Allowance and have committed to an increase the Carer's Allowance for those looking after more than one disabled child.

Additionally the Scottish Government have committed to:-

The introduction of a Young Carer Grant from autumn 2019 to help carers aged 16, 17, and 18 if still in school, to help them access the same opportunities as other young adults, look after their own health and wellbeing, improve their quality of life and reduce any negative impact of caring.

The Young Carer Grant will be a £300 annual payment for young adults caring for an average of 16 hours each week who do not currently qualify for Carer's Allowance. In line with the definition of a young carer in the Carers Act, it will be paid to 16 and 17 year olds, and 18 year olds if at school and caring for someone in receipt of the middle or higher rates of Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Attendance Allowance or Armed Forces Independence Payment. The detail of the Grant, such as its name and detailed eligibility criteria (for example dealing with terminal illness), will be developed in collaboration with young carers through the Experience Panels.

### **Summer 2019: Best Start Grant**

Delivery of the Best Start Grant will be rolled out by summer 2019.

The Best Start Grant is intended to provide lower-income families with financial support during the key early years of a child's life, to improve children's wellbeing and life chances, and provide support to low income families at key transition points in early years. The support is designed to help improve outcomes for children including reducing health inequalities and closing the attainment gap. The Healthy Start Vouchers Scheme (used to help to pay for milk, fruit and vegetables to help mothers and children get the nutrition they need) has also been devolved and will work alongside the Best Start Grant to help mitigate the effects of child poverty and material deprivation.

The Best Start Grant replaces and expands upon the UK Government's Sure Start Maternity Grant by:

- providing eligible families with £600 on the birth of their first child and £300 on the birth of any subsequent children
- not putting a limit on the number of children that are supported

- giving eligible families two further payments of £250 around the time of nursery and around the time a child starts school, to recognise the additional financial costs during these key transition periods.
- Illustrative regulations have been published, reflecting the product of discussions and consultations to date. The framework on the three payments listed above are well established but Scottish Government are still developing policy on the detail of the payments and how they will be implemented.

### **Summer 2019: Funeral Expense Assistance**

In March 2016, Scottish Government set up the Funeral Payment and Funeral Poverty Reference Group to support Scottish Ministers in developing policy for a new funeral payment.

The Scottish Government's Funeral Costs plan included details of the new Funeral Expense Assistance benefit which will be rolled out by summer 2019 and replaces the UK Government's Funeral Payment. The benefit is intended to provide critical financial support to people at a time of bereavement.

The new payment is intended to simplify and speed up the process, making it easier for people to understand if they are eligible. Applications will be processed within 10 working days of receipt of a completed application and payment will be made as soon as practicable thereafter.

Alongside the Funeral Expense Assistance benefit will be a number of other ongoing actions taken to make more affordable funeral options available, including

- producing guidance to help people plan their own funeral
- strengthening consumer protection in relation to pre-paid funeral plans
- providing more options to help people save for their funeral by piloting a Scottish funeral bond.

## **5.7 EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS**

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 Benefit Delivery Team continues to maximise take up of Free School meals and School Clothing Grants by automatically awarding where a Housing Benefit/Council Tax Reduction application has been made. Since the administration of these grants has been transferred to the Benefit Delivery Team there has been an increase in the number of families receiving their entitlement.

	<b>Clothing Grant Awards</b>	<b>Average Free School Meals P4+</b>
2016/17	6352	3581
2017/18	6627	3674

Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) payments which provide financial support to 16 – 19 year olds who stay on in full time non advanced education after their statutory school leaving date, are now administered by the Council's Benefit Delivery Team.

Using information and data already held by the Benefit Delivery Team allows for proactive work to be undertaken to encourage pupils to apply for EMA (where they haven't already done so). Applications can also now be submitted online making it easier for the young person to apply.

## **5.8 CO-LOCATION OF ADVICE WITHIN GP SURGERIES**

Co-location of advice within GP practice settings continues apace in Dundee with 3 new practices coming on board since January 2018, Erskine Practice (7195 patients), Mill Practice (8878 patients) and Maryfield Practice (7212 patients). Dundee City Council's Welfare Rights Officers are now co-located within 7 practices within Dundee (Taybank, Lochee, Wallacetown, Douglas, Erskine, Mill and Maryfield) and partner agency Brooksbank Centre and Services are now co-located within The Crescent practice in Whitfield. This means that a total of 48,905 patients across Dundee now have access to advice within a stigma free, trusted setting within their community.

This alternative model of service delivery within Dundee GP practices aims at engendering an early intervention approach by accessing medical evidence on behalf of patients with the patient's explicit consent. This in turn leads to better supported 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.

Previous research into the Social Return on Investment undertaken by the Improvement Service suggested that for every £1 invested in the project this has generated a social return of up to £50. This research has now been peer reviewed and confirmed by the Scottish Public Health Observatory.

In 2017/18 the service made 921 appointment and saw 734 patients. This has resulted in £1,564,432 in extra household income for patients through benefits and tax credit claims. The service was also the winner of a special award (Chairperson's Gold Award) at the COSLA Excellence Awards 2017 on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

## **5.9 DUNDEE JOBCENTRE CO-LOCATION OF ADVICE STAFF**

Council Advice Service continue 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 533 referrals during the period 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018, which is an average of 44.4 referrals each month. Many of these clients had multiple benefit and tax credit related queries. Universal credit has accounted for 33% of all queries raised since Universal Credit Full Service was rolled out on 08 November 2017.

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.

## **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](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**

**7.1** The Council Management Team has been consulted in the preparation of this report.

## **8.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**8.1** None

**GREGORY COLGAN**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES**

**16 MAY 2018**