

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 4 September 2018

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Enterprise, Community & Resources

PORTFOLIO: Resources

SUBJECT: Progress Updates regarding the Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit.

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1. To provide updates regarding the delivery of the Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the latest position regarding the Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit, be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Discretionary Support Scheme (DSS) is now in its sixth year of operation. Over this period the Scheme has been developed and amended where necessary by the Board.

3.2 When responsibility was passed from the Department for Work and Pensions to the Council and the Discretionary Support Scheme was established, the associated grant funding was significantly reduced by Government. The DSS Team and a proportion of the DSS awards granted are funded, but the Board previously agreed to carry forward any unspent DSS funds, in order to provide a reserve which would be used to sustain the Scheme for as long as possible. Details of funding and expenditure are provided in Section 1 of Appendix 1.

3.3 The DSS made 863 awards during 2017/18 totalling £175,317. The analysis of applications by type and awards granted are set out in Appendix 1.

3.4 In 2017/18 total grant funding of £406,692 was received for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). Actual expenditure totalled £412,767 representing 1,403 DHP awards and giving an over spend of £6,075. This compares with 2016/17 where 1,201 awards were made with total expenditure of £379,974. The increase in the number of awards and total expenditure in 2017/18 compared to the previous year has been caused by increasing numbers of

Halton residents becoming eligible for Universal Credit. Section 2 in Appendix 1 provides further details of DHP spend during 2017/18 and a comparison with previous years.

- 3.5 On 27th July 2016, Halton Job Centres commenced the roll out of Universal Credit (UC) Full Service. This meant that all new working age claimants must claim UC, and all claims must be made on-line. The Council has an agreement with the Department for Works and Pensions whereby it provides Universal Support, which involves delivering Assisted Digital Support and Personal Budgeting Support for UC claimants. Earlier in 2018 the Government introduced two measures that will have improved UC claimant's transition to this new benefit. Firstly in February 2018 the 7 day waiting period for UC was abolished reducing the wait for payment from 6 to 5 weeks. Secondly paying an additional 2 weeks of Housing Benefit after the end of a person's Housing Benefit claim and into their UC claim, and this was effective from April 2018. According to the Department for Works and Pensions in June 2018 there were 9,242 Halton residents claiming UC. Section 3 in Appendix 1 provides details of the UC caseload in Halton since April 2015.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 4.1 The Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit have the potential to affect all of the Council priorities.

5.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 5.1 DSS and DHP payments will be monitored to ensure they remain within budget.

6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 6.1 The eligibility criteria and application process for DSS and DHP ensure that no particular groups of individuals are excluded.

7.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

- 7.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.

1.0 Discretionary Support Scheme

The funding and expenditure for the Scheme during 2017/18 is shown in the table below.

Available Funding and Actual Expenditure 2017/18

	£
B/f administration grant	1,014
2017/18 administration grant	<u>114,380</u>
Total grant available	115,394
Less DSS team expenditure	<u>101,341</u>
C/f administration grant	14,053
B/f DSS reserve	905,291
2017/18 DSS grant funding	<u>140,000</u>
Total funding available	1,045,291
Less actual DSS awards expenditure	<u>175,317</u>
C/f DSS reserve (incl admin grant c/f)	884,027

1.1 Expenditure during 2017/18 was spread as follows;

Month	Total Awarded (£)
April	14,313
May	10,610
June	10,623
July	18,843
August	21,086
September	16,265
October	16,804
November	15,766
December	11,221
January	17,412
February	14,675
March	7,699
Total	175,317

- 1.2 The number of awards and average amount of each award paid during 2017/18 was as follows;

Type of Award	Number Granted	Cost (£)	Average Award (£)
Emergency Support	607	32,413	53.40
Community Support	256	142,904	558.22
Total	863	175,317	203.15

- 1.3 The following table shows the number of applications received during 2017/18, together with the number granted analysed between Emergency Support and Community Support;

Breakdown Of Applications		Emergency Support		Community Support	
		Runcorn	Widnes	Runcorn	Widnes
Received Applications	2,634	938	994	411	291
Granted	863	300	307	154	102
Awarded Amount £	175,317	16,517	15,895	89,071	53,834
Percentage Awarded	100%	9%	9%	51%	31%
Rejected	1,771	638	687	257	189

- 1.3 Over half of the applications received were rejected and the reasons for rejection are detailed below:

Reasons For Rejection	
Not a Halton Resident	147
Customer Sanctioned	88
Alternative help available	595
Requested Cash	4
Requested Fuel Payment	0
Signposted to approved partner to complete application	0
Criteria Check	778
Not a Discretionary Support Application	8
Withdrawn Application	34
Two Awards Within 12 Months	116

Not Eligible	1
Total	1,771

1.5 Of those applications which were approved, the main categories of award were as follows;

Awarded Items	Number
One Adult to last up to 2 weeks food award	396
Child between 10 and 16 food award	44
Child up to the age of 9 food award	251
2 Adults food award	150
Toiletry Pack	60
Vegetarian food award	6
Gluten Free food award	4
Nut Allergy food award	9
Cold food award	4
Household Items	0
Bedding Only	56
Single Bed with Bedding	177
Single Bed	7
Single Mattress	35
Single Bed Frame Only	18
Double Bed	1
Double Bed with Bedding	8
Double Mattress	24
Double Bed Frame Only	8
Bunk Beds with Bedding	4
Bunk Beds	6
Cot with Bedding	21
Sofa	152
Set of Curtains	252
Cooker	100
Washing Machine	27
Fridge	5
Kitchen Equipment	171
Table and Chairs	0
Clothing	1
Pram	0
Fuel	208
Removal	11
Cooker Connection	1

- 1.6 The table below shows where referrals were received from and the percentage of the total this represented.

Signposting	From	%
Ashley House	0	0
Belvedere	0	0
Children's Duty Team	1	0
Citizens Advice Team	113	5
DWP	1,285	62
Fuel Supplier	1	0
Grangeway Court	7	0
HDL	5	0
HHT	24	1
Housing Solution	1	0
HPIJ	0	0
LHT	1	0
Police	2	0
Riverside	6	0
SHAP	60	3
Social Services	17	1
Welfare Rights	12	1
Women's Aid	0	0
Word Of Mouth	553	27
Total	2,088	100

- 1.7 Based upon the experience of 2017/18, there is clearly a continued need for the Discretionary Support Scheme and it appears to be operating well. At this stage it is not proposed to make any changes to the Scheme's application criteria.

2.0 Discretionary Housing Payments

The table below shows an analysis of DHP spend for 2017/18

Purpose of DHP award	Total amount of DHP award £
Benefits cap	46,628
Under occupancy (Bedroom Tax)	258,939
LHA reform	22,660
Other	84,540
Total	412,767

- 2.1 Of the 1,403 DHP awards paid during 2017/18, 595 were to UC claimants with a total value of £163,150.
- 2.2 The table below provides a summary of DHP grant funding and expenditure since April 2013.

Year	Grant Funding £	Amount Spent £	Council contribution £	No. of awards
2013/14	382,452	413,562	31,110	2,620
2014/15	386,553	518,310	131,757	2,016
2015/16	343,725	361,381	17,656	1,516
2016/17	388,533	379,974	-	1,201
2017/18	406,692	412,767	6,075	1,403
2018/19 (to 30/0718)	536,534	206,424	n/a	570

- 2.3 We have continued to grant full year awards to those customers who are in properties adapted for a disability, those with foster carer responsibilities and those who are adopting (or going through the process of adoption).
- 2.4 Rent in-advance cases are only supported through DHP payments if the household are receiving assistance from Housing Solutions, either through statutory homeless duties or those where homeless prevention assistance has been granted.
- 2.3 The Council's DHP grant funding for 2018/19 has been increased by £129,842 (32%) compared to 2017/18. It is assumed that this increase in grant funding has been provided in order to assist with the increasing numbers of new and existing UC claimants in Halton.

3.0 Universal Credit

- 3.1 As of June 2018 there were 9,242 UC claimants in Halton. The table below shows the growth in the UC caseload in Halton since April 2015.

Date	UC caseload
April 2015	720
Sept 2015	1,592
Dec 2015	1,901
May 2016	1,990
Aug 2016	2,171
Oct 2016	3,330

Nov 2016	3,779
Dec 2016	4,122
April 2017	5,941
May 2017	6,185
Aug 2017	7,148
Nov 2017	7,492
Feb 2018	8,210
May 2018	8,969
June 2018	9,242

3.2 On 7th June 2018 the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) announced a number of changes it is making to Universal Credit (UC) relating to people who move on to UC. The main changes are as follows:

- Claimants in receipt of Severe Disability Premium will remain on legacy benefits until they are moved to UC as part of the DWP's managed migration plans. At this point they will qualify for transitional protection if their legacy entitlement is more than their UC payment.
- Incentives will be strengthened for parents to take up temporary work, by making sure receipt of child care costs does not erode transitional protection.
- Short term increases in earnings will not affect transitional protection.
- Capital over £16,000 will be disregarded for any claimants who are moved from tax credits over to UC, for 12 months.
- The migration of all claimants to UC will be completed in March 2023.