

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 12th November 2019

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

Discretionary Support Scheme

- 3.1 The Discretionary Support Scheme is now in its seventh 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 (DSS) was established, the associated grant funding was significantly reduced by Government. The staffing cost of the DSS Team and a proportion of the DSS awards made, are grant funded. However, 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.
- 3.3 Details of funding and expenditure during 2018/19 are provided in Section 1 of the Appendix. The DSS made 574 awards during 2018/19 totalling £137,238. The analysis of applications by type and awards granted are also set out in the Appendix.

Discretionary Housing Payments

- 3.4 In 2018/19 total grant funding of £536,534 was received for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). Actual expenditure totalled £535,414 representing 1,544 DHP awards and giving an under spend of £1,120. This compares with 2017/18 where 1,403 awards were made with total expenditure of £412,767.
- 3.5 The increase in the number of awards and total expenditure in 2018/19 compared to the previous year, has been caused by increasing numbers of Halton residents becoming eligible for Universal Credit. Section 2 of the Appendix provides further details of DHP spend during 2018/19 and a comparison with previous years.

Universal Credit

- 3.6 On 27th July 2016, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commenced the roll out of Universal Credit (UC) Full Service in Halton. This meant that all new working age claimants must now claim UC, and all claims must be made on-line. According to the DWP as at September 2019 there were 10,179 Halton residents now claiming UC. Section 3 in the Appendix 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 2018/19 is shown in the table below.

Available Funding and Actual Expenditure 2018/19

	£
B/f administration grant	1,014
2018/19 administration grant	<u>102,859</u>
Total grant available	103,873
Less DSS team staffing expenditure	<u>102,859</u>
C/f administration grant	1,014
B/f DSS reserve	812,373
2018/19 DSS grant funding	<u>106,140</u>
Total funding available	919,527
Less actual DSS awards expenditure	<u>137,238</u>
C/f DSS reserve (incl admin grant c/f)	782,289

1.1 Expenditure during 2018/19 was spread as follows;

Month	Total Awarded (£)
April	11,170
May	13,759
June	9,439
July	10,185
August	12,533
September	12,091
October	11,387
November	11,752
December	12,084
January	10,848
February	7,706
March	14,284
Total	137,238

- 1.2 The number of awards and average amount of each award paid during 2018/19 was as follows;

Type of Award	Number Granted	Cost (£)	Average Award (£)
Emergency Support	360	18,094	50.26
Community Support	214	119,144	556.74
Total	574	137,238	239.09

- 1.3 The following table shows the number of applications received during 2018/19, together with the number of awards granted, analysed between Emergency Support and Community Support;

Breakdown Of Applications		Emergency Support		Community Support	
		Runcorn	Widnes	Runcorn	Widnes
Applications received	2,751	903	933	473	442
Number of awards granted	574	181	183	102	108
Awarded amount	£137,238	£9,098	£10,083	£60,152	£57,905
Percentage awarded	100%	7%	7%	44%	42%
Applications rejected	2,177	722	750	371	334

- 1.4 Over two thirds of the applications received were rejected and the reasons for rejection are detailed below;

Reasons For Rejection	
Excess income	64
Non-dependent in the property	28
Not liable for council tax	150
Police reference required (e.g. if money lost or stolen)	45
Security check, I.D. validation failed	48
Relying too much on Discretionary Support Scheme	20
Homeless	11
White goods (washing machine & fridge for medical needs only)	123
Not receiving a means tested benefit	75
Alternative help available	487

Requested a replacement item	299
Non-Halton resident	286
Sanctioned by DWP	62
Two awards	65
Three awards	0
Requested cash	121
Application withdrawn	75
UC budgeting issue	179
UC delay issue	39
Total	2,177

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	62
Child between 10 and 16 food award	65
Child up to the age of 9 food award	0
2 Adults food award	121
Toiletry Pack	75
Vegetarian food award	366
Gluten Free food award	39
Nut Allergy food award	0
Cold food award	0
Household Items	0
Bedding Only	249
Single Bed with Bedding	11
Single Bed	133
Single Mattress	68
Single Bed Frame Only	65
Double Bed	2
Double Bed with Bedding	1
Double Mattress	0
Double Bed Frame Only	1
Bunk Beds with Bedding	0
Bunk Beds	47
Cot with Bedding	139
Sofa	6
Set of Curtains	6
Cooker	2
Washing Machine	0
Fridge	4
Kitchen Equipment	26
Table and Chairs	8
Clothing	5
Pram	12
Fuel	154
Removal	132
Cooker Connection	55

1.6 The table below shows where referrals to the DSS were received from;

Sign posting (referrals received from)	Referrals
Food bank	5
Children's Duty Team	0
Citizens Advice Team	27
DWP	60
Fuel Supplier	48
Grangeway Court	7
HDL	19
HHT	0
Housing Solutions	0
HPIJ	21
Local Housing Association	54
Police	2
Changing Lives	54
SHAP	2
Social Services	4
Welfare Rights	34
Private landlord	2
Total	283

1.7 Based upon the experience of 2018/19, 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 expenditure for 2018/19;

Purpose of DHP award	Total amount of DHP award £
Benefits cap	64,762
Under occupancy (Bedroom Tax)	273,602
LHA reform	24,941
Other	172,109
Total	535,414

2.1 Of the 1,544 DHP awards made during 2018/19, 695 were to UC claimants with a total value of £280,372.

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	536,534	535,414	-	1,544
2019/20 (to 30/9/19)	469,587	263,748	n/a	756

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.

2.5 The Council's DHP grant funding for 2019/20 has been reduced by £66,947 (-12.5%) compared to 2018/19.

3.0 Universal Credit

3.1 As of September 2019 there were 10,179 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
Nov 2018	10,390
March 2019	10,631
May 2019	9,702*
Sept 2019	10,179

***DWP Revision**

The DWP revised the numbers of people on UC for the period January 2016 – December 2018 following an identification of an issue with their figures.

- 3.2 The UC caseload for working age claimants has been continually rising since April 2015, and the numbers increased after July 2016 when Halton became a Full Service UC area. The DWP are currently piloting a managed migration of legacy benefit claimants to UC in Harrogate. At this point we have had no indication from the Government when Halton will be affected by managed migration of legacy benefit claimants to UC.