

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 28th July 2020

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 eighth 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 expenditure during 2019/20 are provided in Section 1 of the Appendix. The DSS made 523 awards during 2019/20 totalling £143,598. The analysis of applications by type and awards granted are also set out in the Appendix.

Discretionary Housing Payments

- 3.4 In 2019/20 total grant funding of £469,587 was received for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). Actual expenditure totalled £469,579 representing 1,391 DHP awards and giving an under spend of £8. This compares with 2018/19 where 1,544 awards were made with total expenditure of £535,414.
- 3.5 The decrease in the number of awards and total expenditure in 2019/20 compared to the previous year, has been caused by a reduction in Government funding of £66,947. Section 2 of the Appendix provides further details of DHP spend during 2019/20 and a comparison with previous years.

Universal Credit

- 3.5 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 May 2020 there were 14,070 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.

APPENDIX

1.0 Discretionary Support Scheme

The expenditure for the Scheme during 2019/20 is shown in the table below.

Expenditure 2019/20

	£
DSS team staffing expenditure	107,048
DSS awards expenditure	143,598
Total expenditure	250,646

1.1 Expenditure during 2019/20 was spread as follows;

Month	Total Awarded (£)
April	8,893
May	9,897
June	4,929
July	9,740
August	12,495
September	7,866
October	20,399
November	12,090
December	8,629
January	24,336
February	12,259
March	12,065
Total	143,598

1.2 The number of awards and average amount of each award paid during 2019/20 was as follows;

Type of Award	Number Granted	Cost (£)	Average Award (£)
Emergency Support	329	17,215	52.33
Community Support	194	126,383	651.46

Total	523	143,598	274.57
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- 1.3 The following table shows the number of applications received during 2019/20, 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	2,378	999	754	324	301
Number of awards granted	523	176	153	95	99
Awarded amount	£143,598	£8,883	£8,124	£66,049	£60,542
Percentage awarded	100%	6%	6%	46%	42%
Applications rejected	1,855	823	601	229	202

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

Reasons For Rejection	
Excess income	96
Non-dependent in the property	43
Not liable for council tax	129
Police reference required (e.g. if money lost or stolen)	44
Security check, I.D. validation failed	35
Relying too much on Discretionary Support Scheme	20
Homeless	19
White goods (washing machine & fridge for medical needs only)	57
Not receiving a means tested benefit	35
Alternative help available	436
Requested a replacement item	152
Non-Halton resident	372
Sanctioned by DWP	55
Two awards	44
Three awards	0
Requested cash	92
Application withdrawn	52
UC budgeting issue	16

UC delay issue	35
Payment due	120
General budgeting	367
Payment delay	8
Total	2,227

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	245
Additional adult	13
Child pack award	124
2 Adults food award	47
Toiletry Pack	62
Vegetarian food award	3
Gluten Free food award	2
Nut Allergy food award	2
Cold food award	3
Household Items	0
Bedding Only	46
Single Bed with Bedding	135
Single Bed	0
Single Mattress	6
Single Bed Frame Only	3
Double Bed	0
Double Bed with Bedding	4
Double Mattress	28
Double Bed Frame Only	6
Bunk Beds with Bedding	4
Bunk Beds	0
Cot with Bedding	11
Sofa	145
Set of Curtains	158
Cooker	59
Washing Machine	5
Fridge	1
Kitchen Equipment	157
Fuel	77
Removal	11
Cooker Connection	3

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

Sign posting (referrals received from)	Referrals
Food bank	7
Creative Support	178
Children's Duty Team	18
Citizens Advice Team	50
DWP	1,690
Fuel Supplier	28
Grangeway Court	20
Halton Direct Link	38
Halton Housing Trust	43
Housing Solutions	13
Halton People Into Jobs	6
Local Housing Association	27
Police	0
Changing Lives	24
SHAP	41
Social Services	53
Welfare Rights	8
Brennan Lodge	15
Family & friends	23
Total	2,282

1.7 The onset of Covid19 in March 2020 has clearly impacted everyone's lives in the whole country, and the table below shows awards made from the Discretionary Support Scheme that are Covid19 related.

Month	No. of emergency support awards	Value	No. of community support awards	Value
March	15	£890	0	0
April	30	£1,655	2	£2,686
May	12	£632	0	0
June	5	£392	0	0
Total	62	£3,569	2	£2,686

1.8 Based upon the experience of 2019/20 and the impact of Covid19, 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 2019/20

Purpose of DHP award	Total amount of DHP award £
Benefits cap	49,721
Under occupancy (Bedroom Tax)	259,110
LHA reform	29,503
Other	131,245
Total	469,579

2.1 Of the 1,391 DHP awards made during 2019/20, 766 were to UC claimants with a total value of £177,888.

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	469,587	469,579	-	1,391
2020/21 (to 25/6/20)	527,810	204,782	n/a	719

2.3 We have continued to grant full year awards to those customers who are in properties adapted for a disability.

- 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 2020/21 has increased by £58,223 compared to 2019/20.
- 2.6 To assess the impact of Covid19 we have carried out a comparison of the number of DHP applications received in March, April, May and June 2020 with the same months in 2019. The table below illustrates the difference between the two years.

	Year	
	2019	2020
Month	Number of DHP applications received	
March	201	151
April	103	81
May	97	60
June	89	53

- 2.7 The above figures indicate a reduction in the number of DHP applications received in 2020 in the months from March to June compared to the same months in 2019. This represents a 30% decrease in the number Halton residents applying for DHP for help with their rent compared to last year. All the other Liverpool City Region (LCR) Councils report the same trend of reduced DHP applications over this period. The view across LCR Councils is that landlords, particularly registered providers are not pursuing rent arrears during Covid19 lockdown, and therefore tenants are not being encouraged to apply for DHPs. When lockdown restrictions are eased and there is a return to 'normality' then the Council may experience a surge in demand for DHPs with Halton residents requiring help with their rent.

3.0 Universal Credit

3.1 As of May 2020 there were 14,070 Universal Credit (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
November 2019	10,296
14 th March 2020	10,918
May 2020	14,070

*DWP Revision

3.2 The effect of Covid19 and the lockdown is clearly illustrated in the table above on the UC caseload, which after March 2020 shows a significant increase in the number of people claiming UC in Halton.