

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 2nd November 2021

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 ninth 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 2020/21 are provided in Section 1 of the Appendix. The DSS made 610 awards during 2020/21 totalling £170,554. The analysis of applications by type and awards granted are also set out in the Appendix. During the first half of 2021/22 (1st April – 30th September) the DSS had made 162 awards with a total value of £66,592. An analysis of these payments is included in the appendix.

Discretionary Housing Payments

- 3.4 In 2020/21 total grant funding of £527,810 was received for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). Actual expenditure totalled £527,396 representing 1,645 DHP awards and giving an under spend of £414. This compares with 2019/20 where 1,391 awards were made with total expenditure of £469,579.
- 3.5 The increase in the number of awards and total expenditure in 2020/21 compared to the previous year has been caused by an increase in Government funding of £58,223. Section 2 of the Appendix provides further details of DHP spend during 2020/21 and a comparison with previous years.
- 3.6 In 2021/22 the Council has received DHP grant funding of £394,099, which is a reduction of £133,711 compared to 2020/21. Section 2 of the Appendix shows the number of DHP awards and value up to 30th September 2021.

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 12th August 2021 there were 15,968 Halton residents 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 2020/21 is shown in the table below.

Expenditure 2020/21

	£
DSS team staffing expenditure	106,500
DSS awards expenditure	170,554
Total expenditure	277,054

1.1 Expenditure during 2020/21 was spread as follows;

Month	Total Awarded (£)
April	9,173
May	3,067
June	15,114
July	24,239
August	16,786
September	11,391
October	9,803
November	18,112
December	13,293
January	10,661
February	21,002
March	17,913
Total	170,554

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	412	22,710	£55.12

Community Support	198	147,844	£746.68
Total	610	170,554	279.60

- 1.3 The following table shows the number of applications received during 2020/21, 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	1,936	707	559	381	289
Number of awards granted	610	249	166	104	91
Awarded amount	£170,554	13,593	9,072	83,654	64,235
Percentage awarded	31.5%	35.2%	29.7%	27.3%	31.5%
Applications rejected	1,326	458	393	277	198

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

Reasons For Rejection	
Excess income	55
Non-dependent in the property	39
Not liable for council tax	99
Police reference required (e.g. if money lost or stolen)	20
Security check, I.D. validation failed	60
Relying too much on Discretionary Support Scheme	5
Homeless	11
White goods (washing machine & fridge for medical needs only)	35
Not receiving a means tested benefit	47
Alternative help available	306
Requested a replacement item	161
Non-Halton resident	162
Sanctioned by DWP	14
Two awards	41
Three awards	5
Requested cash	62

Application withdrawn	47
UC budgeting issue	6
UC delay issue	1
Payment due	47
General budgeting	102
Payment delay	1
Total	1,326

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	293
Additional adult	27
Child pack award	188
2 Adults food award	77
Toiletry Pack	111
Vegetarian food award	4
Gluten Free food award	6
Nut Allergy food award	1
Cold food award	0
Household Items	0
Bedding Only	56
Single Bed with Bedding	147
Single Bed	3
Single Mattress	6
Single Bed Frame Only	1
Double Bed	1
Double Bed with Bedding	10
Double Mattress	36
Double Bed Frame Only	11
Bunk Beds with Bedding	2
Bunk Beds	0
Cot with Bedding	11
Sofa	158
Set of Curtains	160
Cooker	65
Washing Machine	4
Fridge	8
Kitchen Equipment	169
Fuel	86
Removal	6
Cooker Connection	2

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

Sign posting (referrals received from)	Referrals
Food bank	0
Creative Support	15
Children's Duty Team	9
Citizens Advice Team	40
DWP	1180
Fuel Supplier	7
Grangeway Court	15
Halton Direct Link	1
Halton Housing Trust	17
Housing Solutions	15
Halton People Into Jobs	1
Private landlord	1
Local Housing Association	28
Police	0
Changing Lives	155
SHAP	24
Social Services	28
Welfare Rights	5
Brennan Lodge	14
Family & friends	11
Credit Union	4
Halton Borough Council	144
Total	1,714

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 2020/21	No. of emergency support awards	Value £	No. of community support awards	Value £
April	30	£1,655	2	£2,686
May	15	£752	0	0
June	9	£597	0	0
July	7	£399	0	0
August	0	0	0	0
September	6	£358	0	0

October	9	£580	0	0
November	5	£334	0	0
December	0	0	0	0
January	2	£158	0	0
February	1	£65	0	0
March	3	£213	0	0
Total	87	£5,111	2	£2,686

1.8 Based upon the experience of 2020/21 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.

1.9 During 2021/22 for the period 1st April – 30th September 2021 the table below shows the payments awarded categorised between emergency support and community support.

Emergency support		Community support		Total	
No. of awards	Value	No. of awards	Value	No. of awards	Value
93	£5,648	69	£60,944	162	£66,592

2.0 Discretionary Housing Payments

The table below shows an analysis of DHP expenditure for 2020/21

Purpose of DHP award	Total amount of DHP award £
Benefits cap	£46,611
Under occupancy (Bedroom Tax)	£194,629
LHA reform	£25,648
Other	£260,508
Total	£527,396

2.1 Of the 1,645 DHP awards made during 2020/21, 1,010 were to UC claimants with a total value of £342,248.

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	527,810	527,396	-	1,645
2021/22 To 30/9/21	394,099	195,825	n/a	588

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 increased by £58,223 compared to 2019/20.

2.6 As indicated in the table above in 2021/22 the grant funding has been reduced by £133,711 compared to 2020/21. This represents a 25% cut in DHP funding, and it is worth noting that other Liverpool City Region local authorities have also had significant reductions to their DHP funding allocations for 2021/22.

3.0 Universal Credit

3.1 As at 12th August 2021 there were 15,968 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
11 th June 2020	15,589
July 2020	15,846
August 2020	15,925
10 th September 2020	16,090
October 2020	16,250
11 th November 2020	16,295
10 th December 2020	16,502
16 th January 2021	16,517
11 th February 2021	16,398
11 th March 2021	16,459
8 th April 2021	16,500
13 th May 2021	16,371
10 th June 2021	16,277
8 th July 2021	16,149
12 th August 2021	15,968

*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. After April 2021 the UC caseload has reduced by over 500 cases, which suggests a recent slight improvement in the local economy.