



Report to Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee

28 November 2013

Report of: Director of Policy, Performance and Communications

Subject: Welfare Reform – November Update

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Summary:

At the meeting of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee in July 2013, members requested that a one-page update on progress with Welfare Reform issues be provided to Committee Members bi-monthly. This report provides the update for November.

Type of item:

Reviewing of existing policy	
Informing the development of new policy	
Statutory consultation	
Performance / budget monitoring report	
Cabinet request for scrutiny	
Full Council request for scrutiny	
Community Assembly request for scrutiny	
Call-in of Cabinet decision	
Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	
Other	X

The Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee is asked to note the contents of the update report.

Category of Report: OPEN

Welfare Reform in Numbers

4,261

Sheffield council tenants are affected by under-occupancy rules ('bedroom tax')



140 less than two months ago

38%

have paid in full the shortfall in their benefit resulting from under-occupancy without receiving a DHP* payment



up from 23% two months ago

10%

have paid nothing towards the shortfall in their benefit resulting from under-occupancy

compared with 11% two months ago

33,000

working age tax payers in Sheffield receive council tax support



All of whom must now pay 23% of their Council Tax

15,645

summonses have been issued to Council Tax Support customers since April 2013 for non payment of Council Tax



£4.02m

= value of summonsed debt for Council Tax Support customers



Average amount of debt = £260**

988

Local Assistance Scheme grants have been awarded since 1st April 2013

4,181

Council Tax Hardship Scheme awards have been made since 1st April 2013

948

Local Assistance Scheme loans have been awarded since 1st April 2013

3,610

Discretionary Housing Payment awards have been made since 1st April 2013



168 households in Sheffield are subject to the Benefit Cap***



around **900** children



All figures are to 31 October 2013, unless otherwise stated

* DHP = Discretionary housing payment

** At this stage the full annual outstanding debt is summonsed, not the unpaid debt to that date

***Data accurate at 30 September 2013

Welfare Reform: Key Updates November

- Following a meeting between council officers and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in November 2013, the Council now understands that the earliest that Universal Credit will be introduced in South Yorkshire will be April 2015.
- A Universal Credit Project Group has been established to enable the Council and its customers to prepare for the introduction of UC. On-going progress updates will be provided to the Scrutiny Committee.
- Following an initial trial, the Income Management Unit of Council Housing Services are continuing to work in close partnership with the Sheffield Credit Union to set up budgeting accounts for tenants affected by welfare reforms. A budget has been established to fund the initial setting up of the budgeting accounts. Tenants will be supported to gain budgeting and money management skills, which will in most cases allow them to operate a normal current account in the future, at no further cost to the Housing Revenue Account.
- Work has now commenced to review the Local Assistance Scheme design and delivery options for Phase 2 of the scheme (from 2015/16). This will include consideration of future options for the scheme, ensuring that the emerging scheme is in line with the wider policy of the Council, including the vision set out by the Sheffield Fairness Commission.
- From October 2013 onwards, people aged between 16 and 64 who currently receive Disability Living Allowance (DLA) were due to start to be reassessed for a new benefit called Personal Independence Payments (PIP). The timetable for PIP replacing DLA has now been changed. All claimants receiving DLA in South Yorkshire will now continue to claim DLA until at least October 2015.¹ From October 2015 claimants receiving DLA will start to be reassessed for PIP and by October 2017 all existing DLA claimants will have been reassessed for PIP.

¹ It is important to note that since June 2013 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has no longer accepted **new claims** for DLA from anyone aged 16 to 64, unless they are making a renewal claim from a fixed term DLA award that is due to expire before 17 March 2014. These claimants will re-claim DLA, and will be reassessed for PIP at a later stage.

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