

EX86. WELFARE REFORM UPDATE

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Neighbourhood Services and the Chief Finance Officer providing an update on how the Council is responding to the welfare reform changes.

The report provided an update on:-

- Size criteria mitigation
- Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) (non size criteria cases)
- DHP and universal credit
- Single fraud investigation and the introduction of the Fraud and Error Service
- The Welfare Funds (Scotland) Bill;
- The introduction and role of Tenancy Sustainment officers
- Research carried out to understand customer support requirements;
- The introduction of a pilot project to improve support for customers with complex needs (Buildings Resilience);
- The roll out of Universal Credit and the roll out of Universal Support – Delivered Locally; and
- The future of Housing Benefit in light of the publication of the Smith Commission report.

In regard to size criteria mitigation, the Scottish Government had significantly increased the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) funding available to Local Authorities with a commitment to enable social landlords to fully mitigate the housing benefit loss in 2014/15. In September 2014, £12m was made available to 20 Councils including Falkirk Council. A further £3m will be available to Local Authorities in May 2015 when the actual DHP spend for 2014/15 is known.

The projected Housing Benefit loss due to size criteria restrictions is currently projected to be £1,345,017. The total confirmed funding for 2014/15 is £1,213,695, resulting in a projected shortfall of £131,322. At the current time there has been no confirmation that funding will be made available to offset the projected shortfall.

Decision

The Executive agreed:-

- (1) to note the content of the report and the future changes to benefits and the impact this will have on Council services;
- (2) to note the update on size criteria mitigation and that the Discretionary Housing Payments Policy approved in May 2013 will not apply for cases relating to size criteria restrictions as described in section 2 of the report;
- (3) to note the findings of the work undertaken to understand our customer requirements and that a report on the outcomes of the work arising from this report will come back to Members in due course;
- (4) to take the opportunity to attend an Elected Members' Mental Health Awareness session; and

- (5) to note the timescales for roll out of Universal Credit and to engage with the Department of Work and Pensions to explore how Universal Support – Delivered Locally could be delivered and the implications for Council services and citizens in receipt of support.