

Welfare Reform Update – March 2014

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report is a follow up to the Welfare Reform update given to Resources PDS in September 2013.
- 1.2 At the panel meeting we will have a series of short presentations relating to the latest spend against the various welfare support budgets; the emerging impacts of the reforms to-date and the actions we are taking to meet the challenges ahead.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 In September we reported that spending was running slightly below budget for Welfare Support and Discretionary Housing Payments, we highlighted an increase in rent arrears with our Social Landlords and an increasing threat of evictions although it was too soon to draw conclusions about the overall impacts.
- 2.2 The message is still somewhat confusing, although we are close to spending the budget for both Welfare Support and Discretionary Housing payments this year and these are detailed in the report. The Welfare Support budget has been confirmed at the same level for 2014/15 but is to cease as a ring fenced DWP grant after 14/15 and whilst there is likely to be provision within RSG settlement it will be necessary to decide if / how future funding for such a scheme should be provided.
- 2.3 Curo who are our major Registered Social Landlord suggest that Welfare Reform has been a lifeline to some of their tenants and has enabled those tenants to keep a roof over their heads.
- 2.4 They also tell us that there has been a marked increase in debt relief orders this year, arrears continue to grow and there are an increased number of tenants subject to eviction proceedings.
- 2.5 Food banks usage continues to grow as do other innovative ways that the Welfare Support team are delivering support.
- 2.6 Overall Council Tax Collection is on course to emulate previous year performance of around 99% in year collection with relatively good collection rates from those customers paying Council Tax for the first time at around 73% at the end of February 2014.

- 2.7 Some of the Welfare Support fund has been used to help people struggling to pay Council Tax and this has increased since the last report as expected
- 2.8 Bath has followed the National trend when it comes to the reducing number of people claiming job seekers allowance, which is good news. However, this needs to be taken in context with the fact that the number of Housing Benefit Claimants has remained static, despite the introduction of Capping, under occupancy rules and a restriction on uprating. Indeed the spending on Housing Benefits continues to rise. A closer analysis of the job market shows that in actual fact the number of full time jobs has reduced and the increase is being met from part time work.
- 2.9 The changes to Income Tax contributions has put more money in the pocket of working people, but for those on tax credits, there has not been a big benefit and this contributes to the effect on people struggling to meet a rising cost of living
- 2.10 Evidence from analysis of tenants facing pre eviction proceedings does suggest that whilst they also are likely to have Council Tax arrears these are people who are no longer on out of work benefits, but people who are struggling in low paid jobs with significant debt related problems.
- 2.11 The Connecting Families team is now operating at full capacity and is proving a successful solution for some of our most vulnerable families, having claimed about 50% of the rewards on a payment by results approach at the half way point in the project 107 families have been included on the scheme and a total of 8 families have now been signed off the programme completely.
- 2.11 The Universal Credit Pilot has now come to an end here in Bath, it highlighted the real benefits of working together with the DWP and produced some real success stories. However, the Job Centre has been unable to continue the same level of its support to joint working since December because Bath Job centre went live with Universal Credit National roll out on Monday the 24th February and resources have had to be channelled in to preparing for this.
- 2.12 Universal Credit in Bath has at this stage only been rolled out to a small cohort of claimants; these are single people who are new claimants to Job Seekers Allowance. This cohort is set to expand over the next year and will start to include couples and families. The Council's role in supporting this is limited and we have recently signed up to a local delivery partnership which will be closely monitored
- 2.13 Members may recall that the Council is now a partner in the Governments Transformation Network programme which is sponsored by CLG and the Cabinet office and we are using this to develop a

business case for reviewing the way we deliver Welfare Support across Bath & North East Somerset to enable people to get in to sustainable work. To-date we have run workshops to look at the Customer journey and we are working with a wide range of partners & stakeholders to develop a joined up and innovative solution to this problem.

- 2.14 In a recent visit to Bath Job Centre Lord Freud commended the work we had done as a Pilot authority and approved of the model we use for addressing the needs of our most vulnerable clients, in particular our partnership working in our One Stop Shops and he indicated this may be a preferred model for Local Support Services in the future.
- 2.15 Early indications from the work we have been doing suggest that co-location with key partners including the DWP will be beneficial, as would an expansion of the model used by Connecting Families for our most vulnerable members of society. The Governance for this should sit within a Local Support Service Framework and could potentially fall under the remit of the Health & Well Being Board.

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3.0 Council Tax Support Scheme

3.1 Members will recall that in November 2012 we set a new tax base for the current year. This tax base calculation took in to account the fact that Council Tax Benefits were being abolished and replaced by a local discretionary scheme of Council Tax Support.

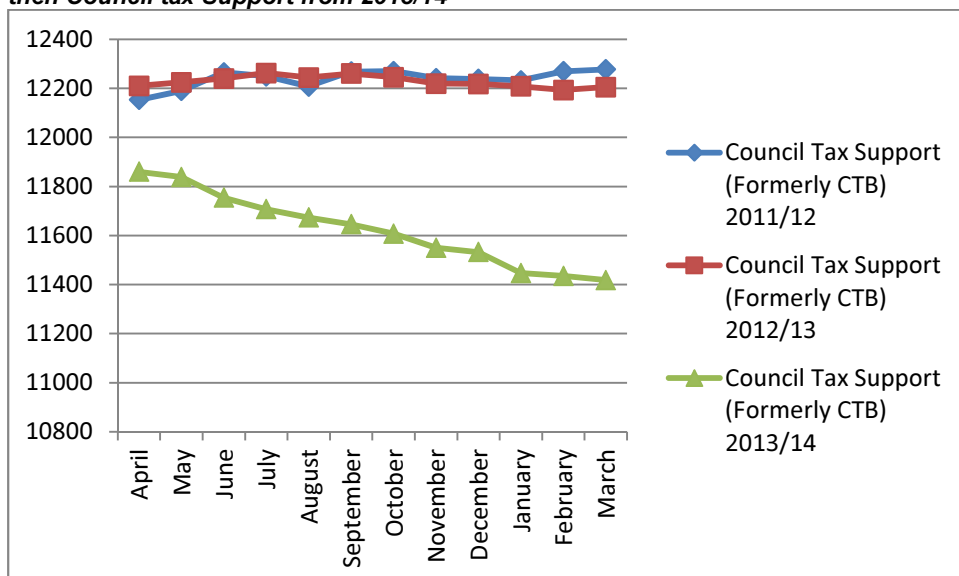
3.2 Bath & North East Somerset had to find a shortfall in funding of £1.5million and set a tax base and support scheme to reflect this. The scheme set out to protect the most vulnerable and encourage people in to work.

3.3 *The Council Tax Support scheme was agreed by full council on the 8th November 2012, more details about the scheme can be found at <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/council-tax-benefits-and-grants/benefits/council-tax-support-april-2013>*

| | |
|--|----------------|
| In 2012/13 we awarded Council Tax Benefit in the sum of :- | £10,500,000.00 |
| As at 31/08/13 the Council Tax Control Account shows that we have awarded Council Tax Support of:- | £9,241,202.94 |
| As at 28/02/14 the Council Tax Control Account shows that we have awarded Council Tax Support of:- | £ 9,152,018.02 |
| Overall funding provision for the Council & Major preceptors in 2013/14 amounts to:- | £9,419,000.00 |

3.4 The total number of claimants eligible for Council Tax Support has reduced over the year; and due to the very good payment rates amongst all client groups there has not been an adverse impact on the collection fund and this has enabled an higher collection rate to be assumed in the calculation of this year's tax base which in turn helps to maintain a Council Tax freeze

This graph shows the number of households receiving Council tax Benefits in 2011 to 2013 and then Council tax Support from 2013/14



| Period covered to the end of: | All Council Tax | | Non CTR Accounts | | Prev Max CTB | | Prev Non Max CTB | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Collection Rate 2012/13 | Collection Rate 2013/14 | Collection Rate 2012/13 | Collection Rate 2013/14 | Collection Rate 2012/13 | Collection Rate 2013/14 | Collection Rate 2012/13 | Collection Rate 2013/14 |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| April | 11.13 | 11.22 | | | 0 | | | |
| June | 30.31 | 29.87 | | | 0 | | | |
| August | 49.09 | 48.58 | | | 0 | | | |
| October | 68.20 | 67.52 | | | 0 | | | |
| | | 86.02 | | 86.37% | | 54.48% | | 68.01% |
| December | 87.20 | 86.30 | | 87.35% | 0 | 56.80% | | 71.93% |
| February | 95.50 | 98.31 | | 98.53% | 0 | 73.49% | | 88.85% |
| Out-turn | 99.00 | | | | 0 | | | |

3.5 At the November meeting of full Council it was agreed that in cases of hardship we should provide temporary support through use of our Social fund allocation.

3.6 This fund is administered by the [Welfare Support Team](#) and is assessed on a case by case basis.

| | Number of discretionary awards for Council Tax Support | Amount Paid to date |
|---------|--|---------------------|
| Sept 13 | 44 | £4,490.67 |
| Feb 14 | 160 | £23,347.90 |

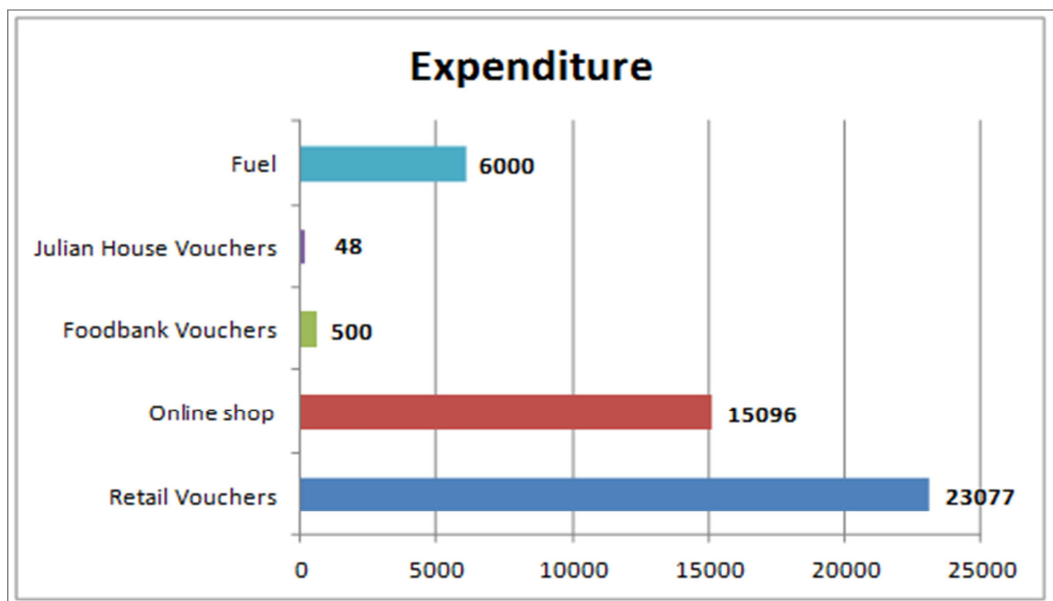
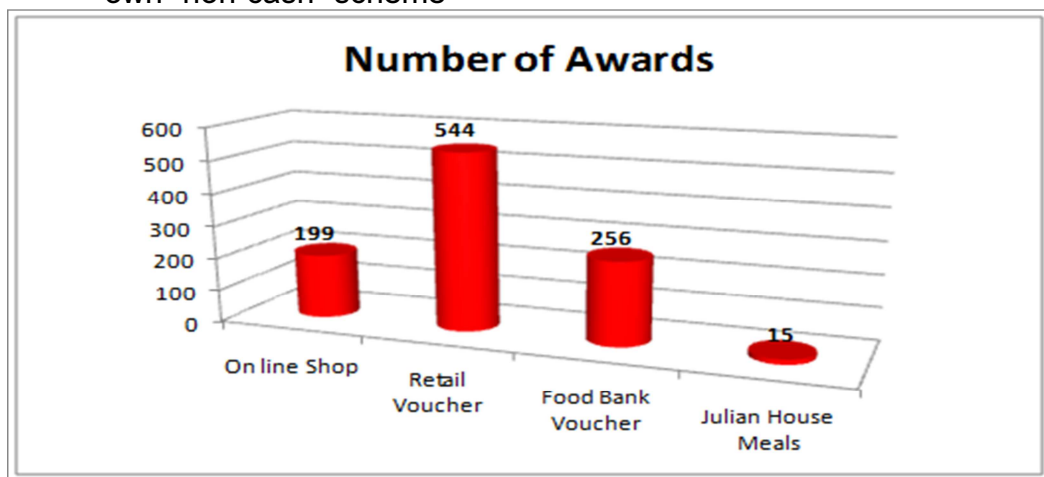
(Funded from £249,260 Social Fund Allocation)

3.7 The majority of awards granted are to assist those customers who:-

- Face delays or changes to their DWP income
- Referred by CAB/Reach due to debt etc.
- Cover a period of hardship

4.0 Social Fund

- 4.1 The council was allocated £249,260 by the DWP as its share of the Social Fund this year and although there were no mandatory responsibilities to provide the same or similar provision to the one previously administered by the DWP we did at very short notice set up our own local welfare Support Scheme. *More details about the scheme can be found at: - <http://www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/council-tax-benefits-and-grants/benefits/welfare-support-scheme>*
- 4.2 The Scheme is administered within the Customer Services Directorate by our Welfare Support Team.
- 4.3 In addition to the Council Tax hardship awards already mentioned the scheme is in two sections, discretionary awards to cover short term emergency Support and non-emergency support for basic household items.
- 4.4 **Emergency Support to cover daily crisis** - This covers elements of the social fund previously administered by DWP and now part of our own “non-cash” scheme



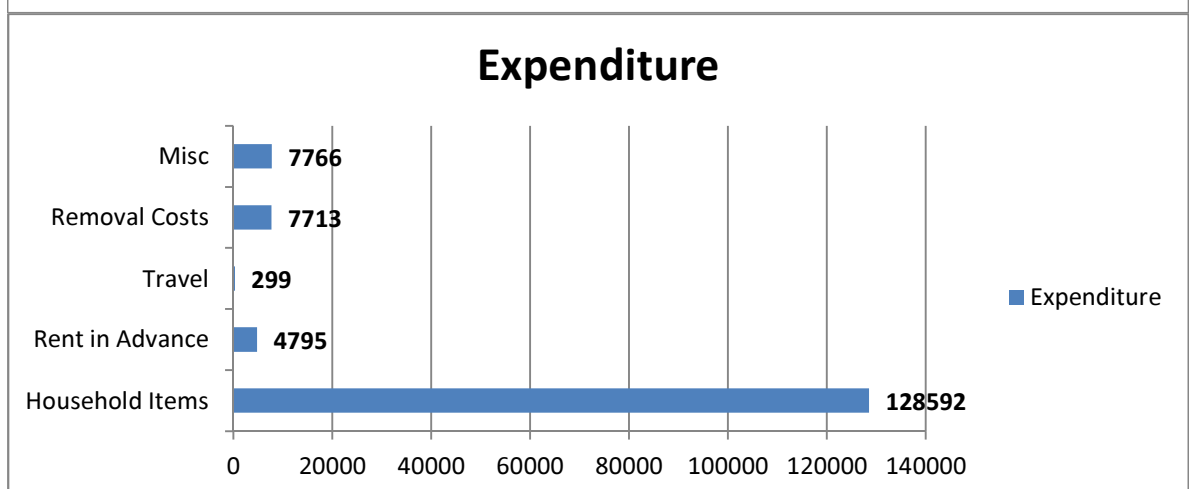
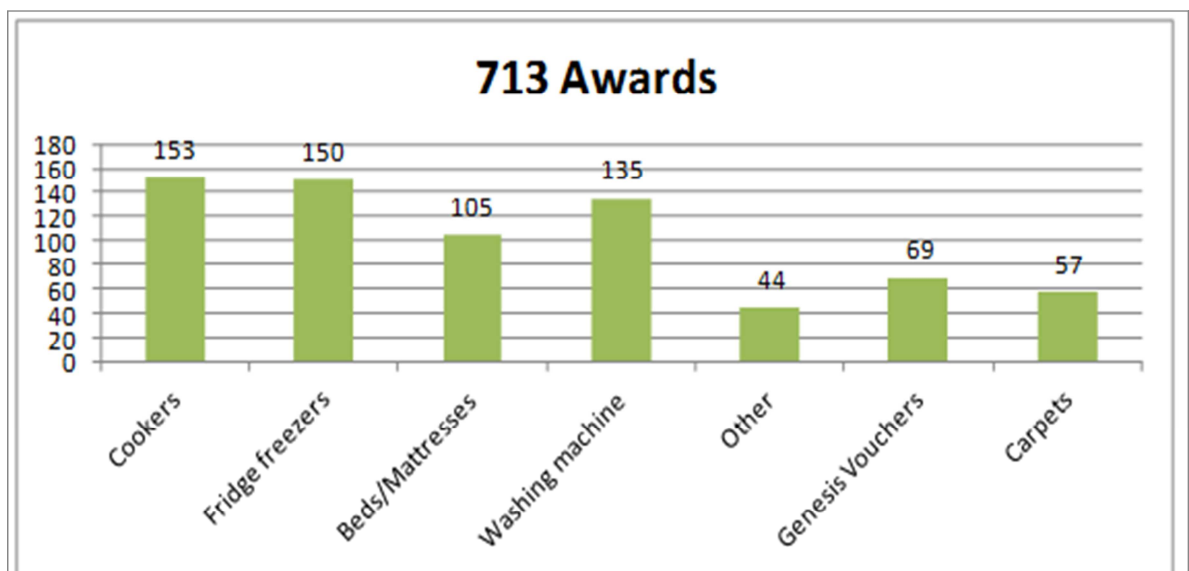
4.5 The majority of claims continue to be made by DWP customers and those who appear to live hand to mouth on a daily basis. Most applications result from:

- DWP sanctions
- Debt problems
- Poor budgeting skills
- Loan repayments
- Irresponsible spending

4.6 Conditions for financial help normally include:

- Money Advice
- Bristol Credit Union
- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
- Reach/Drugs & Homelessness initiative (DHI)

4.7 Non-Emergency Support



- 4.8 Basic household items are purchased to support the homeless and those moving to affordable housing. This is deemed essential support to those who have been placed within accommodation with no means to vital household possessions.
- 4.9 Where possible we use local suppliers and charities such as Sofa Project, St Johns, Genesis Furniture Project and St Monica Trust etc. to reduce or share the costs. The welfare Support Team has agreed with Genesis Furniture Project a voucher scheme whereby customers are awarded an amount to spend on essential items. Quite often the Genesis Furniture Project will add additional items free of charge to support the needs of the customer.
- 4.10 We have also been working closely with the Council's Recycling Team to reuse suitable items of furniture brought into our Recycling Centres. The project aims to make furniture available to people the Council are assisting to set up home or for those trying to maintain their place in the community.
- 4.11 Although it's early days, it is exciting to think that a good proportion of the high volume of furniture brought to the sites for recycling will instead directly benefit local residents.

- **Budget**

| Number of discretionary awards | Annual Budget | Amount Paid to date | Average award Per Claim |
|--------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| 1662 | £249,260.00 | *£211,235.59 | £127 |

** includes the £23,347.90 for Council Tax Support cases*

- 4.12 In order to prevent the retail voucher scheme from being abused, Bath Foodbank Centre has agreed that the Welfare Support Team can issue foodbank vouchers as alternative means to those who may not use the retail vouchers for the purpose to which they are intended. In order to provide on-going support to the Bath Foodbank Centre the Welfare Support Team will continue to support emergency supplies.

- **Number of Refusals 1130**

- 4.13 Principal reasons for refusing support are mainly excess income, DWP sanction, lack of evidence or non-acceptance/compliant of conditions. There are also those who only want cash, therefore rejecting all other offers of help

- **Partners/stakeholders**

- 4.14 The Welfare Support Team has attended many internal and external meetings to promote the Welfare Support Provisions. The team has

identified areas of joint working and shared cost, also acknowledged who and what can provide similar or alternative means of support. There is still a lot more departments and organisation that would benefit from joint working and the intentions are to meet as soon as possible.

4.15 The team are currently working alongside

- CAB
- Reach/DHI
- Curo
- Bristol Credit Union
- Money Advice
- Freeways
- Sirona
- Adult Care
- Children centres
- Family Information Service
- Housing

5.0 Size Criteria

5.1 The issues with size criteria were well reported in September, this chart shows how this has changed over time...

| Date | Total No. of Claims | Change | 25% | | | 14% | | |
|------------|---------------------|--------|---------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| | | | No. of claims | Total Weekly Restriction | Average Weekly Restriction | No. of claims | Total Weekly Restriction | Average Weekly Restriction |
| 01/04/2013 | 868 | | 165 | £4,602.51 | £27.89 | 703 | £10,470.88 | £14.89 |
| 01/05/2013 | 851 | 17 | 160 | £4,474.26 | £27.96 | 691 | £10,300.73 | £14.91 |
| 01/06/2013 | 841 | 10 | 154 | £4,315.39 | £28.02 | 687 | £10,235.15 | £14.90 |
| 01/07/2013 | 835 | 6 | 149 | £4,186.43 | £28.10 | 686 | £10,231.03 | £14.91 |
| 01/08/2013 | 825 | 10 | 145 | £4,069.90 | £28.07 | 680 | £10,138.28 | £14.91 |
| 01/09/2013 | 810 | 15 | 142 | £3,992.24 | £28.11 | 668 | £9,939.58 | £14.88 |
| 01/10/2013 | 806 | 4 | 137 | £3,864.47 | £28.21 | 669 | £9,983.75 | £14.92 |
| 01/11/2013 | 797 | 9 | 141 | £3,988.06 | £28.28 | 656 | £9,841.83 | £15.00 |
| 01/12/2013 | 734 | 63 | 121 | £3,436.76 | £28.40 | 613 | £9,217.94 | £15.04 |
| 01/01/2014 | 727 | 7 | 121 | £3,417.88 | £28.25 | 606 | £9,129.58 | £15.07 |
| 01/02/2014 | 727 | 0 | 123 | £3,477.78 | £28.27 | 604 | £9,091.50 | £15.05 |
| 01/03/2014 | 714 | 13 | 114 | £3,225.16 | £28.29 | 599 | £9,032.55 | £15.08 |

- 5.2 There has been a lot of press coverage about this issue and some successful appeals have led to some cases being reclassified.
- 5.3 The number of cases affected has now reduced to 714 and this is due to a variety of reasons, from people moving in to more appropriate accommodation through to clarification of circumstances leading to a change in the classification.
- 5.4 The reason for the reduction of 63 cases between November and December is largely due to the exemption that was uncovered by an appeal case which meant that people who had been in continuous receipt of Housing benefit since April 1996 should be exempt from the new rules, this loophole has now been closed and the exemption will cease from the 2nd March 2014.
- 5.5 As previously noted some of these cases have been supported with Discretionary Housing Payments whilst they seek alternative accommodation.

6.0 Housing Benefit Cap

- 6.1 The Housing Benefit Capping rules were introduced in Bath on the 31st July 2013 and as shown in the table below it has only affected a small number of households. Original DWP estimates suggested this number would be much higher but through early pro-active work (Some through the Universal Credit Pilot) and cleansing of the data the numbers were reduced before go live. There was then a steady increase as cases were verified. This now seems to have stabilised.

This table shows the number of cases impacted by the Benefit Cap and the reasons for movement off the Cap

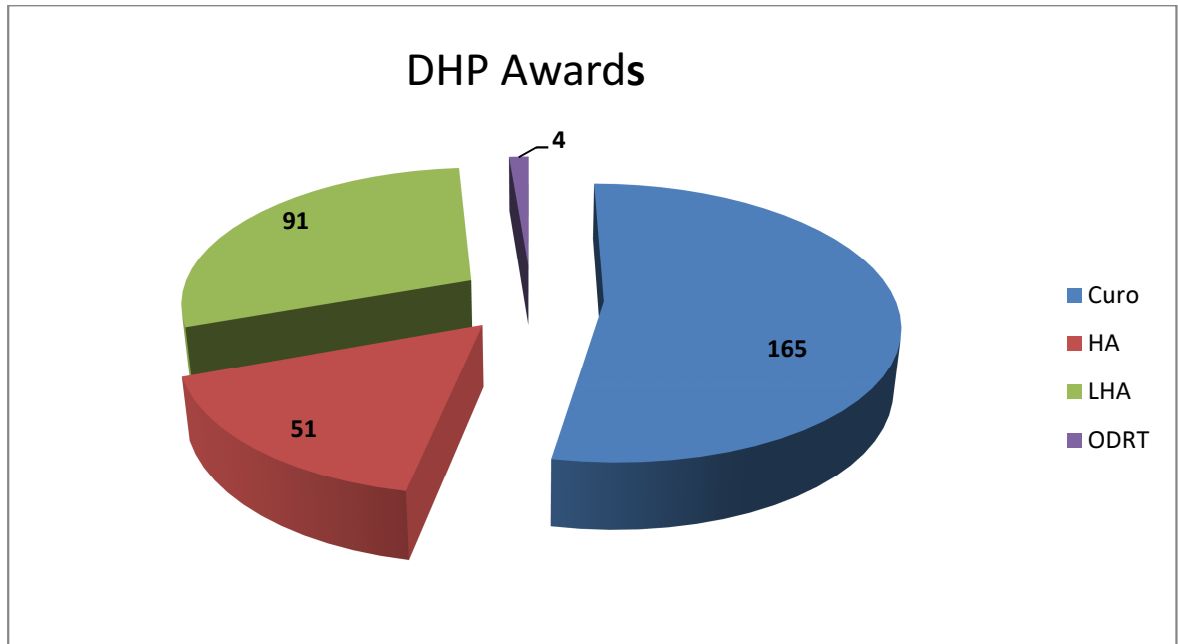
| Date | Total No. of Claims |
|------------|---------------------|
| 01/08/2013 | 2 |
| 01/09/2013 | 6 |
| 01/10/2013 | 12 |
| 01/11/2013 | 12 |
| 01/12/2013 | 11 |
| 01/01/2014 | 10 |
| 01/02/2014 | 11 |
| 01/03/2014 | 14 |

| Reasons for Cap ending | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Started work | 3 |
| Dependant moved out - now under cap | 1 |
| Partner moved in - working | 1 |
| Partner now receiving PIP | 1 |
| Moved out of area | 1 |
| Rent decreased | 1 |

- 6.1 The Welfare Support Team have carried out 12 visits with a further 3 appointments and 2 reclaims as a means to addressing employability and hardship issues.
- 6.2 £17,147.16 has been awarded to 10 customers who are impacted by the Benefit Cap through the local Welfare Support fund.
- 6.3 From the visits carried out, 3 customers have returned to work, 3 are actively seeking employment and 1 has demonstrated an interest in some form of training.

7.0 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

7.1 Number of Awards



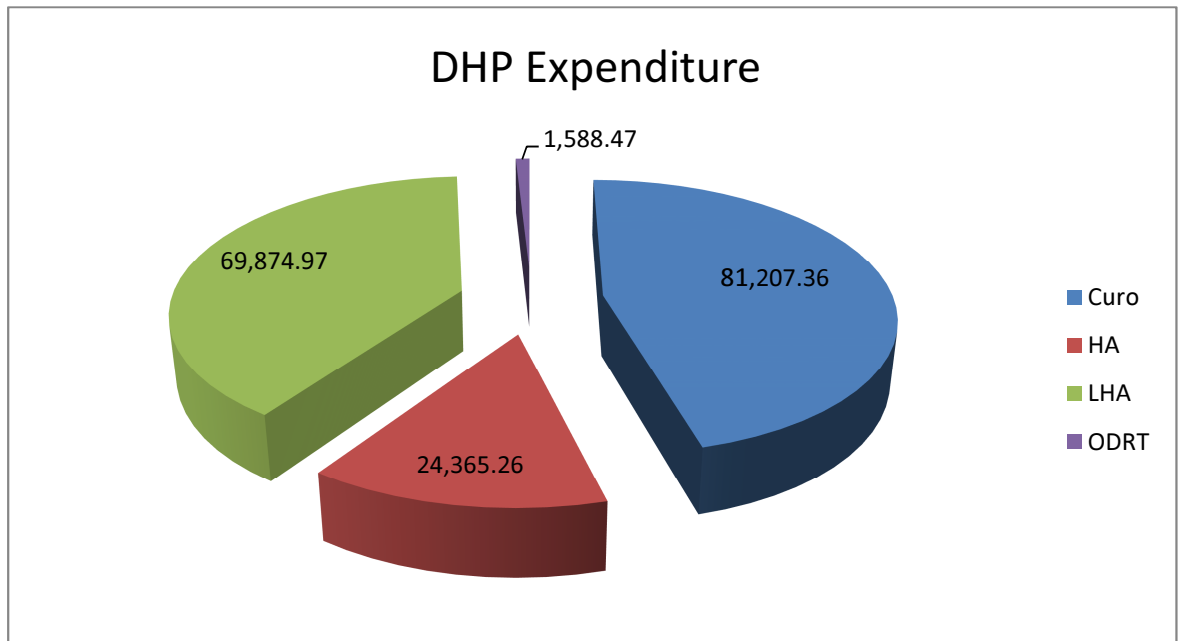
LHA – Local Housing Allowance claimants

HA – Housing Association claimants

CURO – Curo claimants

ODRT – Private sector claimants not subject to Local Housing Allowance, eg) cases subject to individual rent officer decisions

7.2 Paid to Date



7.3 Current expenditure is on a par with the predicted amount at this point in time; funds remain available to provide on-going support to cover Benefit Cap and Universal Credit claims.

| | Number of DHP Awards | Total Amount paid out | Average Award Per claim | Annual Budget | Remaining Budget |
|----------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------|
| Sept 13 | 196 | £94,434.82 | £463 | £243,479.15 | £149,044.33 |
| March 14 | 311 | £194,635.42 | £625 | £243,479.00 | £48,843.58 |

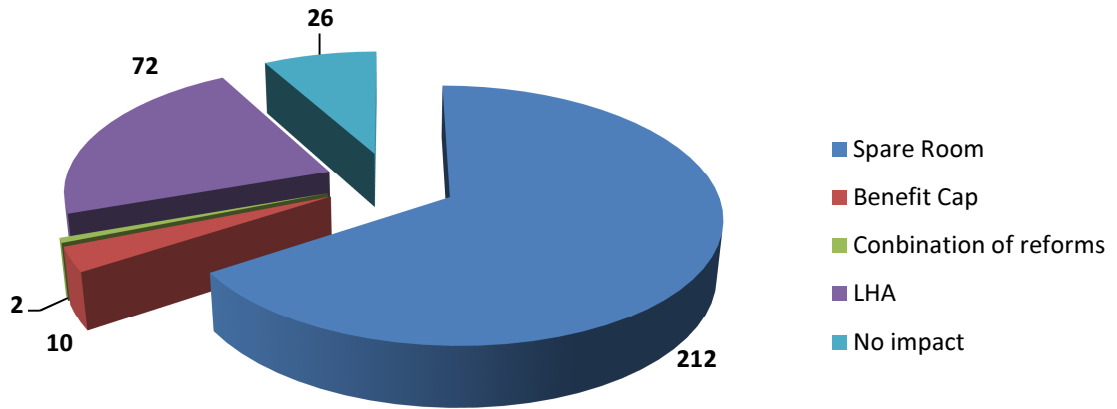
7.4 Discretionary awards are provided to cover a particular point of hardship. Decisions are based upon:

- Income versus expenditure (disabled income is taken into account and offset by any care/mobility costs)
- Level/period of need
- Medical/health factors
- Referred by an organisation and supported by evidence
- Other factors such as, fleeing domestic violence etc.
- Compliance to any conditions that may be attached to award (debt advice, moving etc.)

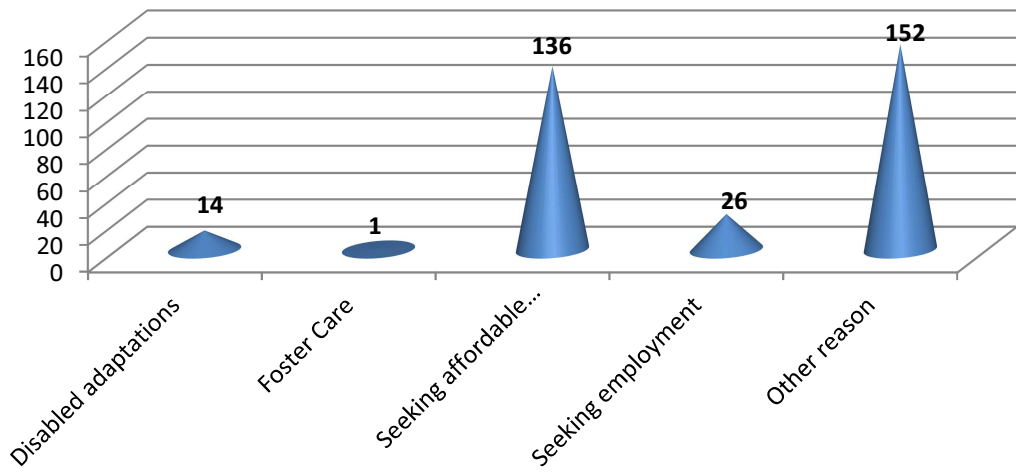
7.5 Period of payment can vary depending on a person's set of circumstances, financial help maybe provided for longer than 13 weeks if they can demonstrate/evidence that their circumstances will change/improve (examples – moving, employment, benefit change, dependants birthdays etc.).

7.6 Due to several welfare changes since 1 April 2013, discretionary housing payments now cover a number of housing benefit restrictions.

DHP Reasons



DHP Outcomes



8.0 *Universal Credit*

- 8.1 Universal Credit is the cornerstone of this Government's Welfare Reforms, it is a well-publicised change in the way Benefits are administered, which aims to bring together 6 existing Benefits in to one single assessment.
- 8.2 The implementation of this process was due to commence National Roll out in October this year but due to its complexity it has been plagued by delays, primarily in relation to the IT. The Universal Credit programme's main concern is that it lands safely and securely.
- 8.3 Bath Job Centre went live as a National rollout site on the 24th February 2014 and is only one of 10 sites across the Country operating the new system. Initially the customer base only applies to new claimants for job seekers but will expand to include couples and families over the next twelve months.
- 8.4 DWP will present an update to Members at the meeting, setting out the experiences from the first few weeks of operation and explaining the latest plans for expanding the claimant groups.
- 8.5 The Council's role in supporting the DWP is captured in our recently agreed Local Delivery partnership which indicates that the Council will:-
- Provide support to UC Service Centre staff around housing issues that may arise.
 - Support for claimants to get on-line and stay on line.
 - Manual processing for Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
 - Support for claimants with complex needs and in particular those who require personal budgeting support.
 - Work with Universal Credit Programme in preparing landlords'.
- 8.6 In providing this support the Council will be able to invoice the DWP for any work done under these headings to an agreed budget limit.

9.0 Housing Services – Housing Options and Homelessness

9.1 The Housing Register was fully reviewed in May 2013, there are now 4621 households on the register. The number increases, on average, by approximately one hundred households per month.

Households on the Housing Register February 2014 split into bedroom need:

»

9.2 Since the spare room under occupation subsidy has been removed, there has been an increasing demand for smaller accommodation. The highest demand is for one bedroom properties, at over 58%.

9.3 The Housing Register gives priority to social housing tenants who need to downsize to smaller properties. Currently fifty eight households have priority to downsize as a result of the removal of the spare room subsidy.

9.4 Some Social Landlords in the West of England are now asking for advance rent from tenants on benefits before the start of new tenancies. Advance rent may be required to offset the risk of losing rent which is being paid directly to tenants under Universal Credit. Some Social Landlords are also seeking to limit access to Affordable Rent Tenancies with an affordability test.

9.5 There has been month by month increase in people seeking Housing Advice from Housing Services. Prevention work has meant that this has not led to an increase in Homeless Applications. The most significant reason for people presenting as homeless between April – December 2013 was notices and evictions for private rented tenants. Homelessness has been prevented by finding alternative accommodation, negotiating with landlords and use of discretionary funding.

9.6 The number of rough sleepers has increased since 2013, the annual estimate at the end of November identified thirty three (33), up from twenty two (22) in 2012. The increased demand for one bedroom properties in social housing as well as the reduction in the availability of properties within the LHA has exacerbated this problem.

9.7 Our major RSL, Curo has commented that...

- *the impact of welfare reform will be cumulative over the coming years – our rents are going up at RPI (3.7%, plus £2 if they are not at target rent – **this is a formula set by the government**), council tax support is reduced and other benefit uplifts are limited to 1% - so people will have less money in their pockets to pay their rent or Council Tax. All this at a time when there is a proliferation of high-cost lenders who can get money in your account in minutes. We predict that demand will increase.*
- *We are very concerned about the prospect of the welfare support funding ending & would urge the Council to consider what alternatives they will put in place. Customers who are working with the CAB on average have debts that are 10 times their monthly income – and we predict that this will get worse **unless action is taken to better regulate these lenders.***
- *There has been a marked increase in Debt Relief Orders this year*
- *We are also very concerned at the current proposal to restrict customers housing costs under UC if they are deemed to be working too few hours & no Housing Benefit for under 25's.*
- *Arrears are increasing **and we are finding that many of our peers are reporting increased arrears this year.***
- *We have re-written our arrears procedures so that they escalate more quickly*
- *At the same time we are increasing our pre-tenancy checks and will have a much more detailed affordability check in place – means we will be saying no to customers who cannot afford to pay the rent and service charges.*
- *We are finding increasing numbers of customer's are struggling to pay "affordable rents" – which is the tenure that all current new-builds and a percentage of relets have to be let on – these are 80% of the market rent. **Affordable rents were introduced when grants were reduced.***
- *We have increased our in-house provision and commissions with advice providers.*
- *800 customers in BANES are at Notice Seeking Possession Stage or higher*
- *124 of these customers have a court order that they are in breach of **and our account managers are working with them to remedy the breach. If they do not engage then their home is at serious risk.***

10.0 *Connecting Families*

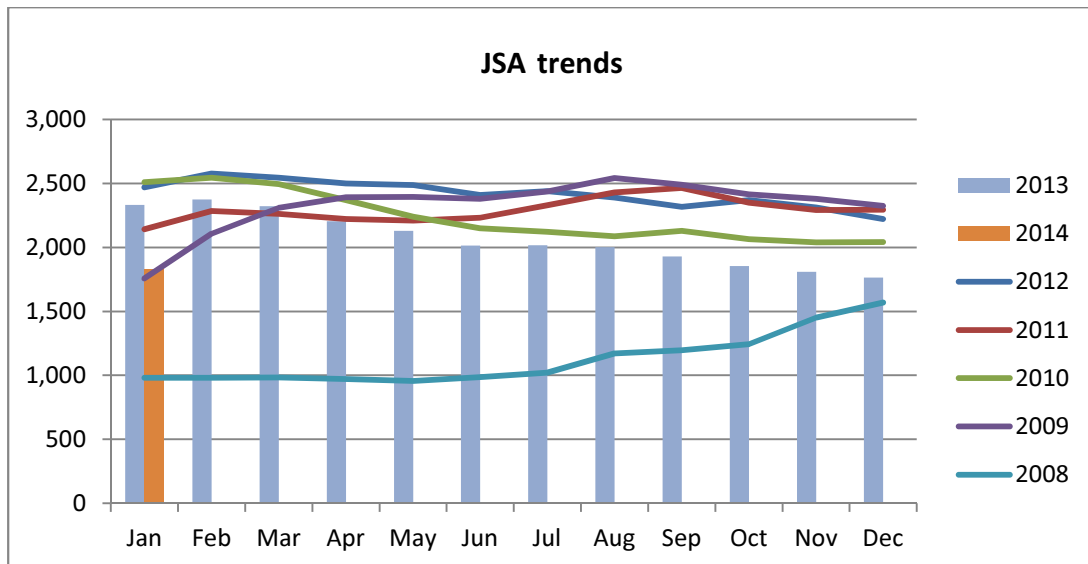
- 10.1 The last report outlined the work done by Connecting Families team and it is now developing in to a really effective model for dealing with some of our most vulnerable families who are identified in the programme as meeting 2 or 3 national criterions.
- 10.2 Connecting Families Team have submitted a second payment by results claim to the Troubled Families Unit, bringing the total to 107 claims which equates to 50% of the total target for the 3 year programme.
- 10.3 To date we have claimed for the following outcomes:-
- 81 education/crime/anti-social behaviour
 - 26 continuous employment
 - 10 Progress to work
- 10.4 Out of the 43 families the core team have worked with, 8 have been closed. These have been given a sustainable action plan and linked to other agencies and services they can access. They can always come back to us for help if needed.
- 10.5 As part of their profile on the family, key workers now complete outcome stars directly from the scaling questions on the action plan. This is more visual and helps the family to visibly see their progress over time, and to identify any areas that are not improving.
- 10.6 One of the key successes of the programme has been the use of a small core team and the adoption of matrix working approach with partners; Curo are already working effectively as part of the matrix team and have officers on the ground tackling the issues. They have learnt that “not one size fits all” and workers have to approach families in different ways.
- 10.7 Paula Bromley who is leading this work is currently looking into recruiting some volunteers from Bath Christian Action Network (BathCAN) and Southside Family Project to work as volunteers doing light touch work with our families when the core team key worker closes.
- 10.8 There is potential to upscale this project to 2020 and increasing the criterion used to bring in more vulnerable groups, this approach could also be linked to the work being done with the Transformation network and offers a real opportunity to develop a One council approach to our most vulnerable residents not just those with young children.

11.0 Other

11.1 Employment and Economic Activity

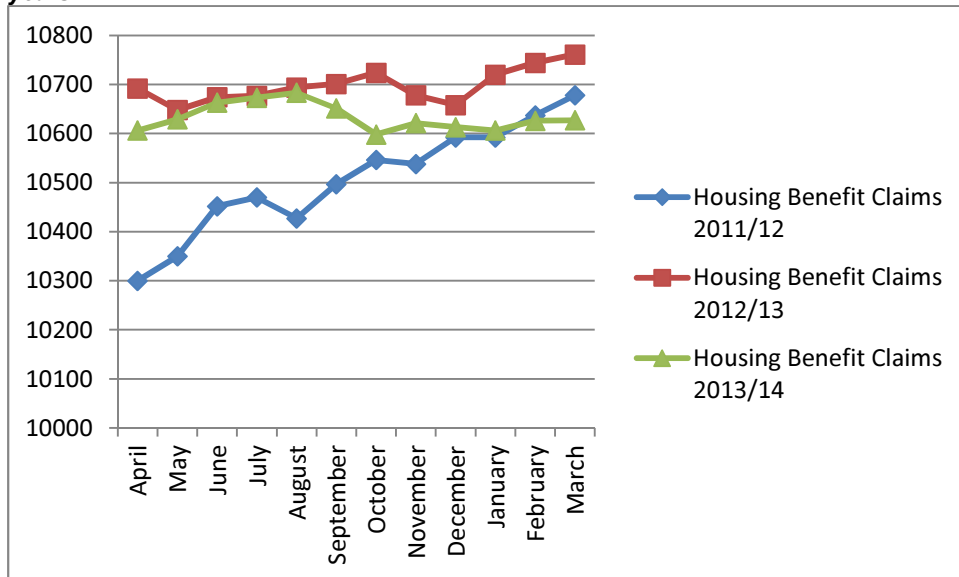
JSA Figures since start of 2009 Recession

| | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | change from 2012 | change from 2013 |
|------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------------------|------------------|
| Jan | 982 | 1756 | 2508 | 2142 | 2468 | 2331 | 1827 | -137 | -504 |
| Feb | 981 | 2107 | 2544 | 2284 | 2577 | 2373 | | -204 | -2373 |
| Mar | 984 | 2310 | 2495 | 2262 | 2545 | 2321 | | -224 | -2321 |
| Apr | 972 | 2391 | 2369 | 2222 | 2500 | 2203 | | -297 | -2203 |
| May | 955 | 2395 | 2238 | 2209 | 2486 | 2130 | | -356 | -2130 |
| Jun | 987 | 2379 | 2148 | 2231 | 2410 | 2015 | | -395 | -2015 |
| Jul | 1020 | 2437 | 2122 | 2330 | 2438 | 2016 | | -422 | -2016 |
| Aug | 1170 | 2541 | 2086 | 2430 | 2389 | 2002 | | -387 | -2002 |
| Sep | 1197 | 2488 | 2129 | 2465 | 2317 | 1929 | | -388 | -1929 |
| Oct | 1245 | 2415 | 2065 | 2350 | 2368 | 1855 | | -513 | -1855 |
| Nov | 1452 | 2379 | 2038 | 2292 | 2311 | 1809 | | -502 | -1809 |
| Dec | 1570 | 2324 | 2041 | 2293 | 2221 | 1765 | | -456 | -1765 |



11.2 Housing Benefits

This graph shows the number of households in receipt of Housing Benefits over the last three years.



11.3 The number of live Housing Benefit claims is now at similar levels to three years ago. Anecdotally we believe this is linked to the fact that most new jobs are low paid and part time and also that more people qualify for Housing benefit because of increasing rents.

11.4 Bath Foodbank

| | Vouchers Redeemed | Adults | Children | Total |
|---------------|-------------------|--------|----------|--------|
| Oct 13-Jan 14 | 554 | 697 | 291 | 988 |
| Oct 12-Jan 13 | 553 | 753 | 338 | 1091 |
| Increase | 1 | -56 | -47 | -103 |
| Increase % | 0.18% | -7.44% | -13.91% | -9.44% |

11.5 Wards with greatest numbers of vouchers issued: Twerton (152), Southdown (118), Abbey (101) with 172 unknown location.

11.6 Context – *'Bath Food bank use has stabilised over the last 6 months. Some months are up and some down. We have done some work on cutting down on multiple use which may partly be the explanation.'*

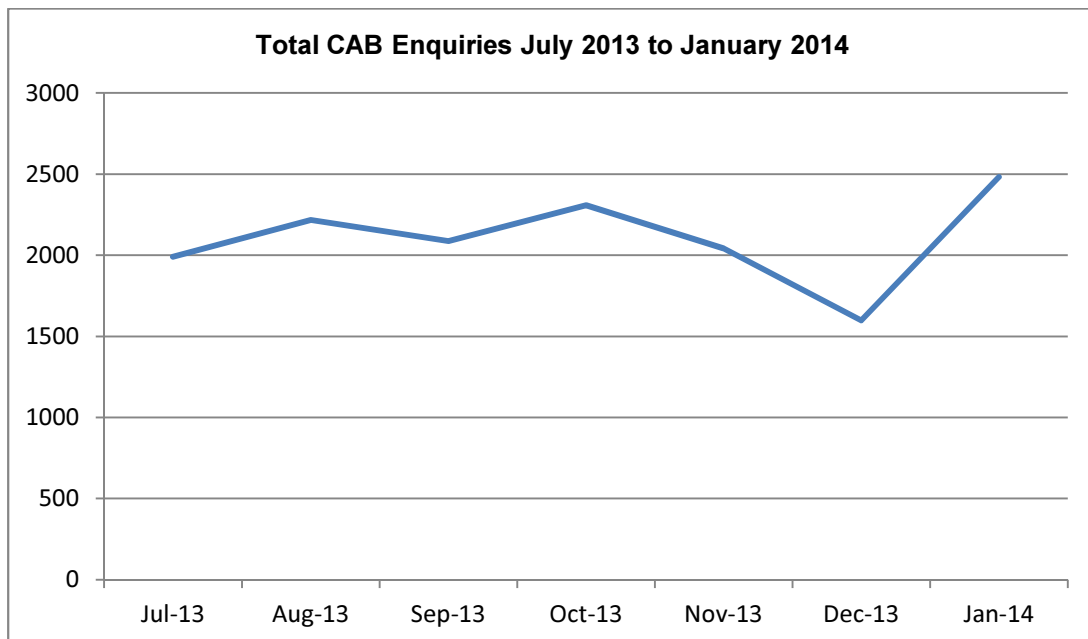
11.7 This historic increase can be seen in the 220% increase in referrals between Q1 2012/13 and Q1 2013/14 (as presented to Panel in a previous update).

11.8 This comparison includes food parcels given out by [Lifeline](#) – they give out much smaller food parcels to those whose lives are much more chaotic, particularly drug and alcohol misuse. Food bank gives to those experiencing a temporary crisis.

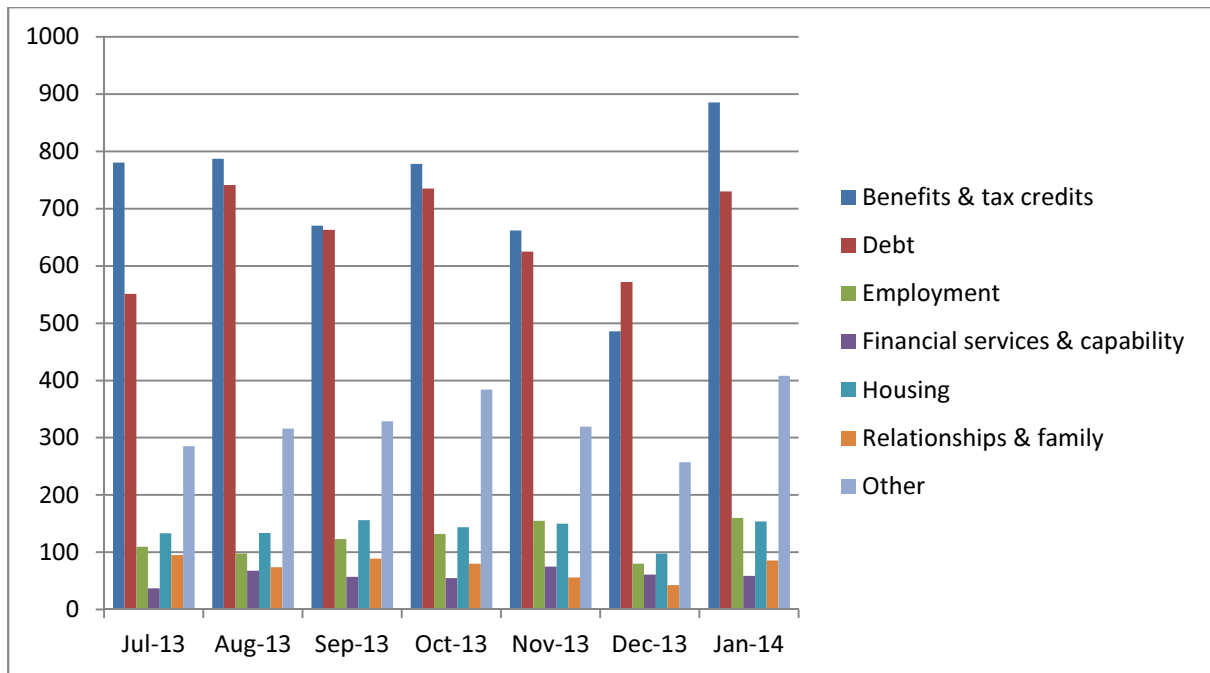
11.9 In addition to the work done through our own Welfare Support Team we are aware that Genesis enrol the following people/organisations to issue food bank vouchers on their behalf

- Health visitors
- Children centres
- 5 GP practices (names unknown)
- 3 Schools (names unknown)
- CAB
- JCP
- Mental Health Teams
- Social Services
- Reach
- DHI

11.10 Citizens Advice Bureau



11.11 Overall numbers of CAB enquiries have remained fairly stable since July 2013, with a notable drop over the Christmas period.



11.12 Enquiries for Benefits/Tax credits and Debt remain the largest enquiry groups at an average 66% of total enquiries from July 2013. For Benefits, the majority of enquiries were around eligibility/entitlement (43%). For debt advice, the majority of enquiries were concerning liability for debt and dealing with debt repayments (58%).

11.13 Community Regeneration's Worklessness Programme Team have between April 2012 – February 2014 - Overall Team Achievements of two Engagement Officers (Young People Leaving Care and General Over 25s claiming for over 1 year an out of work benefit):

- Successfully engaged 110+ (aged 16-59) clients both at early stage support, through to 6 months off out of work benefit or in Employment.
- 42 individuals in over 16 hours Jobs and Apprenticeships, while taking an active role in increasing their paid hours and sustaining such clients.
- Paid activity under permitted working on benefits under 16 hours for circa 12 individuals
- Delivering successful Forwards Work Clubs for General Out of Work Benefit claimants (mainly Work Programme Returners and Connecting Families), 11 of 20 attendees supported into paid work.
- Saved over 62K (April 2012 to February 2014) in out of work benefit savings and counting.
- Prevented homelessness and custodial sentences for a number of clients.
- Developing innovative solutions to enduring problems around economic wellbeing.

Data Sharing

11.14 Continues to be a barrier to developing a cohesive response to Welfare Reforms. However, as part of the successful bid to the Public Transformation Network the Council is working with CLG and the Cabinet Office to overcome barriers and develop a system for enabling much wider sharing of data to enable better analysis and joined up responses to deliver earlier preventative solutions.

Commissioning Advice & Support

11.15 As previously reported we have learnt from co-locating partners within our One Stop shops that there is duplication in the work that the Council, Partners and Voluntary Organisations provide and with smarter commissioning of some of these services we can improve the way we do this.

11.16 Council has recognised that a more coordinated strategic approach is required to the provision of Information and Advice and this work is now progressing.

Acknowledgements

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|---|--|
| Jon Poole & David Singleton | Collating information about many of the impacts and creating the Wi-ki link |
| Teresa Welch; | Providing an update on the work done by the Welfare Support Team; Social Fund replacement and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP's) |
| Debbie Stevenson | Checking and updating information relating to Housing Benefit; DHP and Social Fund issues |
| David Waters; Maxine Wilson; & Sara Kennedy | Information relating to Council Tax Support; Benefit Cap & Size Criteria |
| Paula Bromley | Information relating to Connecting Families |
| Mike Chedzoy | Home Search and New Housing Allocations Policy information |

Abbreviations:-

| | |
|------|---------------------------------|
| DWP | Department For Work & Pensions |
| DHP | Discretionary Housing Payment |
| LGA | Local Government Association |
| SSSC | Social Sector Size Criteria |
| HMRC | Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs |
| CAB | Citizens Advice Bureau |
| RSL | Registered Social Landlord |