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To: Cllr Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: Sian Braun, David Cox, Jean Davies, Ron Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Rosetta Dolphin, Mared Eastwood, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Dennis Hutchinson, Ted Palmer, Mike Reece, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

1 November 2018

Dear Councillor

You are invited to attend a meeting of the Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee which will be held at 10.00 am on Wednesday, 7th November, 2018 in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold CH7 6NA to consider the following items

A G E N D A

1 APOLOGIES

Purpose: To receive any apologies.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING WHIPPING DECLARATIONS)

Purpose: To receive any Declarations and advise Members accordingly.

3 MINUTES (Pages 3 - 14)

Purpose: To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meetings held on 26 September and 12 October 2018.

4 HOUSING RENT INCOME (Pages 15 - 24)

Report of Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) - Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing, Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets

Purpose: To provide scrutiny with an operational update on rent collection, current arrear levels and the strategies now being adopted to mitigate financial risks to the HRA as welfare reforms and Universal Credit are rolled out by the UK Government.

5 **WELFARE REFORM UPDATE – UNIVERSAL CREDIT ROLL OUT** (Pages 25 - 50)

Report of Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) - Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets

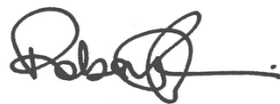
Purpose: To provide an update on the impact of Welfare Reform on Flintshire residents.

6 **FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME** (Pages 51 - 58)

Report of Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator -

Purpose: To consider the Forward Work Programme of the Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Robins', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Robert Robins
Democratic Services Manager

COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE **26 SEPTEMBER 2018**

Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in the Delyn Committee Room, County Hall, Mold on Wednesday, 26 September 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)

Councillors: Sian Braun, David Cox, Jean Davies, Ron Davies, Adele Davies-Cooke, Rosetta Dolphin, Mared Eastwood, George Hardcastle, Ted Palmer, Mike Reece, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

SUBSTITUTION: Councillor Patrick Heesom (for Ray Hughes)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Bernie Attridge, Cabinet Member for Housing

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Helen Brown and Christine Jones attended as observers

CONTRIBUTORS: Chief Officer (Housing and Assets), Customer Support Manager, and Capital Works Manager

IN ATTENDANCE: Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator and Democratic Services Officer

Prior to the start of the meeting it was agreed that the Facilitator would write to Councillor Bernie Attridge to express the Committee's best wishes for his speedy recovery following illness.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

22. MINUTES

(i) The minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2018 were submitted.

Matters Arising

Minute number 11: In response to a request from Councillor George Hardcastle, the Facilitator advised that an update report on rent arrears would be provided to the next meeting of the Committee to be held on 7 November 2018.

(ii) The minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2018 were submitted.

Accuracy

Page 9: the title of the minutes to be amended

Matters Arising

Councillor Paul Shotton commented on the success of the Holiday Hunger Programme.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the above amendment, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

23. SINGLE ACCESS ROUTE TO HOUSING (SARTH)

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) introduced a report to consider the Allocations Policy for social housing. He invited the Customer Support Manager to present the report.

The Customer Support Manager provided background information and advised that a review of the SARTH policy had been carried out in 2017 following the first year of operation. The review identified that the policy required updating to ensure compliance with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. A review of issues raised at the operational panel and steering group established that there were no significant changes required to any of the key principles of the policy. The Customer Services Manager advised that the requirement for an updated policy provided an opportunity to develop a document that was easier to read and understand. The revised policy (attached at appendix one) sets out the key commitment of the partners to a common regional approach to social housing allocations.

The Customer Services Manager reported on the main considerations, as detailed in the report, regarding regional collaboration, social housing demand, audit, and specialist housing.

Councillor Ian Dunbar commented on the need for suitable housing solutions to meet specialist needs and asked if appropriate housing had been provided from old or new housing stock. The Customer Services Manager explained that solutions had been provided from a mixture of old and new housing.

Councillor Paul Shotton referred to the collaborative work undertaken with Denbighshire County Council and asked if there were further opportunities to develop work on the triage and housing register with other local authorities. The Customer Services Manager explained that the Authority also received an income from other partner landlords and would follow up any opportunities to widen the partnership to further Councils.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked if information was shared between service areas in the Authority, and cited Housing services and Social Services as an example and a situation if a property became vacant because a tenant had moved into a care home. The Chief Officer gave an assurance that information and intelligence was shared between the Authority's Housing and Social Services departments.

In response to a concern raised by Councillor George Hardcastle around the allocation of social housing, the Customer Services Manager explained that Flintshire and Denbighshire operated two separate housing registers. She advised that Flintshire had been managing the triage and housing register for Denbighshire since April 2017 and referred to the many benefits of Flintshire hosting both Registers.

Councillor Patrick Heesom raised concerns around the triage service and referred to the increase in the number of applications in 2017/18. He commented on the number of annual applications and asked what support was provided to those applicants that did not proceed to the housing register. He also commented on the Council's democratic accountability in providing housing and said that he did not feel that this had been written into the terms of reference of the SARTH Policy and neither had the role of elected Members been adequately referenced. The Customer Services Manager gave an assurance that all applicants who presented themselves in need of housing assistance were provided with support, information, and signposted to other services/agencies where appropriate.

Councillor Heesom sought an assurance that the Housing service would not be put forward for consideration as an alternative delivery model. The Chief Officer confirmed that no such proposal was under consideration.

Councillor David Wisinger referred to the need for specialist housing and the number of applicants in urgent need in Flintshire. He commented on the need to work with property developers and the Planning department to increase the supply of stock to meet the needs of households with a disability or which required a larger sized property. The Chief Officer advised that developers were not obliged to provide adapted properties, however, the Authority did influence the type and number of social housing units through its discussions with developers and based on housing need in a specific area; in addition controls were further exercised through the planning system. The Customer Support Manager advised that a full report on specialist housing would be presented to the Committee in early 2019.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee continue to support the management of the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) policy in Flintshire.

24. WELSH HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS (WHQS) CAPITAL PROGRAMME – DELIVERY REVIEW UPDATE

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) introduced a report to provide an update on the progress of the WHQS the Council was delivering through its Capital Investment Programme. He explained that the WHQS Programme of Works had reached its halfway milestone and was moving into the final three years of delivery. The report focussed on what had been delivered to date and what was left to be completed before the 2020 deadline.

The Chief Officer reported on the main considerations, as detailed in the report on the WHQS Programme. He advised that the WHQS project team was nearing the end of the Internal Work programme (kitchens and bathrooms) and the remaining

properties were either 'tenant refusals' or 'no access' which were classed as 'acceptable fails' by the Welsh Government in terms of achieving the WQHS. The WQHS project team had also procured all of the main WQHS Contracts moving into Year 4 (2018/19) of the Capital Programme and were ahead of target on the number of components installed and looking to implement the Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) Solution in Quarter 4 of this financial year. The Chief Officer continued that the WHQS project team had delivered many contracts varying from internal upgrade works through to large external refurbishment and environmental schemes. The Council had invested around £60m to date within its housing stock and was currently ahead of target in meeting the WHQS 2020 deadline.

The Chief Officer referred to the Welsh Audit Office (WAO) Report and provided background information, as detailed in the report. He said the audit had covered a number of areas relating to the Authority's service users and having undertaken surveys, considered feedback from users, and moderated their findings, the WAO concluded that "overall the Council was making good progress towards achieving the WHQS and most Council tenants were satisfied with the quality of the service and their homes".

The Chair and Councillor Paul Shotton congratulated the Chief Officer and his team on their achievements on the WQHS to date and on a good report.

Councillor Patrick Heesom commented on the need to ensure that local contractors and labour was used in the WQHS programme of works. The Capital Works Manager advised that local contractors and labour was involved on all new house build and said thresholds had to be met when contracting works for the WHQS programme. He explained that for every £1m spend the Authority had to ensure that a certain number of local job opportunities and apprenticeships were provided and commented that the target had been exceeded to date.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin referred to properties which had not been upgraded due to 'tenant refusals' or 'no access' and asked if the condition of the properties was checked to ensure housing standards were complied with. The Capital Works Manager explained that a condition inspection would be undertaken when appropriate.

The Chief Officer suggested that the Committee receive an annual update report on the delivery of the WHQS Capital Programme, to include information on the use of local labour and the number of apprentices and school leavers.

RESOLVED:

That the progress made in delivering the Housing Capital Investment Programme be noted.

25. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

In presenting the Forward Work Programme for consideration, the Facilitator referred to the items to be considered at the next meeting of the Committee on 7 November, and said it had been agreed to defer the Quarter 1 and 2 Council Plan

2018/19 Monitoring Report to the meeting on 19 December 2018. It was also agreed that the Rent Arrears report would be submitted to the meeting on 7 November.

The Facilitator advised that a workshop would be arranged during October for members of the Committee to consider the budget proposals and said the details would be confirmed to Members by email.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Forward Work Programme, as amended, be approved; and
- (b) That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chairman of the Committee, be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

26. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There were no members of the press or the public in attendance.

(The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 10.52 am)

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Chairman

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COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
12 OCTOBER 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Community and Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee of Flintshire County Council held in Delyn Committee Room, Mold on Friday 12 October 2018

PRESENT: **Councillor Ian Dunbar (Chairman)**

Councillors: Jean Davies, Ron Davies, Rosetta Dolphin, George Hardcastle, Ray Hughes, Mike Reece, Paul Shotton and David Wisinger

SUBSTITUTES: Councillors: Chris Dolphin (for Mared Eastwood) and Glyn Banks (for Ted Palmer)

APOLOGIES: Councillors: Dave Cox and Dennis Hutchinson

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors: Haydn Bateman, Helen Brown, Patrick Heesom and Tony Sharps (initiators of the call-in)

Councillors: Derek Butler, Carol Ellis, Christine Jones, Hilary McGuill and Aaron Shotton (as observers)

CONTRIBUTORS:

Councillor Bernie Attridge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing; Chief Officer (Housing & Assets); Customer Support Manager; Accommodation Support Services Manager and Connects Manager

IN ATTENDANCE:

Democratic Services Manager and Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

28. CONSIDERATION OF A MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE PURSUANT TO THE CALL IN ARRANGEMENTS

The Democratic Services Manager gave an overview of the procedure for the call in of a Cabinet Decision as detailed in the supporting document. The Cabinet had considered a report on the *Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH)* at its meeting on 25th September 2018. The decision (Record of Decision 3560) had been called in by Councillors Haydn Bateman, Helen Brown, Patrick Heesom and Tony Sharps. Copies of the Cabinet report, the Record of Decision and Call in Notice, which identified four reasons for the call in, were included with the agenda papers for the meeting.

The Democratic Services Manager advised that, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, he had accepted reasons 1 and 3, as set out in the Call in Notice, but had advised the signatories of the Call In that reasons 2 and 4 were requests for

information rather than a challenge to the Cabinet decision. A report on rent arrears was due to be submitted to the Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7th November, 2018.

29. SINGLE ACCESS ROUTE TO HOUSING (SARTH)

As initiators of the Call in, Councillors Haydn Bateman, Helen Brown, Patrick Heesom and Tony Sharps were invited to address the Committee first.

Councillor Helen Brown outlined a number of concerns around the bedroom requirements by household type, as detailed within the SARTH Policy. She felt that this section of the Policy was inconsistent and outlined an instance where a pregnant woman could be placed in a 1 bedroom property, only for this person to be moved following the birth of a child, which in turn placed an unnecessary cost to the tenant and the Council. She commented on the high number of instances where a 2 bedroom property would be offered to an applicant but raised concern that there were not enough 2 bedroom properties across Flintshire to support this. She opined that Cabinet should reconsider the Policy, in particular the sections relating to bedroom size and household type.

Councillor Patrick Heesom said that, whilst he recognised the pressure placed on the Council due to the continued increase in social housing demand, there was a need for Cabinet to reconsider the banding system as detailed within the SARTH Policy. He commented on the budget pressures incurred by the Council through the use of temporary/alternative accommodation due to the lack of suitable housing available across Flintshire and said that the Policy did not alleviate this pressure. He also raised concerns around the urgent actions which had been identified as part of an audit of the SARTH which he felt showed a need to revise the Policy, and around the Local Lettings Policy.

Councillor Haydn Bateman commented on the stress put on applicants who were housed away from family and friends and questioned how this was in line with the Future Well-Being and Generations Act. Wellbeing of Future Generations Act

Councillor Tony Sharps concurred with the comments made by Councillor Heesom around localism and spoke in support of referring the SARTH Policy back to Cabinet to reconsider as he felt that it was difficult to understand and explain to applicants.

Responses from the decision makers

The Cabinet Member for Housing explained that he had been Cabinet Member since May 2017. He said that Councillor Brown had held this role prior to this and had introduced the SARTH Policy which he had continued to support.

In response to the detailed comments and questions raised by the initiators of the Call in, the Customer Support Manager explained that a review of the SARTH Policy, carried out in 2017, had identified that the Policy required updating to ensure compliance with the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The current Policy gave a high priority to applicants with a local connection to an area and performance and management

information for the register was monitored. The most recent statistics found the following average wait times:-

- 1 bedroom properties – 16 ½ months waiting time;
- 2 bedroom properties – 15 months waiting time; and
- 3 bedroom properties – 13 months waiting time.

The data on general waiting times had identified longer waiting times for 1 and 2 bedroom properties but the Strategic Housing and Development Programme (SHARP) was going some way to address the additional need for these types of properties.

On the issue of the use of temporary accommodation, the Customer Support Manager reported that the cost of using temporary accommodation was lower than it had been in the last 3 years and that the SARTH Policy had played its part in bringing this cost down.

The audit of SARTH, undertaken during September 2017, had identified urgent actions, all of which had since been implemented. None of the actions related to the Policy document, but were around capacity issues and training for the teams. In terms of hosting SARTH for Denbighshire, this was a separate register with no shared applications and therefore no impact upon Flintshire applicants.

The Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) acknowledged the significant pressure placed on the Council housing stock due to the lack of available properties but said that the Council was responding positively to this demand through building homes across Flintshire through the SHARP. He said that the SARTH Policy was equitable and fair in dealing with the current pressures. The Cabinet Member for Housing said that he continued to fully support the SARTH Policy and said that he did not feel that the issues raised by the initiators warranted Cabinet to amend the Policy.

The Chairman invited Members of the Committee to comment and ask questions.

Councillor Rosetta Dolphin asked whether the Council still provided financial assistance to tenants who were under occupying a property. The Customer Support Manager advised that financial assistance through the Discretionary Housing Payment was provided but this was not a long term solution. The Chief Officer said that it was important to ensure applicants were matched to the appropriate property type in order not to set tenants up to fail and fall into rent arrears.

Councillor Paul Shotton proposed that the Committee support Option 1, as shown in the Call in arrangements document as he had been satisfied with the responses given to the concerns and questions raised by the initiators. This proposal was seconded by Councillor Ron Davies.

Councillor George Hardcastle spoke in support of Option 3, to refer the SARTH Policy back to Cabinet in order to provide the opportunity to address the concerns of the initiators. He also suggested that a workshop be arranged in order to allow all Members the opportunity to consider the Policy. The Cabinet Member for Housing

reiterated his comments that he did not feel that the issues raised warranted a change to the SARTH Policy.

Councillor Glyn Banks said that he had been satisfied with the responses by the decision makers. Councillor Ray Hughes commented on the Council house building programme (SHARP) within his own ward which had been welcomed by local residents and said that he would continue to support the current SARTH Policy. Councillor Chris Dolphin said that he had been satisfied with the responses provided by the Customer Support Manager.

The Chairman invited the initiators of the Call-in to sum up.

Councillor Brown responded to the comments that she had brought the SARTH Policy to Cabinet during her time as Cabinet Member for Housing but felt that the Policy now needed to be amended. She commented that not all tenants were claiming benefits so for those under occupying a property as a result of the Spare Room Subsidy they would not be eligible to apply for the Discretionary Housing Payment to assist them. The Customer Support Manager explained that when offered a property the applicant would be made fully aware of the impact of the Spare Room Subsidy if they would be under occupying a property.

Councillor Heesom expressed his disappointment with the debate. He felt that the current SARTH Policy was not working for the best interests of the applicants across Flintshire and sought the support of the Committee in amending the Policy with input from Members. He commented on issues around applicants not having a local connection within his own ward and said that the social housing demand would continue to increase, therefore a revised Policy was needed to meet this demand.

In response to a question from Councillor Sharps around the Local Lettings Policy, the Cabinet Member for Housing explained that the Policy was part of the SHARP to ensure that new Council properties were offered to applicants with a local connection to an area.

In response to a comment from Councillor Brown around matching applicants to properties in line with the Spare Room Subsidy, the Customer Services Manager explained that the 'bedroom requirement by household type' section of the SARTH Policy was dictated to the Council through Housing Legislation but said that the Council were the only organisation to provide flexibility around the opportunity to under occupy a property where appropriate.

The Chairman thanked the initiators of the Call in for their attendance and thanked the decisions makers for responding to the comments and questions.

Before a vote was taken, the Democratic Services Manager reminded the committee of the voting procedure at a call in meeting. As an option was proposed and seconded, it should be voted on before an alternative option could be considered.

RESOLVED:

That having considered the explanations which it has received, the Committee is satisfied and the decision to continue to support the management of the Single Access Route to Housing (SARTH) policy and to support the revised and updated policy document may now be implemented.

30. MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS IN ATTENDANCE

There was two members of the public and one member of the press in attendance.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and ended at 3.01 pm)

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Chair

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COMMUNITY & ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 7 th November 2018
Report Subject	Housing Rent Income
Cabinet Members	Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Housing; and Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources & Assets
Report Author	Chief Officer (Housing and Assets)
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides scrutiny members with an operational update on rent income collection and the detail of £2.2m of rent arrears in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The report also considers the financial impact on rent arrears within the HRA as a result of UK Government led welfare reforms, especially full service rollout of Universal Credit from April 2017.

There is general consensus across local government and the housing association sector that all social landlords are now needing to change their operations in response to the rollout of welfare reforms, to maximise rent income and mitigate, as far as possible, the impact on those reforms on households.

This report sets out the measures and interventions that have been introduced in the Housing service to protect rent income streams and which are designed to support tenants, especially the vulnerable, to cope with the programme of Government reform, but also ensure rent is paid on time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

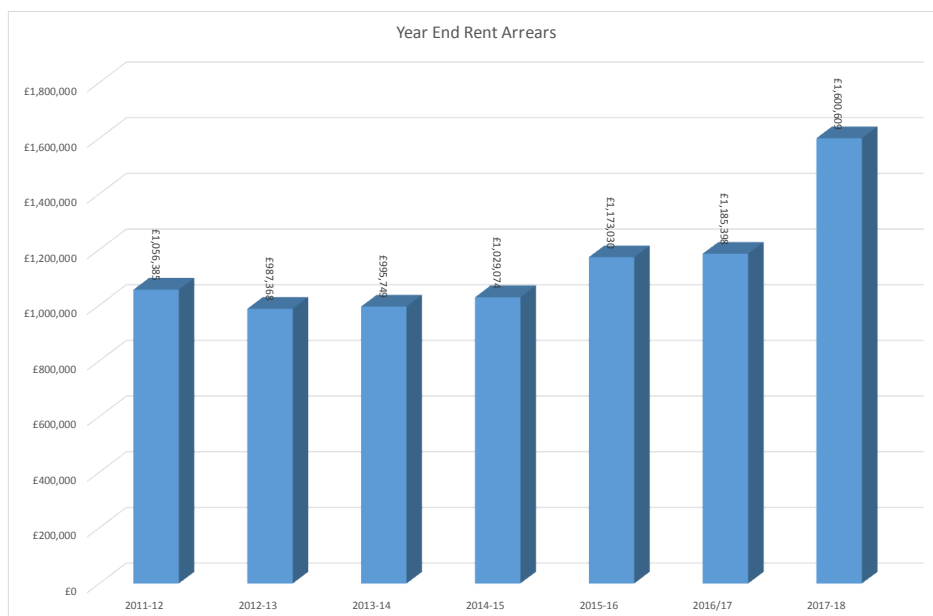
1	Note the latest financial position for rent arrears in 2018-19 in the context of the UK Government welfare reform programme.
2	Endorse the new measures and interventions being taken to maximise rent income but which also support tenants to maintain sustainable tenancies.
3	Support the robust steps that are necessary to recover arrears from tenants who, despite all interventions, make little or no effort to pay.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE POSITION OF RENT ARREARS IN THE CONTEXT OF WELFARE REFORM
	Spare Room Subsidy and the Benefit Cap
1.01	Welfare reforms, introduced across the UK from 2010, represent a major challenge for the Council's and Housing Associations.
1.02	Many of these reforms, including the introduction of the Benefit Cap and the Spare Room Subsidy (otherwise known as the Bedroom Tax) impact upon tenant household income and Housing Benefit entitlement and therefore have a knock on effect tenant's ability to pay rent to the Council.
1.03	The restriction on the amount of benefit that can be received (otherwise known as the Benefit Cap) means that some tenants are now receiving less housing benefit than they did in the past and as a consequence they need to make up the shortfall in rent themselves. There are 43 council tenants impacted by the Benefit Cap of which 27 (or 62%) are in arrears over £300 to the value of £38k
1.04	Other households are impacted by the Spare Room Subsidy (otherwise known as the Bedroom Tax) which places a restriction on the amount of housing benefit that can be paid to households that are deemed to have one or more spare bedrooms. In many cases, tenants are not easily able to move to smaller properties, or do not wish to move, so they need to make up the shortfall between their restricted housing benefit entitlement and the amount of rent charged.
1.05	There are around 474 Council tenants impacted by the Bedroom Tax of which 140 (or 30%) are in rent arrears over £300 to the value of £127,000
	Universal Credit
1.06	The biggest reform of the UK welfare system is the rollout of Universal Credit (UC) by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) which was introduced in Flintshire as a full service rollout from April 2017. This replaced 6 legacy benefits into a single payment for those tenants migrating over to the UC system.
1.07	The single UC payment includes a housing element for help with housing costs/rent and unlike the Housing Benefit system where entitlement is paid directly to the rent account on a weekly basis (and in advance), the UC system is designed to provide tenants with a single payment from DWP which includes an element towards their housing/rent costs.
1.08	The design of the UC system places an expectation on tenants to manage their own finances and budget to pay rent on time to their landlord. UC therefore imposes a big budgeting and prioritising responsibility on tenants. The theory is plausible, but in reality it is far from straight forward for landlords or tenants to ensure rent is paid on time.

1.09	There is growing evidence within the Council and indeed, across the UK, that the introduction of UC is directly leading to a significant rise in rent arrears and resource challenges for Councils and Housing Associations.												
1.10	Tenants in receipt of the former legacy benefits are naturally accustomed to receiving their benefits on a weekly or fortnightly basis and then paying rent to the Council on a weekly basis. The payment of UC is made on a monthly basis to cover living expenses and housing costs. UC is never paid during the first week of the claim and is typically paid after a period of at least five weeks or more in arrears. Some tenants can even wait up to eight weeks. The payment, when it is made, is designed to replicate the budgeting required by people who receive a monthly wage.												
1.11	There is strong evidence that demonstrates UC risks causing or exacerbating debt problems and tenants in receipt of UC are more likely to be falling into arrears than those on legacy benefits.												
1.12	<p>The table below shows the extent rent arrears for those tenants in receipt of UC as opposed to those still receipt of Housing Benefit.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="464 869 1240 1128"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>No of tenants</th> <th>Total Arrears</th> <th>Average Rent Arrears</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Universal Credit Claimants</td> <td>449</td> <td>£661,552</td> <td>£1,473</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Housing Benefit Claimants</td> <td>1,313</td> <td>£438,608</td> <td>£334</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		No of tenants	Total Arrears	Average Rent Arrears	Universal Credit Claimants	449	£661,552	£1,473	Housing Benefit Claimants	1,313	£438,608	£334
	No of tenants	Total Arrears	Average Rent Arrears										
Universal Credit Claimants	449	£661,552	£1,473										
Housing Benefit Claimants	1,313	£438,608	£334										
1.13	The financial risk to the Council is significant, as in reality, the Council is competing for payment of rent from tenants who do not always ensure rent in paid as a priority payment. Other problems that exacerbate the situation and lead to an increase rent arrears, include lengthy delays of a minimum of five weeks before payment of UC is made to claimants leading to the accrual of rent arrears unnecessarily.												
1.14	Vulnerable tenants who have relied on the Housing Benefit previously and who are not used to paying rent themselves can often lack the budgetary skills to prioritise payment of rent and this also leads to a trend of non-payment of rent leading to the Council putting interventions in place to support tenants.												
	Rent Arrears – Year End Comparisons												
1.15	Rent arrears are the amount of rent due but not paid to the Council on time and the arrears position is expressed as the accumulated running total amount due across all years which has not been paid. Putting this into context, £223m was due in rent between the 7 year period between 2011 and 2018, and accrued rent arrears as at the end of 2017/18 were £1.6m.												

1.16 Over recent years, rent arrears have fluctuated, as detailed in the chart and table below, but through re-structuring and service re-alignment, the Council's Rent Income team was successful in starting to reduce rent arrears in 2016/17, despite the introduction of a series of welfare reforms starting with the Spare Room Subsidy (otherwise known as a Bedroom Tax) and Benefit Cap.



Financial Year	Gross Rent Yield	Year End Rent Arrears	Movement (£)	Total Rent Arrears as % of in-year Rent Yield
2017-18	£36,153,000	£1,600,609	£415,211	4.4%
2016/17	£34,293,000	£1,185,398	£12,368	3.5%
2015-16	£32,857,000	£1,173,030	£143,956	3.6%
2014-15	£31,452,000	£1,029,074	£33,325	3.3%
2013-14	£30,859,000	£995,749	£8,381	3.2%
2012-13	£29,222,000	£987,368	£-69,017	3.4%
2011-12	£28,097,000	£1,056,385	-	3.8%

1.17 Accumulated Rent arrears during 2016-17 fell to 3.5% of the in-year gross rent yield, which in monetary terms resulted in a arrears year end position of £1.185m

1.18 However, during 2017/18, UC 'full service' was implemented in Flintshire by DWP from April 2017 to replace the six legacy benefits, including Housing Benefit for working-age claimants, rent arrears have increased significantly since then, largely as a direct result of UC and the cash flow implications of tenants waiting to receive UC and the knock on effect of the Council waiting to receive payment from tenants.

1.19	Although the UC system is designed to be simpler for tenants to access money from DWP in the form of a single payment, of greater concern is the effect on rent arrears during the first year of UC full service implementation which resulted in a 2017/18 year end position total arrears of £1.6m – an increase of £415k compared to 2016/17.																																																																	
	Rent Arrears – Current Position in 2018/19																																																																	
1.20	Accumulated Rent arrears up to the first half of 2018/19 (up to rent accounting week 26) are now £2.22m compared to £1.80m during the same period in 2017/18. In other words, rent arrears have increased by £416k compared to week 29 last year.																																																																	
1.21	Put another way, since UC full service rollout, accumulated rent arrears up to week 29 in 2018/19 have increased by £1m as a comparison with the year-end position in 2016/17. A significant factor in the increase in rent arrears is attributable to the implementation of UC since 449 council tenants who are in receipt of UC have accumulated rent arrears of £661k. Although some tenants might have been in rent arrears prior to UC sign up, the five week minimum delay in processing UC is a major contributory factor to the efficient collection of rent.																																																																	
1.22	In an increasing number of cases, the Council is having to apply to DWP for managed payments. This is a system where a landlord can request payment of rent from a tenant’s Universal Credit if a tenant is 8 weeks or more in arrears. There are 75 tenancies where the Council has instigated managed payments, however, not all requests are granted as tenants can be off and on UC or have insufficient UC for rent deductions to be made.																																																																	
1.23	<p>The graph below illustrates the very latest position with rent arrears which also shows the comparison over a 4 year period:</p> <p>Arrears Comparison 2015/16 - 2018/19</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Estimated Weekly Rent Arrears (£)</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Week</th> <th>2015/16</th> <th>2016/17</th> <th>2017/18</th> <th>2018/19</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Week 1</td><td>1,200,000</td><td>1,350,000</td><td>1,550,000</td><td>1,750,000</td></tr> <tr><td>Week 5</td><td>1,250,000</td><td>1,450,000</td><td>1,600,000</td><td>1,950,000</td></tr> <tr><td>Week 10</td><td>1,350,000</td><td>1,500,000</td><td>1,650,000</td><td>2,100,000</td></tr> <tr><td>Week 15</td><td>1,400,000</td><td>1,550,000</td><td>1,700,000</td><td>2,250,000</td></tr> <tr><td>Week 20</td><td>1,450,000</td><td>1,600,000</td><td>1,750,000</td><td>2,300,000</td></tr> <tr><td>Week 25</td><td>1,500,000</td><td>1,650,000</td><td>1,800,000</td><td>2,350,000</td></tr> <tr><td>Week 30</td><td>1,550,000</td><td>1,700,000</td><td>1,850,000</td><td>2,400,000</td></tr> <tr><td>Week 35</td><td>1,600,000</td><td>1,750,000</td><td>1,900,000</td><td>2,350,000</td></tr> <tr><td>Week 40</td><td>1,650,000</td><td>1,800,000</td><td>1,950,000</td><td>2,300,000</td></tr> <tr><td>Week 45</td><td>1,700,000</td><td>1,850,000</td><td>2,000,000</td><td>2,250,000</td></tr> <tr><td>Week 50</td><td>1,750,000</td><td>1,900,000</td><td>2,050,000</td><td>2,200,000</td></tr> <tr><td>Week 51</td><td>1,200,000</td><td>1,150,000</td><td>1,100,000</td><td>1,050,000</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Week	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	Week 1	1,200,000	1,350,000	1,550,000	1,750,000	Week 5	1,250,000	1,450,000	1,600,000	1,950,000	Week 10	1,350,000	1,500,000	1,650,000	2,100,000	Week 15	1,400,000	1,550,000	1,700,000	2,250,000	Week 20	1,450,000	1,600,000	1,750,000	2,300,000	Week 25	1,500,000	1,650,000	1,800,000	2,350,000	Week 30	1,550,000	1,700,000	1,850,000	2,400,000	Week 35	1,600,000	1,750,000	1,900,000	2,350,000	Week 40	1,650,000	1,800,000	1,950,000	2,300,000	Week 45	1,700,000	1,850,000	2,000,000	2,250,000	Week 50	1,750,000	1,900,000	2,050,000	2,200,000	Week 51	1,200,000	1,150,000	1,100,000	1,050,000
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	Mitigating the impact of Welfare Reform and improving Rent Collection
1.24	<p><u>The duty to prevent homelessness</u></p> <p>The Council has a statutory duty to support tenants and to avoid homelessness. It is widely recognised that homelessness generates significant negative impacts upon a person's and family health, well-being; education and employment. Welsh Government (WG), supported by the Council, has had a long standing commitment to implement strategies that aim to prevent homelessness, where possible. A commitment that WG significantly strengthened through the introduction of a new statutory prevention duty within Part 2 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. This duty requires the Council to try to prevent homelessness amongst 'all' households, not just council tenants, who are at risk of losing their homes.</p>
1.25	<p>Collection of rent remains a key priority for the Council, and running alongside the statutory duty to support tenants, is the need to strike the right balance between supporting tenants and targeting those tenants who fail to pay and do not engage with the Council.</p>
1.26	<p><u>Housing Intervention Team</u></p> <p>To mitigate against an increasing in rent arrears position, senior officers across the Housing service have been working together to tackle the increase in arrears.</p>
1.27	<p>During 2018/19, additional resources have been allocated from the Supporting People Grant to ensure that arrears are managed through intensive interventions at the earliest opportunity that prevent arrears building up but ensure that tenants with complex situations or those in financial difficulty receive the 'fast tracked' support they need to address their rent payments. A project team consisting of four additional posts costing £130k per annum was launched in the summer of 2018 initially targeting low level arrears to stem the problem.</p>
1.28	<p>The team consist of two Rent Income officers and two support staff working together to tackle low level arrears. This is done through early intervention using new operating methods by contacting tenants by phone, as opposed to posting out rent reminders, to discuss arrears and also discussing the reasons for non-payment. The new Housing Intervention Team (HIT) has been in place since August with weekly meetings taking place to target specific cases that Income officers have not managed to either contact or get a positive outcome from. Early Support is then quickly provided to those tenants that are in need of help, even if the arrears are at low levels, and a decision made to fast track cases to court where a tenant is refusing to pay or engage with the Council.</p>
1.29	<p>To date a total of 534 cases have been reviewed by the HIT team, this work has seen positive results and has directly led to a collection of £245K to date and assisted 362 tenants in bringing their arrears up to date and provided them with the support with their finances to maintain their ongoing rent.</p>

1.30	Support visits have been carried out by the team for 40 tenants and following non engagement five court orders have been applied for as part of the 'fast track' approach to target rent arrears at low levels.
1.31	In addition to the HIT team, work is also ongoing to review and develop a 'rent first' approach across wider teams including homelessness, managing housing applications, housing allocations and estate management. The work will focus on staff training and revision of procedures to develop a 'rent first' culture. Staff within all teams need to be focussed on ensuring tenants understand the importance of making rent payments; that comprehensive affordability checks have established the rent is affordable and budgeting or debt advice is offered; that homeless applicants are assisted to address former rent arrears.
1.32	The focus of the work across housing is to establish those households that won't pay and deal with arrears firmly and swiftly. There are some instances where a household genuinely cannot pay or they are facing significant difficulties. In these cases the focus has been on providing the necessary intensive support.
1.33	<u>Adopting a rent first approach</u> To prevent rent arrears from escalating, the Council is also taking a more robust approach to tackling rent arrears by 'fast tracking' cases through the County Courts where necessary for lower levels of arrears to ensure rent is paid as a priority debt. Court action is a necessary recovery tool to secure regular payment from tenants who do not pay on time and who do not engage with the support offered.
1.34	In most cases, initiating the judicial process ensures tenants get into a cycle of paying their rent on time and the referrals into the court system also protect the finances of the HRA.
1.35	Court proceedings can be a lengthy but necessary process. The Council is also bound by the decisions and judgements made by the court in terms of the number of opportunities afforded to tenants to pay. The payment terms are often directed by the courts based on the personal circumstances for each tenant appearing in court. Ultimately, the Council is governed by the decision of the courts.
1.36	Court work is complex and not all hearings lead to a quick resolution to non-payment. As an anecdotal example of this, an eviction recently took place in respect of rent arrears of £2k. The tenant had previously been subject to court proceedings over an extended period of time and yet it did not result in the tenant keeping up to date with the payment order. There had been four court hearings over a nine month period. At the first hearing the tenant had been ordered to pay weekly rent plus £3.70 towards the arrears but the tenant failed to pay. Even if the tenant had kept to the terms of the payment order, it would have taken a period of forty five years to bring the account up date. A second court hearing eventually resulted in an order to pay £5, a third hearing £17 and a fourth hearing £29 but the tenant neglected to pay.

1.37	At a final hearing the court eventually agreed to disallow an application by the tenant to stop the eviction and the tenant was subsequently evicted from the property for non-payment.																					
1.38	<p>The table below provides an analysis of the current position for £417k of arrears that are subject to court action. There are 215 tenants who are currently subject to court action and 80% of cases are subject to payment orders to ensure rent is paid on time.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Court Stage</th> <th>Number of Tenancies</th> <th>Value of Arrears (£)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Eviction pending</td> <td>7</td> <td>24,386</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Court Order</td> <td>7</td> <td>6,389</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Possession Order</td> <td>28</td> <td>57,943</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Postponed Order</td> <td>1</td> <td>2,444</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Suspended Order on Payment Terms</td> <td>172</td> <td>326,336</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>215</td> <td>417,498</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Court Stage	Number of Tenancies	Value of Arrears (£)	Eviction pending	7	24,386	Court Order	7	6,389	Possession Order	28	57,943	Postponed Order	1	2,444	Suspended Order on Payment Terms	172	326,336	Total	215	417,498
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1.39	In most cases, there is a positive outcome at court, but over the past four years there have also been 80 evictions against those tenants who fail to pay, keep to the terms of the court order, or work with the Council.																					
1.40	<p>During 2018/19, the Rent Income service have undertaken seventeen evictions to up to week 26, compared to eleven during the period last year – an increase of 54.5% during the like-for-like period. The increase in evictions is partly due to the Council now needing to take more robust action to tackle rent arrears and to end tenancies for those tenants who refuse to engage or pay the rent which is due.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Evictions for rent arrears</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2018/19 (to date)</td> <td>17</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017/18</td> <td>22</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2016/17</td> <td>19</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2015/16</td> <td>22</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Evictions for rent arrears	2018/19 (to date)	17	2017/18	22	2016/17	19	2015/16	22											
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1.41	Tackling rent arrears cannot be achieved in isolation from offering support and the service will continue to work other advice and support agencies to support vulnerable tenants, especially those impacted by welfare reforms to prevent homelessness and ensure sustainable tenancies going forward.																					
1.42	Tackling rent arrears, despite the challenges of welfare reform, is business critical. Although the service has increased resource levels in view of increasing caseloads and case complexity, there is also a need to invest in the right technology to help move us forward.																					
1.43	Officers have been in discussion with other social landlords who are grappling with the same challenging environment and a growing number of Councils and social landlords (over 118 organisations in total) have																					

	invested in specialised Housing software systems which deploy analytical applications to predict and risk assess which tenants will and won't pay their rent on time.
1.44	We know from housing providers the deployment of this software is helping to reduce workloads, free up capacity in order to target the limited resources on those cases that are at most risk of not paying rent. Detailed business cases project that reduced arrears levels of 16% can realistically be achieved by deploying this software within the Council.
1.45	Work is therefore at an advanced stage to consider the implementation of this software by February 2019 as part of the wider strategy to tackle rent arrears.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	The ongoing welfare reforms and rollout of UC full service will continue to generate financial pressures as a result of deploying additional resources to assist many households who continue to require advice and support to help them manage the transition from housing benefit to UC.
2.02	The deployment of additional resources, at a cost of £130k per annum, are also required ongoing to tackle the issues of recovering unpaid rent from an increased number of tenants.
2.03	The deployment of analytical software in early 2019 will assist with the recovery of unpaid rent.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	None.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	To mitigate the risks of increasing rent arrears, losses in collection and increased bad debt impairment, the formation of the HIT team and fast tracking of cases to court, is designed to ensure financial risks are minimised.
4.02	The deployment of predictive 'risk based' software to support the recovery of rent will also help to increase collection rates and target those cases at highest risk of non-payment.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	None.

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing (Wales) Act 2014 • Welfare Reform Act 2012 <p>Contact Officer: David Barnes, Revenues Manager Telephone: 01352 703652 E-mail: david.barnes@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Welfare Reform: these are changes being introduced to a range of social security benefits and tax credits which aim to ensure that the United Kingdom has an affordable benefits system.</p> <p>Benefit Cap: is a limit imposed by the UK Government on the total amount of benefit that most people aged 16 to 64 can get. People of pension age are exempt from the Benefit Cap. The Benefit Cap depends on family situations and circumstances and when all benefits are calculated, housing benefit must be reduced so that the total benefits being received by a tenant don't go above the benefit cap limit.</p> <p>Spare Room Subsidy: a change to housing benefit was introduced in 2013 by the UK Government (often referred to as the 'Bedroom Tax') which means tenants might receive less in housing benefit if they live in a property that is deemed to have one or more spare bedrooms. Having one spare bedroom usually results in the loss of 14% of housing benefit entitlement and having two or more spare bedrooms results in the loss of 25% housing benefit entitlement</p> <p>Universal Credit: is an integrated means-tested benefit for people of working age whose income is below a specified minimum amount. UC can be claimed by working age people in and out of employment and combines six legacy benefits for working age claimants. The legacy benefits include housing benefit, income support, job seekers allowance, employment support, child tax credits, working tax credits.</p> <p>Housing Revenue Account (HRA): The Council is required to keep a HRA to record all expenditure and income relating to the provision of local authority social housing. All rental income must be held within a ring fenced HRA account. This means the income can only be used for council housing purposes and not general council expenditure. This also allows the rental income to be invested locally to help improve and maintain council owned homes and also build new council homes.</p> <p>Housing Benefit: is a means tested scheme that helps tenants pay all, or part of their rent, if they have a low income. Housing Benefit is administered by Local Authorities on behalf of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).</p>



COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 7 November 2018
Report Subject	Welfare Reform Update – Universal Credit Roll Out
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Corporate Management and Assets
Report Author	Chief Officer, Housing & Assets
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welfare reforms will, by 2020, have reduced expenditure on available social security benefits to low income working-age households by around £31¹ billion per annum in the UK.

This report provides an update on the impacts Universal Credit ‘Full Service’ and other welfare reforms are having on Flintshire residents and the work that is being undertaken to mitigate and support these households. It also explores longer term impacts and some of the considerations required in order to prepare and plan a response to these impacts, both now and in the future.

Since 2012, Flintshire County Council, together with its partners, have attempted to mitigate the full impacts of the reforms from falling upon vulnerable Flintshire residents and the report considers how to manage the impacts of the reforms being introduced under the provisions of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1	That Scrutiny Committee support the report and the ongoing work to manage the impacts that Welfare Reforms has and will continue to have upon Flintshire’s most vulnerable households.
2	Note the changes to grant funding arrangements for Universal Support as announced by Central Government on 1st October 2018 and consider future risks to the Council that may come as a result of these changes.

¹ The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduced reforms that reduced expenditure on social security benefits by £19 billion pa and the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 is introducing reforms which will reduce expenditure by a further £12 billion pa.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	Existing Welfare Reforms
1.01	<p>Flintshire’s Welfare Reform Response team has been in place for the last two years and combines the administration of discretionary housing payment with personal budgeting support and aims to provide financial inclusivity.</p> <p>An independent report was commission, which provided and up to date Welfare Reform impact assessment analysis for Flintshire County Council. This detailed analysis has modelled impacts for today and as it is projected to be in 2020, both under the current system and Universal Credit.</p>
1.02	<p>The analysis has identified a number of households that continue to be highly impacted by welfare reform, and has evaluated individual circumstances using two measures of living standards;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relative poverty and; • Financial resilience <p>This data and information is being used to form a proactive action plan for the team so they can target support to these households in order to alleviate the impacts and help them to prepare now for future changes.</p>
1.03	<p>Work focus includes targeting support to those who are unemployed with low barriers to work to enable a referral process to access and improve employability options. A total of 45 households have been identified to receive less income in 2018 if receiving Universal Credit.</p> <p>The report also helped to cross match families with potential Free School Meal entitlement.</p>
	The Benefit Cap
1.04	<p>In the Autumn of 2016, the benefit cap ceiling was significantly lowered. The total amount of annual “out of work” benefit income which a “working-age” household can receive is set at (figures for households outside greater London):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £20,000 per year for couples and lone parents (£383.56pw) <i>(previously £26,000 per year or £500 .00 pw)</i> • £13,400 per year for single claimants (£256.96pw) <i>(previously £18,200 per year or £350.00 pw)</i> <p>As a June 2017, there were 116 households impacted by the Benefit Cap compared to 101 households in June 2018 which is a reduction of 13%. In real terms this equates to a reduction in Housing Benefit between £1.06 per week up to £137.96 per week.</p>

1.05	The reduction in the ceiling for the benefit cap in 2018/19 is anticipated to equate to a collective loss of income of £4996.00 per week – annual this equates to £258,278.80.
1.06	The Benefit Cap also applies to households receiving Universal Credit. Currently there are no households in Flintshire who are subject to the Benefit Cap and also receiving Universal Credit, although this is likely to change as the rollout continues.
1.07	Households affected by the Benefit Cap have been offered help through Discretionary Housing payments and an offer of personal budgeting advice to assist them to review personal income and expenditure.
1.08	Assistance and applications are made for customers around emergency type applications via the Discretionary Assistance Fund and referrals to fuel and utilities companies to access social tariffs and support services
1.09	Information is provided to help signpost additional support such as childcare offers to reduce barriers to employment.
1.10	Discretionary Housing Payments of around £52,220 have been awarded to 85 households in Flintshire to help them to manage the reduction in their household income due to the Benefit Cap.
	The Spare Room Subsidy (commonly referred to as the Bedroom Tax)
1.11	As at June 2018, there were 811 households impacted by the Spare Room Subsidy detailed as below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 177 Housing Association tenants • 630 Local Authority tenants • 4 private boarders <p>The total value of the under occupancy is £13,056.04</p>
1.12	164 households are under occupying by two or more bedrooms and 647 by one bedroom.
1.13	The total reduction in Housing Benefit (HB) payments across the 811 households is £13,056.04 per week - £678,914.08 per year.
1.14	Of the 630 households living in Local Authority owned properties, 132 households are under occupying by two or more bedrooms and 498 by one bedroom.
1.15	The total reduction in HB payments for Local Authority tenants is £10,065.31 per week - £523,396.12 per year.
1.16	From the date the Spare Room Subsidy was introduced, the Council has supported its tenants affected by the reduction in the HB award and attempted to mitigate the full impact of the reduction in Central Government HB payments from falling upon the Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

1.17	Proactive work is undertaken by the Welfare Reform Response team for cases where Discretionary Housing payments are due to end in order to review whether continued support is required.
1.18	During 2017-18 Discretionary Housing Payments totalling £58,273.28 were awarded to tenants of registered social landlords (which includes Flintshire tenants) whose HB payments were reduced by the Spare Room Subsidy.
1.19	Analysis for an ongoing award of Discretionary Housing Payment includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers with long term illness where there is need for an extra room for medical equipment (for example a dialysis machine) • Customers with mental health conditions who are on a low income • Customers who are willing to move to smaller accommodation, but there are limited smaller properties available to relocate to
	Universal Credit – Update
1.20	Universal Credit (UC) is the Government’s “flagship” welfare reform. It has been introduced to address a number of problems inherent within the current social security system, which result in many workless households developing a culture of benefit dependency. UC “full service” was implemented in Flintshire in April 2017.
1.21	UC Full Service replaces six legacy benefits for working-age claimants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Benefit; • Income Support; • Job Seekers Allowance; • Employment Support Allowance; • Child Tax Credit • Working Tax Credit
1.22	Comparing Flintshire’s UC caseload from June 2017 of 828 to June 2018 of 3623, shows a significant increase of 337% and will continue to rise as customers move over to UC via a new claim of a change in their circumstances.
1.23	Delivery of Personal Budgeting Support has provided the council with a challenge in delivering in line with the funding arrangements to provide basic budgeting advice. Experience has shown that at least 80% of appointment time is spend dealing with UC related issues such as incorrect calculations of entitlement.
	Support for Customers: “Universal Support”
1.24	Since April 2017 Personal Budgeting Support has been delivered by the Welfare Reform Response Team within Job Centres and Connects Centres.
1.25	The Government provide an annual grant funding to the Local Authority to deliver support in respect of Persona Budgeting and Assisted Digital Support.

1.25	<p>Funding from Supporting People grant is also provided so that targeted financial support for people impacted by Welfare Reform can be offered.</p> <p>This funding has helped to provide support to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 people facing homelessness • 152 people with rent arrears • 20 people facing eviction • 16 people experiencing domestic violence • 101 people suffering with mental health related issues
1.26	<p>UC Full Service is a fully digital service and in response to the implementation of full service, digital support is provided through Flintshire Connects.</p>
1.27	<p>In 2017/2018 Assisted Digital support was provided to approx. 2,757 Universal Credit customers, e.g. in making a new claim for UC and managing their online claim for UC.</p>
1.28	<p>The Council's data confirms the need for ongoing support to its customers in relation to managing their UC claim once their initial claim has been made.</p>
1.29	<p>The Welfare Reform Response Team have provided Personal Budgeting Support (PBS) to over 300 Universal Credit customers during 2017-18.</p> <p>Due to an increase in demand for the service, a further 3 sessions were introduced in February 2018, with 6 PBS sessions offered five days a week, working within Jobcentres and Connects offices across Flintshire.</p>
1.30	<p>Analysis confirms that of those customers seen during the year, 48 were repeat appointments which equates to 11% of the total appointments made.</p>
	<p>Personal Budgeting Support</p>
1.31	<p>Flintshire's Team deliver Personal Budgeting Support to help Universal Credit claimants manage their own budgets in order to prepare them for moving back into work, and to help support the financial changes that UC brings.</p>
1.32	<p>In 2017/18 Flintshire assisted approx. 355 Universal Credit Customers with budgeting advice and referrals for further specialist advice.</p>
1.33	<p>Comparing June 2017 to June 2018, an increase of 44% in referrals were made for people identified with mental health problems.</p> <p>The highest number of referrals were made in relation to rent arrears across all tenure types.</p>
1.34	<p>Experience has shown that people face a variety of impacts which have resulted in Flintshire Council escalating to the Universal Credit Service Centre. These impacts include:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorrect housing element • Delays in payments

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backdating
1.35	Flintshire's response to the implementation of UC has been seen as a model of good practice by other Welsh Local Authorities and the Welsh Government and the Benefit Department have been providing support to other Welsh Local Authorities ahead of the roll out in their respective areas.
1.36	Flintshire are actively engaged with Registered Social and private landlords, Financial Inclusion Forum and Flintshire's Tackling Poverty Group to help provide support and advice for households affected by Welfare Reform.
	Universal Credit - Key Issue Areas
1.37	Flintshire has played a key role in raising concerns relating to the Universal Credit scheme. Specifically in areas relating to:-
	"Untidy tenancies "
1.38	Flintshire has raised concerns around those tenancies where a partner has vacated the property (separation, relationship breakdown etc). In such cases where there are rent arrears, the partner's name remains on the tenancy. Universal Credit will only pay half of the housing costs
1.39	A solution has been put forward to DWP to consider an approach which mirrors the Council Tax Regulations around joint and several liability. Interim local arrangements are now in place. Flintshire is anticipating that this will have some positive impact on rent arrears whilst confirmation is agreed.
1.40	This matter is being considered at a national level and Flintshire currently await the outcome.
	Deputyship Arrangements
1.41	There are a number of concerns from deputyship and support service areas within Flintshire Council. It has become clear that Universal Credit does not support those who are unable to deal with their own affairs and have a corporate appointee in place.
1.42	To make a claim online the customer requires an individual email address which often they do not have. Corporate appointees/deputyship support who provide support for a number of people have been required to provide individual email addresses for each client making it difficult to provide support.
1.43	Recent progress has been made, whereby currently there is a local working arrangement with Mold Job Centre which has helped assist appointee/deputyship officers without the need for further consent.
1.44	The DWP have agreed and extended this approach to further Job Centres within the locality. There has been a successful local working agreement in response to this within Flintshire Job Centres whilst a national approach is agreed.

	Backdating
1.45	Backdating of Universal Credit is only considered for a one month period which causes financial difficulties for new applicants of Universal Credit.
1.46	Flintshire has raised concerns with Dept. for Work & Pensions to consider an alternative approach to reduce the impact of this. The local authority are putting measures in place to help identify a customer's "date of claim" when an application for Housing Benefit is made rather than Universal Credit.
1.47	Analysis work though manual intervention to is to be undertaken to review the effectiveness of this intervention.
	Losses for Bed & Breakfast Homeless Placements
1.48	Following the Autumn Budget Statement in November 2017, changes to Universal Credit for Temporary and emergency accommodation were introduced. From 11th April 2018, any person on Universal Credit and entering Temporary Accommodation (not just emergency temporary accommodation) will not make a claim for the UC Housing Element and will instead make a claim for Housing Benefit.
1.49	For the period 1 st April 2017 to 22 nd January 2018 Housing Benefit losses for cases placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation if claimed via the Housing Benefit route at the time rather than UC is £59,246.21. However, with the re-introduction of temporary accommodation into Housing Benefit from April 2018 will remove this pressure for 2018/19.
	Universal Credit End of Year Report
1.50	A summary of the first year of Universal Credit and it's impacts in Flintshire can be found at appendix 1
	DWP Announcement 1st October 2018
1.51	On 1 st October, DWP published an announcement on their website of their decision that from 1 st April 2019 they will no longer fund Local Authorities to provide Universal Support (Personal Budgeting and Assisted Digital support) but will instead fund Citizens Advice to deliver this service.
1.52	As this announcement came without any prior consultation the details and implications for Flintshire are currently being worked through and further details will be brought to Scrutiny at the earliest opportunity.
1.53	A copy of the letter received from the DWP is attached at appendix 2

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Although there have been some changes to Welfare Reform legislation. Ongoing welfare reforms will generate additional financial problems for low-income Flintshire households, many of whom will have been impacted by the previous reforms of their benefit entitlements.

2.02	These households will require appropriate advice and support to help them to manage the difficulties the reduction in their household budget will generate.
2.03	Delivery of Personal Budgeting Support has provided the Council with challenges in delivering in line with the funding arrangements to provide basic financial advice. Experience has shown that at least 80% of appointment time is spent dealing with and trying to resolve UC related issues, time spent contacting DWP Service Centres often resulting in the need for further appointments rather than delivering personal budgeting advice.
2.04	In addition, the latest welfare reforms will impact on new Flintshire households, for example, working households, who may also seek advice and support on how to manage their loss of income.
2.05	To manage the increased demand from Flintshire households experiencing social welfare problems, the Council has supported the development of the Flintshire Local Advice and Housing Support Gateways.
2.06	Both Gateways aim to reduce pressures on internal and external providers by effectively triaging referrals to ensure a person is referred to the most appropriate service provider.
2.07	There are clear risks to the Council around increasing rent and council tax arrears.
	Financial Implications
2.08	The DWP have provided a grant to the Council to provide UC customers with Personal Budgeting Support and Assisted Digital Support. This funding is based on volumes determined by DWP.
2.09	For 2018/2019 an advance payment of 50% of the grant funding is made available to the Council and adjustments to this funding will be made for actual volumes for more than 20% above forecasted volumes. Additional quarterly payments based on actual volumes delivered will be paid for Q1, Q2 and Q3 where take up is more than 50% of each quarter's relevant target.
2.10	Following the DWP announcement on 1 st October, consideration will need to be made around the loss of funding for Universal Support from April 2019. Further details will be made available to Scrutiny at the earliest opportunity once the implications have been worked through.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	There has been an initial meeting with DWP officials and the Council has been clear about the disappointment about the lack of consultation around the changes to funding arrangements.
3.02	The council is waiting now for DWP to share the rationale for the change


	and also the risk mitigation plan.
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4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	For some Flintshire households the financial impacts of UC is yet to be fully felt in terms of the time taken to receive the first payment of UC. However, the activities that have taken place and are underway to mitigate the negative impacts as far practicably possible have been noted in the main report
4.02	The increase in the Welfare Reform Response Team will assist residents in dealing with the financial pressures felt as a result of the implementation of UC. The team work to directly target advice and support for households throughout Flintshire whom, due to the impact of the ongoing welfare reforms, are at most risk of losing household income, those facing increasing difficulties in maintaining their rent payments, and those at an increased risk of homelessness.
4.03	The team are, with the extra resources able to identify, plan support and undertake pro-active activities to assist residents in order to mitigate welfare reforms in 2018/19
4.04	The DWP announcement regarding the removal of funding for the Local Authority to provide Universal Support from 1 st April 2019 will put the work of the team at risk in terms of providing “wrap around” support from a single point of contact from this date

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 - UC End of Year Report 2017-18 Appendix 2 – Letter to Local Authority regarding 1 st October announcement

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	https://www.gov.uk/government/news/citizens-advice-to-provide-support-to-universal-credit-claimants?utm_source=4f4a9ae5-2d1e-4c58-acad-f05b19d5849e&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate
6.02	Contact Officer: Jen Griffiths Telephone: 01352 – 702929 E-mail: Jen.Griffiths@flintshire.gov.uk

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	<p>Housing Benefit - helps tenants pay all, or part of their rent if they have a low income. Housing Benefit is administered by Local Authorities.</p> <p>Universal Credit (UC) – is an integrated means-tested benefit for people of working age whose income is below a specified minimum amount. UC can be claimed by working age people in and out of employment.</p> <p>UC Full Service – in a full service area, UC will be claimed by all working age claimants who make a new claim for a means-tested benefit.</p> <p>UC Live Service - access to UC within a live service area is controlled by an ‘eligibility gateway’ which, predominantly, restricts new UC claims being made unless the claimant is a newly unemployed single person.</p> <p>Universal Support – Helps claimants through every step of making a UC claim. Offers people comprehensive and practical support they need to get their first payment on time and be ready to manage it when it arrives. It has a focus on personal budgeting advice and digital support.</p> <p>Working Age – for social security benefits ‘working age’ ends for both men and women at the female statutory retirement pension age. In May 2016 this is 63 years old The female statutory retirement age is gradually increasing to equalise with men (65 year old) in October 2018. The pension age for both men and women will then increase to 66 in 2020.</p> <p>Welfare Reforms – changes being introduced to a range of social security benefits and tax credits, which aim to ensure that the United Kingdom has an affordable benefit system.</p>



Flintshire County Council
Universal Credit and Welfare Reform

End of Year Report 2017-2018

Contents

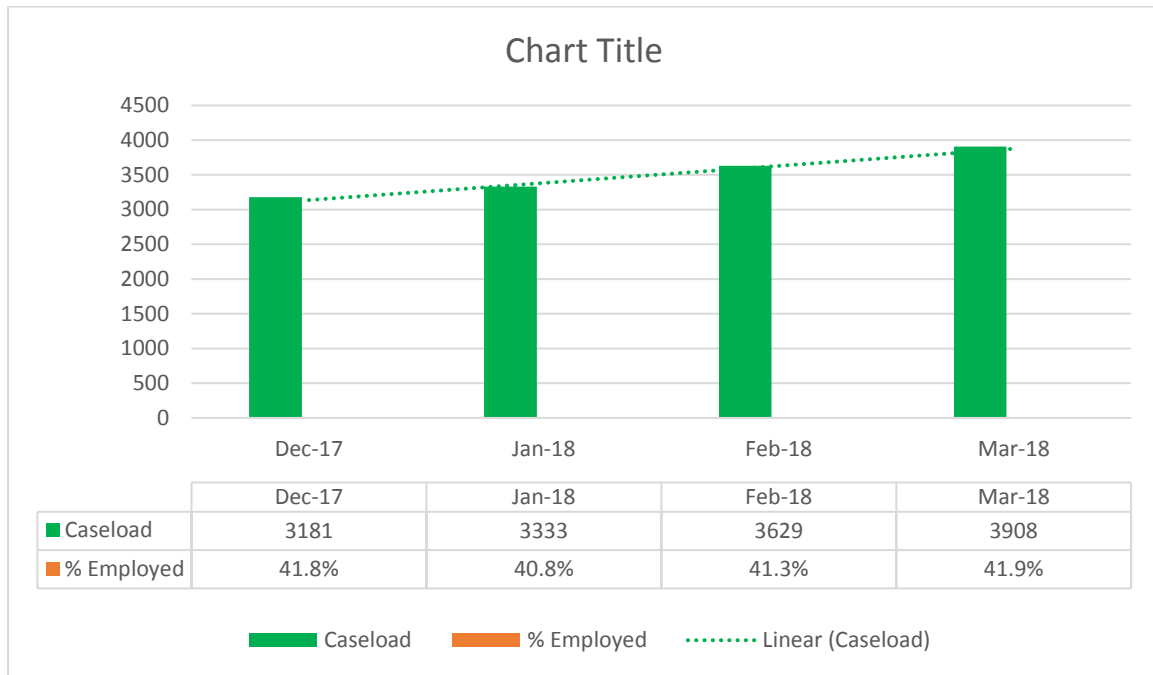
- 1.0 [Background](#)
- 2.0 [Universal Credit – Wales Picture](#)
- 3.0 [Personal Budgeting & Support \(PBS\)](#)
- 4.0 [Welfare Reform Response Team WRRT](#)
- 5.0 [Universal Credit Issues Raised by Flintshire](#)
- 6.0 [Autumn Budget Statement](#)
- 7.0 [Additional Delivery](#)
- 8.0 [Case Studies](#)

1.0 Background

Universal Credit, which is one of the UK Governments Flagship reforms, has been operating in Flintshire since 2014. From April 2017 Universal Credit Full service was rolled out in Flintshire job centres.

2.0 Universal Credit – Wales Picture

Following the latest release of the GB UC statistical data by DWP, a snapshot confirms Flintshire’s Universal Credit caseload for December 2017 and January 2018 and the percentage of those employed:-



The chart shows a steady increase of caseload volume with still less than 50% of people who are employed.

For Wales, the overall caseload picture is 28,549 – an increase of 1,423 of which 40.2% are employed. These figures are indicative of the roll out for further job centres. More recently Wrexham and Denbighshire areas which border Flintshire postcodes.

Flintshire’s Picture

Universal Credit – Stats March 2018

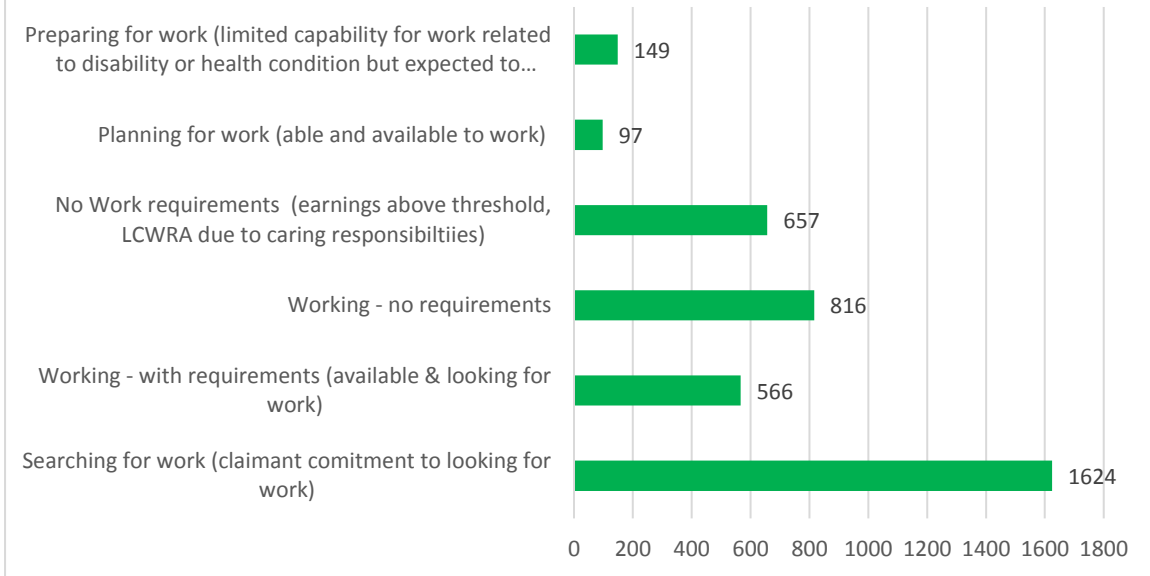
Volume of UC Caseload by Job Centre = 3974 (see breakdown below)

Please Note: There are some variances in data due to minimising risk of identification of individuals.

Job Centre	Total people on UC
Flint	1137
Mold	1098
Shotton	1739

Source of information: Universal Credit: Official Statistics Dept. for Work & Pensions.

Flintshire Snapshot - March 2018



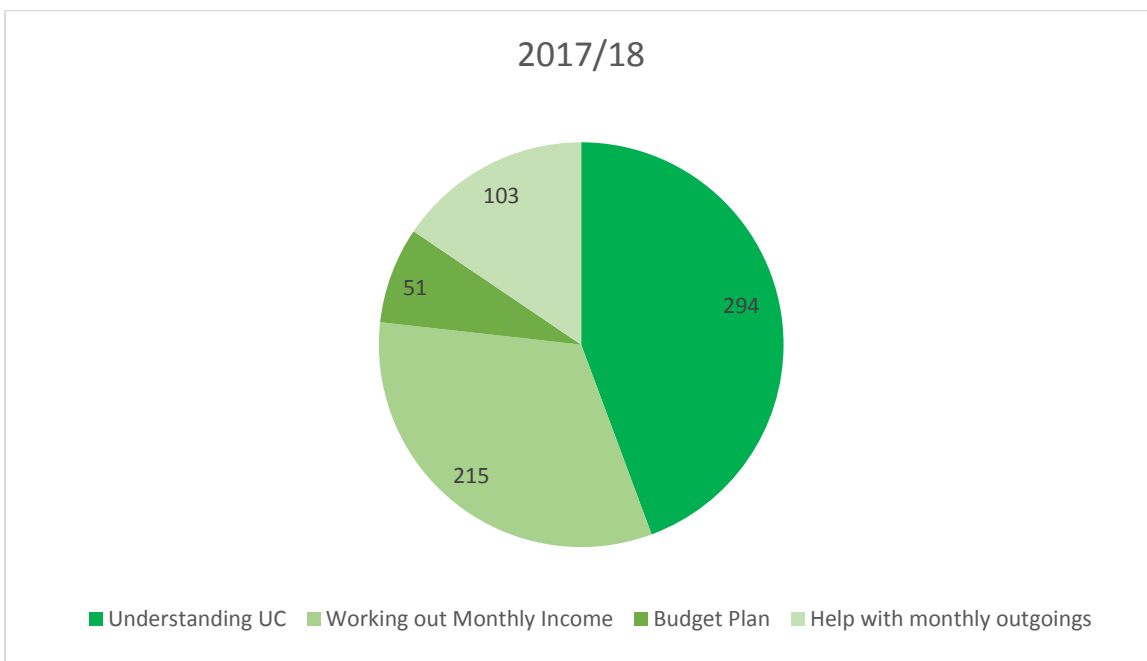
This graph is based on a total of 3,909 caseload, and indicates 83% of UC cases either are searching for work or have conditionality and contact with work coaches.

3.0 Personal Budgeting Support (PBS)

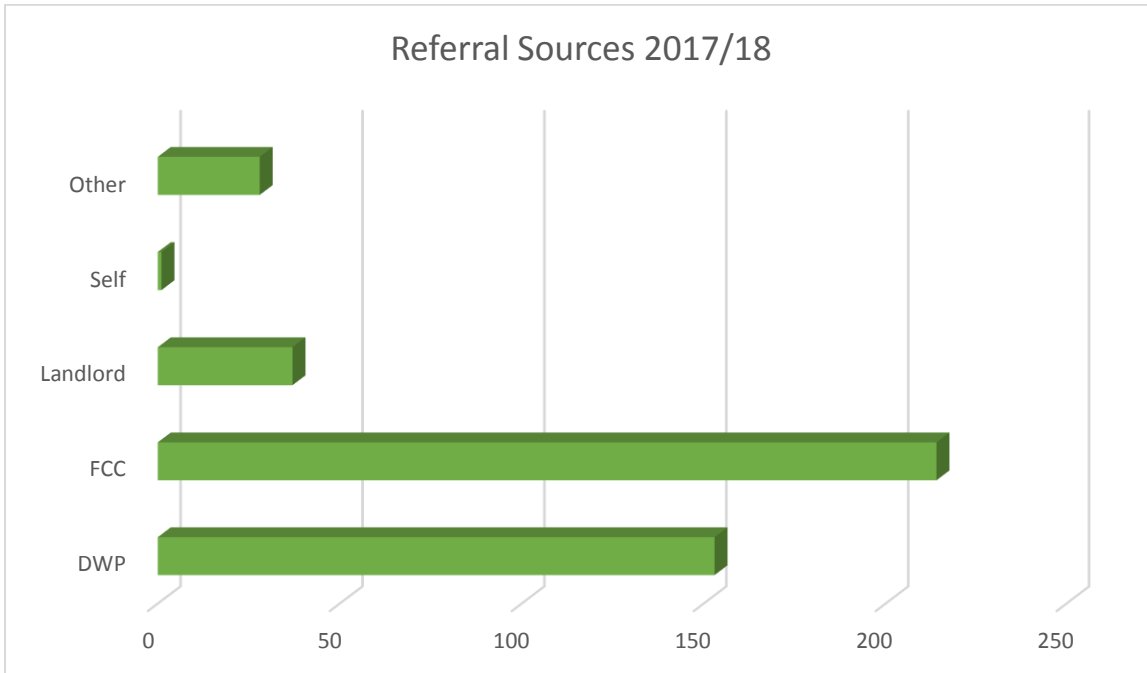
Personal Budgeting and Support is to help Universal Credit claimants to manage their own budgets in order to prepare them for moving back to work, and to help support the financial changes that UC brings.

Due to an increase in demand for the service, 6 PBS sessions are offered over five days a week, working within Jobcentres and Connects offices across Flintshire.

Some of the outcomes achieved in 2017/18 include:

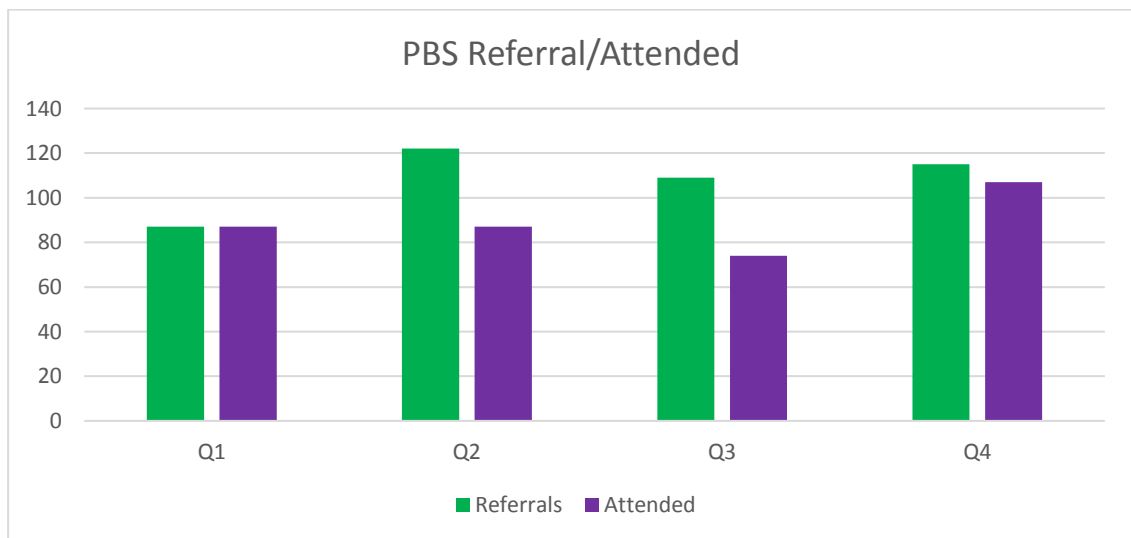


The referral sources are shown below for 2017/18, the other includes other support agencies and partners.



During PBS appointments our experience has shown that there many customers who are experiencing difficulties relating to :-

- Delays in telephone response whilst trying to contact UC,
- Incorrect calculations of housing costs etc.



As part of Personal Budgeting Support (PBS), budget plans are completed, and discussions around potential DHP can be considered for any shortfalls in rent liability as a method of supporting customers faced with financial difficulties.

In addition, recognising UC customers who receive managed payments to landlords are being referred for PBS as this is a potential indicator of someone who may require further support to manage finances.

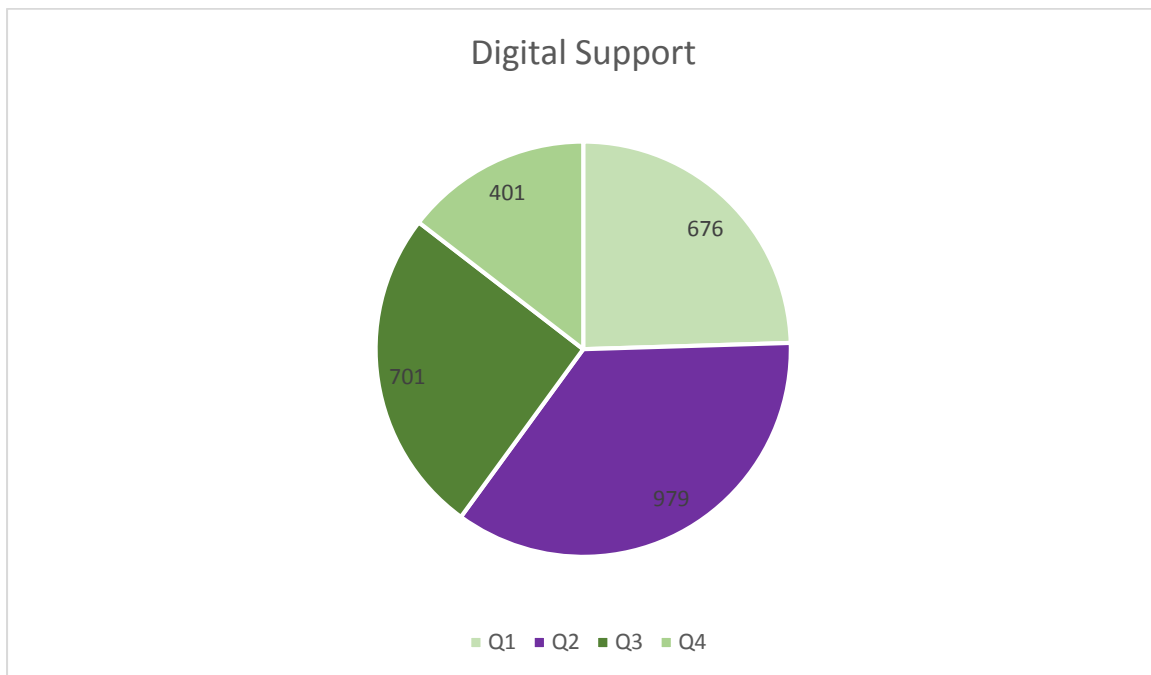
To continue improving communication links between the Job Centres and Flintshire, the customer is asked to inform the work coach via their journal of Discretionary Housing Payment awards to inform the work coach of support in place.

Customers are reminded of appointments prior to the session, and work coaches are informed of appointments made which is updated on the customer's journal which aids discussion around financial management. We have seen an increase in Q4 (refer to chart above) which seems to indicate that this approach has increased customer's attendance.

Personal Budgeting Attended - 2017/18

Universal Support	Estimated Numbers	Actual Numbers
Personal Budgeting	487	355

73% of the estimated numbers actually attended Personal Budgeting Appointments.



Funding arrangements from DWP are based on estimated numbers Personal Budgeting and digital support. For the digital support, FCC current exceeds the estimated numbers.

Universal Support	Estimated Numbers	Actual Numbers
Assisted Digital	510	2757

People accessing Assisted Digital Support exceeded estimated numbers by 462%.

For Assisted Digital Support, Local Authority receiving funding based on providing access to digital support for up 102 mins per customer.

Personal Budgeting Advice – Repeat Appointments 2017/18

The funding receiving by Flintshire Council from the Dept for Works & Pensions is paid based on one appointment for a customer, however, analysis has confirmed that a person may visit more than once however, for the purposes of MI this attendance is only recorded once.

Analysis below confirms from a total of 452 customers seen during the year, 48 of those were repeat appointments which equates to 11% of the appointments.

No. of customers attended more than one PBS appointment	Additional time spent (Appointment hrs)	% extra hours (due to additional appointments)
48	91 hrs	11%

No. of customers attended 2 appointments	No. of customers attended 3 appointments
43	5

4.0 Welfare Reform Response Team

The Welfare Response Reform Team (WRRT) provides support to Flintshire residents with options to become more financially independent.

The team has recently adapted its processes to incorporate DHP decision making for customers who also are attending Personal Budgeting Support appointments. The aim is to help address demand for DHP and proactively engage in early budgetary discussions.

Work undertaken include:-

- Support with budgeting for customers receiving Universal Credit to help manage income and expenses.
- Assisting in planned responses through Discretionary Housing Payments to those who are having problems paying their rent, and people who are at an increased risk of homelessness/eviction.
- Complete emergency type applications such as Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF).

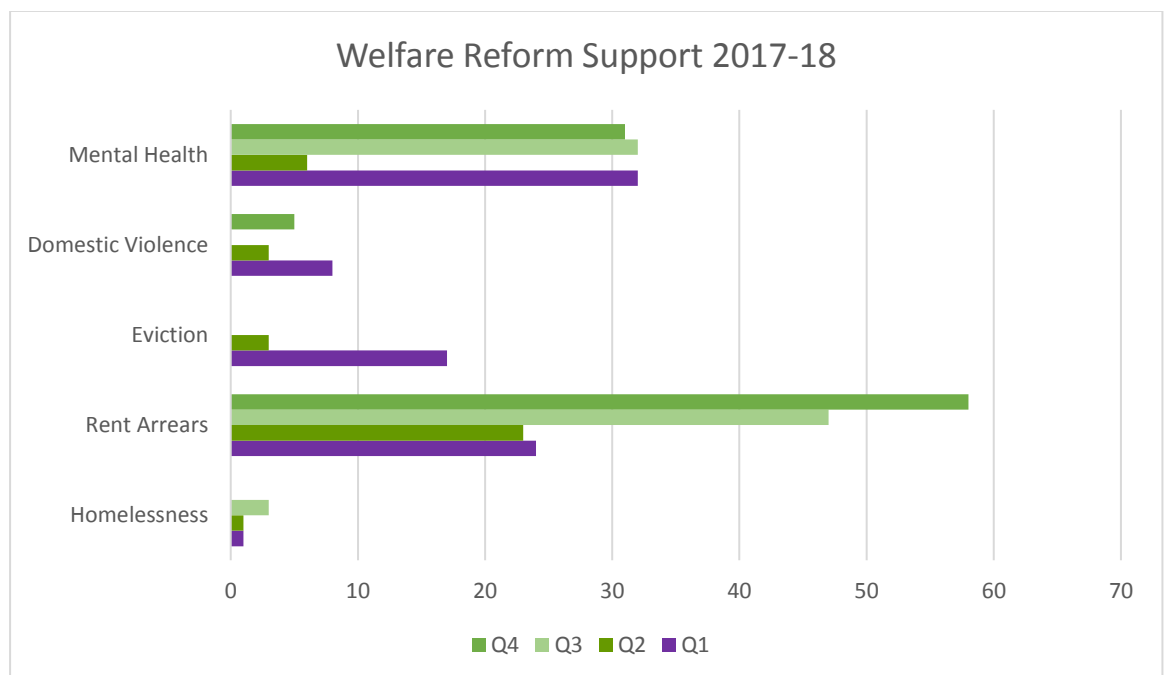
- Signpost for specialist advice and/or support; including those with employment barriers and referrals to energy advice.

The Team offer PBS appointments for those customers who have “managed payment to landlord arrangements” which require authorisation from landlords and any new Universal Credit customers are offered PBS appointments to help with the financial transition to Universal Credit. This is a recent introduction into the Welfare Reform Response Team work and analysis is currently being undertaken around its success.

As part of the Budgeting and Welfare work undertaken, the team have assisted people who are facing a variety of experiences which have included incorrect housing element. This has resulting in contacting the Universal Credit Service Centre Housing team to escalate. Our findings indicate that it can often be very lengthy to resolve due to reliance on information being provided from landlords or from the information provided Universal Credit’s understanding of eligible and non-eligible service charges.

The chart below shows that the majority of support has been provided to those with mental health and rent arrears. There has been a particular growth in Q3 with these issues

For those identified with mental health or rent arrears, support can often be in place, however, our experience shows there is a growing number of support referrals made.



The increase of customers with rent arrears could be related to an increase in volume of customers making new claims for Universal Credit and experiencing delays between their benefits. (From Housing Benefit over to Universal Credit).

The team will continue to work with other departments and closely with the DWP, to identify those cases where rent arrears are starting to increase and financial difficulties are experienced with a view to establishing appropriate options such as offering Personal Budgeting and Support for earlier intervention and longer term outcomes which the LA and customer agrees.

Some key issues for escalation have included:-

- Incorrect housing costs
- Delays in payments

Detailed below are some of the outcomes provided by the Welfare Reform, the team support people effected by a variety of reforms including MRSS (bedroom tax), benefit cap, local housing allowance reform, under 35 LHA etc.

2017/18	Preventing Homelessness	Immediate Needs	Budgeting	Priority Debts	Non priority Debts
Quarter 1	54	25	35	22	25
Quarter 2	41	37	35	45	30
Quarter 3	50	50	33	63	38
Quarter 4	72	54	58	74	57

5.0 Universal Credit Issues raised by Flintshire

Flintshire has played a key role in raising concerns relating to the Universal Credit scheme, specifically in the following areas:-

“Untidy tenancies “

Flintshire has raised concerns around those tenancies where a partner has vacated the property (separation, relationship breakdown etc). In such cases where there are rent arrears, the partner’s name remains on the tenancy. Universal Credit will only pay half of the housing costs in these cases, as the partner left in the property will be making a single claim.

A solution has been put forward to consider an approach which mirrors the Council Tax Regulations around joint and several liability. This matter is currently being considered at a national level.

As an interim measure, customers are advised to report the change via their UC journal and ask their Landlord to confirm that they are the only tenant in the property, other customers have provided council tax bills showing the single person deduction as evidence. This has some impact on rent arrears whilst confirmation is agreed, in some cases has taken a few months to resolve.

Deputyship Arrangements

During discussions and reported concerns from deputyship and support service areas within Flintshire Council, it has become clear that Universal Credit does not support those who are unable to deal with their own affairs and have a corporate appointee in place.

To make a claim online the customer requires an individual email address which often they do not have. Corporate appointees/deputyship support who provide support for a number of people have had to supply individual email addresses for each case which makes it difficult to manage and provide the support. This also provides difficulties when supporting people to make new claims for Universal Credit.

Currently, there is a local working arrangement with Mold Job Centre which has been most helpful in assisting appointee/deputyship officers without the need for further consent when supporting customers.

The DWP are currently looking into this issue and it is hoped this will be formally agreed and extended to further Job Centres within the locality and nationally.

Flintshire are currently awaiting an outcome.

Backdating

There is an issue with backdating of Universal Credit claims and this is causing financial hardship for new UC customers. Flintshire has raised this with Dept for Works & Pensions for considering an alternative approach to reduce the impact of this. The local authority are putting measures in place to help identify a customer's "date of claim" when an application for Housing Benefit is made rather than Universal Credit.

Losses for Bed & Breakfast Homeless Placements

For the period 1st April 2017 to 22/1/18 Housing Benefit losses for cases placed in Bed & Breakfast accommodation which if claimed via the Housing Benefit route at the time rather than UC is £59,246.21. However, with the re-introduction of temporary accommodation into Housing Benefit from April 2018 will remove this pressure for 2018/19.

6.0 Autumn Budget Statement

Removal of 7 day waiting period

February 2018 sees the removal of 7 day waiting period for Universal Credit claiming process so that the claim starts from the date of application. This reduces the number of weeks from 6 to 5 before a first payment is received.

Additional 2 weeks of Housing Benefit

From April 2018 those already on Housing Benefit will continue to receive their award for the first two weeks of their Universal Credit claim.

Private Landlords can ask for their tenant's Universal Credit housing costs to be paid directly to them without explicit consent from the customer, this can be triggered by the work coach or account manager.

In addition customers who are migrating/starting a new claim from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit whose previous Housing Benefit award was paid direct to the landlord, will be given the option for their Housing Costs to be paid direct to their landlord.

The results of this change will need to be monitored for impact on UC customer's financial ability.

Temporary Accommodation

From April 2018 Temporary accommodation (i.e. B&B, emergency, homeless) will be moved back into main Housing benefit for administration.

18 – 21 Year Olds

In March 2018, it was announced that all 18 -21 year olds, will be able to access support with their Housing Costs through Universal Credit. Currently, changes in legislation are due. The Council are waiting for further announcements.

Couples with three or more children

From February 2019, people with 3 or more children will be signposted to claim Universal Credit.

7.0 Additional Delivery

To help supporting other services throughout the Council and third party organisations Universal Credit awareness training has been provided to the following areas:-

- Flintshire County Council, Human Resource & Organisational Development
- Flintshire Connects
- Community Based Accommodation Support
- Drug & Alcohol Team
- Community Mental Health Team
- Social Services
- Housing Team
- Rent Income Team
- Libraries

In addition, awareness sessions have been delivered to the DWP Work Coaches for Discretionary Housing Payments and Council Tax Reduction Scheme applications.

Workshops and events have been provided to a range of support service providers including Registered Social Landlords, through relevant Landlord Forum events, Flintshire Citizens Advice, Shelter and other third party organisations.

Plans for 2018/19

To re-evaluate the Discretionary Housing Payments Policy to consider impacts for Universal Credit customers.

8.0 Universal Credit - Case Studies

Miss W Case Study

Customer has various health problems including chronic anxiety, depression and an eating disorder in which she has experienced significant weight loss, mainly due to the recent bereavement of her long term partner. Customer made a claim for Universal Credit as her joint claim with her partner stopped after he passed away.

Chronology of events and issues with UC claim:

Customer made a claim for UC, and had her housing costs verified, housing element was not included in her first UC payment.

UC were contacted and informed her that there was a delay in processing housing costs but the issue should be resolved by her next payment date. On the second payment date there were still no housing costs.

At the PBS appointment, UC was contacted and service centre advised the issue should be resolved shortly the delay was due to a discrepancy. The Service Centre could not confirm what the discrepancy was at this point but she was in rent arrears of two months. The officer advised the customer to submit a tenancy agreement and rent statement to UC, to quicken the process of the discrepancy.

Two weeks later at a second PBS session, the customer had submitted their tenancy agreement as advised, The Service centre was contacted and informed that there was no discrepancy and the Managed Payment to Landlord had been set up and the two payments were sent the previous week. At this point the customer was having £63.56 deducted from her UC award, as there was rent arrears, there were still no payments going direct to the landlord.

The officer applied for a Discretionary Assistance Fund emergency payment and issued a foodbank voucher. This case was escalated through the Department for Works & Pensions, who advised that the payments had been made the week before, again the officer stated that no payments had been received and submitted an up to date rent statement as proof of this.

The arrears which were £780.00 were caused by the delay in the UC housing costs which lasted three months, and although no housing costs were being paid but they were deducting £63.56 for rent arrears, leaving the customer in financial hardship, a Discretionary Housing Payment was discussed and a budget plan completed, it was agreed that when there was housing costs in payment a DHP would cover the shortfall in the rent for a period of six months to further help the customer. The officer again escalated this issue to a DWP manager, three days later the payments were received by the landlord and a DHP was put into payment.

This could have been avoided by the service centre being aware of what the discrepancy actually was and having a time frame in which this would be resolved keeping the customer informed and updated.

Mr S Case Study

Customer and his wife are new benefit claimants and applied to claim UC, they rent a house from the Local Authority.

Chronology of events and issues with UC claim:

Customer had housing costs verified with UC, the landlord completed a social rented sector form with the correct amount of rent and service charges being paid. When the customer received his first UC breakdown the Housing Element was incorrect and higher than the rent. Customer contacted UC to advise.

The customer attended a PBS appointment, UC were contacted who advised that this was correct amount as per the verification received. After rechecking the UC breakdown again against the Rent Verification form, it was noticed that the service charges were included in the housing costs calculation. This was escalated to the DWP, to be re checked. The response from the DWP came back that the calculation was correct, the rent statement was submitted and the customer was becoming increasingly stressed.

There had been no contact from the DWP for two months, this was escalated a third time, the following week there was a positive response from the DWP. The housing costs had been miscalculated and there would be a overpayment of £125.00 the customer attended a second PBS session the DWP Debt Management line was contacted to arrange a lower recovery rate of the Overpayment and a budget plan was completed.

What was learnt from this particular case study was ineligible service items were not deducted by Universal Credit.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

www.dwp.gov.uk

Neil Couling,
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Programme
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1 October 2018

For the attention of:
Chief Executives,
Local Authorities

You will have seen today that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has announced a new partnership between DWP and Citizen's Advice to deliver the important service of Universal Support, from 1 April 2019. This means that Local Authorities will no longer be asked to deliver Universal Support from that date.

We have listened to views and feedback, including from yourselves, about many aspects of Universal Credit including the delivery of Universal Support. From that feedback it is clear that the model as currently configured is not delivering the support for vulnerable claimants as effectively as it could have been. I also know that many Local Authorities were unhappy with the referrals mechanisms and the processes involved.

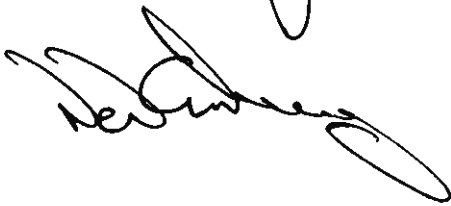
We have been keen to work more closely with third-parties to reach more widely the communities we work with, and as a result our Secretary of State has chosen to establish and launch a new partnership with Citizen's Advice and Citizen's Advice Scotland to deliver Universal Support. Funding arrangements will remain in place for Local Authorities until 31 March 2019, with joint running of the Citizens Advice offer alongside until this date, to ensure that there are no gaps in provision and to ensure that you are able to exit your annually-funded grant arrangements in good order.

I know, first hand, that Local Authorities have worked hard to deliver Universal Support, but it is right that we tackle issues that arise as we see them in the spirit of improving our service continuously. It is clear that despite the hard work, the

service as currently configured is not providing consistent support nationwide as the feedback from claimants, their representatives and the NAO has shown.

I would like to thank you sincerely for the hard work and effort you have put in to help us deliver Universal Support to date and your help to ensure the continued Success of Universal Credit. Our relationships will remain critical and I look forward to working with you to continue to deliver for, engage and support those who need it most in our society and I and my teams will continue to support and work alongside you to do just that.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil Couling', written in a cursive style.

Neil Couling
Director General, Universal Credit Programme



COMMUNITY & ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 7 th November 2018
Report Subject	Forward Work Programme
Cabinet Member	N / A
Report Author	Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator
Type of Report	Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview & Scrutiny presents a unique opportunity for Members to determine the Forward Work programme of the Committee of which they are Members. By reviewing and prioritising the Forward Work Programme Members are able to ensure it is Member-led and includes the right issues. A copy of the Forward Work Programme is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration which has been updated following the last meeting.

The Committee is asked to consider, and amend where necessary, the Forward Work Programme for the Community & Enterprise Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

1	That the Committee considers the draft Forward Work Programme and approve/amend as necessary.
2	That the Facilitator, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee be authorised to vary the Forward Work Programme between meetings, as the need arises.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	EXPLAINING THE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME
1.01	Items feed into a Committee's Forward Work Programme from a number of sources. Members can suggest topics for review by Overview & Scrutiny Committees, members of the public can suggest topics, items can be referred by the Cabinet for consultation purposes, or by County Council or Chief Officers. Other possible items are identified from the Cabinet Work Programme and the Improvement Plan.
1.02	<p>In identifying topics for future consideration, it is useful for a 'test of significance' to be applied. This can be achieved by asking a range of questions as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Will the review contribute to the Council's priorities and/or objectives?2. Is it an area of major change or risk?3. Are there issues of concern in performance?4. Is there new Government guidance of legislation?5. Is it prompted by the work carried out by Regulators/Internal Audit?
2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	None as a result of this report.
3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	Publication of this report constitutes consultation.
4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	None as a result of this report.
5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Current Forward Work Programme
6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>None.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Ceri Shotton Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator</p> <p>Telephone: 01352 702305</p> <p>E-mail: ceri.shotton@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	Improvement Plan: the document which sets out the annual priorities of the Council. It is a requirement of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 to set Improvement Objectives and publish an Improvement Plan.

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CURRENT FWP

Date of meeting	Subject	Purpose of Report	Scrutiny Focus	Report Author	Submission Deadline
Wednesday 19th December 2018 10.00 am Page 55	Council Plan 2018/19 – Mid Year Monitoring Communities for Work Homeless Strategy and Action Plan New Homes Board	To review the levels of progress in the achievement of activities, performance levels and current risk levels as identified in the Council Plan 2018/19 To update members on the delivery of the Welsh Government employability programmes in Flintshire To provide details of the Homeless Strategy and Action Plan To receive an update on the work of the New Homes Board	Assurance/Monitoring Assurance Monitoring Assurance Monitoring Assurance Monitoring	Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator Service Manager – Enterprise and Regeneration Customer Support Manager Housing Strategy Manager	
Wednesday 23rd January 2019 10.00 am	HRA Business Plan and Budget	To consider the proposed HRA Business Plan and Budget for 2019/20	Consultation	Chief Officer (Housing and Assets)	

	Housing Strategy	To consider the Housing Strategy	Consultation	Housing Strategy Manager	
	Sheltered Housing Review	To consider the outcome of the Sheltered Housing Review	Consultation		
Wednesday 13th March 2019 10.00 am Page 56	Quarter 3 Council Plan 2018/19 Monitoring Report	To enable Members to fulfil their role in relation to performance monitoring	Assurance Monitoring	Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator	
	Welfare Reform Update – Universal Credit Roll Out	To provide an update on the impact of Welfare Reform on Flintshire residents	Assurance/Monitoring	Benefits Manager	
	Specialist Housing	To consider how the Council will meet the needs of applicants with specialist needs through specialist housing	Consultation	Customer Support Manager	
Wednesday 1st May 2019 10.00 am	Update Report – Disabled Facilities Grant Internal Audit Report 2017	To provide a six month update on progress in relation to the service control action plan			
Wednesday 26th June 2019 10.00 am	Quarter 4/Year-end Council Plan 2018/19 Monitoring Report	To enable Members to fulfil their role in relation to performance monitoring	Assurance Monitoring	Overview & Scrutiny Facilitator	

Items to be scheduled to a date

- Work to address economic inactivity and support entrepreneurship
- Update on private sector housing renewal strategy
- Update report on stairwell at Castle Heights Flint – as suggested during the 20th September meeting
- Smart Metres – as suggested during the 16th October meeting.

REGULAR ITEMS

Month	Item	Purpose of Report	Responsible / Contact Officer
Quarterly / Annual Page 57	Performance Reporting	To consider performance outturns for improvement targets against directorate indicators.	Chief Officer (Housing and Assets) Chief Officer (Planning, Environment and Economy)
Six monthly	Welfare Reform Update – including Universal Credit	To update Members on the impact of Welfare Reform and the cost to the Council.	Chief Officer (Housing and Assets)
Six monthly	Update on North East Wales Homes & Property Management	To update Members on the work of the North East Wales Homes & Property Management	Chief Officer (Housing and Assets)
Annually – September	WHQS Capital Programme – Delivery review update	To provide an update on progress of the Welsh Housing Quality Standards (WHQS), that the Council is delivering through its Capital Investment Programme. Report to include information around the use of local labour and number of apprentices and school leavers.	Chief Officer (Housing and Assets)

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