

# Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee

10.00am, Tuesday 17 May 2016

## Welfare Reform – Update

Item number	7.2
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	

### Executive summary

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The Department for Work and Pensions implemented Universal Credit for new single claimants in Edinburgh on 9 March 2015. The Council is involved in a new Delivery Partnership Agreement (DPA) to support citizens through the transition into Universal Credit for 2016/17.

The Department of Work and Pensions also announced the extension of its digital programme to include Musselburgh Job Centre Plus which covers the East Lothian area. The Council is seeking to be involved in discussions and learn from the experience of our neighbours in preparation for the digital roll out, and extension to the wider group of citizens. An area of Edinburgh which links into Musselburgh Job Centre has been identified. The caseload anticipated is minimal, but will allow Edinburgh to test and learn to support the transition of Citizens.

The Council continues to engage with tenants providing advice and financial support through Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP).

### Links

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**Coalition pledges**

**Council outcomes** [CO6; CO8; CO9; CO16; CO24; CO25; CO26](#)

**Single Outcome Agreement** [SO2](#)

## Welfare Reform – Update

### Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee notes:
  - 1.1.1 the status of Universal Credit in Edinburgh;
  - 1.1.2 the Council's ongoing activities relating to Welfare Reform;
  - 1.1.3 to note the COSLA Paper Scotland's New Social Security Powers – Role of Local Authorities
  - 1.1.4 the current projection of spend on Discretionary Housing Payments;
  - 1.1.5 the current projection of spend on Council Tax Reduction Scheme; and
  - 1.1.6 the current projection of spend on Scottish Welfare Fund.

### Background

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- 2.1 The Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee recommended on 22 January 2013 to continue to monitor the Council's actions relating to Welfare Reform and requested bi-monthly update reports.
- 2.2 Following discussions with relevant Councillors it was agreed to report the Welfare Reform update on a quarterly basis, to align with the Working Group meeting cycle. The last report was considered by Committee on 23 February 2016.

### Main report

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#### **Universal Credit (UC) and Universal Support Delivered Locally**

- 3.1 Universal Credit in Edinburgh continues to operate in DWP 'Live' version which is available to new single claimants who would previously have been eligible for Job Seekers Allowance.
- 3.2 The DWP digital service was extended to Musselburgh Job Centre from 23 March 2016 as planned. This extends UC to all working age categories seeking work, not just single claimants, in the neighbouring authority of East Lothian. Some Edinburgh claimants resident in the east of the City who use Musselburgh JCP for their job seeking activities will also be included in this pilot.
- 3.3 Council Officers have profiled social sector Housing in the area and have identified a maximum of 14 households have potential of entering full UC service if there is a change in their current circumstances.
- 3.4 Communication has commenced with these households to identify this change and to offer them support through this transition should they require this. This will allow the Council to profile impacts and outcomes for Citizens across the City in preparation of change to UC digital in Edinburgh on a very small scale.

The Council have asked that they are involved in preliminary meetings so as to learn from our close neighbours in preparation for any digital service launch in Edinburgh. This continues to be considered by colleagues within DWP.

- 3.5 The Council is currently negotiating a further Delivery Partnership Agreement with the DWP for 2016/17 to provide the following services
- provide support to UC Service Centre staff around housing cost issues that may arise;
  - support claimants to get on-line and stay on line;
  - providing the necessary Management Information to support number of claimants assisted;
  - support for claimants with complex needs and in particular those who require personal budgeting support (PBS) by performing the acts, functions and roles assigned to it in the outline of the personal budgeting support arrangements; and
  - work with Universal Credit Programme in preparing landlords for complex rent collection and direct payment of housing costs to customers.
- 3.6 The corporate cross council operational team have and are continuing to work in conjunction with DWP and JCP staff to support citizens in the transition to the new UC system. There continues to be a strong commitment that both organisations work together in an attempt to support citizens.
- 3.7 The City's landlord sub-group last met 30 March 2016 with DWP to maintain operational focus to allow landlords to better prepare and engage with tenants entering UC, and protect income streams and payment management regimes.
- 3.8 The collaboration between the Council and the DWP continues to work well at a local level, and this co-operation provides an effective means of access into the DWP operational service centres.
- 3.9 **UC Caseload in Edinburgh**

The latest UC figures available by caseload up to 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2016

<b>Job Centre</b>	<b>UC Claims</b>
High Riggs	648
Edinburgh City	594
Leith	858
Wester Hailes	448
<b>Total</b>	<b>2548</b>

This represents an increase of 522 claimants of UC city wide based on figures published by DWP of the position as at 12 November 2015.

### 3.10 UC Caseload Nationally

DWP have produced statistics to demonstrate the national trends of Universal Credit. This report is attached as Appendix 1

#### **SWF and UC Claims to be updated**

- 3.11 In order to assess the impact of Universal Credit waiting and assessment periods on alternative funding streams, separate information is collated on those claimants citing UC as a reason for applying for Crisis Grant from the Scottish Welfare Fund. Latest information at 11 April 2016 show that since the introduction of Universal Credit there have been a total of 41 UC related applications for Crisis Grants, representing significantly less than 1% of all UC claims.

The value of awards related to UC are as follows:

Cash Awards	-	£2190
Vouchers	-	£2510
Total	-	£4380

- 3.12 The process of referring citizens in the first instance to DWP for a short term benefit advance continues. The Scottish Government, who have overall control of the SWF, are working with local authorities to monitor spend in this area. The level of applications and awards remains relatively low, indicating appropriate funding of citizens in transition to UC.

#### **Personal Budgeting Support Referrals**

- 3.13 The Delivery Partnership Agreement between DWP and the Council requires the delivery of this service. The pilot scheme undertaken involving co-location of the Council's Personal Budgeting Support officer with the DWP in an attempt to increase accessibility to citizens requiring this type of support continues. This pilot involves a council officer working alongside DWP work coaches in Leith Job Centre Plus and High Riggs Job Centre Plus in an attempt to drive up take-up.

The figures for PBS engagement are as follows:

October 2015	11
November	11
December	3
January 2016	6
February 2016	6
March 2016	11

## **Management of UC Roll Out**

- 3.14 Council operations supporting UC claims and payments will continue to be delivered through the Customer Hub at 249 High Street in the coming financial year. The Centralisation of this activity will continue to adequately assess the success and cost of service delivery.

## **Council Housing Services – Universal Credit (UC)**

- 3.15 As at the end of March 2016, there are just under 390 council tenants now receiving UC. The proportion of tenants also affected by under-occupation has remained consistent at around 44%. Dedicated advice and support continues to be provided to all tenants moving onto UC to ensure that they have claimed the housing costs element of UC and through the initial transition to the new scheme.
- 3.16 The majority of Council tenants on UC had legacy arrears at the start of their UC claim. Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA) involving direct payments to the Council continue to be used. This is intended as a temporary arrangement that is subject to DWP review. Managing APAs and ongoing payments for rent, including any outstanding arrears is resource intensive. The focus of the approach and the dedicated advice offered is to encourage tenants to take responsibility for managing their ongoing rent payment responsibilities.
- 3.17 Council services also continue to be adapted as required while the roll out of UC continues, and the overall number of tenants on UC remains small. A joint approach to referrals for additional support is being managed through existing services. This includes support for personal budgeting which is recorded as part of the management information return to the DWP to fully assess the impact the Council's delivery of services.

## **Temporary and Supported Accommodations**

- 3.18 Households in temporary accommodation affected by the Benefit Cap and/or Under Occupation, continue to be provided with advice and assistance to apply for Discretionary Housing Payments. Households are placed in temporary accommodation that reduces the likelihood of them being affected by the Under Occupancy regulations where possible. They may on occasion be placed in a larger property to meet their emergency housing need. There are currently 39 households who are under occupying temporary accommodation out of a total of 420.

## **Advice Shop**

- 3.19 Advice Services continue to respond to demand for information and advice on income maximisation and debt matters.
- 3.20 Data on service demand across advice agencies is not yet available for the period January to March 2016.
- 3.21 There has been a small increase in the number of welfare rights tribunals over the past six months.

Comparative figures as follows:

### **Welfare Rights Tribunals**

The number of Welfare Rights Tribunals reported by Advice Shop are as follows:

2013	-	774
2014	-	483
2015	-	396
2016	-	80 for first 2 months

- 3.22 PIP is the single biggest growth area for benefits advice as more people are transitioned from DLA.
- 3.23 Alongside PIP, there continues to be a growth in the number of benefit enquiries from people from abroad as welfare reform changes have led to benefits becoming less accessible for some categories of claimant.

### **Devolved Powers**

- 3.24 The report of [the Smith Commission](#) for further devolved powers to the Scottish Parliament was published 27 November 2014. The Edinburgh is represented in a national group headed by COSLA to determine the potential delivery of these benefits by Local Authorities. A briefing note has been produced and submitted to the Scottish Government (Appendix 2).

### **Extension of Benefit Cap**

- 3.25 The benefit cap is a limit on the total amount of income from certain benefits a household can receive. If they receive more than the benefit cap allows then their Housing Benefit will be reduced until they are brought back within the income cap. For a couple or single person with children the benefit cap is currently £500 per week. The limit for single people with no children is £350 per week. From April 2016 this will be reduced to £335 for a couple or single person with children and £258 for a single person.
- 3.26 This was proposed for implementation in April, however DWP have now advised this will not be implemented until autumn 2016. The Council received information from DWP at the end of April which will now allow affected citizens to be identified. Various services will begin working with this group to support them as they transition through this change.

### **Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS)**

- 3.27 The DWP has confirmed that it will continue with the funding arrangement in place for 2016/17. This reflects the evolving nature of CTRS and that the implementation and migration of Housing Benefit to UC is being done as staged process. The Settlement and Distribution Group continue to consider the distribution of CTRS funding and will advise Local Authorities accordingly.

- 3.28 CTRS is not part of the UC package of benefits, with the fund being independently administered by each local authority. Every effort is being made to raise awareness of this and to ensure customers make the separate CTRS claim at the point of UC claim.
- 3.29 The demand on the 2016/17 budget continues to be monitored monthly in line with changes to customers' circumstances.
- 3.30 At 31 March 2016 the annual spend for the fund was 94.17% (Appendix 3). This is indicative of the falling caseload. CTRS take-up has fallen based on previous year and the graph contained within this appendix details the reduction from 10.92% in June 2015 to 10.19% for the same period last year of all Council Tax Liability
- 3.31 Whilst CTRS spend has reduced, Council Tax collection has increased by just over 1% based on 2014/15. This means less of the total tax liability is subject to relief through CTRS, and that less citizens are requiring this financial support to meet liabilities.

### **Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) – Crisis Grants and Community Care Grants**

- 3.32 Overall spend totals for the 2015/2016 on the fund:

	Budget	Spend	Carry Over to 2016/17
2015/16 SWF Fund	£	£	£
Crisis Grant	666,000	604,158	61,842
Community Care Grant	1,865,628	1,625,013	240,615
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,531,628*</b>	<b>2,229,171</b>	<b>302,457</b>

*\*Including carry forward of £343,808 of under spend from 2014/15*

- 3.33 There were three 2<sup>nd</sup> tier Crisis Grant meetings between December 2015 to March 2016 – of which 2 were refused and 1 upheld.
- 3.34 There were three 2<sup>nd</sup> tier review panel meeting between December 2015 and March 2016 for Community Care Grants, all of which remained with the original decision.
- 3.35 At the time of writing this report, 1 appeal has been made under the new process for 2<sup>nd</sup> tier review to Scottish Public Services Ombudsman effective from 01 April 2016.
- 3.36 **SWF – 2016/17 Allocation**

2016/17 SWF Fund	Budget	Carry Over to 2016/17	Total Spend Available	2016/17 Spend as at 18/04/2016
	£	£	£	£

Crisis Grant	660,000	43,712	703,712	28,680.00
Community Care Grant	1,424,325	363,016	1,787,341	51,131.40
Total	2,084,325	406,728	2,491,053	78,811.40

- 3.37 The 2015/16 year end spend profile for each fund is included in Appendix 4.
- 3.38 Both Crisis Grant and Community Care Grant applications have been considered for medium and high priority cases since January 2015 and this will continue for the immediate future in 2016/17.
- 3.39 The monthly spend levels for both grants continue to be monitored on a daily basis to allow appropriate adjustments to be made to the priority levels or budget allocation.
- 3.40 The Furnishing Service has delivered approx 90% of ordered goods within agreed timescales. Positive feedback has been received from the SWF team and customers.

#### **Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)**

- 3.41 The remaining £9m of the original £35m of Scottish Government funding available to Local Authorities to fully mitigate Under Occupancy will be distributed to councils based on actual DHP expenditure following the publication of the 2015/16 DHP statistics in May 2016.
- 3.42 Edinburgh's total DHP spend for 2015/16 is estimated at around £4.6m. Therefore a proportion of the remaining £9m will be required to cover all of Edinburgh's DHP expenditure. The Council will continue to monitor DHP spend on a monthly basis and an appropriate claim will be made to the Scottish Government.
- 3.43 There have been 6965 DHP applications for 2015/16 considered up to 31 March 2016 of which 769 were refused. The overall refusal rate is 11%. The most common reason for refusal is where a customer's income exceeds their expenditure.
- 3.44 For 2014/15 the overall refusal rate for Scotland was 9.2% against Edinburgh's rate of 10.6%. No details are yet held for Scotland's overall refusal rate for 2015/16.

3.45 At 31 March 2016, the Council's DHP financial position was:

Total Fund	£3,914,405
DWP	£1,343,558
Scottish Government,	£2,570,847*
Total Spend	£4,539,275.96**

*\*exclusive of additional 20% to be allocated in 2016*

*\*\*estimated as applications continue to be made to last years fund*

3.46 Statistics for 2015/16 are not yet available for the spend for Under Occupancy. However mid year comparisons would suggest a similar spend to 2014/15:

Spend in 2014/15 - £3,931,634.07

The mid financial year position for 2015/16 - £1,922,169.25

3.47 Appendix 5 outlines the Council's DHP spend profile at 31 March 2016. The additional Scottish Government funding is expected to mitigate under occupancy in 2015/16 following final settlement from Scottish Government.

3.48 DHP Allocation for 2016/17 is as follows:

Awarding Organisation	2016 Allocation Total £	Under Occupancy Element of Total Allocation £	Hardship not related to Under Occupancy of Total Allocation £
DWP	1,450,868	587,168	863,700
Scottish Government	2,565,504*	2,565,504	0
Total	4,016,372	3,152,672	863,700

*\*additional contribution of £780,348 expected as final settlement from Scottish Government to mitigate under occupancy based on actual spend in May 2017 increasing total fund to £4,796,720.*

### **Foodbanks**

3.49 The Council continues to work with foodbanks to address immediate crisis of citizens in need.

3.50 The working party set up to look at foodbank provision across the City continues to meet, with a view to better supporting those outlets who provide holistic services along with emergency food aid. This group is now chaired by Councillor Lewis Ritchie, Deputy Convenor of Communities and

Neighbourhoods, and its membership includes cross council services, foodbanks and representatives from DWP.

- 3.51 Council officers have facilitated meetings with community partner organisations to discuss the provision of emergency food aid with holistic advice services in the East of the City. These discussions continue and the outcome will be reported as soon as plans are finalised.
- 3.52 Citizens calling the Council and selecting access to foodbank options on Advice telephony services will be routed through the Scottish Welfare Fund in an attempt to support citizens through this service as an alternative to foodbank use.
- 3.53 Agreements have been reached with a number of foodbanks to accept electronic referrals from the Scottish Welfare Fund should citizens not qualify for a Crisis Grant. Foodbank referral will be offered as a final option to alleviate citizens' crisis and the new process should improve access to these services.
- 3.54 The map showing emergency food aid and related services such as advice agencies has been updated and is included again in Appendix 6. The updated map is also displayed on the Council Website.

### **The Welfare Reform Working Group**

- 3.55 The Welfare Reform Working Group continues to meet quarterly to monitor the impacts of Welfare Reform on the Council and its service user.

Items considered included:

- Rent Re-Design Progress Report
- Personal Independence Payments Briefing
- Universal Credit Update
- Foodbank Referral Process New Arrangements
- Devolved Powers for Scottish Government on Welfare Reform
- Benefit Changes from April 2016 Including the Benefit Cap
- Future Membership and Representatives of Group
- Personal Budgeting Service Personal budgeting Service

### **The Welfare Reform Core Group – Delivering Social Security in Edinburgh a strategic response to Welfare Reform**

- 3.56 The Welfare Reform Core Group continues to meet quarterly to agree the delivery of the key actions to achieve outcomes in terms of:
- Prevention of hardship and worsening inequality;
  - Effective response to crisis needs for housing heat and food;
  - Effective support for vulnerable individuals and families; and
  - Partnership action to sustain Edinburgh's social security.
- 3.57 Business Intelligence are reviewing the document Delivering Social Security in Edinburgh with a view to linking better with the Council's Policy Strategy and providing more detailed data on impacts of Welfare Reform across the City.

## **The Welfare Reform Partners' Forum**

- 3.58 The Welfare Reform Partners' forum met on 13 April 2016 with EVOC acting as the first rolling host in an attempt to create greater ownership and external partnership input.

### **Measures of success**

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- 4.1 The success of the programme will continue to be measured through:
- reductions in forecast loss of income; and
  - customer satisfaction with advice and advocacy services relating to benefit changes, including increased benefit take up and minimises losses by ensuring people get their full entitlement under the new arrangements.

### **Financial impact**

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- 5.1 The increase in numbers of people experiencing hardship has led to increased demand for services across the Council and also partner advice agencies. There is a risk to Council income, particularly in relation to rent arrears, changes to subsidy levels for temporary accommodation and service charges. Known risks include:
- loss of rental income to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) arising from Housing Benefit under Occupation reforms and Direct Payment under Universal Credit;
  - Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payment budget will be insufficient to meet demand longer term;
  - the spend on Council Tax Reduction Scheme exceeds the available funding;
  - reduced DWP Administration Subsidy due to the abolition of Council Tax Benefit, the phasing out of Housing Benefit and Central Government budget savings;
  - increased demand on advice and advocacy both for the Council and Third Sector advice agencies; and
  - increase in homeless population where delays in payment of rent due to assessment periods for UC in the private sector.

### **Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact**

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- 6.1 The financial risk to the Council as well as the risk to the Council's reputation is being monitored regularly. Actions taken to assess and mitigate these risks and ensure effective governance include:
- Tri-monthly updates were provided to Corporate Policy and Strategy, however, these will now be reported on a quarterly basis, to align with the Working Group meeting cycle;
  - annual update to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee;

- dedicated teams introduced to provide support and assistance;
- quarterly meetings with Elected Members, Council Officers and External Partners; and
- a strategic approach and action plan for delivering Social Security in Edinburgh (A strategic response to Welfare Reform in Edinburgh).

## Equalities impact

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- 7.1 The UK Government has prepared Equalities and Human Rights assessments for the welfare reform proposals. The Council will undertake an EHRIA when necessary for any of its proposals.

## Sustainability impact

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- 8.1 Welfare Reform is expected to have general implications for environmental and sustainability outcomes, for example in relation to fuel poverty and financial exclusion.

## Consultation and engagement

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- 9.1 Council officials continue to engage with the UK and Scottish Governments, directly and through COSLA, with the DWP, the Third Sector, the NHS and other partners. The Council is also engaging with citizens, both in and out of work, who rely on benefit income and tax credits.
- 9.2 The Council continues to participate in groups with the looking at the impacts of Welfare Reform, namely Local Authority Transition Working Group (LATWG), and COSLA's Welfare Reform Local Authority Representative Group.
- 9.3 Recent community engagement has resulted in plans for joint working initiatives to provide Foodbank Plus models which will address immediate crisis as well as preventative action to reduce use of such services in the future.

## Background reading / external references

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Recent reports to committee:

[Welfare Reform – Update – Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee 20 January 2014](#)

[Strategic Response to Welfare Reform in Edinburgh – Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee 30 September 2014](#)

[Welfare Reform update – Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee 3 November 2015](#)

[Welfare Reform – update – Finance and Resources Committee, 28 August 2014](#)

[Discretionary Housing Payment Policy – Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee, 5 August 2014](#)

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## Links

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### Coalition pledges

### Council outcomes

### Single Outcome Agreement

**SO2** – Edinburgh’s citizens experience improved health and wellbeing, with reduced inequalities in health

Appendix 1- Universal Credit Statistics to 7 April 2016

### Appendices

Appendix 2 – Scotland’s New Social Security Powers – Role of Local Authorities

Appendix 3 – Council Tax Reduction Scheme Spend

Appendix 4 – Scottish Welfare Fund Spend

Appendix 5– Discretionary Housing Payment Spend

Appendix 6 - Foodbanks mapped with support services



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Universal Credit Statistics

Data to 7 April 2016



Monthly

Published: 20 April 2016 Great Britain

Official  
Experimental

Universal Credit aims to reduce poverty, by making work pay, and to help claimants and their families to become more independent.

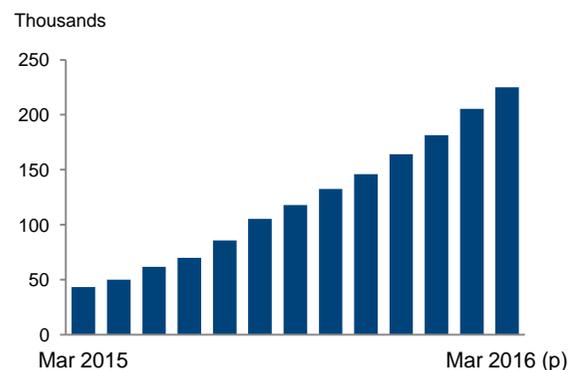
Universal Credit was introduced in April 2013 in certain pathfinder areas of North West England. Since October 2013, it has progressively been rolled out to other areas. In the period covered by this release, 690 Jobcentre Plus offices have started to introduce Universal Credit.

## Main story

The number of people on Universal Credit as of 10 March 2016 was 225,002. The number of people in employment is currently 87,592 (39 per cent).

### 225,002 claimants

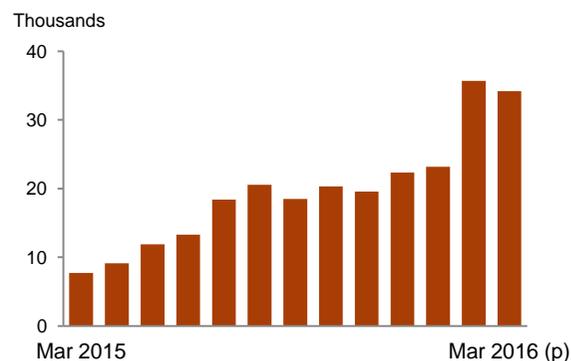
March 2016



As Universal Credit is expanded across the country the number of people receiving it continues to increase, reaching 225,002 in March 2016.

### Starts remain high

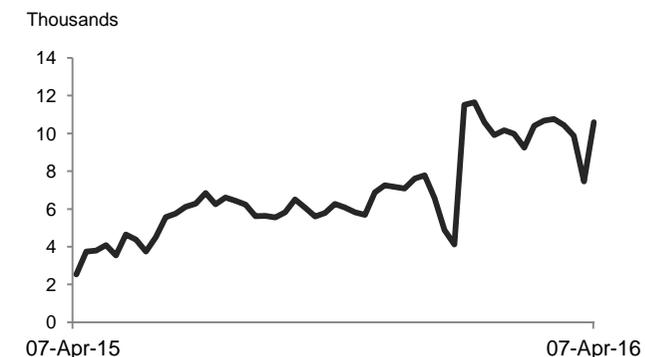
March 2016



The number of starts made to Universal Credit was 31,538 in March 2016 as roll-out extends to cover over 95% of Jobcentre Plus Offices.

### Claims drop over Easter

Up to 7 April 2016



## At a glance

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Drop in claims over Easter

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Starts remain high

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39 per cent of claimants in employment

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Where you live

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**DWP Press Office:** 0203 267 5129

Thoughts? We welcome feedback

Published 20 April 2016

Next edition 18 May 2016

## What you need to know

This summary contains statistics on Universal Credit covering the period to 7 April 2016 (for claims made) and 10 March 2016 (for starts and people receiving Universal Credit) encompassing the 690 Jobcentre Plus offices which had implemented Universal Credit up to those dates.

Universal Credit aims to reduce poverty, by making work pay, and to help claimants and their families to become more independent. It also aims to simplify the benefits system by providing a single payment based upon the circumstances of the household. Support for housing costs, children and childcare costs are integrated in the new benefit. It also provides additions for disabled people and carers.

The following benefits will be replaced as Universal Credit rolls out.

- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Income Support
- Working Tax Credit
- Child Tax Credit
- Housing Benefit

The main differences between Universal Credit and the current welfare system are:

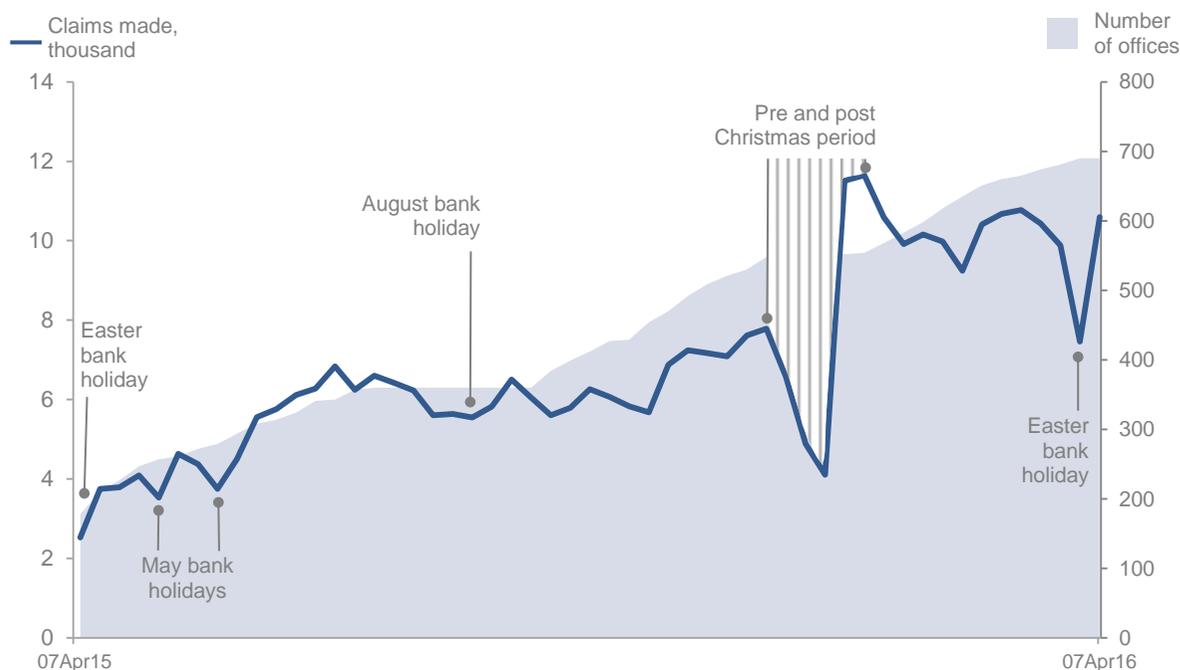
- Universal Credit is available to people who are in work and on a low income, as well as to those who are out-of-work.
- Most people will apply online and manage their claim through an online account.
- Universal Credit will be responsive – as people on low incomes move in and out of work, they will get on-going support.
- Most claimants on low incomes will still be paid Universal Credit when they first start a new job or increase their part-time hours.
- Claimants will receive a single monthly household payment, paid into a bank account in the same way as a monthly salary; support with housing costs will usually go direct to the claimant as part of their monthly payment.

This report contains three measures. **Claims** made counts the number of applications submitted for Universal Credit. Some of these people will go on to **Start** receiving Universal Credit. **People on Universal Credit** includes all those who have started and are still on Universal Credit at the count date (second Thursday of the month). Some people will have their claim terminated either at the request of the individual or if their entitlement to Universal Credit ends. See the Background Information document for more detail on the definitions used in this publication.

# Claiming Universal Credit

## The number of claims made dipped over Easter but generally remain high

New claims per week and number of offices accepting claims in the last year to Thursday 7 April 2016



The total number of claims made for Universal Credit in the last four weeks is 38,369, with an average of 9,592 claims per week, compared to an average of 10,276 claims in the previous four weeks.

There was a decline in the number of claims made to Universal Credit over the Easter period. The number of claims made for Universal Credit dropped to 7,462 for the week ending 31 March 2016. However, the number of claims picked up again the following week. This is a seasonal Easter trend, and matches what we have seen since Universal Credit has been rolled out.

Claims made for Universal Credit reached a daily peak of 3,227 on 4 January 2016, and a weekly peak of 11,647 on the week ending 14 January 2016. These peaks are part of the post-Christmas seasonal trend and follow a lull in claims before Christmas.

See **Table 1.1** for summary statistics and [Stat-Xplore](#) for the full data series.

## How people claim Universal Credit

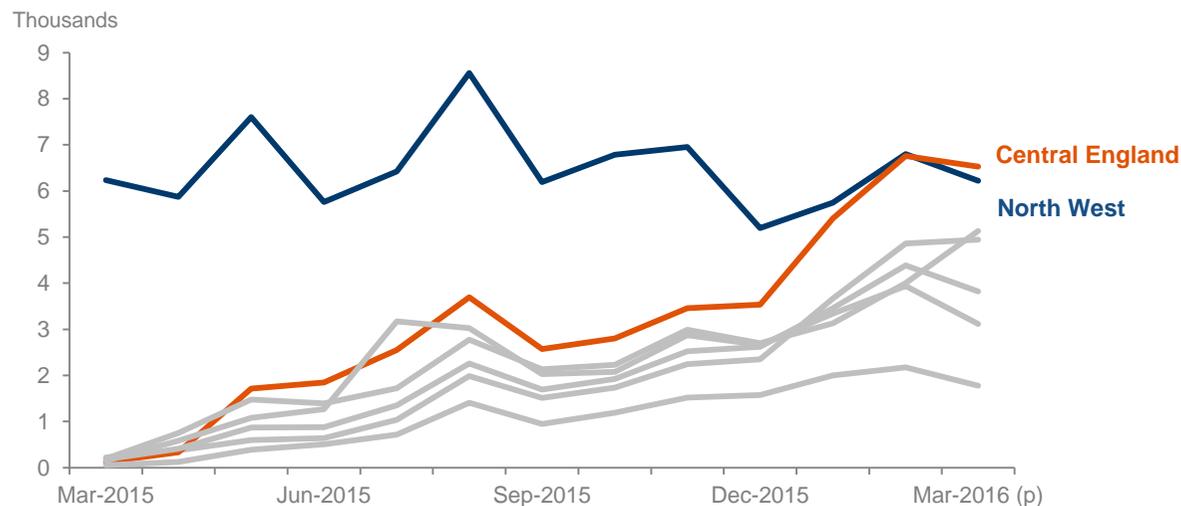
People will usually make a claim for Universal Credit online, during which initial claim verification will take place. After making a claim, an initial interview will take place with the claimant at which the eligibility for Universal Credit will be confirmed, and the claimant will accept a [Claimant Commitment](#). At this point, a claimant will be recorded as starting Universal Credit. Users should note that the statistics on claims made are four weeks more up-to-date than statistics on starts and people on Universal Credit. Not all people who make a claim for Universal Credit will go on to start. The statistics for claims and starts used in this publication include all claims and starts to Universal Credit.

In last month's publication improvements to the people on Universal Credit data and starts data at a local level led to both data series being revised. As a result, if not already obtained, it is advisable to get the new data series for starts and people on Universal Credit via [Stat-Xplore](#).

# Starts to Universal Credit

## Proportion of starts to Universal Credit from the North West is decreasing

Number of starts to Universal Credit by region and month



Since national roll-out in February 2015 the regional picture of starts has changed dramatically.

The proportion of overall starts in the **North West** has decreased as Universal Credit expands to other areas. It has fallen from 87 per cent in March 2015 to 20 per cent in March 2016.

**Central England** is now the largest region in terms of new starts to Universal Credit. In March, 21 per cent of all starts came from this region.

London and the Home Counties and the North East have also seen a rise in starts, and are the third and fourth highest region respectively in March.

**The total number of starts that have been made to Universal Credit in the month up to 10 March 2016 was 31,538.** This is the second highest monthly number of starts to Universal Credit. The total number of starts that have been made since Universal Credit began is 298,664.

In the past month, there have been more starts to Universal Credit in Bolton, Blackhorse Street, Jobcentre Plus office than any other (229 people starting).

Oldham Jobcentre Plus office still has the highest cumulative number of starts of any Jobcentre Plus office (7,041).

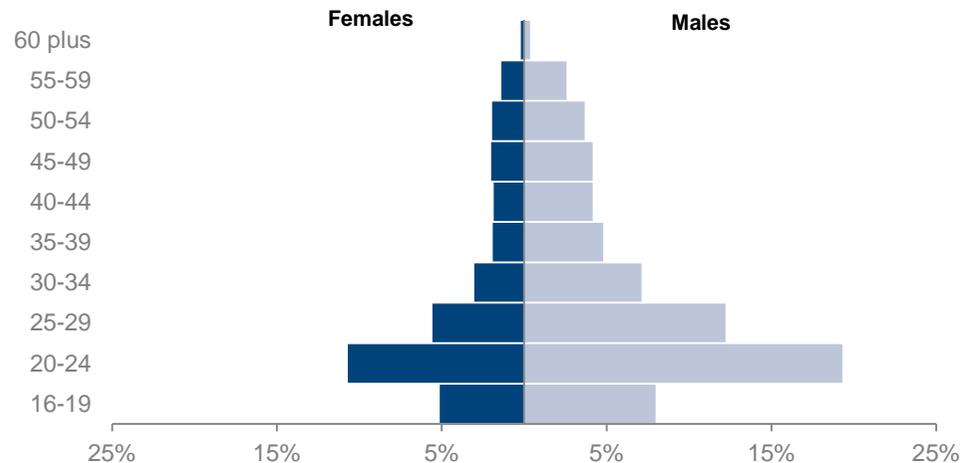
Over the last two months there have been more starts to Universal Credit from the 16-24 age group compared to other age groups. This goes against the trend we were seeing towards the end of last year, when the proportion of starts from the 16-24 age group was declining.

Please note the figures for the latest month (March 2016) are provisional and will be finalised in the next release. See the Background Information document for more details. See **table 2.1** for summary statistics and [Stat-Xplore](#) for the full data series.

# People on Universal Credit

## Men aged 20-24 make up one fifth of the total on Universal Credit

Percentage of people on Universal Credit, by age group and gender, March 2016



**There were 225,002 people on Universal Credit as of 10 March 2016.** This represents an increase of 10 per cent when compared to the number of people on Universal Credit in February 2016.

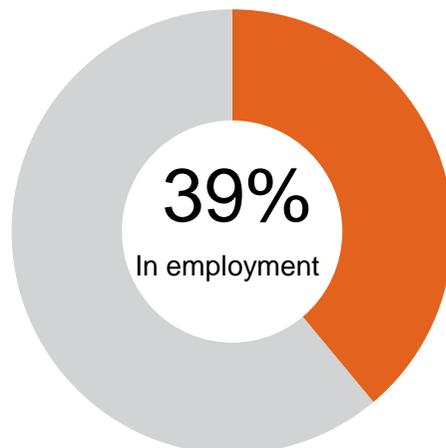
In March, there were more males on Universal Credit than females (66 per cent compared to 34 per cent).

Males aged 20-24 made up 19 per cent of the total Universal Credit figure. However, since the last summer there has been a slight decrease in the proportion of 20-24 year olds males on Universal Credit.

Over the last two months there has been an increase in the proportion of people who have been on Universal Credit for less than three months. At 38 per cent it has risen to match the proportion of people who have been on Universal Credit for more than six months.

## Almost two fifths of people on Universal Credit are in employment

Percentage of people on Universal Credit who are in employment, March 2016



Of the people on Universal Credit in March 2016, 39 per cent (87,592) were in employment and 61 per cent (137,414) were not in employment. The proportion in employment dipped in February 2016 following the seasonal trade period, but has risen to 39 per cent this month.

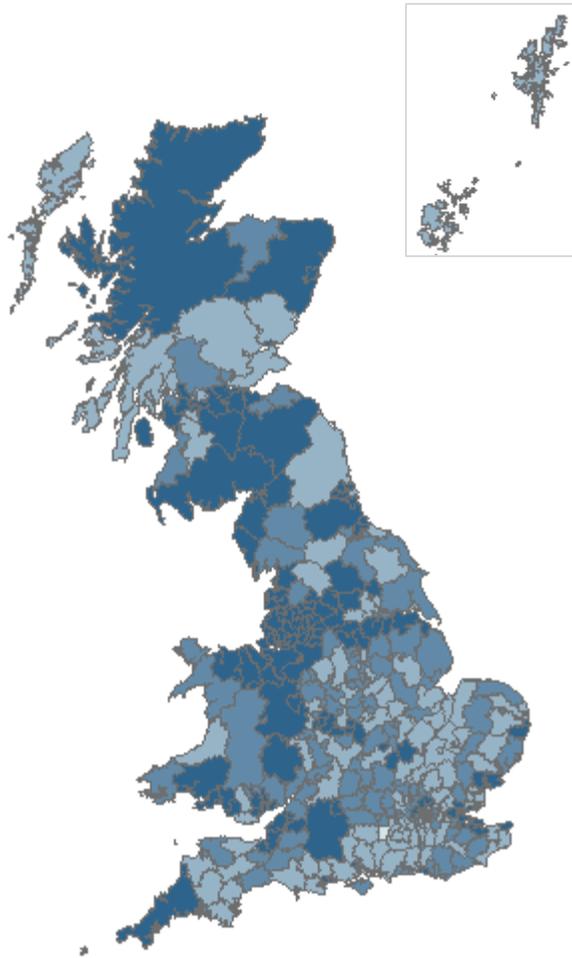
The Jobcentre Plus office with the most people on Universal Credit was Bolton, Blackhorse Street, with 3,066 Universal Credit claimants, followed by Oldham, with 3,030 (breakdowns of people on Universal Credit by Jobcentre Plus office, local authority and parliamentary constituency are available on [Stat-Xplore](#)).

See **tables 3.1-3.3** for summary statistics and [Stat-Xplore](#) for the full data series.

Please note figures for the latest month (March 2016) are provisional and will be finalised in the next release. See the Background Statistics document for more details.

# Where Universal Credit claimants live

## The North West, where roll-out started, has the largest number of Universal Credit claimants



The adjacent map shows people on Universal Credit by Local Authority as at 10 March 2016.

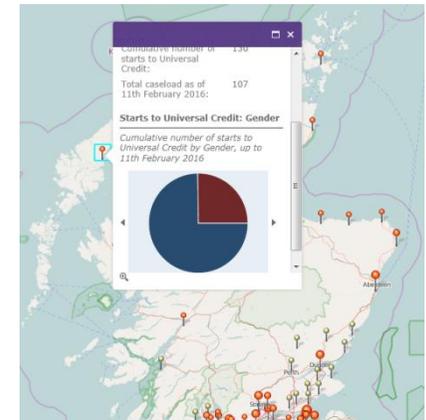
The darker areas of the map are local authorities with high levels of Universal Credit claimants, while the lighter areas are the Local Authorities with fewer Universal Credit claimants.

### Where you live

Find information about your local Jobcentre plus office on our interactive map.

Please click [here](#) to access the interactive map.

On the interactive map, the size of each pin is proportional to the number of claimants on Universal Credit as of 10 March 2016. Key statistics for each Jobcentre Plus office can be viewed by clicking on each pin, as can be seen in the adjacent example.



For further information on supported browsers, please visit the following website: <http://doc.arcgis.com/en/arcgis-online/reference/browsers.htm>

## About these statistics

These official statistics have been compiled using data from systems within local offices and records of Universal Credit benefit payments made by the Department.

This and other new data sources will, in time, allow a progressively wider range of breakdowns to be published as new IT systems are introduced. The methodology used and definitions of the official statistics may be updated within subsequent releases, along with information on the impact of any changes to the time series already released. A [strategy](#) for the release of official statistics on Universal Credit was published in September 2013 and updated in February 2016.

These statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority, and are new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They have, therefore, been designated as [Experimental Statistics](#). Users are invited to [comment](#) on the development and relevance of these statistics at this stage.

For the period which these statistics cover there were 690 Jobcentre Plus offices delivering Universal Credit. See **table 4.1** for a full list of Jobcentre Plus offices by the date they implemented Universal Credit.

## Further roll out

Universal Credit, which is available in the majority of Jobcentre Plus offices across England, Scotland and Wales, completed its roll out to the whole of the North West of England on 15 December 2014. From 30 June 2014 Universal Credit expanded to include new claims from couples and from 24 November 2014 to new claims from families. Universal Credit continued its roll out to all Jobcentre Plus offices and local authorities across the country on 16 February 2015.

A limited test of the Full Service for Universal Credit was launched in Sutton, South London, on 26 November 2014, and expanded into Croydon and Southwark, South London on the 10 June 2015 and 4 November 2015 respectively. Claimants will manage their Universal Credit claim online to monitor payments, communicate with their work coach and record work search progress. Please note that this publication does not currently include statistics covering these areas.

The Full Service for Universal Credit was introduced into Hounslow, West London, on 27 January 2016, and Musselburgh, East Scotland, on 23 March 2016. Figures for Hounslow and Musselburgh in this publication do not include Full Service claimants.

## Where to find out more

This document and the summary tables can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/universal-credit-statistics>

Build your own tables using Stat-Xplore: <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>

See our interactive map: <http://dwp-stats.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Viewer/index.html?appid=82116e01690d4e8584014362d67900c6>

Older releases can be found here but please note that figures are subject to change. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/universal-credit-statistics>

Background Information and a release strategy for the statistics can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-statistics-background-information>



## **Scotland's new social security powers – Role of local authorities Elected Members Discussion Paper**

### **Purpose of Report**

1. A Sub Group of Elected members of both the Health and Well Being and Community Well Being Executive Groups are being asked to provide comment on the content of this discussion paper. This follows the paper outlining some of the broad arguments in favour of a local authority role in delivery in Scotland's new social security power which was considered by the Community Well Being Executive Group in December.

### **Background**

2. COSLA's response to consultations by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee on the new social security powers which will come from the Scotland Bill was pitched at a high level with a strong emphasis on integrated services at a local level for people with disabilities and an emphasis on simplifying access to support and services. We have been mindful not just of the need to ensure a smooth transition of the delivery of these services in Scotland, but also the need to respond creatively to the future challenges of growing service demands with a more holistic approach.

### **Discussions to date**

3. A meeting took place before Christmas with a number of local authority advisors, Social Work Scotland representatives and COSLA officers. The purpose was to develop further what a local authority role in delivery might look like following devolution of powers under the Scotland Act. A further meeting took place in January which looked at the possible end to end customer journey (Appendix 1). There is recognition that this needs to be developed for political consideration by COSLA and that the financial mechanism must be right.

### **Welfare Reform Committee Report**

4. The Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee held its own inquiry and produced a report on the new social security powers. It recommended the Scottish Government take on board the principles of dignity, respect, simplicity, fairness, consistency, accessibility, coherence, common-sense and both an entitlement based and human rights based approach in designing the new Scottish social security system.
5. The Committee also heard from a number of voluntary organisations strongly opposed to a role for local authorities in delivery. However, it did not share this view and commented, 'The Committee believes that there is a difficult balance to be struck between responsibilities at national and local level. It believes that a national framework of entitlements etc. is necessary to avoid the risk of creating a 'postcode lottery' in benefit provision. However, it recognises that there are many advantages in local provision, including the scope for integrating services. It does not share the view that local authorities should be excluded from consideration.'

## **Scottish Government Proposals**

6. Scottish Government has been undertaking option appraisal work on the main options for policy delivery and have involved stakeholders including COSLA in a workshop to explore options. Alex Neil, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, has now announced to Parliament the setting up of a Scottish benefits agency providing Scottish ministers with clear control and responsibility. There is strong support from MSPs and stakeholders for consistent national entitlement and eligibility in a new Scottish system based on the principles of 'dignity, fairness and respect.' COSLA's understanding is that the decision to create a new agency is in relation to the governance of the Scottish social security system rather than the user interface or back room delivery. Alex Neil also expressed interest in working with local government in reducing the number of assessments etc. A hybrid approach involving local delivery of a nationally set policy and framework may therefore be a possible way forward.

## **Local authority role in delivery**

7. COSLA has expressed the benefits of locating delivery with local authorities all of which chime with the jointly endorsed Christie agenda. Local authorities already have experience of administering housing benefit, council tax reduction and discretionary housing benefits. Over recent years councils have demonstrated an ability to very quickly put in place the delivery arrangements for the Scottish Welfare Fund. In addition, local authorities deliver a range of services relevant to the needs of people with disabilities. Social Work and the integrated arrangements with Health are obvious examples, but it is important to remember that councils also directly deliver and have strategic responsibilities for housing and administer a range of pass ported benefits including concessionary travel. Local authorities also lead partnership arrangements across public services through community planning arrangements.
8. So, while taking on new responsibilities in relation to social security benefits would certainly be challenging and complex, local authorities would be able to draw on a range of experience and established partnerships across key services which are also very relevant to quality of life outcomes for people with disabilities. Importantly, if we want to develop more holistic approaches and draw on the experience of professionals who know the circumstances of people who might be entitled to these benefits, locating delivery at a local level is the place to start, since services are best aligned at local level. It is much more likely in this setting that effective cross service links will be developed centred on the needs of individuals.
9. We need to be clear that we are not suggesting that access to benefits should be dependent on a social work assessment and recognise that many people with disabilities will not need to or want to engage with social work. Rather, we are putting forward the view that we develop a much more holistic approach to maximising the life chances of people with disabilities where all services and supports operate much more effectively at a local level. This would include services we currently deliver, those to be devolved and those which currently remain reserved but could be devolved in the future. Such an approach would seek to avoid a multiplicity of assessments, share data and information (based on individual consent), reduce bureaucracy and simplify customer access to the financial support and services they require.

## **Core Components**

10. Despite some claims by others to the contrary, there is little appetite within local government for unfettered discretion for authorities if councils were involved in the delivery of disability benefits. From initial discussions, some of the core components of what is envisaged would be:

- Local delivery within consistent national policy on entitlement and eligibility. This would provide consistency of support but local knowledge and service relationships would be utilised to the benefit of the customer.
- A single Scottish application for disability benefits designed in partnerships with the new benefits agency, Scottish Government, local authorities and disabled peoples' organisations
- Local discretion would be centred on making effective links to relevant services offered locally through identifying 'triggers' for onward referrals or sign posting.
- Customers would be invited to consent to information sharing as part of the process to assist access to other services.
- Face to face engagement where necessary would be offered in a local setting
- Adequate funding and appropriate financial mechanisms would require to be in place to support national eligibility criteria, both for the benefit and the administration. This could be similar to the arrangements in place for housing benefit where local authorities are able to draw down funding from central government in accordance with the level of claims agreed in line with regulations. Alternatively there would need to be in place alternative robust financial arrangements where authorities would not be left carrying all the financial risks.

### **Opportunities and risks**

11. The major strength of locating delivery with local authorities is the opportunity to provide a more holistic customer journey not only to benefits which support individuals in dealing with the impacts of their disability but also through smoothing access to a range of local services and supports which can assist their independence and quality of life. A national delivery body is unlikely ever to be able to develop this crucial linkage to locally provided services in as effective a manner as it will lack both the detailed knowledge and established links. People with impairments and long term conditions are often 'disabled' by the complexity in accessing services and supports so streamlining and simplifying access is key to the effectiveness of services in fostering independence and enhancing quality of life.
12. Adopting a locality focus to delivery is also consistent with other efforts local government is making to streamline access to support. These include the Health and Social Care Integration Boards, the locality focus of the SWF, the emphasis on delivering local authority led support in the context of the introduction of Universal Credit and an increasing emphasis on local delivery of employability supports. Any face to face involvement is better done locally.
13. However, taking on a delivery role here is a major undertaking for local authorities which comes with its own reputational risks. In addition the financial mechanisms have to provide sufficient confidence regarding potential financial risk to local authorities.
14. We also have to bear in mind that Social Work officers within councils are wary of being drawn into any role which could be construed as assessing for benefits although there seems little reason why information gathered to determine eligibility for benefits should not be shared, on the basis of customer consent, with social work staff to assist their assessment of needs in determining priority for social work supports.

### **Areas for consideration**

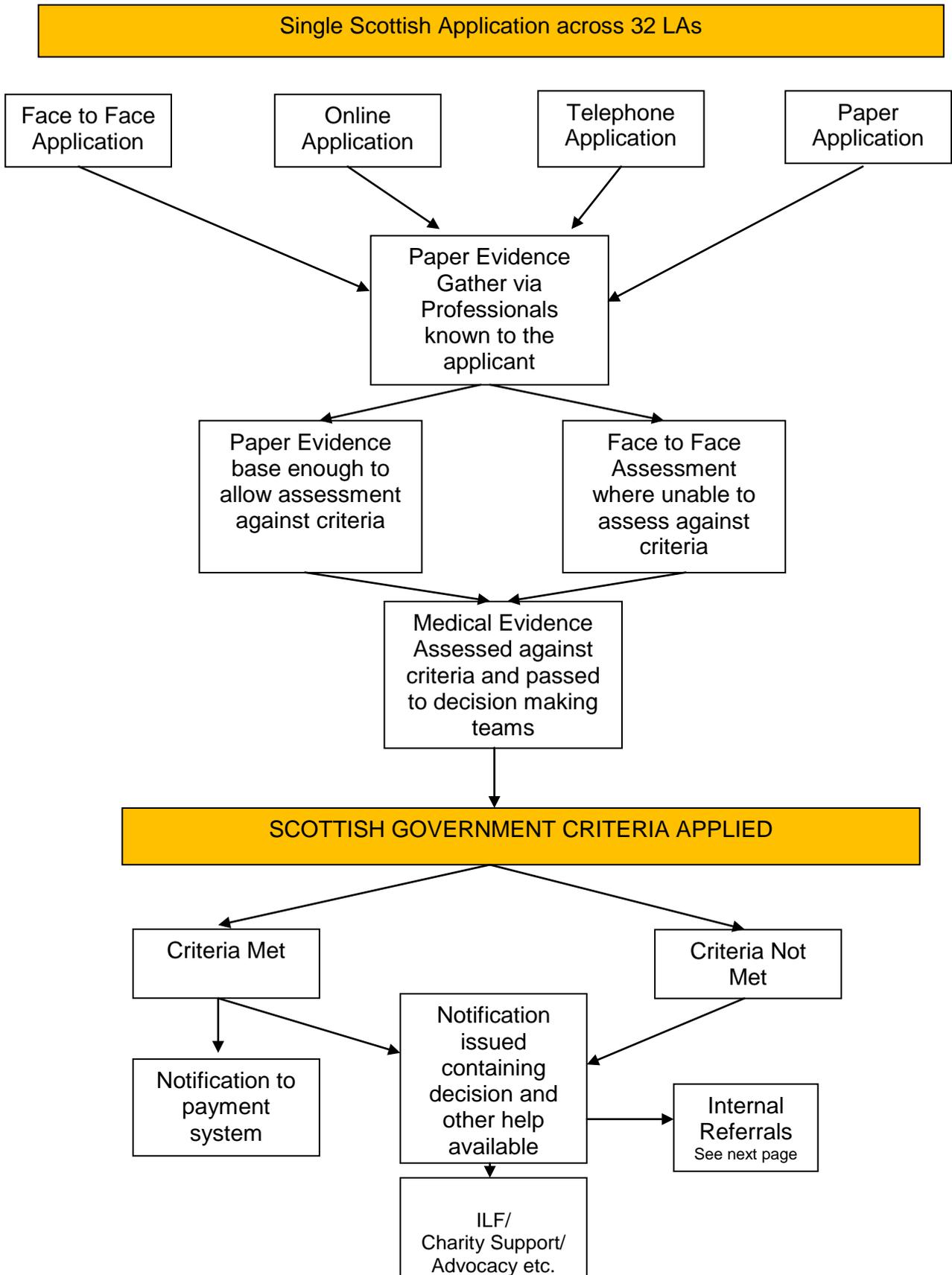
15. There are also a variety of other areas which would require to be considered. It will be important to have in place a system which enjoys the confidence of stakeholders and customers and is viewed as supportive and one which treats people with dignity. At the same time, core eligibility criteria and processes would require to be agreed nationally. What level of validation would in place for claims? Would face to face interviews be the exception, as with DLA, or the rule, as with PIP?
16. A strong case, given the potential numbers of claimants and the size of the budget, can be made for national procurement of appropriate IT systems. The opportunity for a nationally procured pay-out system to ensure consistent pay out for all Scottish benefits could be explored. This might realise savings.
17. In some areas consideration could be given to the case for local authorities to share services where this might be more viable as long as the locality needs of customers are taken into account.
18. There would also have to be in place effective access to review of decision making along with appeals processes which provided safeguards and commanded confidence of customers and key stakeholders.

### **Conclusion**

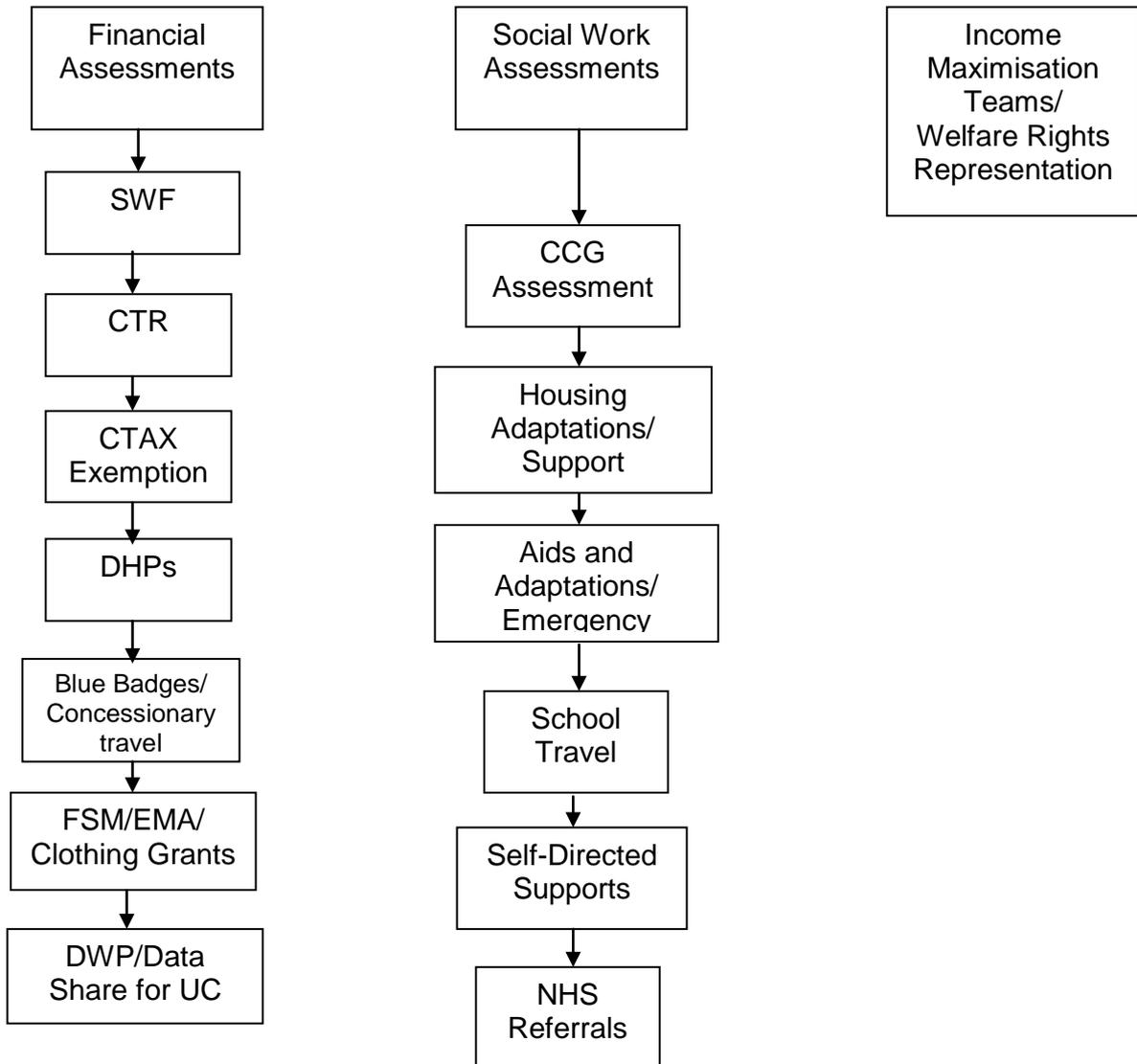
19. Discussions on the shape of Scottish arrangements for delivering devolved benefits principally for people with disabilities are continuing. COSLA has put forward a broad preference for a principal role by local authorities to build on service integration and support improved outcomes. The core components of what is envisaged are outlined above. Members of the Sub Group are being asked to provide views for or against COSLA continuing to promote the proposition for a local authority role in delivery on the lines outlined in this paper.

**COSLA**  
**March 2016**

**Disability Benefits Journey**  
**Sample**

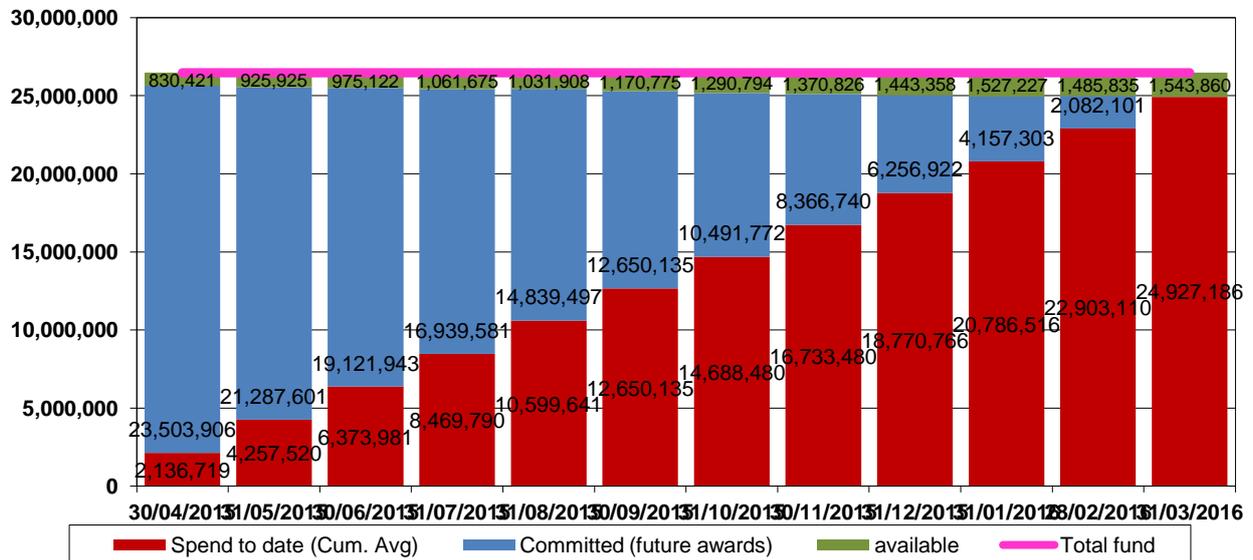


**Disability Benefits Journey**  
**Internal Onward Referrals**  
**Process**

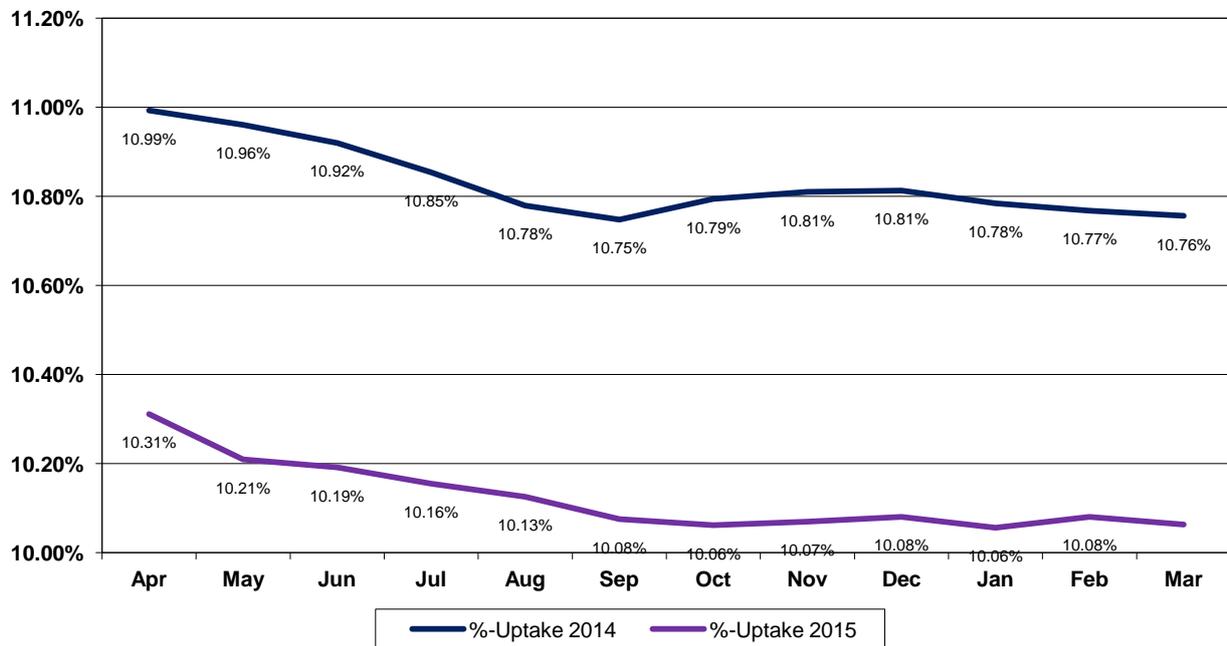


**Council Tax Reduction Scheme (31 March 2016)**

**CTRS Distribution 2015/16**



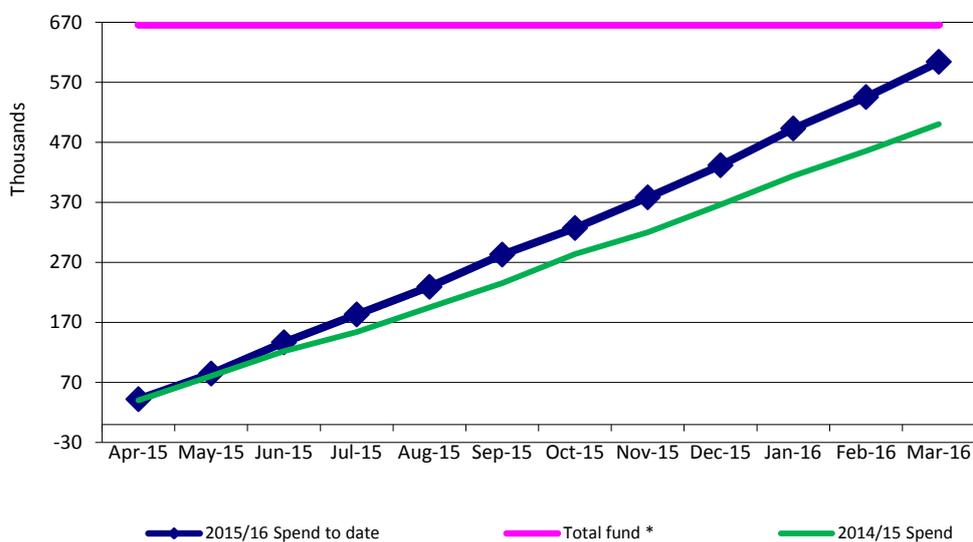
**CTRS Uptake Comparison**



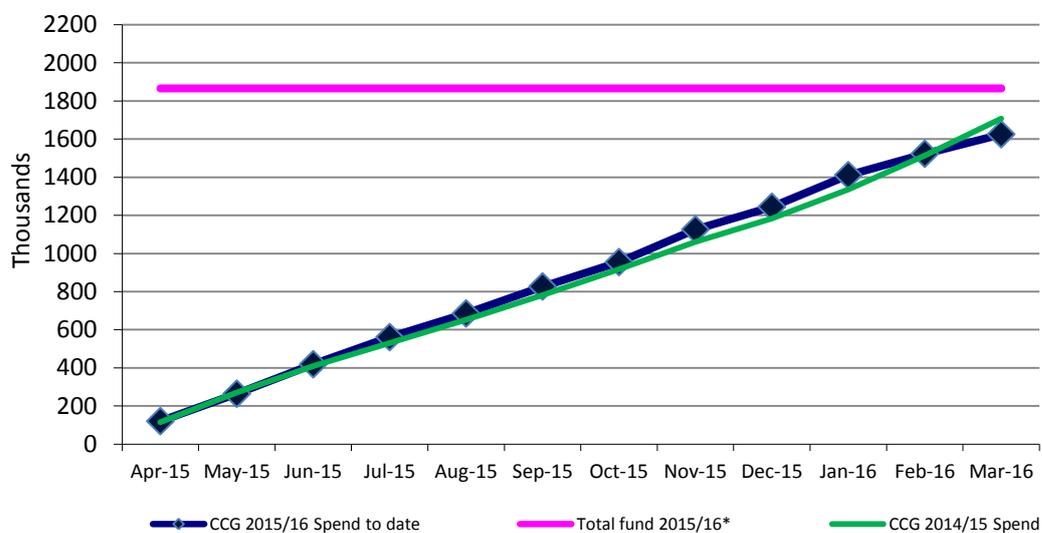
This Uptake is in relation to Ctax liability.  
 In June, CTR accounted for 10.19% of Ctax liability as opposed to 10.92% same time last year.

**Scottish Welfare Fund Payments (31 March 2016)**

**Crisis Grant Allocation 2015/16**

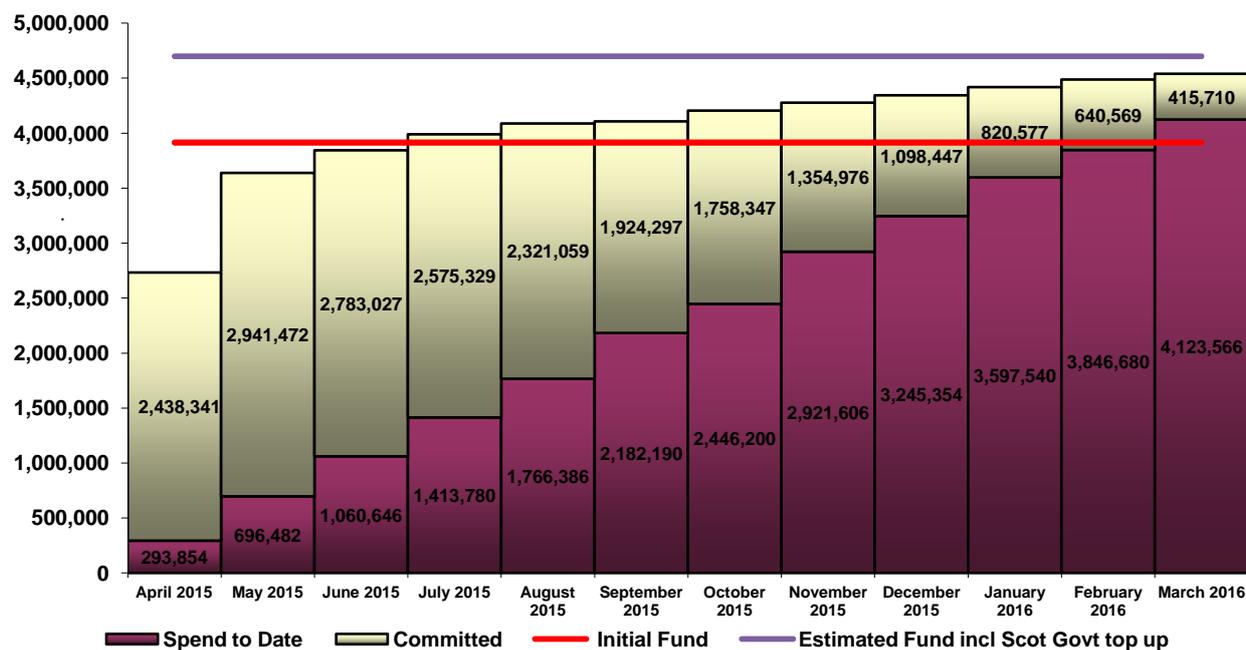


**Community Care Grant Allocation 2015/16**



**Discretionary Housing Payments (31 December 2015)**

**DHP Fund Allocation 2015/16**



**Foodbank and Advice Services Map**

