Local Government and Regeneration Committee
Inquiry into the Impact of Welfare Reforms
on 2014/15 and 2015/16 Spending Plans and Resources

Submission from Dumfries and Galloway Council

As part of our scrutiny of local government budgets the Local Government and Regeneration Committee is seeking the following information from your council on the financial and resource impact of UK Government welfare reforms, for the period 2012/13 to 2014/15—

• Q1 – In what areas of (a) work and (b) costs and resources has the ongoing programme of UK welfare reforms affected your council?

(a) Areas of work affected by the welfare reform are Revenues and Benefits (Council Tax Reduction administration, Housing Benefit reduced administration subsidy) Customer Services, Libraries, Employability Services, Social Services, School Meals and Advice Services. It has also been established that there is a lack of available, affordable credit locally and joint working with the 2 largest Registered Social Landlords is under way to develop local Credit Unions.

(b) Cost and resources – the Council has funded additional staff for Welfare Reform and Money Advice within the Council and allocated additional funding to the 3rd Sector to meet the increased demand for money and debt advice, this funding is approx. The establishment of a Discretionary budget team who deal with Scottish Welfare Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments, has also been partially funded from within Council resources as the admin grant associated with both is insufficient to meet the cost of the full service delivery. The reduced DWP administration subsidy for Housing Benefit and the transferred Council Tax Reduction scheme has placed added pressures as the demands for these services has not diminished. For 2013/14 the additional funding set aside by the council for Welfare Reform is approx. £1,478K which will rise to £1,738 for 2014/15, these amounts exclude any additional funding from other sources ie Scottish Government.

• Q2 – What was the level of actual or budgeted crisis grants made by your council in the period 2012/13 to 2014/15? What percentage increase/decrease did this represent over the previous three financial years?

Figures for 2012/13 Crisis loan are currently still not available from DWP, therefore unable to determine what the local spend was for this during this financial year.

For 2013/14 the Crisis grant budget was £193K of which £123K was spend in year. A proportion of the under spend was vired across to Community Care Grants which was over spent on budget.

The 2014/15 Crisis Grant budget remains at £193K, and it is not anticipated that the demand will exceed this. The 2013/14 underspend is anticipated to be carried over the 2014/15 Community Care Grant

• Q3 – What has been the financial and resource implication of the welfare reforms for your social work and housing services in the period 2013/14 to 2014/15? What
has been the level of emergency housing applications your council has dealt with in 2013/14? What level do you expect to deal with in 2014/15?

As the majority of tenants impacted by size criteria and other welfare reforms have had successful awards of Discretionary Housing Payments there have been no increases to homeless applications within the area. Social Work are seen demands on their service increase but this is currently not quantified.

- Q4 – What actions has your council taken to coordinate its efforts and responses to the welfare reform changes to ensure the most needy/vulnerable people in your council area receive the support and assistance they require?

The Council has established a Welfare Reform Sub Committee which concentrates on all Welfare Reform issues. A cross departmental Welfare Reform working group has also been set up which looks at issues across the council and organises reports for committee. Welfare Reform issues have also been recognised in the Council's Financial Inclusion Strategy which has a working group made of partners across the 3rd sector. These working groups bring together information from front line services to identify potential pressure areas or gaps in services.