Submission from East Dunbartonshire 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?

• 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?

• 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?

• 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?

Question 1

The Council has responded to the welfare reform agenda through the establishment of a Working Group that incorporates the main Council and Partner organisation services. This Group is focused on ensuring that all relevant services are in place to provide the most appropriate advice and assistance to all people who are affected by the changes.

The Council also has dedicated a full-time Welfare Reform Officer (on secondment).

There is also a cost to the councils in terms of staff time being dedicated to administering the Discretionary Housing Payment. There has been an increase in the administration and customer contact workload within the Revenues and Benefits Teams. This Council had 239 applications throughout the whole of 2012/13, increasing to 739 by 28th February 2014 for financial year 203/14. This may increase during 2014/15 given change in guidance on sanctions and eligibility to apply for DHP. FOIs have also increased and are regularly received in relation to removal of the spare room subsidy, DHP and rent arrears.

In 2013/14, the Council has also ‘topped-up’ the DHP Fund to the maximum allowed by DWP, which amounts to £1,629.

The Council also supported the local CAB’s successful SLAB bid which resulted in the funding of 3 posts - 2 Welfare Reform Officers and 1 Officer working specifically with Women's Aid. The Council has also made available storage facilities for the local food bank.
Question 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Crisis Grants</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>% Change from previous year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010/11</td>
<td>1820 applications 1430 awards (78.6%)</td>
<td>£80,500.00</td>
<td>+11%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011/12</td>
<td>1580 applications 1260 awards (79.8%)</td>
<td>£65,100.00</td>
<td>-19.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012/13</td>
<td>Only Scotland-wide data available for all crisis loans (not just for living expenses)</td>
<td>302,500 applications 222,600 awards (73.6%)</td>
<td>£12.6 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013/14</td>
<td>Crisis Grants for living expenses.</td>
<td>1071 applications 746 awards (to 28/2/14, 69.6%)</td>
<td>£47,497.15 (to 28/02/2014)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Question 3

Social Work – to date there has been no quantifiable impact on social work resources (that can be directly attributable to the welfare reforms). There was an expectation that there would have been an upsurge in section 12, 22 and 27 payments but this has not occurred as yet.

Housing - The Housing Allocations policy was revised in December 2012 to reflect the Housing Benefit changes and substantial points have been awarded to accelerate moves and to prevent under-occupation situations occurring where possible. As a result of increased contact with tenants over 20 new transfer forms have been returned as a direct result of Welfare Reforms. It is a reality that most tenants wish to stay in their current accommodation and try and pay the rent due for extra bedrooms.

An on line mutual exchange system has been introduced to assist tenants to move via Homeswapper which can also assist mitigate under-occupation situations and address overcrowding at the same time. The cost around £3k per year

Housing Officers and Welfare Reform Officers seconded in to assist have been carrying out more face to face visits which helps inform tenants, encourages them to seek assistance and to pay due rent. The cost around £40k

The rent arrears policy is being revised to ensure the policy is distinct from procedures. This revision will include welfare reform changes and specifically under-occupation procedures while building in additional checks with social work to ensure that all assistance possible it being
provided. Special circumstances will also be factored into the policy as part of mitigation activity. The cost of under-occupation directly is at an estimated £100k.

In terms of homeless rates we get per year 609 homeless plus 254 housing options applications. We expect 750 to 1,000 in any given year of such applications and only have 300 empty void properties each year. There are 4,200 applicants on waiting list (which includes at any given time 360+ homeless applicants waiting for accommodation that we do not have).

**Question 4**

Please see response to question 1.