Submission from Glasgow City 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?

Glasgow City Council was faced with direct changes arising from the Welfare Reform Act 2012 including Housing Benefit changes, abolition of Council Tax Benefit, repeal of the Social Fund and Benefit Cap implementation. Consequential impacts such as Additional Funding for Discretionary Housing Payments followed, as did Scottish Government legislation to introduce Council Tax Reduction and a new appeals process via the Council Tax Reduction Review Panel, plus the Scottish Welfare Fund. Glasgow City Council efforts were concentrated on preparation for implementation during 2013. Activities began with scoping and planning, through to implementation go-live and are continuing with ongoing support.

Work
- Implementation of changes
- Direct mailing potentially affected Housing Benefit Claimants in advance
- System testing and process redevelopment
- Fitting regulation changes into existing protocols
- Liaison with and support of Registered Social Landlords
- Liaison with and support of the advice sector
- Managing additional demands for Discretionary Housing Payments, including the complexity of the changing funding landscape during 2013/2014
- Working with the Department for Work and Pensions to provide support for Benefit Cap implementation
- Managing significantly increased numbers of Housing Benefit appeals
- Inter-departmental awareness and readiness

Costs and Resources
- Corporate Welfare Reform Group – set up to overview Welfare Reform
- Full time resources to focus on Welfare Reform
- Redirection of resources for additional activities and new activities e.g. The Scottish Welfare Fund
- Costs of additional activities and new activities
- Reduced overall Housing Benefit administration grant from the Department for Work and Pensions
- Changing Council Tax Benefit/Local Council Tax Support administration grant arrangements from the Department for Work and Pensions
- Additional funding for Housing Benefit “new burdens” from the Department for Work and Pensions
- Award and administrative funding for Scottish Welfare Fund from Scottish Government
- Limited funding for Council Tax Reduction implementation from Scottish Government
- Increased demand for welfare rights advice service and for welfare rights training to both internal and external staff/organisation on the impact and changes from the welfare reforms
Local Government and Regeneration Committee
Inquiry into the Impact of Welfare Reforms
on 2014/15 and 2015/16 Spending Plans and Resources

• 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?

The Scottish Welfare Fund was introduced in April 2013 and as such no comparison can be made against the previous three financial years. The total Crisis Grants awarded during 2013/14 = £927,948. This total is subject to final reconciliation.

• 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?

While there has been an increased demand for support this has in the main been provided out of existing resources. There have been no additional council funds allocated to Social Work Services to provide support for welfare reforms. Through the Scottish Legal Aid Board, funds were provided for 18 months to April 2015 for three additional welfare rights officers to help residents at appeal tribunal.

We had anticipated that there would be a loss of income to the council via our non residential care charging as a result of the re-assessment of DLA cases under the new PIP rules. However due to the delay in the DLA re assessment process this is not yet causing an impact in Glasgow.

The number of homelessness applications for April 2013/ to April 2014 was 6,700 which is a 20% reduction on the previous years. The reason for this reduction is the preventative measures that have been put in place via housing options and as such masks what might otherwise have been an increase.

Please note that Glasgow City Council does not have its own housing stock. There are 67 Registered Social Landlords within Glasgow and a significant number of Private Landlords.

• 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?

As part of the Council’s Corporate Welfare Reform Group, various work streams have been established to plan for and mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform (WR). Extensive training on WR has been provided to frontline Revenues & Benefits staff, Social Work Services staff and advisors from external Advice Agencies. WR briefings have been provided to Elected Members, other council staff, Registered Social Landlords, Private Landlords and WR presentations have been made at various forums and events.