

Epping Forest District Council

WELFARE REFORM MITIGATION ACTION PLAN
1 June 2013

No	Objective	Action	Responsibility (& Add. Costs)	Timescale	Progress Report (as at 1 st June 2013)
Strategic					
<i>To ensure that a strategic and corporate approach is taken to mitigate the effects of welfare reform, including good data management</i>					
1	Ensure that members and senior officers are aware of the Welfare Reforms and their impacts and implications	(a) Present the CIH Report on the Impact and Implications of the Welfare Reforms on Epping Forest to members and senior officers	Director of Housing	Sept 2012	Achieved – September 2012 A presentation was given by representatives of CIH to members and senior officers
2		(b) Webcast the CIH Report and Presentation and provide all members and officers with a link to view the Presentation Webcast	Director of Housing	Sep 2012	Achieved – October 2012 The presentation was webcast and all members were advised of the link to the webcast in the Council Bulletin,
3	Ensure that the Council prepares and plans for the effects of the welfare reforms in a corporate, effective and co-ordinated way.	(a) Establish a Welfare Reform Mitigation Project Team, chaired by the Director of Housing and comprising officers from Housing and Housing Benefits, to plan and oversee the delivery of the Council's response	Director of Housing	Sept 2012	Achieved – September 2012 The Project Team is chaired by the Director of Housing and comprises officers from Housing and Benefits
4		(b) Formulate a Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan for adoption by the Cabinet and formally monitor progress on a bi-monthly basis	Director of Housing	Oct 2012	Achieved – October 2012 The Mitigation Action Plan was adopted by the Cabinet at its meeting on 22 nd October 2012.

5	Update and refine the CIH's assessments of the effects of the Welfare Reforms	(a) Match EFDC property and tenant data to identify individual tenants to be affected by the bedroom tax.	Assistant Director (Benefits)	Oct 2012	<p>Achieved – October 2012</p> <p>There were originally around 390 under-occupying Council tenants affected by the Bedroom Tax (around 300 under-occupying by 1 bedroom and around 90 by 2 bedrooms). By 31st May 2013, this number had reduced by around 10% to 347 tenants. A further 180 under-occupying housing association tenants (155 under-occupying by 1 bedroom and 25 by 2 bedrooms) were also affected.</p> <p>The average weekly loss for EFDC tenants is £14 p/w for those under-occupying by 1 bedroom (based on an average rent of £105.00 per week) and £26.48 p/w for those under-occupying by 2 or more bedrooms (based on an average rents of £105.93 p/w).</p>
6		(b) Use data from the DWP to identify Epping Forest benefit claimants who will have reduced income as a result of the introduction of the Benefit Cap	Assistant Director (Benefits)	Oct 2012	<p>Achieved – October 2012</p> <p>In December 2012, the Government unexpectedly announced that instead of introducing the Benefit Cap in April 2013 for everyone, it would be introduced in only 4 London Boroughs from this date. It will then be rolled out in all other districts before September 2013</p> <p>The DWP & Benefits Division has established that, as at 1st April 2013, 88 households in the District will be affected by the Benefits Cap as follows:</p>

					<p>EFDC tenants – 16 HA tenants – 11 Private tenants - 61</p> <p>The estimated total loss of benefits will be around £4,275 per week (£222,000 per annum).</p> <p>The average loss in benefits for these households is as follows:</p> <p>EFDC tenants - £52.18 p/w HA tenants - £44.04 p/w Private tenants - £48.45 p/w</p> <p>The highest loss by a household will be around £208 p/w. 12 claimants will lose more than £100 per week. 14 claimants will lose less than £10 per week. 2 claimants (both EFDC tenants) will lose <u>all</u> their housing benefit.</p>
7	<p>Improve the quality of information held about all the occupants of Council properties, in order to improve tenant profiling and identify potential current and future under-occupation</p>	<p>Undertake a further Census of all Council tenants, with data input resourced by 2 temporary members of staff for 6 weeks</p>	<p>Housing Resources Manager</p> <p>£5,000 – HRA (Serv. Enhance. Fund)</p>	<p>June 2013 Aug 2013</p>	<p>Good Progress – On 22nd October 2012, the Cabinet agreed to the appointment of 2 temporary staff for 6 weeks to input the Census results, funded from the Service Enhancements Fund. Consideration is also being given to an online version of the form.</p> <p>A new Census Form has been produced and a consultant has been identified to analyse the data collected and produce a profiling report.</p> <p>The Census is due to be undertaken in June 2013.</p>

Information to Residents and Advice Agencies

To ensure that residents and advice agencies are provided with accurate, useful and timely information, advice and support on the welfare reforms; how they may be personally affected; and action they can take to mitigate the effects

8	Advise all current and new Council and private tenants of the main Welfare Reforms and the potential implications	(a) Produce a Special Issue of <i>Housing News</i> - received by all Council tenants - providing general information on the Welfare Reforms, and include information in every issue until at least the end of 2013/14	Principal Housing Officer (Information & Strategy)	Special Issue - Jan 2013/Ongoing to Mar 2014	No longer required – The Project Team has concluded that a Special Issue is not necessary and a better communication strategy is to include welfare reform information in every standard issue.
					Further Action (Achieved) - The PHO (Info/Strategy) has provided a link from the Housing pages to the relevant Benefits pages of the EFDC website
9		(b) Produce a leaflet on the main Welfare Reforms and the potential implications to Council tenants, including direct payments, bedroom tax, increasing non-dependent charges and the need for transactional bank accounts	Principal Housing Officer (Information & Strategy)	Jan 2013	No longer required – The Project Team has agreed that the leaflet produced by the National Housing Fed. is good and should be used.
10		(c) Provide the Council's Welfare Reforms leaflet to all new tenants with their tenancy offers	Housing Options Manager	From Jan 2013	Achieved – A copy of the National Housing Federation leaflet is now included with all tenancy offers, and information is also included within the tenancy offer itself.
11		(d) Include discussions on budget planning and debt concerns as part of the existing system of new tenant visits undertaken by Housing Management Officers	Area Housing Managers (North/South)	From April 2013	Achieved – These discussions are now included as part of new tenant visits

12		(e) Assess the range of “Personal Welfare Reform Calculators” on the market and purchase the most appropriate application for Housing Management Officers and Benefit Officers to use in order to advise claimants of the potential financial effects.	Assistant Director (Benefits) Area Housing Managers (North/South) <i>£3,000 – HRA (Service Enhance. Fund)</i>	Dec 2012 July 2013	<p>Almost Achieved – Essex Benefits Officers have assessed a range of personal calculators and agreed to jointly purchase the “Entitled to” calculator - a web-based system that claimants and officers can use to assess the affects on benefits, including the effects of the Local Council Tax Support Scheme. A purchase order has been issued.</p> <p>The system will be placed on EFDC’s website, with users signposted to it.</p> <p>When the system is available, the Assistant Director (Benefits) will arrange a demonstration for appropriate Housing staff. The Area Housing Managers will consider whether it would be useful for housing officers to have a mobile tablet that can be used on visits.</p>
13	Ensure that all advice agencies are fully aware of the Welfare Reforms, the Council’s response and identify potential increased partnership arrangements	Meet with all CAB Managers (and where possible their advisers), Epping Forest Housing Aid and NACRO Housing to explain the Welfare Reforms, the Council’s response and who to contact	Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)	Jan 2013	Achieved – Senior Benefit Officers met with all CAB Advisors in Summer 2012 to explain the reforms. The Asst Director of Housing (Operations) and the Housing Options Manager have met with CAB Managers, EFHAS and NACRO to advise them of the Council’s response.
14	Provide targeted information to Council and private tenants known to be affected by the Welfare Reforms	(a) Write to all benefit claimants assessed as losing income as a result of the introduction of the Benefit Cap to advise them of the assessed loss	Assistant Director (Benefits)	Oct 2012	Achieved - The Benefits Division has written to all the households affected, advising them of the amount of loss.

					<p>The Benefits Division has also provided Housing with a list of the EFDC tenants. The Area Housing Managers have written to all 15 EFDC tenants affected, offering for their Housing Management Officer to visit them at home and provide advice to mitigate the effects, as well as information on the effects of the Council's proposed new Local Council Tax Support Scheme on them.</p> <p>The Benefits Division will be writing to affected tenants again during June 2013, to advise them of the introduction of the Benefits Cap - sometime between July and September 2013.</p>
15		(b) Produce and send a leaflet to all Council tenants in receipt of housing benefit, explaining the action required by them on the introduction of direct payments to tenants	Principal Housing Officer (Information & Strategy)	July 2013 Feb 2014	Not yet required – Note that the first direct payments will not now be introduced before March 2014 at the earliest
16		<p>(c) Write to all housing applicants of working-age on the Housing Register who have a housing need of 2 or more bedrooms as assessed by the current Housing Allocations Scheme, but a lower property size requirement under the Local Housing Allowance, advising them that:</p> <p>(i) if they are offered Council accommodation for their assessed property size need and are in</p>	Housing Options Manager	Nov 2012	<p>Achieved – The Housing Options Team are enclosing letters on the potential effects of the welfare reforms with all new tenancy officers.</p> <p>The Asst. Housing Options Manager (Allocations) has also arranged for similar information to be provided on the Log-In page of the HomeOption (Choice Based Lettings) website.</p>

		<p>receipt of housing benefit, their benefit will be reduced as a result of the “bedroom tax” from April 2013; and</p> <p>(ii) they therefore bid on smaller sized properties</p>			
--	--	---	--	--	--

Reducing Under-occupation

To minimise the under-occupation of Council properties by working-age Council tenants in receipt of housing benefit, and to endeavour to assist under-occupying Council tenants to move to smaller accommodation if they wish

17	Minimise the number of Council tenants who under-occupy their Council property	(a) Update the Council’s Housing Service Strategy on Under-occupation to include the Council’s responses to the implications of the “bedroom tax”	Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)	Jan 2013	Achieved – An updated Service Strategy was discussed and agreed by the Housing Scrutiny Panel at its January 2103 meeting, and has been signed off by the Housing Portfolio Holder
18		(b) Appoint to the newly created post of Housing Under-Occupation Officer to deliver the Council’s updated Housing Service Strategy on Under-occupation	Housing Manager (Older People’s Services)	Jan 2013 Apr 2013	Achieved – The new post-holder commenced her new post in May 2013, following delays with the required CRB Check.
19	Identify Council tenants and housing association tenants assessed as being affected by the “bedroom tax”	<p>Housing Benefits staff undertake a data-matching exercise and provide:</p> <p>(a) The Housing Service with a list of Council tenants affected; and</p> <p>(b) Housing associations with a list of their tenants affected</p>	Assistant Director (Benefits)	Oct 2012	<p>Achieved – October 2012</p> <p>The Benefits Division has provided the Housing Directorate with a list of Council tenants affected by the “bedroom tax”.</p> <p>The Benefits Division is also advising housing associations of their tenants affected, where</p>

					<p>housing associations have provided the required information.</p> <p>The Benefits Division wrote to all housing association tenants affected by the bedroom tax” on 5th November 2012, advising them of the potential loss of housing benefit</p>
20	Advise and discuss with Council tenants the options available to them in response to the “bedroom tax”	(a) Write to all Council tenants assessed as being affected by the “bedroom tax”, explaining the position and advising that a Housing Management Officer will visit to discuss options	Area Housing Managers (North & South)	Nov 2012	Achieved – A letter was sent by Housing to all affected tenants in November 2012.
21		(b) Produce a leaflet explaining the effects of under-occupation for tenants in receipt of housing benefit / universal credit, the options available and support provided by the Council	Principal Housing Officer (Strategy & Information)	Dec 2012	No longer required – The Project Team has agreed that the leaflet produced by the National Housing Fed. is good and should be used.
22		(c) Arrange for all Housing Management Officers to visit tenants affected by the “bedroom tax” to advise them of the options available	Area Housing Managers (North & South)	Feb 2013	<p>Achieved – The letter referred to in (20) above requested tenants to contact their Housing Management Officer to arrange a visit in their own home, or at the office if they prefer. The Area Housing Managers have briefed all visiting staff, and have prioritised visits to those under-occupying tenants in arrears.</p> <p>Area Housing Managers wrote again to all non-responding tenants, soon after letters were sent to LCTS claimants about the changes to their entitlement, urging them to contact their Housing Management Officer.</p>

					<p>By 1st April 2013, all Council tenants who were willing to have visits had been visited - 217 out of a possible 387 visits (56%) were undertaken.</p> <p>Between 1st January 2013 and 31st May 2013, 8 Council tenants affected by the "bedroom tax" have been known to downsize to smaller Council accommodation, and a further 6 Council tenants affected have been known to downsize through mutual exchanges.</p>
23	<p>Ensure that new Council and housing association tenants are offered properties that meet the bedroom requirements of the Local Housing Allowance, to ensure that no "bedroom tax" arises on initial letting</p>	<p>When the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme is reviewed and revised, include provision within the Scheme to ensure that the size of Council properties offered to housing applicants meets the Local Housing Allowance requirements</p>	<p>Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)</p>	<p>March 2013 April 2013</p>	<p>Achieved – Following detailed consideration and recommendations by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, and a subsequent consultation exercise, the Cabinet adopted a new Housing Allocations Scheme on 15 April 2013, effective from 1st September 2013, which includes:</p> <p>(a) A change to the size of Council properties offered to housing applicants, in order to meet the Local Housing Allowance requirements;</p> <p>(b) A provision that no penalties will be applied for downsizing tenants who refuse an offer of accommodation for which they have expressed an interest; and</p> <p>(c) A reduction in the age limit for bungalows, from 60 to 50 years of age.</p>

24	Encourage under-occupying working age tenants to move to smaller accommodation	(a) Continue to ensure that under-occupying tenants are kept in the highest priority band when the Housing Allocations Scheme is reviewed and revised, and that the criteria for assessing their under-occupation is line with the Local Housing Allowance requirements.	Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)	March 2013 April 2013	Achieved – The new Housing Allocations Scheme continues to give the highest priority to under-occupying housing applicants.
25		(b) Double the budget in 2013/14 for providing tenants with a financial incentive if they downsize to smaller accommodation from £22,000 p/a to £44,000 p/a	Housing Resources Manager £22,000 – HRA (Service Enhance. Fund)	Nov 2012 Mar 2013	Achieved – Following consideration and recommendations by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, in March 2013, the Cabinet agreed that some of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund for 2013/14 should be used to double the budget for downsizing financial incentives. The Housing Options Manager will be recommending to the Housing Portfolio Holder that the incentive scheme be extended to EFDC tenants who downsize through a mutual exchange.
26	Assess the no. of 1 and 2 bedroom properties required for current and future under-occupying tenants who wish to downsize	Survey under-occupying tenants about their re-housing intentions when Housing Management Officers visit them to discuss options and record the no. of smaller properties required	Area Housing Managers (North & South)	Feb 2013	Achieved – The checklist devised for Housing Management Officers to follow when visiting tenants includes a provision to ask tenants about re-housing intentions and to discuss options. A record is being kept on the overall no. of smaller properties required as a result of tenants seeking to downsize. As at 1 st April 2013, of those visited to date:

					<p>(a) 23% of tenants had expressed an interest in downsizing;</p> <p>(b) Around half wanting to downsize are seeking 1 bed accomm, with the remainder seeking 2 bed accomm.</p> <p>(c) No tenants had expressed an interest in taking in a lodger.</p>
27	Seek to ensure an adequate provision of 1 and 2 bedroom properties within new affordable housing developments	(a) Seek to negotiate with developers and housing associations sufficient numbers of 1 and 2 bedroom properties within new affordable housing developments to meet the demands of down-sizing Council and housing association tenants.	Housing Development Officer	Ongoing to March 2014	Not yet required – Awaiting the outcome of the visits to under-occupying tenants referred to in (26) above.
28		(b) Endeavour to include sufficient numbers of 1 and 2 bedroom properties within the Council's Housebuilding Programme as part of Development Appraisals to meet the demands of down-sizing Council and housing association tenants.	Housing Development Officer	Sept 2013	Not yet required - Awaiting the outcome of the visits to under-occupying tenants referred to in (26) above.

Reshaping Service Delivery

To change services, or introduce new services, to assist the Council and residents to mitigate the effects of the welfare reforms

29	Minimise tenants' debts and the financial loss to the Council from the introduction of direct payments of Housing Benefit and Universal Credit to Council tenants	(a) Advise Housing Management and Housing Options staff of the Welfare Reform Act's definition of "vulnerable people"	Area Housing Managers (North/South)	July 2013 Jan 2014	Not yet required – Note that the first direct payments will not now be introduced before March 2014 at the earliest
----	---	---	-------------------------------------	----------------------------------	--

30		<p>(b) Undertake an exercise by Housing Management staff to identify working age tenants classed as potentially "vulnerable" under the Act and;</p> <p>(i) Visit vulnerable working age tenants to explain the Welfare Reforms and their effects; and</p> <p>(ii) Seek their written agreement to having their Housing Benefit / Universal Credit paid direct to the Council</p>	Area Housing Managers (North/South)	Sept 2013 Feb 2014	Not yet required - Note that the first direct payments will not now be introduced before March 2014 at the earliest.
31		(c) Introduce a procedure for Housing Options staff to identify vulnerable housing applicants prior to lettings and to seek their written agreement to having their Housing Benefit / Universal Credit paid direct to the Council on tenancy sign-up	Housing Options Manager	Sept 2013 Feb 2014	Not yet required - Note that the first direct payments will not now be introduced before March 2014 at the earliest.
32		(d) Introduce a procedure to maximise the use of the discretionary power within the Local Housing Allowance changes allowing Housing Benefit Teams to pay the LHA direct to private landlords and the Council's Housing Service where this would help to secure or retain a letting	Assistant Director (Benefits) / Housing Options Manager	Sept 2013 Feb 2014	Not yet required - Note that the first direct payments will not now be introduced before March 2014 at the earliest.
33	Assist Council tenants to prepare for the introduction of Universal Credit	(a) When visiting vulnerable working age Council tenants, offer assistance to those without transactional bank accounts to open accounts in preparation for Universal Credit	Area Housing Managers (North/South)	Aug 2013 Jan 2014	Not yet required - Note that the first direct payments will not now be introduced before March 2014 at the earliest.

34		(b) Prepare for the automatic credit of housing benefit to tenants of pensionable age from Pension Credit	Asst. Director (Benefits) / Housing Res. Manager	Sept 2013 Feb 2014	Not yet required - Note that the first direct payments will not now be introduced before March 2014 at the earliest.
35	Support the introduction and operation of the Home2Home Furniture Recycling Scheme in Epping Forest	(a) Provide a grant of £20,000 from the General Fund and £10,000 from the HRA when there is surety and sufficient evidence that the Scheme will become operational and sustainable	Director of Housing / Policy Officer <i>£10,000 – HRA £20,000 – G/F (both already allocated)</i>	March 2013	Achieved – The Cabinet agreed to the provision of the HRA and General Fund grants in Spring 2012. The Scheme, now called Epping Forest Re-use, is working in partnership with the Lighthouse Furniture Project, which has leased a warehouse at Bowers Hill, Epping. The Scheme was launched in April 2013 The first quarterly payments of both the GF and HRA grants have been made.
36		(b) Housing Options Manager to provide support and advice to the Scheme, including attendance at support meetings	Housing Options Manager	From Jan 2013	Achieved – The Homeless Persons Hostel Manager has been nominated as Housing's representative at support meetings.
37	Provide a facility for local residents to obtain independent general and financial advice on mitigating the effects of the Welfare Reforms, including the new Council Tax Support Scheme	Discuss with Epping Forest CAB the possible of 2 temporary paid Advisors for 18 months, funded jointly from the Council's HRA (90%) and General Fund (10%) as an addition to the existing SLA, and recommend to Cabinet if supported by the CAB	Asst. Director of Housing (Operations) <i>£67,500 – HRA (Service Enhance. Fund) £7,500 – GF (DDF)</i>	Nov 2012 Jan 2013	Achieved – Following a formal proposal being submitted by the CAB on EFDC's invitation (including a proposal that an advisor attends the Limes Centre at least one half day each week), the Cabinet agreed (4 th February 2013) to provide the requested funding of £67,900 to the CAB for the two posts. The two posts have now been filled and are operational.

Minimising Homelessness

To minimise the numbers of households who become homeless as a result of the welfare reforms and to assist such households to minimise the resultant effects

38	Provide sufficient staff resources to respond to the anticipated increased numbers of homelessness applications	Recommend to Cabinet that part of the unallocated homelessness funding from the CLG for 2013/14-2014/15 is used to appoint 1 FTE additional Homelessness/Prevention Officer on a temporary basis for 2 years	Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) £28,500 (CLG Funding)	Dec 2012	Achieved – At its meeting on 3 rd December 2012, the Cabinet agreed that part of the CLG’s funding for homelessness prevention for 2013/14-2014/15 should be used to appoint an additional Homelessness Prevention Officer. An appointment has been made, and the new postholder is due to start on 6 th June 2013.
39	Increase the availability of accommodation for homeless applicants	(a) Recommend to Cabinet the adoption of a policy to place homeless families with less than 3 years residence in the District in suitable private rented accommodation	Assistant Director of Housing (Operations)	Jan 2013 Apr 2013	Achieved - The new Housing Allocations Scheme includes a provision that homeless families with less than 3 years residence in the District should be placed in suitable private rented accommodation if possible.
40		(b) Work with the Council’s Preferred Housing Association Partners to secure and provide private rented housing as part of the non-affordable housing provision on new developments or through acquisition from the open market	Director of Housing	From Jan 2013	Limited Progress – Informal discussions have been held with Willmott Dixon (private developer/contractor) who has expressed an interest in working with one of the Council’s Preferred Housing Association Partners to develop new private rented housing. Willmott Dixon intends to contact the Council’s Preferred HA Partners to assess their interest.

					This issue was discussed with all the Preferred HA Partners at the meeting of the Epping Forest Strategic Housing Partnership held in April 2013.
41	Target the increased CLG funding provided for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) to tenants in the most need, and with the greatest chance of using DHPs to prevent homelessness	Housing Benefits and Housing Options staff to jointly formulate a targeted Discretionary Housing Payment Scheme for adoption by the Cabinet	Housing Options Manager / Assistant Director (Benefits)	Feb 2013 Mar 2013	<p>Achieved – The Finance P/H has agreed the Council’s new DHP Policy, which includes the use of DHPs for rental loans etc.</p> <p>Appropriate representatives from Housing will be invited to attend DHP Panel meetings to discuss individual cases.</p> <p>Since April 2013, 47 applications for DHP’s have been considered, of which 26 applications have been accepted and 21 have been refused. Most of the requests have been due to the introduction of the “bedroom tax”.</p> <p>The cost of the accepted claims to date amounts to £20,600 per annum, representing 10% of the Council’s DHP allocation of £206,000.</p> <p>An item will be included in the next issue of Housing News to inform tenants of the availability of DHP’s.</p>

Council's Financial Management

To identify and minimise the financial cost and effects of the welfare reforms on the Council as an organisation, and to ensure that appropriate budget provision for the additional costs are made within the HRA Financial Plan

42	Adjust performance indicator targets to reflect the effect of the Welfare Reforms	(a) Reduce the KPI for rent collection rate from 98.80% to 96.75% from 2013/14	Director of Housing	Mar 2013	Achieved – The Finance & PM Scrutiny Panel has agreed a rent collection rate of 96% for 2013/14.
43		(b) Increase the Management PI for rent arrears from 1.60% to 2.75% from 2013/14	Principal Housing Officer (Info / Strategy)	Mar 2013	No Longer Required – Following discussion between the AD Housing (Ops.) and AHMs, it has been agreed to keep the current PI target for the time being
44		(c) Increase rent arrears targets for individual Housing Management Officers by 60% from 2013/14	Area Housing Managers (North & South)	Mar 2013 Aug 2013	<p>Not yet required – AHMs will consider appropriate targets for individual officers in the light of experience at the end of Quarter 1 of 2013/14.</p> <p>However, in the first two months of the “bedroom tax” coming into operation (1st April 2013 - 31st May 2013), of the 347 tenants affected:</p> <p>(a) 53 tenants (15%) who now have to contribute towards their rent (due to under-occupying their Council property) did not pay <u>any</u> rent;</p> <p>(b) 122 tenants (35%) who now have to contribute towards their rent (due to under-occupying their Council property) paid the <u>full amounts</u> required;</p>

					<p>(c) The total amount of rent arrears that accrued during this 2-month period from tenants who now have to contribute towards their rent (due to their under-occupation) was £6,175. The existing level of rent arrears for these cases at 1st April 2013 was £39,400, which increased to £45,575 on 31st May 2013.</p> <p>(d) The total amount of rent due from all these tenants affected during this 2-month period was around £93,000, plus the existing rent arrears of around £39,000 – totalling around £132,000.</p> <p>(e) Of this £132,000, only around £70,000 was paid - representing a rent collection rate of just 53% (compared to the Council's overall rent collection rate for all properties in 2012/13 of 97.16% - some 44% lower).</p>
45		(d) Increase the KPI for the no. of homeless households in temporary accommodation in 2013/14, based on Quarter 3 data	Director of Housing	Mar 2013	Achieved – The Finance & PM Scrutiny Panel has agreed an increase in the target from 60 to 70 households. The Quarter 3 (2012/13) figure was 64 households.
46	Promote efficient payment methods for Council tenants receiving direct payments	(a) Recommend to Cabinet a Direct Debit Marketing Campaign for all Council tenants, providing an appropriate financial incentive for tenants who pay by direct debit for one year without any missed payments	Housing Resources Manager £10,000 – HRA (Service Enhance. Fund)	June 2012 (wef Sept 2013) Jan 2014 (wef April 2014)	Not yet required - Note that the first direct payments will not now be introduced before March 2014 at the earliest.

47		<p>(b) Introduce a procedure to identify and seek third party payments from the DWP for:</p> <p>(i) Tenants in rent arrears of 4 weeks or more; and</p> <p>(ii) All licensees of the Council's Homeless Persons Hostel</p>	<p>Area Housing Managers (North & South)</p> <p>Housing Options Manager</p>	<p>Aug 2013 Jan 2014</p>	<p>Not yet required - Note that the first direct payments will not now be introduced before March 2014 at the earliest.</p>
48		<p>(c) Join the CIH Direct Payment Learning Network to learn from the experiences of the national Direct Payments Demonstration Pilots</p>	<p>Area Housing Managers (North & South)</p>	<p>From Oct 2012</p>	<p>Achieved – The Council joined the Network in November 2012, and has already obtained useful information on the national Direct Payments Demonstration Projects.</p>
49	<p>Ensure the provision of adequate staffing to minimise Council rent arrears, as a result of direct payments and other Welfare Reforms</p>	<p>Recommend to Cabinet:</p> <p>(a) The immediate appointment of 2 additional Housing Management Officers to help minimise the level of increased rent arrears; and</p> <p>(b) That Housing Management staffing levels be reviewed during 2013/14 in the light of the actual level of rent arrears</p>	<p>Director of Housing</p> <p>£57,000 p/a – HRA (Service Enhance. Fund)</p>	<p>Oct 2012</p> <p>Oct 2013</p>	<p>Achieved – At its meeting on 22nd October 2012, the Cabinet agreed the appointment of 2 additional Housing Management Officers with immediate effect. Both officers have now taken up their posts.</p> <p>Cabinet also agreed that staffing levels should be reviewed during 2013/14 in the light of the actual level of rent arrears.</p>
50	<p>Make appropriate budget provision to fund the costs of the Welfare Reforms</p>	<p>(a) Increase the budget provision for the increased use of bed and breakfast accommodation</p>	<p>Housing Options Manager</p> <p>£5,000 – GF(DDF)</p>	<p>Nov 2012</p>	<p>No longer required – Following discussions between Housing and Finance officers, it has been agreed to retain the same budget provision, accepting that the actual costs may be in excess of the budget.</p>

51		(b) Increase the budget for Council rent transactions by £50,000 p/a	Housing Resources Manager <i>£50,000 p/a – HRA (Collection costs)</i>	Nov 2012 Jan 2013	Achieved – Increased provision has been included within the HRA Budget 2013/14, although not as much as £50,000, since the 2013/14 cost will be less, due to direct payments not being commenced until at least March 2014
52		(c) Increase the annual budget provision for bad debts within the HRA	Housing Resources Manager	Nov 2012 Jan 2013	<p>Achieved – The provision within the HRA Budget 2013/14 has been increased by £86,000 - from £114,000 to £200,000.</p> <p>The first report from the Government’s “demonstration projects” for direct payments, comprising 6,220 tenants of 6 social landlords, has been published. In the first four months of the demonstration projects, rent collection rates reduced to an average of 92% (ranging between 88% and 97%), with rent arrears double the normal amounts.</p> <p>Around 5% of tenants had switched back to the automatic payment of housing benefit to the landlords for various reasons.</p>
53		(d) Report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel on the required additional resources required from the HRA’s Service Enhancement and Improvement Fund to meet the cost of new HRA services identified within the Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan	Director of Housing	Jan 2013	Achieved – Following consideration and recommendations by the Housing Scrutiny Panel, the Cabinet agreed, in March 2013, that some of the Housing Improvements and Service Enhancements Fund should be used to meet all the HRA costs to deliver the Action Plan.

54		(e) Report to the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee on the DDF funding required to meet the cost of new General Fund services identified within the Welfare Reform Mitigation Action Plan	Director of Housing	Nov 2012	No longer required – Since there are no costs to the General Fund.
----	--	--	---------------------	----------	---

Staff Training and Communication

To ensure that all relevant staff are aware of the welfare reforms, the effects on residents, the Council's response to the reforms and ways that residents can mitigate the effects on themselves

55	Provide information to all Housing staff on the main elements and implications of the Welfare Reforms	Provide timely information within the <i>In-House</i> , the Housing Directorate's staff newsletter	Principal Housing Officer (Information & Strategy)	Ongoing to Dec 2013	Good Progress – Information was included in the October and May issues of "In House" and the October issue of "Housing News", received by all staff.
56	Ensure that Housing and Housing Benefits staff affected by the Welfare Reforms are briefed on the detail of the Welfare Reforms, the Council's response and the provision of appropriate advice	(a) Attend Housing Management, Housing Options and Housing Benefits Team Meetings to explain the detail of the Welfare Reforms, the Council's response and the provision of appropriate advice	Assistant Director of Housing (Operations) / Asst. Director (Benefits)	Jan 2013	Achieved – All Housing Management staff have been fully briefed on issues related to the Bedroom Tax, Benefit Cap and the Local Council Tax Support Scheme at Team Meetings.
57		(b) Arrange for key managers and staff to attend training courses on the Welfare Reforms to ensure they are up to date with developments and emerging good practice	Director of Housing	Ongoing to Dec 2013	Achieved – Key managers have attended relevant training courses
58		(c) Ensure Housing Management and Housing Benefits staff are aware of all the circumstances in which benefit can be paid direct to the landlord (ref: Table 16.2 of the Shelter/CIH Guide to	Asst. Director (Benefits) / Area Hsg Mgrs (North and South)	July 2013 Jan 2014	Not yet required - Note that the first direct payments will not now be introduced before March 2014 at the earliest.

		Housing and Council Tax Benefit 2012/13 and DWP Housing & Council Tax Benefit Circular A9/2009)			
Total additional resources required to meet the additional costs of the welfare reforms and implement the Council's response	Housing Revenue Account		One-off	-	£85,500
			Ongoing	-	£129,000 p/a
	General Fund		One-off	-	£7,500
			Ongoing	-	£5,000 p/a

Summary of Progress				
Progress	Current Position		Position reported to Housing Scrutiny Panel – March 2013	
	No.	%	No.	%
Achieved	36	61 %	24	41 %
Almost Achieved	1	2 %	4	7 %
Good progress made	2	3 %	12	20 %
Limited progress made	1	2 %	1	2 %
Actions not yet required	13	22 %	13	22 %
Actions no longer required	6	10 %	5	8 %
Totals	59		59	