House of Commons
Work and Pensions Committee

The local welfare safety net

Fifth Report of Session 2015–16
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Report, together with formal minutes relating to the report

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Work and Pensions Committee

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Contents

Summary 3

1 Introduction 5
   Our definition of the local welfare safety net 5
   Council Tax support 5
   Discretionary Housing Payments 6
   Local welfare assistance schemes 6
   Our inquiry and this Report 7

2 Realising the opportunities of localisation 8
   Single teams and joined up services 8
   Mitigating the impacts of reductions in entitlements 9
   Replicating Croydon’s approach 10

3 Managing the risks 12
   Better joint-working and integration with Jobcentre Plus 12
   Effects of Council Tax debt collection 14

4 Flexibility balanced by protections 16
   Discretionary Housing Payments 16
      DHPs, disabled people and their carers 17
   Local welfare assistance schemes 19
      Local connection criteria 19
      Cash support in local welfare schemes 20

5 Sustainable funding 22
   DHPs: calculation and distribution of individual allocations 22
   Use of DHPs for temporary accommodation for homeless people 29
   Funding for local welfare assistance 30
   Transfer of financial risk 31
   Changes to local government finance in England 31

6 Robust evaluation 34
   DCLG review of local Council Tax support schemes 34
   DWP and NAO reviews of local welfare assistance 36
Summary

Reductions to benefit entitlements have left people on the lowest incomes more vulnerable to short-term financial crises. The local welfare safety net is the last line of defence to prevent these people falling into severe hardship and destitution. Expansion of local discretion in the system at a time of budgetary pressures has given rise to concerns about the coverage and adequacy of the safety net, particularly in England, where variation in available help is widest.

The potential benefits of localising the safety net are clear, however, and being realised in some areas. A number of local authorities are successfully helping their residents to address the underlying causes of their needs and become more self-sufficient, as was the intention of the policy. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Local Government Association (LGA), should take steps to spread good practice elsewhere.

Much better coordination of the local and national benefits systems is required to mitigate the risk of blurred demarcation of responsibilities, which can leave vulnerable people confused about where to turn in a crisis. Co-location of council benefit teams, and other local services, with Jobcentre Plus staff will go some way towards achieving this. The Government should also find a way to overcome any barriers to local and central government sharing relevant benefits data and IT systems.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) must address local Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) criteria which have unintentionally and unfairly excluded disabled people from support. It should strengthen the relevant guidance and give it statutory force.

Time-limited DHPs are clearly inadequate protection for people the Government did not intend welfare reforms to affect but who cannot reasonably be expected to take steps to mitigate the effects. This applies to parents or guardians who care full-time for their severely disabled grown up children and therefore cannot work, and for whom there is no suitable cheaper accommodation, and yet are currently subject to the Benefit Cap. Such groups should be exempted.

The DWP should review its methodology for calculating and distributing individual local authority DHP funding allocations, and devise a system which better matches funding to need. It should also consider rewarding councils for preventative work which ultimately returns more money to the Exchequer than the welfare reforms themselves would otherwise have done.

The recently announced changes to local government finance in England are likely to be broadly positive for local government as a whole, particularly in times of economic growth. The Government’s innovation of offering four-year settlements to councils that wish to plan their budgets over the medium term, as new, potentially transformative, financing arrangements are phased in, is very welcome. Local authorities and the Government, however, must agree a system which can cope with future economic downturns. The new system must also be sufficiently robust to protect services, including
crisis welfare, in deprived areas, in the transition to the new financing arrangements and in the longer term.

The current lack of a robust evaluation strategy for the welfare safety net as a whole should be addressed. Localisation combined with an expansion of discretion (as opposed to entitlement) represents a radical departure from the previous system. The Government must ensure the changes are working as intended. Regardless of responsibility for delivery, central government maintains an ongoing obligation to ensure provision of a safety net which prevents vulnerable people from falling into severe hardship and destitution.
1 Introduction

1. Responsibility for providing discretionary emergency welfare assistance and Council Tax support to people on very low incomes was transferred from Whitehall to local authorities in England and the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales in the last Parliament. Discretionary Housing Payments, for claimants facing a shortfall between their Housing Benefit (HB) and their rent, have been administered by local authorities across Great Britain (GB) since the early 2000s. UK government funding for local welfare and Council Tax support has recently been reduced, partly in response to local authorities’ underutilisation of central government funding allocations and also as part of the Government’s continuing efforts to eliminate the budget deficit.

2. The potential benefits of delivering aspects of welfare support locally are well recognised and widely supported. It brings accountability for decision-making closer to the people who require support and, because local authorities run or work closely with a range of social, health, housing and education services, it has greater potential to address the underlying causes of people’s needs. Concerns have been expressed, however, that the discretionary nature of the local schemes has led to widely varied local practice, particularly in England. Combined with very considerable budgetary pressures across local and central government, this creates the potential for “postcode lotteries” in support. Provision of a minimum level of income below which no one should fall is a long-established feature of our benefits system. Some commentators have expressed concern that a combination of local decisions and national reforms undermine the ability of the overall welfare system to guarantee a reasonable minimum for everyone in need, no matter where they live.

Our definition of the local welfare safety net

3. Each of the three schemes included in our definition of the “local welfare safety net” is briefly summarised below.

Council Tax support

4. The Coalition Government abolished GB-wide Council Tax Benefit (CTB) and subsequently legislated for localised Council Tax support schemes, effective from April 2013. Funding for the local schemes was 10% lower in cash terms than CTB.

5. CTB operated along similar lines to other national income-related benefits. People who were out of work, did not have a working partner, and had savings of less than £16,000 commonly qualified for full benefit, meaning they paid no Council Tax at all. Most local authorities, in response to budgetary pressures, have introduced cost-saving measures including minimum Council Tax payments for all working-age people and reductions...
to the savings threshold (the range of measures is discussed in more detail in chapter 6). Localisation of Council Tax support has therefore entailed many more people on the lowest incomes having to pay at least some Council Tax.\textsuperscript{7}

**Discretionary Housing Payments**

6. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) were introduced around 25 years ago. Broadly they are intended to prevent unmanageable rent arrears by providing financial support for HB claimants experiencing temporary and otherwise unbridgeable shortfalls between their HB payment and their rent. Local authorities are under no obligation to grant DHPs and are largely free to determine their own criteria and decision-making processes; they are expected to draw on guidance from the DWP, but this guidance has no statutory force.\textsuperscript{8}

7. In recent years DHPs have been explicitly(117,283),(220,317) intended to mitigate the impacts of welfare reforms which have significantly reduced social security entitlements for some claimants, principally the household Benefit Cap; the removal of the social sector spare room subsidy (sometimes known as the “Bedroom Tax”); and changes to Local Housing Allowance (by which HB for claimants renting in the private sector is calculated). Central government funding for DHPs was substantially increased to enable local authorities to mitigate the effects of these reforms.\textsuperscript{9}

Table 1: Central government DHP funding for Great Britain (£ million (cash))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>2011/12</th>
<th>2012/13</th>
<th>2013/14</th>
<th>2014/15</th>
<th>2015/16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core funding</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHA</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spare room subsidy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit Cap</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional over core</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DWP Housing Benefit subsidy circulars

Central government funding has recently been increased again, in relation to further reforms announced in the Summer 2015 Budget (see chapter 5).

**Local welfare assistance schemes**

8. Responsibility for delivering discretionary emergency welfare was transferred to local authorities in England, and the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales, from April 2013. The locally run schemes were intended to replace, though not necessarily replicate, the discretionary elements of the DWP’s Social Fund: Crisis Loans (for claimants facing an unforeseen financial emergency) and Community Care Grants (typically to support

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\textsuperscript{7} See, for example, New Policy Institute (LCW0054)

\textsuperscript{8} DWP, *Discretionary Housing Payments Guidance Manual* (last updated August 2015); Giles Peaker (LCW0037)

\textsuperscript{9} Discretionary Housing Payments, Briefing Paper 06899, House of Commons Library, July 2015; HM Treasury, *Summer Budget 2015*, HC 264, July 2015, table 2.1
The local welfare safety net

claimants returning to the community from institutional care).10 From 2012/13 to 2015/16 central government provided additional funding, over and above the central government grant, to local authorities in England to deliver local welfare assistance schemes.11 No such additional funding has been included in the baseline calculation for the 2016/17 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.12 Recently announced, potentially transformative, changes to local government financing in England will have implications for the delivery of services, including local welfare (see chapter 5).13

Our inquiry and this Report

9. We learnt a great deal from visits to Queen’s Park in north Westminster and the London Borough of Croydon. We received formal evidence from policy and legal experts; welfare rights and advice organisations; local authority officers and Councillors; providers of related services; and the central government Departments for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Work and Pensions (DWP). Publication of this Report has been coordinated with the National Audit Office (NAO) report to local government, Local Welfare Provision. We are grateful to Aileen Murphie and David Pottruff of the NAO for sharing their insight with us, and to everyone who contributed to the inquiry.

10. Almost all of the evidence to our inquiry focused on England, where variation in practice is widest. Our recommendations reflect this, but we also considered elements of best practice from the more centrally prescribed approaches in Scotland and Wales. Later in this Parliament we intend to gather more evidence from the more centralised approaches adopted by the devolved Governments. Our aim was to make recommendations which will help to maintain a financially sustainable welfare safety net which promotes self-sufficiency and addresses the underlying causes of need wherever possible, and which also provides people with adequate protection from severe hardship and destitution, no matter where they live.

11. Our conclusions are set out in bold type and our recommendations, to which the Government is required to respond, are set out in bold italic type.

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10 Localisation of the Social Fund, Standard Note 06413, House of Commons Library, November 2012
13 “Chancellor unveils ‘devolution revolution’”, HM Treasury press release, 5 October 2015
2 Realising the opportunities of localisation

12. There were 2.7 million DWP Crisis Loan awards in 2011, immediately prior to localisation, compared to 1.0 million in 2006. The total value of these loans almost tripled to £233 million over the same period. Many people made multiple repeat applications: in 2010/11 alone “over 17,000 people received 10 or more crisis loans”. One of the main policy intentions of localising emergency elements of welfare provision was to facilitate coordination of local social, housing, health and education services and thereby better address the underlying causes of financial difficulty and reduce repeat demand. In this chapter we set out some examples of excellent local practice in this regard, and consider how these might be more widely replicated.

Single teams and joined up services

13. Several local authorities put forward their welfare services as examples of good practice. For example, Milton Keynes Council had established a single team to administer all three localised schemes, and emphasised that:

It is not necessary for the customer to concern themselves as to whether they are applying for help from the correct fund; the team will access whichever funds are most appropriate for the customer thus avoiding multiple applications. We may, for example, when considering a DHP application, find that it would assist the customer if we were able to provide them with goods to enable them to end a hire purchase agreement which would then provide the additional finance the customer needs to pay the rent themselves rather than rely on a DHP award.

14. Jill Farrar, a Senior Team Manager at Blackpool Council, reported that Blackpool had taken a similar approach. The challenge of training staff on the rules of all three schemes had been overcome through the development of a relatively straightforward “toolkit for decision-makers”. Ms Farrar acknowledged that it was important for staff to follow the procedures set out in the toolkit, and keep up to date with any policy changes, but her view was that it was more important for council staff to ask the right questions of claimants and “diagnose the problem”. She contrasted this with the DWP’s previous approach; the Department’s Social Fund guidance was around 250 pages long and attempted to describe “every conceivable scenario, which is not always the best way to go.”

15. Councillor Paul McGlone, Deputy Leader of the London Borough of Lambeth, expressed a more cautious view of single council benefit teams; he emphasised that emergency welfare, DHPs and Council Tax support were “different things for different...

14 HC Deb, 3 March 2011, cols 45–46WMS
15 DWP settlement letter to local authority Chief Executives, August 2012, cited in Localisation of the Social Fund, Standard Note 06413, House of Commons Library, November 2012, appendix 1
16 Including Derbyshire County Council (LCW0010); Blackpool Council (LCW0015); Southampton Local Welfare Provision Group (LCW0016); and Milton Keynes Council (LCW0028)
17 Milton Keynes Council (LCW0028)
18 Q76
19 Q77
20 Q105
purposes”. However, like other witnesses, he supported joining up the different elements of the local welfare safety net and other services. He believed this was best achieved through effective triage:

Where ever people present themselves, whether it be a food bank, whether it be a housing office, whether it be our customer service centre or the town hall, our staff are trained and they are aware of how to get them to the right person, so there is a holistic, rounded approach.21

South Norfolk District Council had a separate team which fulfilled this triage role and was also responsible for following the claim from beginning to end, to ensure resolution of the claimant’s difficulty.22

**Mitigating the impacts of reductions in entitlements**

16. We were hugely impressed by the success of the London Borough of Croydon in helping its residents to mitigate or avoid altogether the effects of national welfare changes. By proactively contacting claimants whose benefits were set to be reduced, Croydon not only mitigated potential hardship but also helped claimants to increase their employability and incomes.

17. Croydon had pre-emptively identified 16,113 residents who would be affected by one or more of the Benefit Cap; the removal of the spare room subsidy; and the LHA reduction. Its analysis of the potential impacts showed that these residents would lose an annual total of £8.4 million in benefit payments. If they took no action, the majority would face reductions of less than £10 per week but a significant number were facing much larger reductions in income:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Loss of benefit (weekly)</th>
<th>Number affected</th>
<th>% of those affected</th>
<th>Average weekly impact per household</th>
<th>Weekly impact (total)</th>
<th>Yearly impact (total for Croydon)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;£10</td>
<td>12,261</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>£3.69</td>
<td>£45,243</td>
<td>£2,358,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–£20</td>
<td>2,403</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>£14.45</td>
<td>£34,729</td>
<td>£1,807,772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–£30</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>£24.23</td>
<td>£18,610</td>
<td>£968,420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–£40</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>£33.40</td>
<td>£5,510</td>
<td>£286,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–£50</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>£43.50</td>
<td>£6,482</td>
<td>£337,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–£100</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>£73.86</td>
<td>£9,897</td>
<td>£514,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100–£200</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>£136.86</td>
<td>£22,308</td>
<td>£1,160,059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200–£300</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>£249.49</td>
<td>£13,972</td>
<td>£726,544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300–£400</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>£340.76</td>
<td>£3,748</td>
<td>£194,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400–£500</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
<td>£436.18</td>
<td>£1,309</td>
<td>£68,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16,113</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>£10.04</strong></td>
<td><strong>£161,807</strong></td>
<td><strong>£8,423,185</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: London Borough of Croydon

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21 Q80
22 Q79 [Councillor Fuller]
18. Croydon council proactively contacted and engaged with 3,300 of the potentially worst affected households, referring individual residents to employment support and housing, budgeting and welfare rights advice, as appropriate, with the aim of maximising the resident’s income and encouraging them to be “financially resilient and live affordable lives”.

19. The success of Croydon’s approach is striking. Some 84% of households engaged with in 2013/14 achieved a “sustainable outcome”, defined as starting a new job; increasing working hours; securing appropriate accommodation; successfully obtaining an exemption from the relevant welfare reform; or more effectively managing the loss of income through budgeting.

**Replicating Croydon’s approach**

20. It should be noted that Croydon was one of four Benefit Cap pilot areas, and as such received additional assistance from the DWP in identifying and contacting potentially affected residents. Some witnesses noted the difficulty for many local authorities in analysing the potential effects of the range of national welfare changes on its residents. The Welfare Reform Club, a consultancy which assists local authorities in this work, told us that:

> Welfare reform, with some changes already taking place and more to come, presents a complex picture for local authorities and their residents. These policies interact and have knock on effects, so it is important to understand the total, cumulative impact. Local authorities need to know what the impact of welfare reform measures (including Universal Credit) will be at both aggregate and individual levels. They need to identify those individual households that will be affected most by the reforms and which households are accessing a range of support services.

21. The Welfare Reform Club noted that it is possible to assess potential effects using “proprietary software” and matching local authority HB and Council Tax support claims data. It argued that this information would be “much more powerful” if more local authorities could “integrate the range of support schemes they have on offer or at least ensure there is a read-across through data-matching.”

> Paul Howarth, Director of the Welfare Reform Club, told us that the DWP could do more to help councils achieve this, particularly helping them to understand the cumulative impacts on residents of the range of planned national benefit reforms.

22. Local government’s potential to address more effectively the underlying causes of financial hardship is being realised in a number of local authority areas. These councils, including Blackpool, the London Borough of Croydon and Milton Keynes, deserve great credit. The transfer of responsibility to more than 150 diverse local authorities in England is a radical departure, however, and not all councils have made such a positive start. We therefore very much regret that no national Department, agency or collective body—not the DCLG, the DWP, nor the Local Government Association (LGA)—has taken responsibility for actively spreading best practice elsewhere.

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23 Welfare Reform Club (LCW0020)
24 Welfare Reform Club (LCW0020)
25 Q2
23. We recommend that the DCLG and the LGA work together more actively to facilitate the adoption of best practice in the administration of the local welfare safety net. They should have a particular focus on approaches which proactively identify vulnerable people and help them to avoid unintended effects of planned national welfare reforms, and most effectively link up discretionary local welfare, housing and Council Tax support with other local services to address the underlying causes of financial difficulties. At the very least the DCLG and the LGA should jointly publish annual good practice guidance with clear studies of the most effective examples. We further recommend that the LGA facilitate secondments of staff from areas of best practice to areas where councils are performing less well.
3 Managing the risks

24. In this chapter we consider remedies for two key potential downsides of localised welfare: blurred demarcation of national and local responsibilities; and potentially counter-productive approaches to the collection of Council Tax debt from people on very low incomes.

Better joint-working and integration with Jobcentre Plus

25. Citizens Advice and others emphasised that one of the risks of localising emergency elements of the welfare system was the potential for blurred demarcation of responsibilities and confusion amongst applicants/claimants about where to turn in a crisis. We heard examples of this during our visit to the Zacchaeus 2000 Trust (Z2K), a third sector welfare rights organisation in Queen’s Park. One very ill and quite elderly man had been passed between the NHS, various council teams and the DWP. Prior to receiving help from Z2K he had spent time sleeping rough, as no single public body or agency was prepared to help him resolve his situation. His story emphasised the potentially bewildering interrelationships between the responsibilities of a range of public bodies.

26. Several councils told us that confusion also existed amongst DWP staff. A number of councils said that they often received referrals to their local welfare provision from Jobcentre Plus (JCP) in circumstances in which the claimant should in fact have first applied to one of the remaining elements of DWP’s Social Fund provision. This was particularly the case in relation to Short-Term Benefit Advances (STBAs), which are available in some circumstances when DWP benefit payments are delayed, and Hardship Payments, which may be paid to claimants whose benefit payment has been temporarily stopped for an infraction of the rules if they can demonstrate that they or their family would otherwise experience severe hardship. Paul Gray CB, Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC), confirmed that SSAC had recently discovered that as many as 40% of referrals to some council schemes were of this “inappropriate or premature” nature.

27. The London Borough of Lambeth confirmed that there had been “teething problems and a series of inappropriate referrals” in the early days of its scheme. Councillor McGlone believed that it was a training issue and reported that the situation was improving. The DWP told us that it had recently raised awareness of STBAs amongst claimants and “refreshed” its guidance to DWP staff. Councillor McGlone, however, was concerned that the longer waiting periods for a first benefit payment inherent in Universal Credit would increase demand on local welfare assistance.

28. Several witnesses emphasised the importance of joint-working between JCP, council benefit teams and other services to reduce confusion and blurred demarcation of...
The local welfare safety net

responsibilities. Paul Gray and several others recommended that Jobcentre staff be co-located in the same offices as related council and other services. He explained that:

 [...] it is so much easier if people are essentially in the same building. If we have an issue, rather than picking up the phone or doing an email I will pop downstairs or upstairs and have a quick chat, and it just builds the relationship much more effectively.

29. Co-location of JCP and other services is happening to some extent already. Councillor John Fuller of the LGA told us that in his area, South Norfolk, council benefits staff are located in local Jobcentres one day per week. We know from a visit in connection with our recent inquiry into welfare-to-work that co-location is happening in Margate. The Government’s response to SSAC’s recent report included other examples, such as the Erith Hub in the London Borough of Bexley. Some local authorities reported that “one-stop-shops” had been established in their areas; for example, in Bolton, Greater Manchester, where credit union and over 50s services were located together, and local welfare assistance, DHPs and “a range of other services” promoted.

30. The DWP told us that it was working with the DCLG to integrate the Troubled Families programme into Jobcentres; 300 Troubled Families Employment Advisers were now located with local authority welfare benefits teams. This was helping working age members of households experiencing a range of entrenched social problems to engage with employment support while also addressing deeper family problems.

31. The DWP Minister (Lord Freud) expressed enthusiasm for much more widespread co-location of Jobcentres with a range of other local services. There is now backing for this from HM Treasury; in the recent combined Spending Review and Autumn Statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that:

DWP’s estate will be reformed and reduced by 20% and the number of jobcentres co-located with local authorities will be expanded, benefiting claimants and those using government services while delivering a total reduction of 30% in estate costs.

Lord Freud confirmed that the current JCP estate contract will expire in 2018. The Department was “very actively looking at all of the options right now so that we are in a good position in what is less than three years’ time.”

32. Councillor Fuller argued that the advantages of co-location would be enhanced if the DWP and local authority benefit teams could share IT systems and data, so that they could check the status of claimants/applicants and more easily cross-refer. He emphasised that both local and central government were now part of the “Secure Government Network”, and recent improvements in government data security were such that any arguments

31 See, for example, GIPSIL (LCW0008); Derbyshire County Council (LCW0010); and The Highland Council (LCW0021)
32 Q4
33 Q91
35 DWP and SSAC, Government response to the SSAC review of localised welfare, September 2015
36 Greater Manchester Combined Authority (LCW0038)
37 DWP and DCLG (LCW0057)
38 HM Treasury, Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015, Cm 9162, November 2015, para 2.53
39 Q111
against sharing of IT and information between local and central government from a data protection perspective were merely “excuses” for inaction.  

33. **We strongly support co-location of JCP staff and Troubled Families Advisers with local authority benefit teams, where possible in “one-stop-shops” with other related services for people on low incomes, including credit unions. We are encouraged by HM Treasury’s support for co-location and welcome the DWP’s assurance that it will consider all options before signing new JCP estate contracts in 2018. We urge the DWP to take the fullest possible advantage of the period between now and 2018, by ensuring that options for co-location are explored in all JCP Districts. The potential benefits of co-location must, however, be balanced by consideration of accessibility for claimants in terms of distance from and transport links to their nearest Jobcentre or one-stop-shop.**

34. **We recommend that the DWP explore with the LGA and the DCLG the possibility of sharing IT systems and data which would allow reciprocal access to the respective parts of national and local welfare information systems.**

### Effects of Council Tax debt collection

35. As noted at the outset of this Report, many more people on very low incomes are paying at least some Council Tax under the new localised arrangements. Citizens Advice and Stepchange Debt Charity reported evidence of a correlation between the introduction of the localised schemes and increased Council Tax arrears. Stepchange told us that in 2012 around 21% of people coming to the charity for debt advice were in Council Tax arrears. The figure remained at 21% in the first quarter in 2013, the period immediately before the implementation of localised schemes. In the remainder of 2013 it increased to 26%. In 2014 it increased again to 28%. Francis McGee, Stepchange’s Director of External Affairs, also noted that the total number of Stepchange clients increased “extremely quickly” over the same period, so the proportion of clients with Council Tax arrears was “a bigger percentage of a bigger number.”

36. Citizens Advice reported a similar experience. The number of Citizens Advice clients with Council Tax arrears problems increased by 14% between 2014 and 2015. In total, it had dealt with around 100,000 enquiries directly related to the localised schemes. Rachel Badger, Head of Policy Research at Citizens Advice, also told us that there was a correlation between the minimum payment threshold set by local authorities and the number of people presenting with Council Tax arrears. Institute for Fiscal Studies research for Citizens Advice found a 30–40% increase in the number of Council Tax arrears cases where councils required a minimum payment of more than 8.5% of Council Tax liability. It should be noted that some councils stipulate a minimum payment of 40%—the wider implications of such varied approaches are discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

37. A range of witnesses raised the issue of Council Tax debt collection. In particular, many were concerned about a recent rise in court summonses and the instruction of bailiffs by local authorities.  

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40 Q91  
41 Q29  
42 For, for example, Child Poverty Action Group (LCW0050); Citizens Advice (LCW0062). See also Advice York, *Every Penny Counts: the real cost of Council Tax support*, October 2015
debts were referred to bailiffs by councils in England and Wales in 2014/15, an increase of 16% in two years. The increase has been substantially higher in some areas; for example, in 2014/15 City of Cardiff Council referred 24,105 debts to bailiffs—equivalent to 15% of all properties in the local authority—an increase of 86% over two years. Citizens Advice told us that there was some evidence of councils issuing court summonses to raise revenue by adding fees to the debt already owed by residents, although it did not have data on how widespread a practice this was.

38. It should be noted that the above figures are for local authority debts of all types and that localisation of Council Tax support cannot be established as a direct cause of the increase. Z2K told us that, in the course of its research into Council Tax reduction schemes in London, local authorities were unable to provide data on the underlying causes of Council Tax debt, as they do not routinely collect it. Joanna Kennedy, Z2K’s Chief Executive, was therefore concerned that DCLG’s review of localised Council Tax schemes (announced in oral evidence to our inquiry and discussed further in chapter 6) would be severely hampered by this lack of information.

39. Francis McGee argued that there was a strong case for statutory protection for debtors from aggressive and counter-productive approaches to debt collection. Local authorities tended to be one of the worst-offending types of creditor. He said that a cross-sectoral “breathing-space” approach, the Debt Arrangement Scheme, “works brilliantly well in Scotland” and recommended the Government consider establishing a similar scheme in England and Wales.

40. We recommend that the recently announced DCLG review of local Council Tax support schemes in England and Wales include consideration of the underlying causes of recent increases in Council Tax arrears and whether particular local approaches to Council Tax support have contributed to the rise. Should an absence of relevant data preclude this, we would request that the review consider reasonable steps which local authorities ought to take to record and report such information. We further recommend that the review investigate, and if necessary recommend actions to eradicate, local authorities issuing court summonses, and instructing bailiffs, as a method of raising revenue.

41. We recommend the Government launch a consultation on an England and Wales-wide debt “breathing space” scheme, drawing on the Debt Arrangement Scheme run by the Scottish Government. Local authorities and other creditors should be required to offer forbearance to problem debtors, including by freezing interest payments and enforcement action, provided that debtors engage with an appropriate debt advice charity or agency and enter into a debt resolution plan.

43 Money Advice Trust, ‘Stop the Knock’, accessed 10 December 2015
44 Q33 [Rachael Badger]
45 Q29
46 Q37
4 Flexibility balanced by protections

42. Local authorities have wide discretion in the criteria they apply to all three schemes in the local welfare safety net. This is a key part of the policy design: the intention is that councils design and administer their schemes to meet local circumstances and priorities. There is strong evidence from official evaluations and independent reports that this is happening in practice.47

43. Concerns remain, however, that wide discretion and budgetary pressures have led some authorities to impose criteria which create a “postcode lottery” in access to support, sometimes contrary to DWP guidance. In this chapter we consider the case for a greater level of prescription in DHP and local welfare assistance criteria, to protect particular groups from being unfairly excluded (variations in Council Tax support, and their potential implications for the national benefits system, are considered separately in chapter 6).

Discretionary Housing Payments

44. It should be noted that a high level of local and regional variation in use of DHPs is to be expected. Local housing stocks and markets vary greatly, with consequent effects on need. The DWP calculates and distributes individual local funding allocations on this understanding (see chapter 5).

45. An obvious example is London, where demand for housing, prices and rents, and general living costs are highest. The Benefit Cap, currently set at a national level, therefore has the greatest effect in the Capital—46% of all claimants affected by the cap in 2014/15 lived in London.48

46. The removal of the social sector spare room subsidy affects a greater proportion of tenants in areas where there is the greatest disparity between the average size of family households and the type of available housing stock—the North West of England is a particularly prominent example. The New Policy Institute told us that in the North West and North East of England there were “more than three times the number of one bed households in the social rented sector affected by the policy than there were one bed social lettings in 2013/14.”49

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47 See DWP, Local welfare provision review, November 2014 and LGA, Delivering local welfare: How councils are meeting local crisis and community care needs, September 2014
48 New Policy Institute (LCW0054)
49 Ibid.
We consider the effectiveness of the Government’s calculation and distribution of funding allocations to meet these varied demands in more detail in chapter 5.

**DHPs, disabled people and their carers**

47. While the above regional variations are to be expected as a consequence of national policy, witnesses were concerned about variations which were instead a consequence of local authorities applying particular DHP criteria and conditions, sometimes contrary to the DWP’s guidance and case law.\(^{50}\)

48. Giles Peaker, a leading Legal Aid housing law solicitor in London and Chair of the Housing Law Practitioners Association, emphasised that DHPs were:

> […] legally and to some extent politically expected to provide medium to long-term support to those who would otherwise suffer discriminatory effects from welfare reforms.\(^{51}\)

This is particularly the case in relation to disabled people, to whom DHPs have been considered by the courts to be essential in certain circumstances to prevent welfare reforms having unreasonable or discriminatory effects. The circumstances in which this has been found to apply include the removal of the social sector spare room subsidy from grandparents caring for a disabled grandchild who required overnight carers and, therefore, an additional bedroom.\(^{52}\) Mr Peaker also reported cases in which local authorities had refused to grant DHPs in relation to disabled people affected by the Benefit Cap, on the grounds that they had not actively taken steps to move to cheaper accommodation, despite the fact that they lived in specially adapted homes.\(^{53}\)

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50 Giles Peaker (LCW0037); Child Poverty Action Group (LCW0050); Crisis (LCW0052)
51 Giles Peaker (LCW0037)
52 Ibid.
53 Giles Peaker (LCW0037)
49. Giles Peaker told us that, according to the DWP’s own research and contrary to a relevant High Court ruling, some 75% of local authorities take Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or its replacement benefit for disabled people of working age, Personal Independence Payment (PIP), into account when calculating a DHP applicant’s income for the purposes of deciding whether to grant a DHP. This is despite DWP’s guidance that local authorities should have regard to the relevant court ruling. DLA and PIP are expressly not income-replacement benefits; entitlement is related to the **extra costs** incurred in day-to-day life as a result of the claimant’s disability.

50. We asked Lord Freud whether the Government would consider putting the DWP’s guidance to local authorities on appropriate use of DLA/PIP income in determining DHP award decisions onto a statutory footing. He told us he saw “no particular benefit” in doing so, because the guidance was “well-used” by local authorities.

51. During our visit to Queen’s Park we spoke to a single woman who cared full-time for her 23 year-old son, who has severe autism and requires 24-hour care. Her son had been in receipt of the higher rate of DLA care component since the age of seven. She told us that both the DWP and the local authority had acknowledged that she was her son’s full-time carer. She had become subject to the Benefit Cap when her son reached adulthood, because he was then no longer considered part of the same household for DWP benefit purposes and therefore an exemption to the Cap no longer applied. This left her with a rent shortfall of £90 per week.

52. In the short-term she was assisted by a DHP, but the local authority later refused to extend it. She told us she was now in serious rent arrears, with no remedies being suggested by either the local authority or the DWP. She believed her only option was to find employment, which would inevitably mean placing her son into care at considerable public cost. She felt a particular sense of unfairness because she had recognised the unsustainability of her housing situation some 10 years ago and had since been asking the council to re-house her and her son, to no effect.

53. We wrote to Lord Freud following our visit, as this case emphasised to us the inadequacy of DHPs as mitigation for the Benefit Cap in these circumstances. We asked whether the Government could provide information on the number of households in this situation, and whether it would consider exempting them from the Benefit Cap because they have no reasonable remedy available to avoid the effects—they cannot work and they cannot move home. The Minister’s reply did not include the requested data and he did not address the question of a possible Benefit Cap exemption. He told us that he would relay our concerns to “officials who have regular dialogues with local authorities to ensure that DHPs are working effectively.”

54. **It was not the Government’s intention that the removal of the social sector spare room subsidy or the Benefit Cap should penalise disabled people and their carers. We believe that, in cases where these people cannot reasonably be expected to work or earn...**

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54 Giles Peaker (LCW0037); See also, Contact a Family (LCW0042)
55 R v. Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, ex parte Hardy. See DWP, Discretionary Housing Payments: Guidance Manual Including Local Authority Good Practice Guide, August 2015, para 3.9
56 See Work and Pensions Committee, Seventh Report of Session 2010–12, Government support towards the additional living costs of working-age disabled people, HC 1493
57 Q132
58 Letter to the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee from the Minister for Welfare Reform, 23 November 2015
more, or be helped to move to cheaper accommodation, they must either be suitably protected from unintended effects by DHPs or exempted from the reforms.

55. We recommend that the Government put on to a statutory footing guidance which makes clear that local authorities must not take into account DLA/PIP awards in their calculations of applicants’ income in relation to DHP award decisions without also taking into account the extra costs incurred by the applicant as a result of their disability. The guidance must also prohibit local authorities from requiring DHP applicants to demonstrate that they have actively sought to move to cheaper accommodation in cases where the applicant in question is disabled and lives in a specially adapted home.

56. We recommend that parents or guardians who care full-time for their adult disabled children, who are in receipt of DLA/PIP and consequently not considered part of the same household for DWP benefit purposes, be exempted from the Benefit Cap. We further recommend that the DWP conduct research—to be completed within six months—into the characteristics of people affected by the Benefit Cap and the removal of the spare room subsidy whose options to remedy the effects—i.e. working more or moving home—are severely limited. It was not the Government’s intention to affect such people and time-limited DHPs are clearly inadequate to protect them.

Local welfare assistance schemes

Local connection criteria

57. Witnesses emphasised the risk that women fleeing domestic violence, and other geographically mobile people such as gypsies and travellers, people leaving care and prison leavers, could be excluded from discretionary support by “local connection” or residency criteria put in place by a number of councils. The Child Poverty Action Group noted that a two-year local residency criterion applied by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council in relation to its Council Tax support scheme had been ruled unlawful, but that there was no such legal restriction on local connection rules for local welfare assistance schemes.59

58. While the risk of particular groups being excluded from support by local connection criteria was widely emphasised, we heard relatively few examples of this happening in practice. The Riverside Group Ltd, a charitable sector housing association, reported that:

In one authority area, a tenant who had fled domestic violence with a young child was receiving support from our services. They moved into a flat with no appliances or furniture […]. An application was put in to support with this but she was advised she did not qualify for assistance as she didn’t fit the very rigid scheme criteria. If she had been in a different geographical area and local authority she would have received support.60

59. Conversely, several local authorities reported that they exempted women fleeing domestic violence and other geographically mobile groups from their local connection and residency criteria. Some gave examples in which their schemes had assisted such people.61

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59 Child Poverty Action Group (LCW0050)
60 The Riverside Group Ltd (LCW0045)
61 Southampton Local Welfare Provision Working Group (LCW0016); London Borough of Lambeth, cited by London Councils (LCW0031); Association of Charitable Organisations (LCW0055)
Lancashire’s Care and Urgent Need Support Scheme, a partnership of the County Council and nine social enterprises, reported that fleeing domestic violence was one of the main crisis situations leading to referral, making up nearly 15% of its cases. London Councils gave a specific example, from Lambeth, of a council helping a woman arriving from a different area:

Claimant from traveller background fled husband and family due to domestic violence, leaving clothing and possessions behind. Continues to suffer from threats and abuse from family. Offered a permanent home in a new area meaning that she is far away from the abuse she suffered and at less risk of domestic violence. Local welfare provision enabled new home to be furnished with essential appliances and a basic wardrobe to be bought. Claimant is now settled in her new home and not constantly making anxious calls to law enforcement agencies.

60. We are concerned that, in local welfare assistance schemes, local connection and residency criteria have the potential to exclude vulnerable people such as those fleeing domestic violence. While many councils provide effective support to people in these situations, the risk remains that people in acute need could be unfairly excluded.

61. We recommend that the DCLG and the LGA issue joint guidance on acceptable use of local connection and residency criteria in local welfare assistance scheme criteria. This guidance should recommend exemptions in certain crisis situations, including for people fleeing domestic violence, and for members of geographically mobile groups, such as gypsies and travellers, people leaving institutional care and prison leavers facing financial emergencies.

Cash support in local welfare schemes

62. Local welfare assistance schemes tend to offer in-kind support to people in crisis, including food, clothing, and white goods, or vouchers to buy particular types of goods, rather than cash. This was one of the policy intentions of the abolition of the DWP’s discretionary Social Fund; the Government believed that the provision of in-kind support would reduce the risk of abuse of the system. Several local authorities told us that they offered cash support only in exceptional circumstances and others said that their scheme offered goods and services only.

63. Some witnesses, however, were concerned about blanket bans on cash support. The Association of Charitable Organisations told us that cash had the flexibility to immediately alleviate hardship, and was therefore often necessary. David Holmes CBE, Chief Executive of the charity Family Action, told us that cash support was often preferable for “a number of very practical reasons” and, most notably, enabled people to “shop around and get best value for money.” Furthermore, he believed there were psychological benefits in awarding

62 Lancashire Community Recycling Network and Global Renewables Lancashire (LCW0041)
63 London Councils (LCW0031)
64 Localisation of the Social Fund, Standard Note 06413, House of Commons Library, November 2012
65 Lancashire Community Recycling Network and Global Renewables Lancashire (LCW0041); Mid-Devon District Council (LCW0036); Hertfordshire Welfare Assistance Scheme, cited in Furniture Re-use Network (LCW0027)
66 Association of Charitable Organisations (LCW0055)
cash in some circumstances; for example, it boosted a sense of independence in women whose autonomy had been diminished by domestic abuse.67

64. **We recommend that the DCLG and the LGA jointly publish guidance that cash payments can be practical and necessary in many circumstances, and promote self-sufficiency in line with the Government’s broader aims for national welfare policy, and should not be ruled out in the design of local welfare assistance schemes.**

65. Witnesses believed that restrictive criteria of the types discussed above have arisen to a large extent because of budgetary pressures.68 We consider issues of funding in the next chapter.

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67 [Q47]

68 See, for example, Jed Meers ([LCW0025](#)); Z2K ([LCW0056](#)); Child Poverty Action Group ([LCW0050](#))
5 Sustainable funding

66. In this chapter we examine the funding arrangements for the local welfare safety net, including the implications of recently announced changes to local government finance in England. We consider the financial viability of discretionary local welfare in the longer term, including in periods of recession and in more deprived communities.

DHPs: calculation and distribution of individual allocations

67. The DWP allocates DHP funding to local authorities across GB. As noted at the outset of this Report, DHP funding has substantially increased in recent years, explicitly to mitigate the effects of welfare reforms since 2010. On top of relatively small amounts of “core” funding, local authorities receive specific allocations intended to address the effects of the LHA reforms; the removal of the spare room subsidy; and the Benefit Cap. A breakdown of the Government’s total DHP funding for 2015/16 is set out in the table below:

Table 3: Total UK Government DHP funding contribution by element, GB, 2015/16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>£ millions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHA</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spare room subsidy</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit Cap</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DWP Housing Benefit Circular S1/2015

Local authorities in England and Wales can spend up to two and a half times the value of their central government allocation on DHPs by topping up from their own resources. The power to determine a limit on local authority expenditure on DHPs was devolved to the Scottish Government in November 2014. The Scottish Government subsequently legislated to remove the upper limit on local authority contributions, with the explicit intention of fully mitigating the impacts of the removal of the social sector spare room subsidy.69

68. In the summer 2015 Budget HM Treasury announced £800 million for DHPs over the course of the current Parliament. This represents a further increase in total DHP funding, to partially mitigate the effects of further welfare reforms, including lowering the Benefit Cap from £26,000 to £23,000 in London and £20,000 elsewhere in GB and further reductions to HB entitlements.70

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69 Discretionary Housing Payments, Briefing Paper 06899, House of Commons Library, July 2015
70 HM Treasury, Summer Budget 2015, HC 264, table 2.1
Table 4: Total UK Government DHP funding allocations, GB (£ millions (cash terms))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial year</th>
<th>Total allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017/18</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019/20</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020/21</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HM Treasury, Summer Budget 2015

69. In November 2012 the NAO found that DHP funding in the 2010 Spending Review period represented 6% of the total savings expected from the HB reforms over the same period. It concluded that it was “not clear” whether this was sufficient to address unintended effects of the reforms. The NAO was also concerned that the DWP had not set out how individual local authority allocations in relation to particular reforms had been determined. It recommended that the Department clarify its methodology for determining the overall level of funding and review its process for allocating funds to individual authorities.\(^7^1\)

70. There is now a little more information on how individual local authorities’ allocations are calculated: they are based on aggregate forecast reductions in benefit expenditure, and savings to the Exchequer, from each of the reforms.\(^7^2\) The DWP has also placed greater reporting requirements on local authorities in relation to their use of DHPs. The latest statistics, covering the period April–September 2015, show that most authorities in England and Wales spent less than 50% of their individual allocation, but there is wide variation and some councils have used all of their allocation and topped up.\(^7^3\)

71. Some councils are spending disproportionate amounts of money to counter unexpected consequences of particular benefit reforms. Such examples prompted concern that the DWP’s allocation methodology was flawed. DHP spending in the London Borough of Hackney, for example, slightly exceeded its total allocation in 2014/15; however, its spending on claimants affected by the Benefit Cap was more than double DWP’s allocation for that specific purpose.\(^7^4\)

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\(^7^1\) National Audit Office, Managing the impact of Housing Benefit reform, HC 681 Session 2012–13, November 2012

\(^7^2\) DWP, Housing Benefit Circular S1/2015

\(^7^3\) DWP, Use of Discretionary Housing Payments Great Britain Analysis of Mid-Year Returns from Local Authorities, April 2015–September 2015

\(^7^4\) London Borough of Hackney (LCW0030)
Figure 2: Local Authorities in GB: Percentage of total UK government DHP allocation spent, April 2015–September 2015

Source: DWP, Use of Discretionary Housing Payments, Great Britain: Analysis of Mid-Year Returns from Local Authorities, April 2015–September 2015, map 1
Figure 3: Local Authorities in GB: Percentage of UK government Benefit Cap DHP allocation spent, April 2015–September 2015

Legend
- Missing
- 0-25%
- 25-50%
- 50-75%
- 75-100%
- 100-125%
- 125-150%
- 150% or more

Figure 4: Local Authorities in GB: Percentage of UK government removal of social sector spare room subsidy DHP allocation spent, April 2015–September 2015

Legend
- Missing
- 0-25%
- 25-50%
- 50-75%
- 75-100%
- 100-125%
- 125-150%
- 150% or more

Source: Work and Pensions Committee calculations from DWP, Use of Discretionary Housing Payments Great Britain: Analysis of Mid-Year Returns from Local Authorities April 2015–September 2015
Figure 5: Local Authorities in GB: Percentage of UK government LHA reform DHP allocation spent, April 2015–September 2015

Source: Work and Pensions Committee calculations from DWP, Use of Discretionary Housing Payments Great Britain: Analysis of Mid-Year Returns from Local Authorities April 2015–September 2015
Figure 6: Local Authorities in GB: Percentage of total UK government DHP allocation spent meeting “other” needs, April 2015–September 2015

Source: Work and Pensions Committee calculations from DWP, Use of Discretionary Housing Payments Great Britain: Analysis of Mid-Year Returns from Local Authorities April 2015–September 2015
72. All unused DHP funding is returned the Exchequer at the end of each financial year. Several witnesses felt this was an ineffective use of resources, as there was clear evidence of continued high levels of need in relation to specific reforms in particular areas. A group of local authority benefits and revenues teams (BenX) recommended that councils be allowed to “carry forward a fixed percentage of unspent allocation” to help manage variations in demand from year to year. It also argued that local authorities which had overspent their allocation should be allowed to bid for unused allocations from under-spending areas. The LGA’s view was that councils ought to be able to retain a share of the savings accrued from the benefit reforms, to “improve outcomes” for claimants. The London Borough of Croydon favoured a broader form of partial “payment-by-results” system—it estimated that its work with residents affected by the Benefit Cap in 2013/14 (discussed in chapter 2) had resulted in around £2.2 million of additional income tax and reduced benefits expenditure, as people moved into work or increased their earnings.

73. **We recommend that the DWP review its methodology for calculating and distributing individual local authority DHP allocations, following consultation with local government, to ensure it more effectively matches funding to needs resulting from particular welfare reforms. We further recommend that this review consider the potential efficacy of a DHP funding system which rewards councils for undertaking preventative work to help residents avoid the effects of national welfare reforms, where this work ultimately returns more money to the Exchequer than the welfare reforms themselves would otherwise have done.**

**Use of DHPs for temporary accommodation for homeless people**

74. Giles Peaker reported that some local authorities, particularly in London, were using more than half of their total DHP allocation to pay for temporary accommodation for homeless people. The DWP’s guidance sets out a number of ways that DHPs are intended to *prevent* homelessness. While using DHPs to cover the full costs of temporary accommodation for people once they have become homeless is not expressly contrary to the DWP’s guidance, it is not specifically set out as one of the intended uses. Furthermore, the DWP has not allocated specific DHP funding for temporary accommodation for homeless people within the increased funding allocations since 2010, as discussed above. Mr Peaker’s view was therefore that using DHPs in this way was “distorting the budget” in some local authority areas.

75. **Some local authorities are using substantial proportions of their total DHP budget on temporary accommodation for homeless people. This is not one of the intended purposes of the additional funding allocations, which are explicitly for people affected by LHA changes; the Benefit Cap; and the removal of the social sector spare room subsidy. Money spent on temporary accommodation for homeless people is therefore money which is not reaching its intended recipients.**

76. **We recommend that the DWP require local authorities to report the amount of DHP funding spent on housing homeless people in temporary accommodation and that**

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75 BenX (LCW0051)
76 LGA (LCW0039)
77 Q15
79 Q15
The local welfare safety net

this data be regularly published as part of the official DHP statistics. This will show the shortfall in appropriate funding for temporary accommodation for homeless people in some areas, which we recommend the Government, in consultation with the relevant local authorities, address as a matter of urgency.

Funding for local welfare assistance

77. A September 2014 review by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion for the LGA concluded that:

[…] there will always be a need for some form of crisis and community care support to be made available. [...] The Government needs to recognise that there is a need to continue to provide [local authorities] with a specific and identifiable pot of funding to meet these types of needs in their localities on an ongoing basis. In the absence of this, the early indications are that local authorities are likely to reduce investment in preventative work, which may lead to greater social and financial costs in the longer term.80

78. The DWP transferred a total of £171 million to councils in England to administer and deliver local welfare assistance in 2013/14. The figure was the same, in cash terms, for 2014/15.81 The funding was not ring-fenced, but the DWP made clear that it was the Government’s intention that the funding was to be used for the new provision.82

79. It was widely expected that the Government would not continue to provide local authorities with additional funding for local welfare assistance in 2015/16.83 This followed a one-off DWP review in late 2014 which found that in 2013/14 some 80% of councils did not spend all of their funding allocation.84

80. It should be noted, however, that this review also found that underspending was at least in part due to councils’ uncertainty around the level of demand in the first year of the schemes. This had led them to take a cautious approach to granting awards.85 This finding is supported by the NAO. Furthermore, the NAO found that fewer councils (24%) reported that they would underspend their 2014/15 allocation, and some of this projected underspending was due to uncertainty over future funding arrangements; councils were planning to spend their year two allocation over a longer period.86

81. The LGA argued that ending additional funding, over and above the general central government grant to local authorities, would be “an expensive mistake which could put thousands at greater risk of losing their homes and cost the public purse hundreds of millions of pounds”.87 Following consultation with local authorities, and to help them recognise how much of their core funding related to the provision of welfare assistance, the DCLG identified £130 million from within the general central government grant and announced additional funding of £74 million for 2015/16, to “recognise that councils have

80 LGA, Delivering local welfare: How councils are meeting local crisis and community care needs, September 2014
81 NAO, Local Government: Local Welfare Provision, January 2016
82 Localisation of the Social Fund, Standard Note 06413, House of Commons Library, November 2012
83 “Scrapping welfare assistance funding ‘an expensive mistake’ warn councils”, LGA press release, 29 January 2015
84 DWP, Local welfare provision review, November 2014
85 Ibid.
86 NAO, Local Government: Local Welfare Provision, January 2016
87 “Scrapping welfare assistance funding ‘an expensive mistake’ warn councils”, LGA press release, 29 January 2015
asked for additional support.”

In the provisional 2016/17 settlement, the Government identified £130 million within the baseline calculation for the core grant; however, the LGA was concerned that the £74 million added to the 2015/16 settlement had not been added to the baseline calculation.

Transfer of financial risk

Dr Kenway of the New Policy Institute pointed out that a practical financial effect of the localisation of Council Tax support and discretionary welfare assistance was the transfer of financial risk from the DWP’s Annually Managed Expenditure, which is intended to be responsive to economic conditions, to the more fixed budgets of local authorities. In effect the poorest residents were now a financial burden on councils in a way they had never been before. Dr Kenway believed it was “unwise” to transfer risk from the “broad shoulders” of HM Treasury to local authorities in this way.

Changes to local government finance in England

In the recent Spending Review and Autumn Statement the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a “devolution revolution” in England; including measures which HM Treasury believes will “fix the current broken system of financing local government”.

Since 2013 individual councils have retained 50% of the Business Rate growth in their areas i.e. half of the tax revenue from new businesses setting up or existing businesses expanding. A system of “growth levies”, paid by local authorities with “disproportionate potential to grow” (including several central London boroughs), was introduced to fund top-up payments to councils with falling Business Rate revenues.

The key elements of the proposed changes, to be phased in over the course of the current Parliament, are:

• Initially allowing local government to retain 100% of Business Rate growth (maintaining a system of growth levies and top-ups);
• Allowing local authorities to “cut [local] business rates as much as they like”;  
• Allowing directly-elected Mayors, with the agreement of their Local Enterprise Partnerships, to add a premium to local business rates, subject to a cap (likely to be 2%), to fund infrastructure projects (since 1990 a Uniform Business Rate has been set centrally; this will be abolished);
• Eventual abolition of the central government grant to local authorities in England and “full devolution of Business Rates” i.e. 100% retention of all local business rates revenue; and

88 Written Statement, 3 Feb 2015, Col SWS [Kris Hopkins]
89 LGA briefing on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2016–2017 and an offer to councils for future years, 17 December 2015; See also, DCLG, Draft Local Government Finance Report (England) 2016–17, December 2015, annex G
90 Q21
91 “Chancellor unveils ‘devolution revolution’”, HM Treasury press release, 5 October 2015
92 Re-wiring local government finance
93 See Directly-elected mayors, Briefing Paper 05000, House of Commons Library, May 2015
• New responsibilities transferred to local government, potentially including administration of HB for pensioners and public health.94

86. The Government intends to consult with local government in preparation for phasing in the reforms. Its longer-term intention is for local authorities to become self-sufficient, through control of all local tax revenues, and better able to promote local economic growth by attracting business investment.95 Paul Johnson, Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, wrote:

These changes could turn out to be transformative. The ability to retain revenues from additional economic development means that for the first time councils will have a direct financial stake in local growth. It is also likely to lead to further divergence between councils in their spending power. Successful areas will benefit, the less successful will lose out. There is, as ever, a trade-off between providing sharp incentives for success and redistributing between the more and the less successful.96

87. The proposed changes initially received a cautious welcome from the LGA, which has “long argued that the current system of business rates needs to be reformed”. The total additional revenue from Business Rate retention is forecast to be £13 billion over the Spending Review period; more than the loss incurred from the proposed phased withdrawal of central government grants. LGA analysis of HM Treasury and Office of Budgetary Responsibility figures, however, shows that core funding from central to local government will be cut by 24% in real terms between 2016/17 and 2019/20. Taking into account OBR forecasts of local tax revenues, the LGA estimates an overall 6.7% real terms reduction in local authority income over the same period.97 The Government calculates that local authority “Core Spending Power”, which takes into account all sources of local government income, will fall by an average of only 0.5%.98

88. The LGA was concerned that “full devolution” of business rates would have uneven effects across unless the country unless local authorities in England can work with the Government to “get the details of the policy right and ensure that it can be introduced in way that is fair to all councils.”99 The Minister for Local Government (Marcus Jones MP) told us that there would be “clear mechanisms built in to make sure that local authorities’ funding from business rates does not drop below a certain level.”100

89. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement for 2016/17 announced that, for the first time, local authorities in England would be offered four-year settlements, so that any council that wishes to can “plan ahead with confidence.”101 The Chairman of the LGA described this as “hugely significant” and “an important step towards the financial

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95 HM Treasury, Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015, Cm 9162, November 2015
96 “Get ready for Osborne’s town hall revolution”, The Times, 8 December 2015
98 Including core grant funding; retained business rates; Council Tax income (included, where appropriate the 2% precept for social care); and income from the New Homes Bonus, the Improved Better Care Fund and the Rural Services Delivery Grant. See LGA briefing on the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement 2016–17 and an offer to councils for future years, 17 December 2015
100 Q148
101 “Greg Clark hails historic 4-year settlement and support for adult social care”, DCLG press release, 17 December 2015
certainty councils need to run important local services to the high standard our residents deserve”.

90. The localisation of Council Tax support and discretionary welfare assistance entails a transfer of financial risk from the DWP’s Annually Managed Expenditure to the stretched and, to-date, relatively fixed budgets of local authorities. We very much welcome the Government’s innovation of offering four-year settlements to local authorities in England that wish to plan their budgets over the course of this Parliament, as potentially transformative financing arrangements are phased in.

91. The proposed devolution of business rates in England is likely to have a broadly positive effect on the spending power of local government as a whole, particularly in areas which are more able to harness local economic growth; however, it will be essential for the new system to include adequate protections for local authorities in which business rates raise relatively little revenue.

92. Central and local government in England must agree and implement an effective local government funding system which can cope with future economic downturns. In its consultation on the proposed changes to local government finance in England announced in the recent Spending Review and Autumn Statement, we recommend that the Government and the LGA consider options for counter-cyclical grants from central government and/or more affluent councils, to less affluent local authority areas, perhaps based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, particularly during future periods of recession. In the interim period, before “full devolution” of Business Rate retention, we recommend that the Government introduce a temporary grant to local authorities with the highest deprivation rates in England, to preserve local welfare assistance schemes in areas with the highest levels of need.

102 LGA media statement, 17 December 2015
6 Robust evaluation

93. A range of witnesses emphasised a relative lack of official research on the effectiveness and adequacy of Council Tax support and local welfare assistance schemes. Similarly, we heard that the cumulative impacts on claimants of the localisation of discretionary welfare more broadly, including how the schemes interact with each other and the national benefits system, had been inadequately evaluated.\textsuperscript{103} In this final chapter we consider a suitable evaluation strategy for the safety net as a whole.

DCLG review of local Council Tax support schemes

94. As previously noted, most local authorities impose criteria to limit Council Tax support. Typically local authorities imposed a combination of the following:

- Requiring all working-age people to pay at least some Council Tax (ranging from 8.5% to 40% of their full liability) no matter what their income;
- Reducing the savings threshold from £16,000 (under CTB) to £8,000 or less;
- Removing “Second Adult Rebates” whereby previously people living with another adult on an income-related benefit received a Council Tax discount;
- Introducing “Band Caps” i.e. limiting support to the value of Council Tax liability at a particular Council Tax Band; or
- Changing the “income taper” i.e. the rate at which support is withdrawn as the applicant’s income rises.\textsuperscript{104}

95. The average effects on Council Tax support ranged from no change in some local authority areas to annual cuts of up to £250 in others:

\textsuperscript{103} See, for example, London Councils (LCW0031); Shelter (LCW0048); Child Poverty Action Group (LCW0050)
\textsuperscript{104} New Policy Institute (LCW0054)
The New Policy Institute and others emphasised that these varied effects, particularly differences in income tapers, could have implications for the finely balanced work incentives in Universal Credit—the new single benefit payment which combines six existing benefits and tax credits into a single monthly household payment and tapers off as the claimant’s income rises. Policy experts therefore believed there was a strong case for amalgamating Council Tax support into Universal Credit. It was not clear to them that any benefits of localising support outweighed the case for amalgamation into the national benefits system.\textsuperscript{105}

96. Lord Freud confirmed that it was originally his intention that Council Tax support be included in Universal Credit. He told us that local schemes were instead introduced because the Coalition Government’s “localism agenda” had taken precedence at the time. He said that there was still the option to bring Council Tax support into Universal Credit in the future. He believed this might become a stronger possibility once the Universal Credit system was fully operational “by the end of this Parliament.”\textsuperscript{106}

97. In oral evidence to us Marcus Jones MP, the Minister for Local Government, announced his Department would launch a review of local Council Tax support schemes,

\textsuperscript{105} Q19 [Paul Howarth]; New Policy Institute (LCW0054)
\textsuperscript{106} Q116
to report by March 2016. The review would “look very carefully at a number of areas, including the interaction of local Council Tax support with Universal Credit.”

98. We welcome the DCLG’s announcement of its intention to review local Council Tax support schemes and, in particular, that it will “consider whether or not the schemes should be brought within Universal Credit”. We strongly support the DCLG’s intention that the review include a consideration of the varied effects of localised schemes on the finely balanced work incentives within Universal Credit. It will be vital that the review benefits from DWP’s input to this analysis. The Government must ensure that local decisions do not militate against the policy intentions of the national benefits system.

DWP and NAO reviews of local welfare assistance

99. The DWP conducted a one-off review of local welfare provision in 2014. The review entailed discussions with the LGA and individual councils and 100 written submissions from local authorities. It reported that councils “were clear that they:

- Have a good understanding of their local community, its demography and what they felt was required to support local people;

- Are working closely with a range of different stakeholders and partners in their local area and are delivering partnership services through these established networks; and

- Are best placed to help vulnerable people locally and provide a timely and better targeted service than the previous remote telephone service.”

The DWP was clear that it had no intention of conducting any further evaluation.

100. The NAO’s report, with which we have coordinated publication, concludes that the most effective councils are realising the potential advantages of localisation. The NAO also emphasises, however, that doubts remain around the sufficiency of funding and the effects of national welfare reforms on demand. The future of local welfare assistance schemes therefore “appears uncertain.”

101. Policy experts believed that the level of evaluation to date of the constituent parts of local discretionary welfare had been inadequate. Paul Gray argued that it “should be incumbent on Government to be the collector of data and ensure that there is adequate evaluation in place for these innovations.” Dr Kenway agreed that such evaluation ought to be the Government’s responsibility. He regarded it as “unacceptable” that the changes were going ahead “without knowing what is happening” to “several million people in this country in the most precarious financial position”.

102. Localisation of support has entailed an expansion of discretion in the overall benefits system at a time when council budgets, like those of the whole public sector, have been under immense pressure. Reforms to income-replacement and housing cost benefit entitlements, both pre and post-2010, have reduced the minimum amount of disposable income on which the State believes it is reasonable and fair to expect the
poorest in society to live. There are more changes, announced in the Summer 2015 Budget, to come. People living on such low incomes will inevitably be vulnerable to income shocks and financial crises. Even where it has not as yet resulted in cuts to people’s incomes, localisation is a major policy change and the expansion of discretion holds out the possibility of future changes.

103. We recommend a cross-departmental evaluation of the adequacy and effectiveness of the welfare safety net in preventing severe hardship and destitution. Its scope should include remaining DWP Social Fund and Hardship Payments—and Advance Payments in Universal Credit—Council Tax support, Discretionary Housing Payments and local welfare assistance schemes. It must take into account the further national welfare reforms announced in the Summer 2015 budget. We recommend that an interim evaluation report be published before the end of 2016 and a further evaluation report be published before the end of the current Parliament. This report should propose an effective evaluation strategy for the longer term.

104. The protection of the vulnerable is a core responsibility of the State. The current lack of a robust evaluation strategy for the welfare safety net as a whole should be addressed; the Government must ensure that its reforms are working as intended. Regardless of responsibility for delivery, central government maintains an ongoing obligation to ensure provision of a safety net which prevents vulnerable people from falling into severe hardship.
Conclusions and recommendations

In this list, conclusions are set out in plain type and recommendations, to which the Government is required to respond, are set out in italic type.

Mitigating the impacts of reductions in entitlements

1. Local government’s potential to address more effectively the underlying causes of financial hardship is being realised in a number of local authority areas. These councils, including Blackpool, the London Borough of Croydon and Milton Keynes, deserve great credit. The transfer of responsibility to more than 150 diverse local authorities in England is a radical departure, however, and not all councils have made such a positive start. We therefore very much regret that no national Department, agency or collective body—not the DCLG, the DWP, nor the Local Government Association (LGA)—has taken responsibility for actively spreading best practice elsewhere. (Paragraph 22)

2. We recommend that the DCLG and the LGA work together more actively to facilitate the adoption of best practice in the administration of the local welfare safety net. They should have a particular focus on approaches which proactively identify vulnerable people and help them to avoid unintended effects of planned national welfare reforms, and most effectively link up discretionary local welfare, housing and Council Tax support with other local services to address the underlying causes of financial difficulties. At the very least the DCLG and the LGA should jointly publish annual good practice guidance with clear studies of the most effective examples. We further recommend that the LGA facilitate secondments of staff from areas of best practice to areas where councils are performing less well. (Paragraph 23)

Better joint-working and integration with Jobcentre Plus

3. We strongly support co-location of JCP staff and Troubled Families Advisers with local authority benefit teams, where possible in “one-stop-shops” with other related services for people on low incomes, including credit unions. We are encouraged by HM Treasury’s support for co-location and welcome the DWP’s assurance that it will consider all options before signing new JCP estate contracts in 2018. We urge the DWP to take the fullest possible advantage of the period between now and 2018, by ensuring that options for co-location are explored in all JCP Districts. The potential benefits of co-location must, however, be balanced by consideration of accessibility for claimants in terms of distance from and transport links to their nearest Jobcentre or one-stop-shop. (Paragraph 33)

4. We recommend that the DWP explore with the LGA and the DCLG the possibility of sharing IT systems and data which would allow reciprocal access to the respective parts of national and local welfare information systems. (Paragraph 34)

Effects of Council Tax debt collection

5. We recommend that the recently announced DCLG review of local Council Tax support schemes in England and Wales include consideration of the underlying causes.
of recent increases in Council Tax arrears and whether particular local approaches to Council Tax support have contributed to the rise. Should an absence of relevant data preclude this, we would request that the review consider reasonable steps which local authorities ought to take to record and report such information. We further recommend that the review investigate, and if necessary recommend actions to eradicate, local authorities issuing court summonses, and instructing bailiffs, as a method of raising revenue. (Paragraph 40)

6. We recommend the Government launch a consultation on an England and Wales-wide debt “breathing space” scheme, drawing on the Debt Arrangement Scheme run by the Scottish Government. Local authorities and other creditors should be required to offer forbearance to problem debtors, including by freezing interest payments and enforcement action, provided that debtors engage with an appropriate debt advice charity or agency and enter into a debt resolution plan. (Paragraph 41)

**Discretionary Housing Payments**

7. It was not the Government’s intention that the removal of the social sector spare room subsidy or the Benefit Cap should penalise disabled people and their carers. We believe that, in cases where these people cannot reasonably be expected to work or earn more, or be helped to move to cheaper accommodation, they must either be suitably protected from unintended effects by DHPs or exempted from the reforms. (Paragraph 54)

8. We recommend that the Government put on to a statutory footing guidance which makes clear that local authorities must not take into account DLA/PIP awards in their calculations of applicants’ income in relation to DHP award decisions without also taking into account the extra costs incurred by the applicant as a result of their disability. The guidance must also prohibit local authorities from requiring DHP applicants to demonstrate that they have actively sought to move to cheaper accommodation in cases where the applicant in question is disabled and lives in a specially adapted home. (Paragraph 55)

9. We recommend that parents or guardians who care full-time for their adult disabled children, who are in receipt of DLA/PIP and consequently not considered part of the same household for benefit purposes, be exempted from the Benefit Cap. We further recommend that the DWP conduct research—to be completed within six months—into the characteristics of people affected by the Benefit Cap and the removal of the spare room subsidy whose options to remedy the effects—i.e. working more or moving home—are severely limited. It was not the Government’s intention to affect such people and time-limited DHPs are clearly inadequate to protect them. (Paragraph 56)

**Local welfare assistance schemes**

10. We are concerned that, in local welfare assistance schemes, local connection and residency criteria have the potential to exclude vulnerable people such as those fleeing domestic violence. While many councils provide effective support to people in these situations, the risk remains that people in acute need could be unfairly excluded. (Paragraph 60)
11. We recommend that the DCLG and the LGA issue joint guidance on acceptable use of local connection and residency criteria in local welfare assistance scheme criteria. This guidance should recommend exemptions in certain crisis situations, including for people fleeing domestic violence, and for members of geographically mobile groups, such as gypsies and travellers, people leaving institutional care and prison leavers facing financial emergencies. (Paragraph 61)

12. We recommend that the DCLG and the LGA jointly publish guidance that cash payments can be practical and necessary in many circumstances, and promote self-sufficiency in line with the Government’s broader aims for national welfare policy, and should not be ruled out in the design of local welfare assistance schemes. (Paragraph 64)

DHPs: calculation and distribution of individual allocations

13. We recommend that the DWP review its methodology for calculating and distributing individual local authority DHP allocations, following consultation with local government, to ensure it more effectively matches funding to needs resulting from particular welfare reforms. We further recommend that this review consider the potential efficacy of a DHP funding system which rewards councils for undertaking preventative work to help residents avoid the effects of national welfare reforms, where this work ultimately returns more money to the Exchequer than the welfare reforms themselves would otherwise have done. (Paragraph 73)

14. Some local authorities are using substantial proportions of their total DHP budget on temporary accommodation for homeless people. This is not one of the intended purposes of the additional funding allocations, which are explicitly for people affected by LHA changes; the Benefit Cap; and the removal of the social sector spare room subsidy. Money spent on temporary accommodation for homeless people is therefore money which is not reaching its intended recipients. (Paragraph 75)

15. We recommend that the DWP require local authorities to report the amount of DHP funding spent on housing homeless people in temporary accommodation and that this data be regularly published as part of the official DHP statistics. This will show the shortfall in appropriate funding for temporary accommodation for homeless people in some areas, which we recommend the Government, in consultation with the relevant local authorities, address as a matter of urgency. (Paragraph 76)

Changes to local government finance in England

16. The localisation of Council Tax support and discretionary welfare assistance entails a transfer of financial risk from the DWP’s Annually Managed Expenditure to the stretched and, to-date, relatively fixed budgets of local authorities. We very much welcome the Government’s innovation of offering four-year settlements to local authorities in England that wish to plan their budgets over the course of this Parliament, as potentially transformative financing arrangements are phased in. (Paragraph 90)

17. The proposed devolution of business rates in England is likely to have a broadly positive effect on the spending power of local government as a whole, particularly
in areas which are more able to harness local economic growth; however, it will be essential for the new system to include adequate protections for local authorities in which business rates raise relatively little revenue. (Paragraph 91)

18. **Central and local government in England must agree and implement an effective local government funding system which can cope with future economic downturns. In its consultation on the proposed changes to local government finance in England announced in the recent Spending Review and Autumn Statement, we recommend that the Government and the LGA consider options for counter-cyclical grants from central government and/or more affluent councils, to less affluent local authority areas, perhaps based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, particularly during future periods of recession. In the interim period, before “full devolution” of Business Rate retention, we recommend that the Government introduce a temporary grant to local authorities with the highest deprivation rates in England, to preserve local welfare assistance schemes in areas with the highest levels of need. (Paragraph 92)

**DCLG review of local Council Tax support schemes**

19. We welcome the DCLG’s announcement of its intention to review local Council Tax support schemes and, in particular, that it will “consider whether or not the schemes should be brought within Universal Credit”. We strongly support the DCLG’s intention that the review include a consideration of the varied effects of localised schemes on the finely balanced work incentives within Universal Credit. It will be vital that the review benefits from DWP’s input to this analysis. The Government must ensure that local decisions do not militate against the policy intentions of the national benefits system. (Paragraph 98)

**DWP and NAO reviews of local welfare assistance**

20. Localisation of support has entailed an expansion of discretion in the overall benefits system at a time when council budgets, like those of the whole public sector, have been under immense pressure. Reforms to income-replacement and housing cost benefit entitlements, both pre and post-2010, have reduced the minimum amount of disposable income on which the State believes it is reasonable and fair to expect the poorest in society to live. There are more changes, announced in the Summer 2015 Budget, to come. People living on such low incomes will inevitably be vulnerable to income shocks and financial crises. Even where it has not as yet resulted in cuts to people’s incomes, localisation is a major policy change and the expansion of discretion holds out the possibility of future changes. (Paragraph 102)

21. We recommend a cross-departmental evaluation of the adequacy and effectiveness of the welfare safety net in preventing severe hardship and destitution. Its scope should include remaining DWP Social Fund and Hardship Payments—and Advance Payments in Universal Credit—Council Tax support, Discretionary Housing Payments and local welfare assistance schemes. It must take into account the further national welfare reforms announced in the Summer 2015 budget. We recommend that an interim evaluation report be published before the end of 2016 and a further evaluation report be published before the end of the current Parliament. This report should propose an effective evaluation strategy for the longer term. (Paragraph 103)
22. The protection of the vulnerable is a core responsibility of the State. The current lack of a robust evaluation strategy for the welfare safety net as a whole should be addressed; the Government must ensure that its reforms are working as intended. Regardless of responsibility for delivery, central government maintains an ongoing obligation to ensure provision of a safety net which prevents vulnerable people from falling into severe hardship. (Paragraph 104)
Formal Minutes

Wednesday 6 January 2016

Members present:
Rt Hon Frank Field, in the Chair
Mhairi Black  Craig Mackinlay
Ms Karen Buck  Steve McCabe
John Glen  Jeremy Quin
Richard Graham  Craig Williams
Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck

Draft Report (The local welfare safety net), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 104 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 13 January at 9.15 am.]
Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the inquiry page of the Committee’s website.

Wednesday 18 November 2015

Giles Peaker, Chair, Housing Law Practitioners Association, Paul Gray CB, Chair, Social Security Advisory Committee, Paul Howarth, Director, Welfare Reform Club, and Dr Peter Kenway, Director, New Policy Institute

Rachael Badger, Head of Policy Research, Citizens Advice, David Holmes CBE, Chief Executive, Family Action, Francis McGee, Director of External Affairs, StepChange Debt Charity, and Joanna Kennedy, Chief Executive, Zacchaeus 2000 Trust

Wednesday 2 December 2015

Jill Farrar, Senior Team Manager, Blackpool Council, Councillor Paul McGlone, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Investment, Lambeth Council, and Councillor John Fuller, Vice-Chairman, Resources Panel, Local Government Association and Leader, South Norfolk District Council

Mr Marcus Jones MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for Local Government), Department for Communities and Local Government, Matthew Style, Director of Local Government Finance, Department for Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform, Department for Work and Pensions, and Pete Searle, Strategy Director, Working Age Benefits, Department for Work and Pensions
Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the inquiry page of the Committee’s website. BFD numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

| 1   | Association of Charitable Organisations (ACO) (LCW0055) |
| 2   | BenX (LCW0051)                                       |
| 3   | Blackpool Council (LCW0015)                           |
| 4   | Bolton Council (LCW0007)                              |
| 5   | Bromsgrove District Council (LCW0002)                 |
| 6   | Calderdale Council (LCW0024)                          |
| 7   | Cambridge & District Citizens Advice Bureau (LCW0040)  |
| 8   | Child Poverty Action Group (LCW0050)                  |
| 9   | Citizens Advice (LCW0043)                             |
| 10  | Citizens Advice (LCW0062)                             |
| 11  | Community Furniture Store (York) Ltd (LCW0004)        |
| 12  | Contact A Family (LCW0042)                            |
| 13  | Crisis (LCW0052)                                     |
| 14  | Derbyshire County Council (LCW0010)                  |
| 15  | DWP & DCLG (LCW0057)                                 |
| 16  | Family Action (LCW0013)                              |
| 17  | Furniture Re-Use Network (LCW0027)                   |
| 18  | Giles Peaker (LCW0037)                               |
| 19  | Gipsil (LCW0008)                                    |
| 20  | Greater Manchester Combined Authority (LCW0038)      |
| 21  | Harrow Law Centre (LCW0046)                           |
| 22  | Hastings Furniture Service (LCW0009)                 |
| 23  | Homeless Link (LCW0019)                              |
| 24  | Lancashire Crn/Global Renewables Lancashire (LCW0041) |
| 25  | Lincolnshire County Council (LCW0018)                |
| 26  | Liverpool City Council (LCW0047)                     |
| 27  | Local Government Association (LCW0039)               |
| 28  | London Borough of Hackney (LCW0030)                  |
| 29  | London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LCW0059)             |
| 30  | London Councils (LCW0031)                            |
| 31  | Macmillan Cancer Support (LCW0053)                   |
| 32  | Mid Devon District Council (LCW0036)                 |
| 33  | Milton Keynes Council (LCW0028)                      |
| 34  | Money Advice Trust (LCW0058)                         |
35 Mr Jed Meers (LCW0025)
36 New Policy Institute (LCW0054)
37 Peabody (LCW0001)
38 Policy In Practice (LCW0026)
39 Redditch Borough Council (LCW0003)
40 Shelter (LCW0048)
41 Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (LCW0061)
42 Southampton Local Welfare Provision Working Group (LCW0016)
43 St Mungo’s Broadway (LCW0035)
44 Stepchange Debt Charity (LCW0004)
45 Suffolk County Council (LCW0022)
46 Surrey County Council (LCW0001)
47 Tameside MBC (LCW0032)
48 The Highland Council (LCW0021)
49 The Riverside Group (LCW0045)
50 Warrington Borough Council (LCW0017)
51 Welfare Reform Club (LCW0020)
52 West Sussex County Council (LCW0014)
53 Z2K (LCW0056)
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee’s website.

The reference number of the Government’s response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2015–16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Report</th>
<th>Pension freedom guidance and advice</th>
<th>HC 371 (Cm 9183)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Second Report</td>
<td>Welfare-to-work</td>
<td>HC 363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Report</td>
<td>A reconsideration of tax credit cuts</td>
<td>HC 548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Report</td>
<td>Benefit delivery</td>
<td>HC 372</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>