

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT: 'HELP ME TO BE FINANCIALLY INDEPENDENT' – 10 JULY 2018

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This bi-monthly report highlights the key areas for the strategic purpose 'help me to be financially independent'.
- 1.2 This report also contains key organisational measures and performance towards the outcomes identified in the Council Plan. It will complement the use of the Corporate Measures Dashboard, the tool used for understanding and reporting our measures.

2. CONTEXT

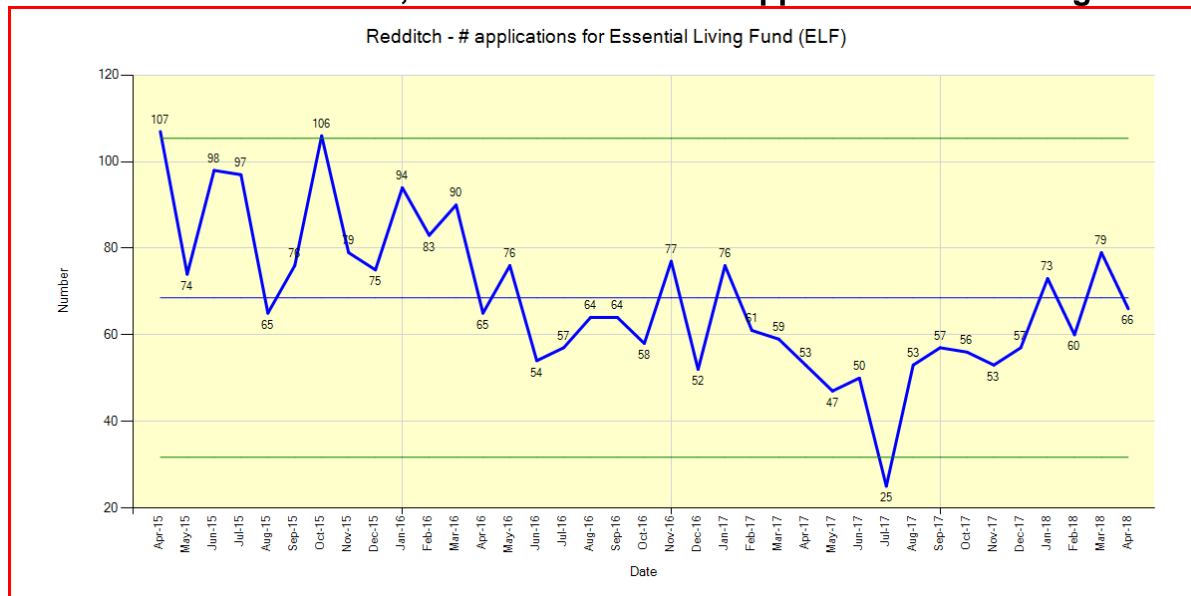
- 2.1 One of the key Strategic Purposes that has been identified following discussions and feedback from the community is to support people in being financially independent. Financial independence can be interpreted in a number of ways. Our aim is for individuals being able to manage within their current financial resources (including some benefits) and to work towards lifting working age people out of reliance on benefits or Council Tax Support. It is important to ensure opportunities to increase income by securing work at a higher income are developed through improved education and increased skills.
 - 2.2 The Council Plan has developed key themes in relation to the support of this purpose. These have links to the delivery of other strategic purposes and include:
 - Develop education and skills to sustain financial independence
 - Support communities during changes to welfare and benefits
 - Support residents to reduce levels of individual debt
 - Support reductions in winter deaths and fuel poverty
 - Support the provision of affordable housing in the District to meet the needs of the community
 - 2.3 It is appreciated that some of the themes are more difficult to measure and therefore the following measures at section 3 have been identified to start to understand how the Council is meeting elements of the themes to be supported through the work to deliver this strategic purpose.
- #### **3. STRATEGIC MEASURES**
- 3.1 The following strategic measures are currently used to understand the purpose 'help me run a successful business':
 - # applications for Essential Living Fund (ELF)
 - # ELF applications by demographic (gender)
 - # ELF applications by demographic (ethnicity)
 - # ELF applications by demographic (age)
 - # applications for ELF by reason for application
 - # people receiving housing benefit (working age)

- # Local Authority rent accounts in arrears (all arrears)
 - Total amount of rent arrears

3.2 Strategic Measures Charts

applications for Essential Living Fund (ELF)

Contact: Rachael Dobson, Assistant Financial Support Services Manager



- 3.2.1 When responsibility for social welfare was transferred to local authorities it was delegated by Worcestershire County Council to the districts along with the government funding at that time.

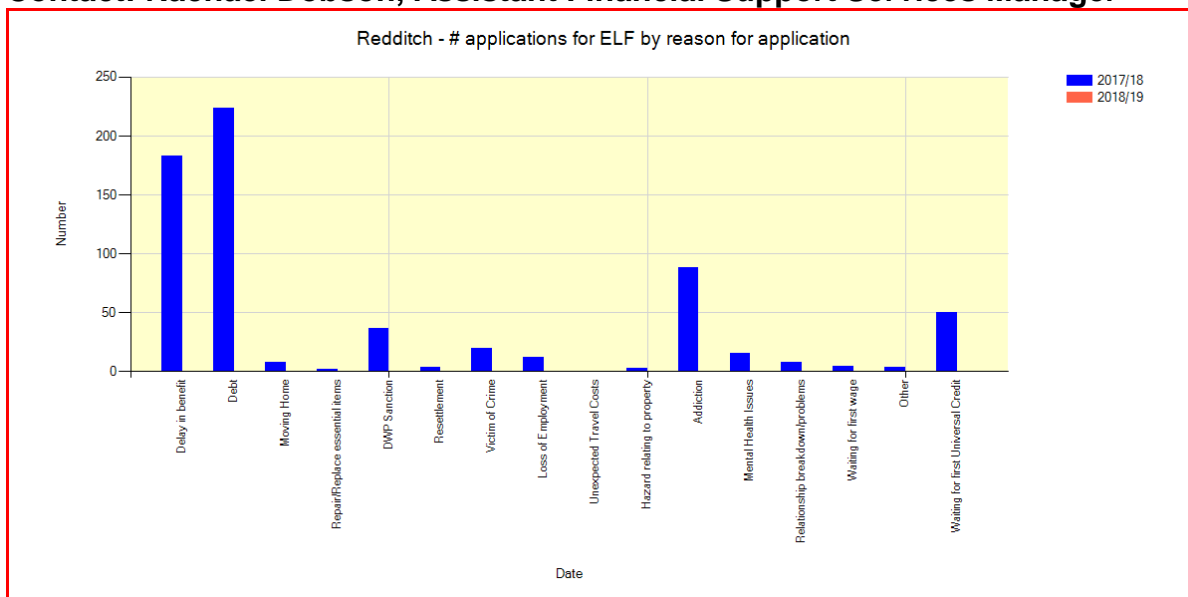
Over the intervening period there has been a stabilisation of applications. This is in part due to a better overall economic picture, but more fundamentally because of the steps taken to support people who apply for help.

The Essential Living Fund is used in conjunction with other avenues of support, as well as budgeting and debt advice to support anyone presenting in financial hardship.

The approach used has helped to ensure that anyone making applications but unwilling to engage with our officers to reduce the likely need for support over a long term period, do not tend to make repeat applications. This in turn has ensured that we are helping the most vulnerable and at risk. As can be seen from the chart above, the level of requests for the Essential Living Fund has reduced which reflects the further support that is available from the Financial Independence Team.

applications for ELF by reason for application

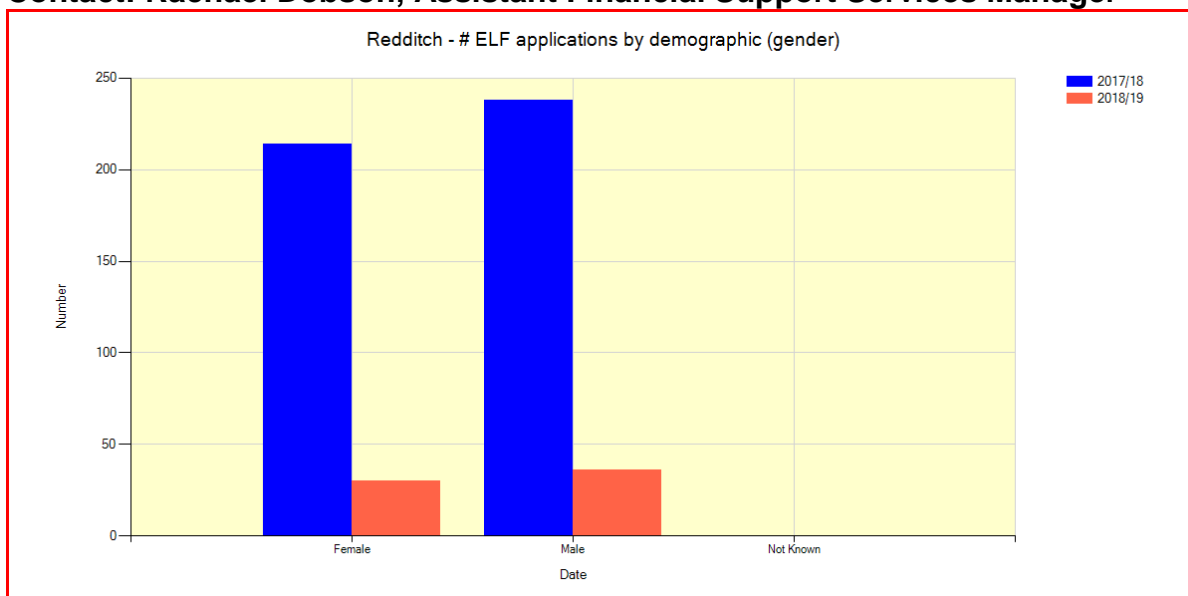
Contact: Rachael Dobson, Assistant Financial Support Services Manager



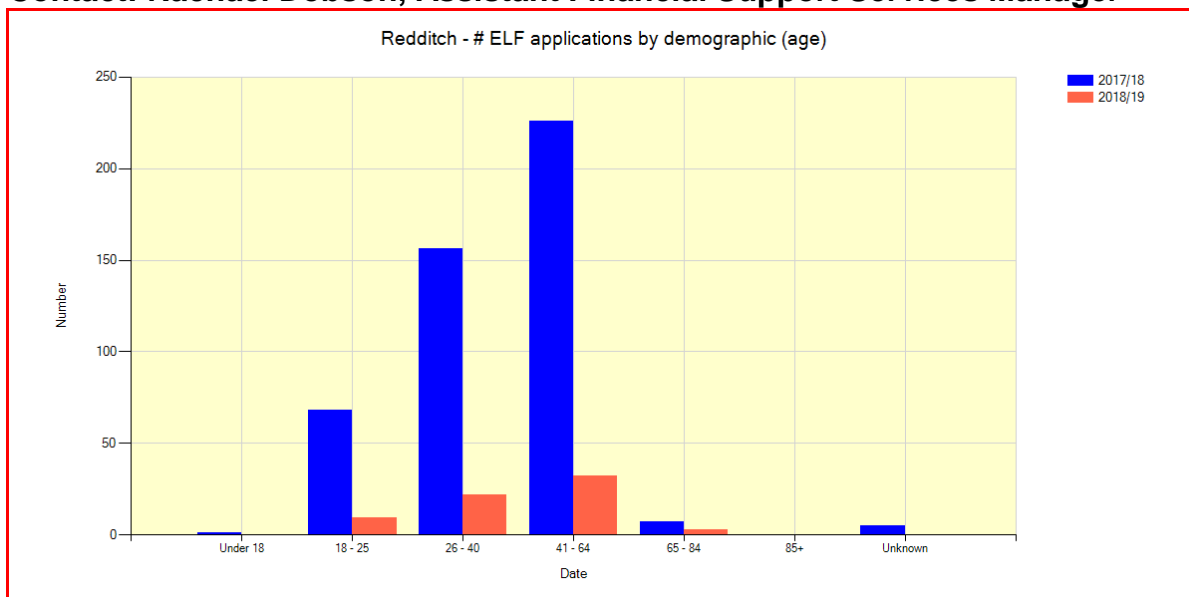
- 3.3 Debt remains a big cause of hardship but delays in DWP benefits, Universal Credit, and DWP sanctioning is causing the majority of need when combined. As a result of the Universal Credit roll out we have seen the number of ELF applications due to delays in payment more than treble. We will be watching these figures closely to understand the ongoing impact of Universal Credit, but it is hoped that recent changes made by the Government will help to ease the situation for new claimants.

ELF applications by demographic (gender)

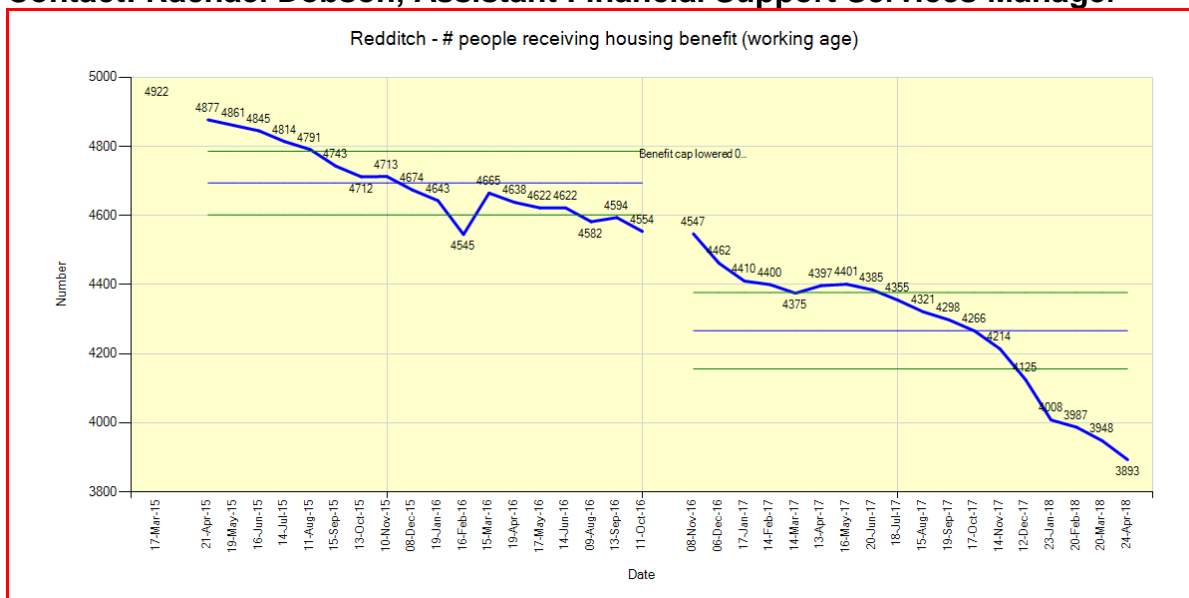
Contact: Rachael Dobson, Assistant Financial Support Services Manager



- 3.4 Over the time that we have been administering the scheme the split of applications by gender has remained much the same.

ELF applications by demographic (age)**Contact: Rachael Dobson, Assistant Financial Support Services Manager**

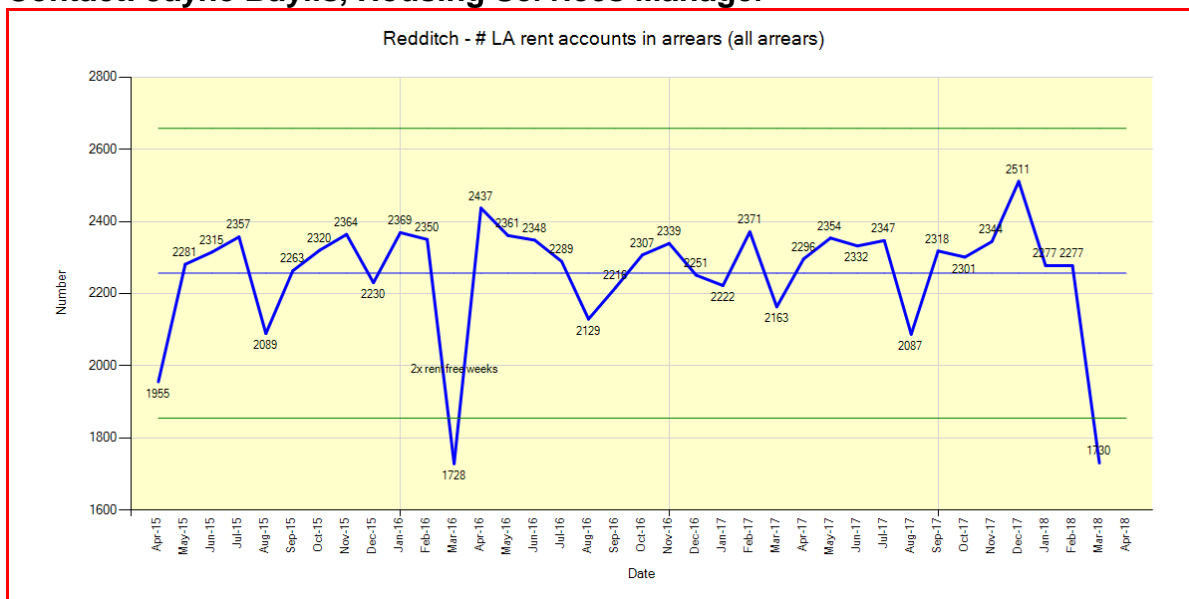
- 3.5 There tends to be an assumption that it is mainly young people who are suffering the most hardship. In fact our data shows that it is people in the 41-54 age bracket that require most support. The Financial Independence Team continue to work with those requesting support to understand the root cause and any trends that may be apparent in their financial hardship.

people receiving housing benefit (working age)**Contact: Rachael Dobson, Assistant Financial Support Services Manager**

- 3.6 The number of working age households claiming housing benefit has reduced significantly since May 2015. This is due in part to the benefit cap introduced in October 2016, but more significantly due to the roll out of Universal Credit, which has resulted in a shift of claimants making new claims over to DWP. The fact that this has not yet resulted in a massive drop in housing benefits claims suggest that there are still a lot of people in work and receiving some housing benefits.

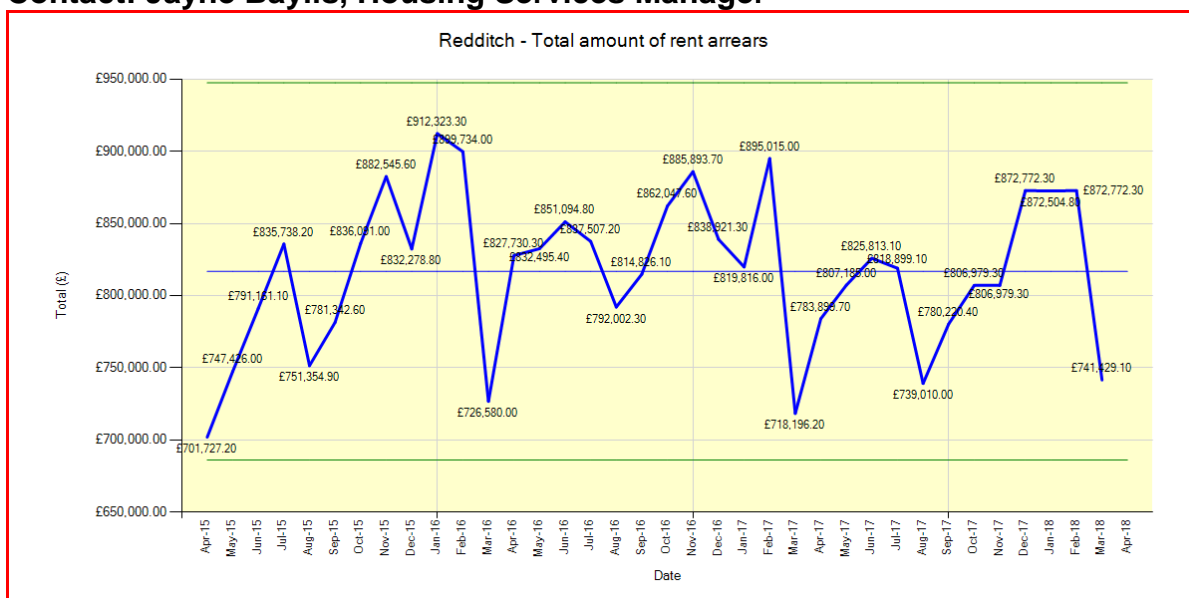
Local Authority rent accounts in arrears (all arrears)

Contact: Jayne Baylis, Housing Services Manager



Total amount of rent arrears (local authority)

Contact: Jayne Baylis, Housing Services Manager



- 3.7 Local Authority rent arrears in the last financial year were £741,429.13 across 1730 accounts. This is the arrears of all the current rent accounts. (NB. The rent debt may go across 1 or more financial years).

As a percentage of the total rent debit, based on the properties in our stock as at 3rd April 2017, the arrears are 3%.

Arrears and rent accounts are following normal trends. Rent is charged over 48 weeks meaning 4 weeks each year are non-chargeable; this contributes to the dips seen in the charts above. A recent tenant's survey demonstrated that tenants would like the 4 no collection weeks to continue.

Officers are working to introduce operational measures. They have had a meeting with the Performance Scrutiny working group to discuss what would be useful and of interest to see, as part of rent arrears measures going forward.

It is clear that the measures above only reflect a small element of the information and data that the Council needs to address and understand the strategic purpose. Officers will continue to work to identify further strategic measures that may help support the Council to meet the purpose.

4. **ENGAGEMENT/RESEARCH**

- 4.1 A survey of the Redditch Community Panel was undertaken in November 2017. The survey was sent to 531 panel members either electronically or through a postal survey. The response rate for the survey was 42.7%. This survey included questions relating to 'help me run a successful business'. Further analysis of the survey data is due to be undertaken and will be issued to relevant officers and Members in due course.

- 4.1.1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements about issues which might be affecting residents of the District?

Fuel poverty (struggling to pay for heating/lighting) is a significant problem:

I agree strongly	11.9%
I agree	28.1%
I neither agree nor disagree	20.5%
I disagree	6.7%
I disagree strongly	1.9%
Don't know	31.0%

Household debt is a significant problem:

I agree strongly	10.5%
I agree	30.5%
I neither agree nor disagree	17.1%
I disagree	3.8%
I disagree strongly	2.4%
Don't know	35.7%

- 4.1.2 To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements about living independently and social contact?

I am able to manage my household finances:

I agree strongly	47.1%
I agree	41.9%
I neither agree nor disagree	5.7%
I disagree	1.9%
I disagree strongly	1.4%
Not relevant to me	1.9%

5. KEY CORPORATE MEASURES SUITE

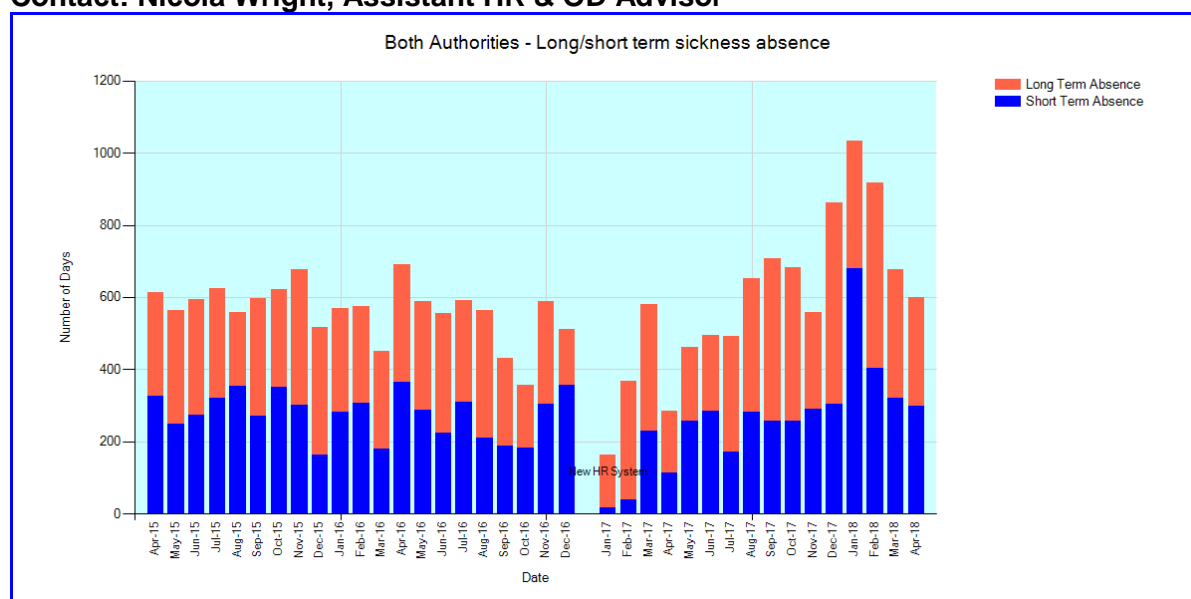
- 5.1 The following key measures are currently used by the organisation to better understand the corporate picture.

Sickness Data

- 5.1.1 In order to support the organisation to capture as comprehensive a set of sickness data as possible, a new online self-serve module has been implemented as part of the HR21 system.
- 5.1.2 Sickness figures have increased over the last 12 month period; this could be attributed to the implementation of the self-service recording system. The system for recording has been internally audited and all recommendations have been met, this included corporate messages regarding the responsibility of managers in recording sickness. Now we have a suitable system for recording sickness, the priorities for HR are monitoring and offering advice and support to managers to reduce sickness absence in their teams.
- 5.1.3 As part of a sickness absence working group there is now an internal issue log relating to sickness absence where issues can be logged to assist in future development of absence management. The issue log is divided into four main sections policy, process, training, and communication, each being tackled individually. The HR team are also actively working with the managers to look at the application of the sickness policy and are formally reviewing the policy in line with the recommendations.
- 5.1.4 Future planned self-service system development also includes managers having access to sickness reports, development of a data dashboard and a return to work interview facility.

Long/Short Term Sickness Absence

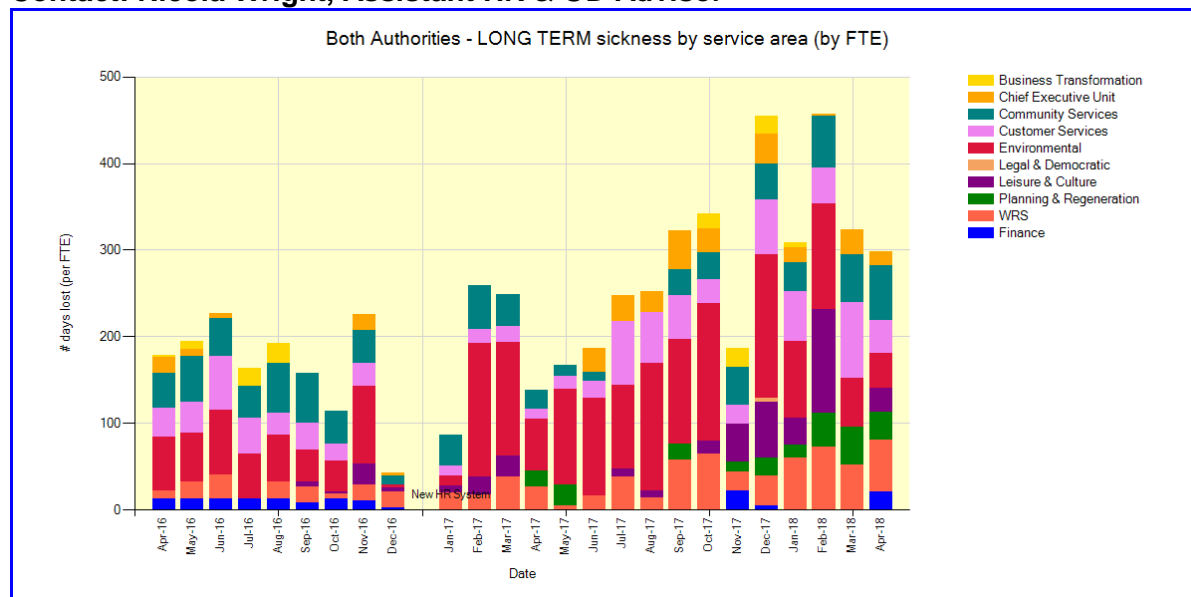
Contact: Nicola Wright, Assistant HR & OD Advisor



- 5.1.5 Short term compared to long term sickness has remained fairly static over the 12 month period even though it has increased overall. The HR team continue to monitor and assist managers in tackling both types of sickness, as well as using the data to make informed interventions where required, such as review of sickness absence policy, occupational health services and the employee assistance programme.

Long Term Sickness Absence by service area (by FTE)

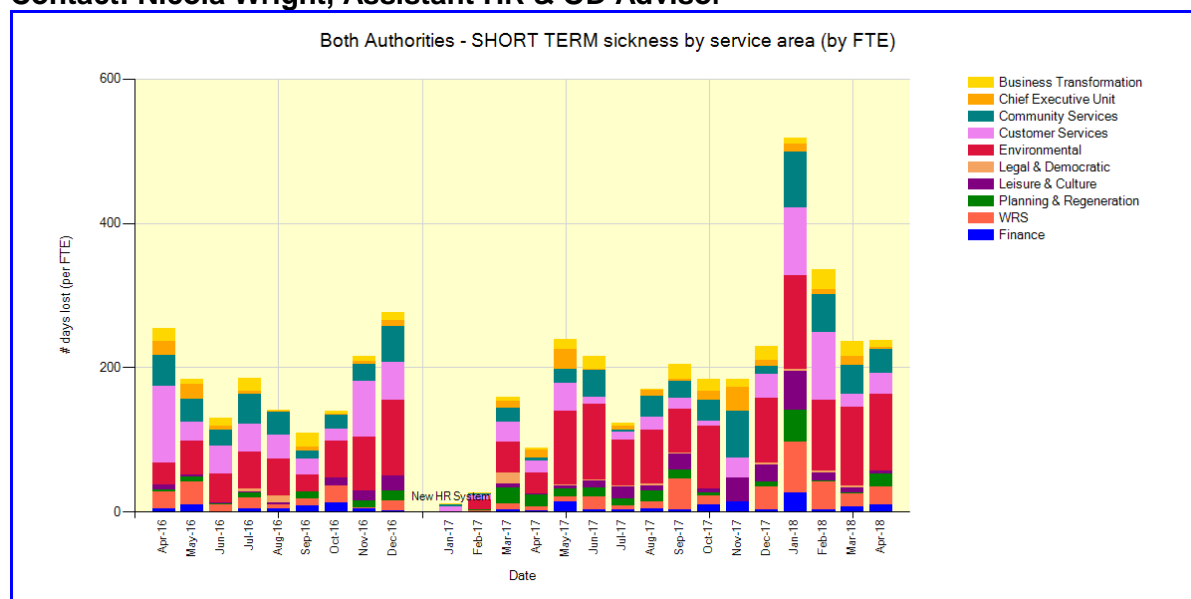
Contact: Nicola Wright, Assistant HR & OD Advisor



5.1.6 Long term sickness has risen overall in comparison to the sickness period of 16/17; however we have attributed this to the implementation of a more efficient recording system. Work will continue within HR to research, implement and monitor effective methods of dealing with long term sickness.

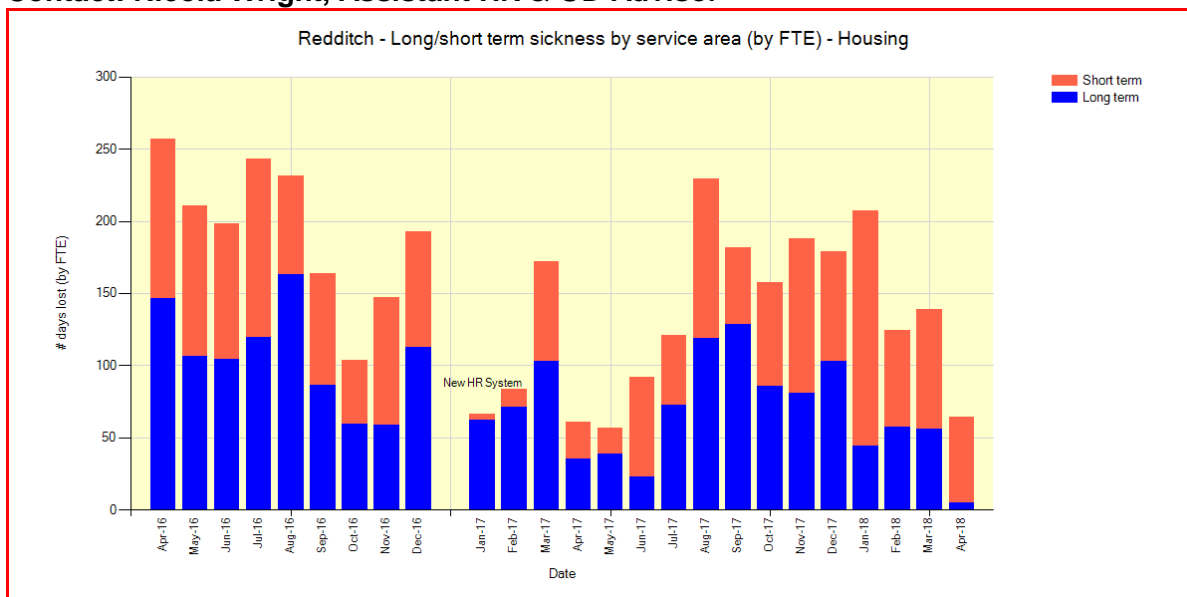
Short Term Sickness Absence by service area (by FTE)

Contact: Nicola Wright, Assistant HR & OD Advisor



5.1.7 Short Term Sickness was much higher in January and sickness data suggested the reason for this was a combination of stress/depression/anxiety and infections such as flu. The HR team will be able to use this data to make recommendations to reduce sickness absence in the same period next year, by a variety of interventions.

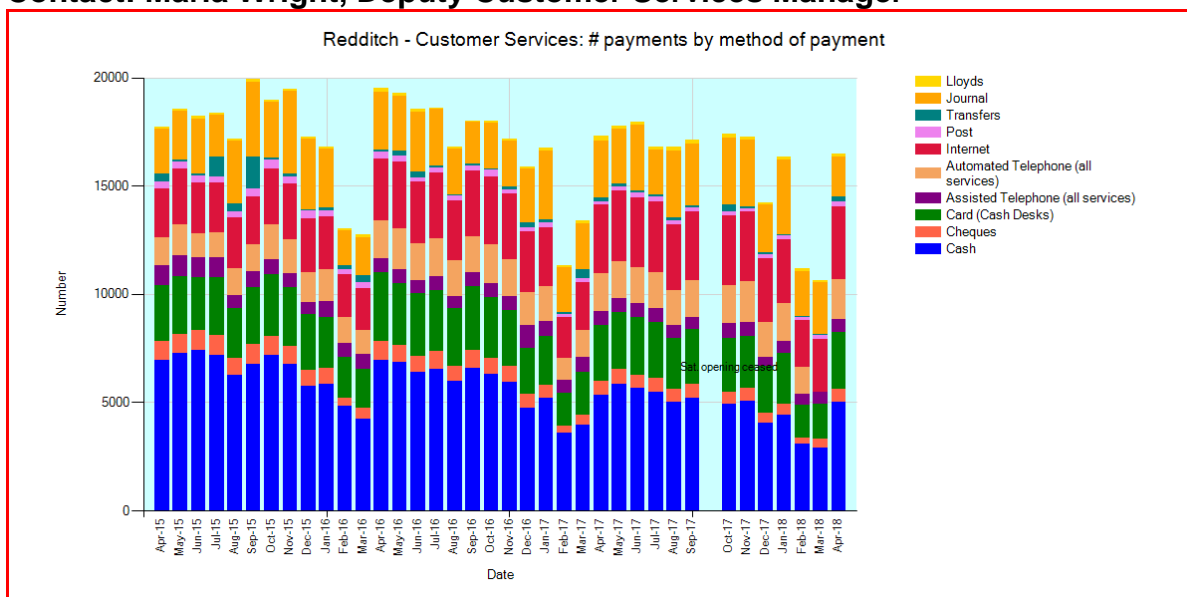
Long/Short Term Sickness Absence by service area (by FTE) - Housing Contact: Nicola Wright, Assistant HR & OD Advisor



5.1.8 Due to a number of changes within Housing Management, HR are providing ongoing assistance in the monitoring and recording of sickness absence.

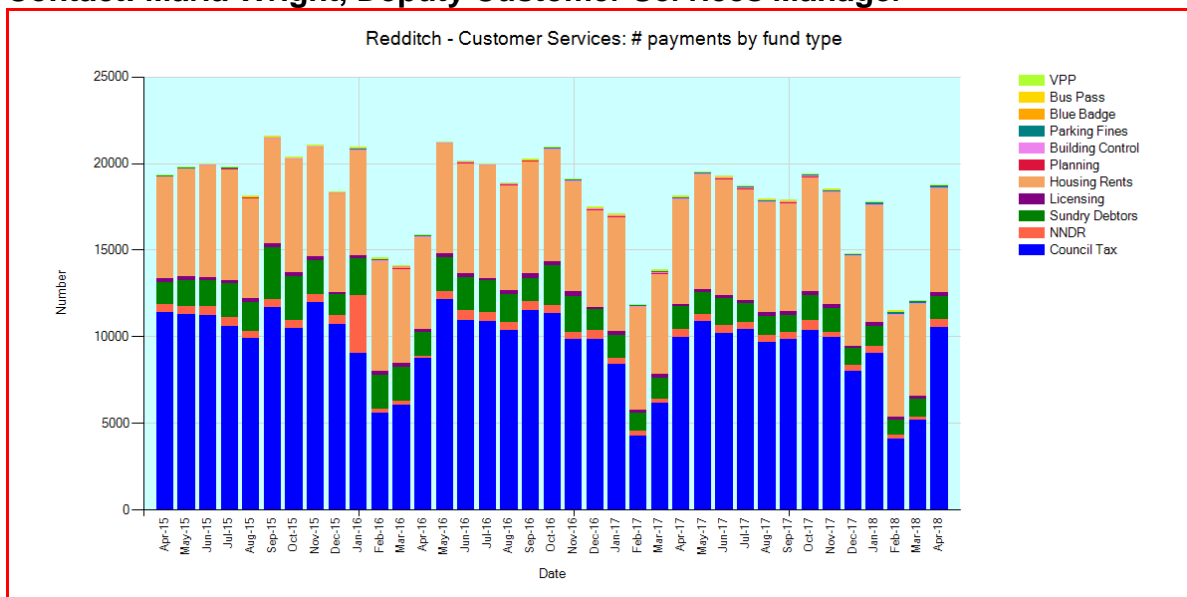
Payments and Collection Data

Customer Services: # payments by method of payment Contact: Maria Wright, Deputy Customer Services Manager



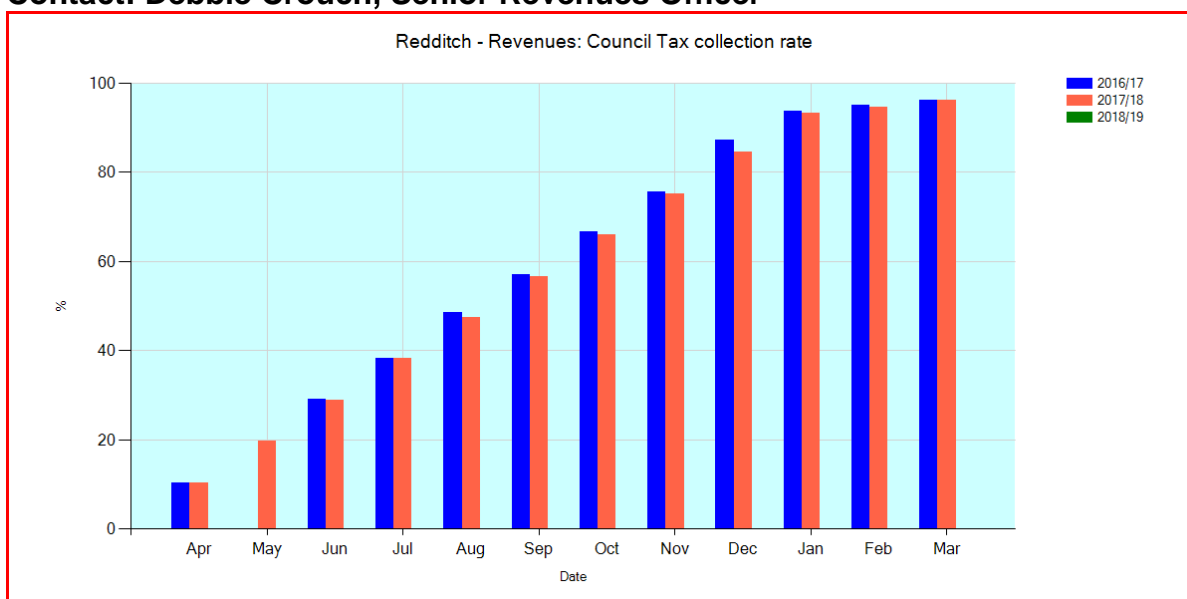
5.1.4 January and February are traditionally the months when least payments are made due to the majority of people paying their council tax in 10 instalments. We are continuing to encourage customers to use payment methods other than cash, which is the most expensive to process. A project group has recently been set up to look at payment methods and our systems for taking payments.

Customer Services: # payments by fund type
Contact: Maria Wright, Deputy Customer Services Manager

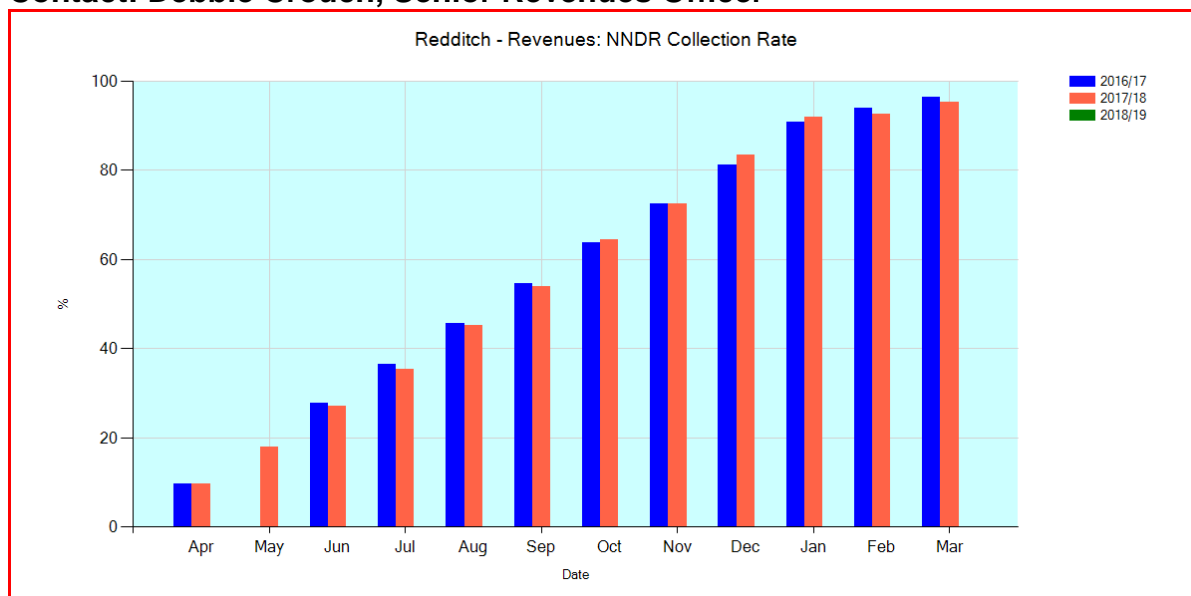


5.1.5 Council Tax and Housing rents clearly make up the majority of payments.

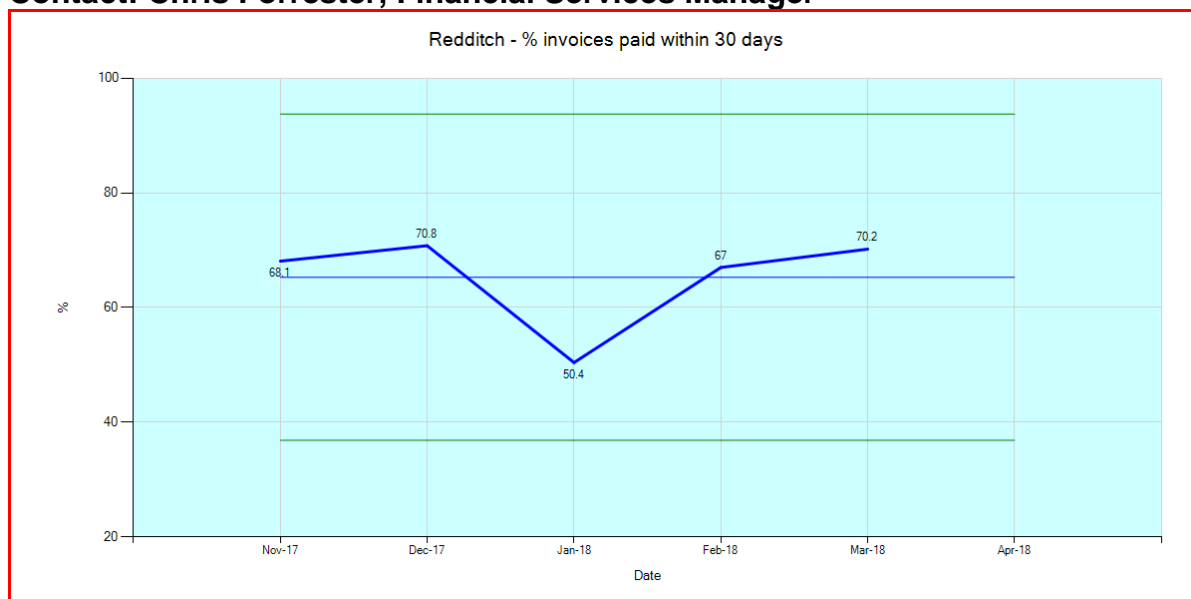
Revenues: Council tax collection rate
Contact: Debbie Crouch, Senior Revenues Officer



5.1.6 The Council Tax collection rate remains stable. Dips in collection during the year have balanced out by the end of the financial year to bring us to the same position as in the previous 2 years.

Revenues: NNDR collection rate**Contact: Debbie Crouch, Senior Revenues Officer**

- 5.1.7 The data suggests an overall dip in business rate collection rates but this is due to 2 large liabilities being added to the rating list at the very end of the financial year, thus skewing the picture.

Financial Services**Finance: % invoices paid within 30 days****Contact: Chris Forrester, Financial Services Manager**

- 5.1.8 There has been a marked improvement in the payment of invoices over the period. Issues remain with the system and its functionality. This is being addressed as part of the consideration of the new enterprise system with the aim to improve the payment profile.