

## **'Incompetence' at heart of housing benefit issue**

Posted by ErnHW Ltd - 11 Jan 2019 10:15

---

Courtesy The Extra

DAWN RENTON

Concerns over East Renfrewshire Council's handling of housing benefits have been raised by Conservative councillor Jim Swift.

He described the council's performance as "shockingly bad".

And he has also claimed:

- The council processes new claimants really slowly and is amongst the worst in Scotland.
- The council reports how long it takes inaccurately.
- It conducts too few interventions that would identify those who are primarily overpaying, but also those who do not access what they are due.

Cllr Swift said: "There is much in the media about food banks, all blamed upon Government austerity, but the harsh reality is, if ERC is processing new claims that are, at best, around 50 per cent longer than in other councils and likely twice as long, ERC is causing people unnecessary hardship.

"ERC is also condemning people to debt recovery processes and long run difficulty if it has miscalculated their benefits and overpaid them or short run and also unnecessary difficulty if it has underpaid them."

However, a council spokesman said: "As one of the smallest housing benefit services in Scotland, with an annual caseload of around 3,600, we have been planning for the gradual phasing out of housing benefit as a result of the implementation of Universal Credit.

"National delays in the rollout of Universal Credit have made the planning of resources in recent years a particular challenge and the Accounts Commission has noted this is having an impact on council benefit

services.

“We have undertaken a number of initiatives to understand and improve benefits processing and our proactive approach is highlighted in the Audit Scotland report.

“Since the Audit Scotland assessment was carried out last summer, we have an action plan to address the points raised in the report and there is increased focus on improving our performance.

“Specific absence and performance management issues within our small benefits team have been addressed.

“The issue of accuracy of reporting has been addressed and we have introduced a much more targeted approach to areas such as debt recovery where further improvements have seen us recover 82 per cent of housing benefit overpayments.”

Read more at: [www.glasgowsouthandeastwoodextra.co.uk/n...u-TwOwnBAGC5VG\\_x-EEU](http://www.glasgowsouthandeastwoodextra.co.uk/n...u-TwOwnBAGC5VG_x-EEU)

=====