

# Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Quality and Accuracy Strategy



## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Council has set out its objectives and targets in relation to the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction in its Business Plans for the Benefits service and Fraud Prevention and Investigation.
- 1.2 The Quality and Accuracy Strategy forms part of the Delivering Outcomes section of the benefits business plan and sets out how this can be achieved.
- 1.3 Well-targeted management checks can ensure that staff process claims accurately and correctly. Management checking is resource intensive and if the checks are poorly targeted the activity may not represent value for money. The management checking should therefore be risk based so that checks are carried out on cases when errors are most likely to occur.

## 2. Checking process

- 2.1 Pre-notification checks – to be undertaken on all New Claims to help reduce error before the claim is notified, or paid, and provide an opportunity to correct any errors.
- 2.2 Risk-based checks - should be carried out on cases where error is most likely to occur, for example:
  - 2.2.1 More complex aspects of claims such as the assessment of persons from abroad and assessment of self-employed earnings;
  - 2.2.2 Decisions on requests for backdating; dual payments; payments prior to occupation and appeals.
- 2.3 Post payment checks – to be undertaken on a sample of claims identified as at greater risk of error and will include samples of:
  - 2.3.1 Cases assessed by inexperienced employees;
  - 2.3.2 Tax credit cases;
  - 2.3.3 Customers who frequently move home;
  - 2.3.4 High value payments;
  - 2.3.5 Areas previously identified as having errors.

### **3 Checks on New Claims**

#### 3.1 Checks on new claims will be undertaken to ensure:

- 3.1.1 The claim form is complete;
- 3.1.2 Original evidence has been verified;
- 3.1.3 It is a new claim and not a change of circumstance;
- 3.1.4 The correct date of claim has been used;
- 3.1.5 A payment on account considered where appropriate;
- 3.1.6 A valid Rent Officer determination exists where appropriate;
- 3.1.7 When a decision to pay a landlord direct has been made, the reasons for the decision are documented;
- 3.1.8 All foreseeable changes in circumstances have been taken into account and diarised;
- 3.1.9 Details of income, capital and rent have been correctly recorded;
- 3.1.10 Any request for backdating has been considered;
- 3.1.11 Appropriate notification letters have been issued;
- 3.1.12 The reasons for any unnecessary delays.

### **4 Checks on not entitled decisions**

#### 4.1 Checks on not entitled decisions will be undertaken to ensure:

- 4.1.1 The customer has been asked to provide appropriate information to support their claim;
- 4.1.2 Timescales given are appropriate;
- 4.1.3 The not entitled decision is correct;
- 4.1.4 Any request for backdating has been considered;
- 4.1.5 The reasons for any unnecessary delays.

### **5 Checks on change of circumstances**

#### 5.1 Checks on changes of circumstances will be undertaken to ensure:

- 5.1.1 All original evidence has been verified;
- 5.1.2 Benefit has been suspended, where appropriate, to avoid an overpayment;
- 5.1.3 The correct effective date has been applied;
- 5.1.4 A valid Rent Officer determination / Local Housing Allowance exists, where appropriate;
- 5.1.5 All foreseeable changes in circumstances have been taken into account and diarised for follow-up action;
- 5.1.6 An overpayment has been raised, when appropriate;
- 5.1.7 If an overpayment has been raised, to check that it has been correctly applied and appropriate recovery action taken;
- 5.1.8 Appropriate notification letters have been issued;
- 5.1.9 The reasons for any unnecessary delays.

## **6 Checks on overpayments**

6.1 Checks on overpayments will be undertaken to ensure:

- 6.1.1 All original evidence has been verified;
- 6.1.2 The correct effective date has been applied;
- 6.1.3 Any underlying entitlement has been established ;
- 6.1.4 The subsidy classification is correct;
- 6.1.5 That benefit subsidy loss to the Council is minimised;
- 6.1.6 The person from whom recovery is being sought is correct and appropriate;
- 6.1.7 Recoverability has been considered correctly;
- 6.1.8 The appropriate method of recovery is being sought;
- 6.1.9 If the overpayment could have been avoided by the Council;
- 6.1.10 Appropriate notification letters have been issued;
- 6.1.11 The reasons for any unnecessary delays.

## **7 Monitoring quality and accuracy checks**

7.1 The results of management and accuracy checks and any other activity, such as targeted reviews, which reveal error, should feed into the system to support continuous improvement. This will include:

- 7.1.1 Using the results to review existing policies and procedures;
- 7.1.2 Analysing the results to identify causes of error and any common patterns that can assist improvement or training issues;
- 7.1.3 Analysing results to identify the overall level of error in the caseload, inform training plans and the appraisal process;
- 7.1.4 Increasing the number of checks if a high number of inaccuracies are identified.

7.2 In accordance with the Benefits Business Plan and the Fraud Prevention and Investigation Business Plan monitoring will take place at regular recorded meetings with the Revenues Manager.

## **8 Review of Strategy**

8.1 The review of the Strategy will be undertaken on an annual basis along with the review of the Benefits Business Plan and the Fraud Prevention and Investigation Business Plan.

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