

Housing Benefit Subsidy Claim 2019-20

For Audit and Governance Committee

Summary

Lead Member: Councillor Tom Dawlings, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance

Lead Director: Stephen McGinnes, Director of Mid Kent Services

Head of Service: Sheila Coburn, Head of Revenues and Benefits Partnership

Report Author: Sheila Coburn, Head of Revenues and Benefits Partnership

Classification: Public document (non-exempt)

Wards Affected: All

Approval Timetable	Date
Audit and Governance Committee	24 August 2021

Recommendations

Officer recommendations as supported by the Portfolio Holder:

1. That the contents of this report and the Housing Benefit Assurance Process are noted.

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Each year the Housing Benefit audit process is due to be completed by 30 November, which is a deadline set by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).
- 1.2 External Audit is required to perform specific test requirements determined by the DWP on defined sample basis and to report the results of those procedures to the local authority and DWP.
- 1.3 Due to the COVID pandemic, the DWP recognised there might be operational issues with external audit companies and local authorities meeting this deadline so offered authorities an alternative deadline of 31 January 2021.
- 1.4 Due to staff resource issues at Grant Thornton, the Council had to request the DWP for a another extension to 31 March 2021 and then a further extension to 31 May 2021.
- 1.5 The value of subsidy claimed from the DWP for Housing Benefit paid to claimants amounts to £28.2 million.
- 1.6 Testing was undertaken on samples of cases and 7 errors were found which provided for a total gross adjustment of £3,659 to the claim.
- 1.7 The Revenues and Benefits Service carried out over 50,000 benefit assessments during 2019-20 and whilst that work is undertaken with a high degree of accuracy, supported by robust quality assurance measures, a level of error is unavoidable. It is commonplace for Housing Benefit grant claims to be qualified.
- 1.8 Due to the number and type of errors identified, it is not proposed to have an action plan put in place. Staff will be reminded of the importance to ensure figures are not transposed and calculations are double checked to minimise errors in future.

2. Options Considered

- 2.1 This report is for information only

3. Cross Cutting Issues

A. Legal (including the Human Rights Act)

The Department for Work and Pensions has developed the Housing Benefit Assurance Procedure (HBAP) that provides a comprehensive guide to providing assurance of Housing Benefit Subsidy claims submitted by Local Authorities including the testing methodology to establish a basis for the assurance and amendment of claims prior to final submission and the provision of the tools with which to conduct the assurance engagement.

The Housing Benefit Grant Claim Audit by Grant Thornton was undertaken in accordance with the HBAP procedures.

Gina Clarke, Mid Kent Legal

B. Finance and Other Resources

The adjustments outlined have minimal impact on the net value of the Council's claim and the level of error identified does not indicate any significant underlying control weaknesses.

Jane Fineman - Head of Finance, Procurement and Parking

C. Staffing

There are no changes to staffing proposed in this report.

Sheila Coburn, Head of Mid Kent Revenues and Benefits

D. Risk Management

The work undertaken by Grant Thornton provides external assurance to the Council on the effectiveness of arrangements for the accurate payment and recording of benefit expenditure.

Sheila Coburn, Head of Mid Kent Revenues and Benefits

E. Environment and Sustainability

No impact

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F. Community Safety

No impact

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G. Equalities

No impact

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H. Data Protection

No impact

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I. Health and Safety

No impact

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J. Health and Wellbeing

No impact

Sheila Coburn, Head of Mid Kent Revenues and Benefits