

For publication

Housing Benefit – Receiving electronic claims (CB000L)

Meeting: Cabinet Member for Business Transformation and Customers

Date: 27 March, 2020

Cabinet portfolio: Business Transformation and Customers

Report by: Digital Programme Manager

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1.0 Purpose of report

1.1 To describe and approve the use of an electronic claim form for the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 To approve the use of electronic claims and changes in circumstance.

2.2 To approve the acceptance of digital forms of evidence to support a claim or change.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 One of the main objectives of the ICT Improvement Programme is to ensure that residents can access key services online at a time and place of their choosing.
- 3.2 During phase one of the programme, the Council purchased the Salesforce digital platform and the Capita 'OneDigital' platform as a mechanism for customers to transact with CBC online. The procurement of the platforms included provision for an electronic claim form for Housing Benefit and Council Tax support.
- 3.3 CBC are currently part way through implementing several Revenues and Benefits modules as part of the project. Initially, the project focused on high volume transactions, such as Council Tax change of address and electronic Direct Debits.
- 3.4 Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the project team have re-assessed their project plan. It now seems sensible to bring forward the implementation of the electronic claim form whilst the Customer Service Centre is closed to the public.

4.0 **Proposed Solution**

- 4.1 A significant number of UK Councils already offer the option of submitting a Housing Benefit / Council Tax Support claim electronically. Chesterfield Borough Council now need to implement this change to avoid unnecessary delays to processing times and limit the amount of paper being received via post / drop in.
- 4.2 Over the coming weeks and months, face to face services will be significantly reduced. Residents need a quick and easy way to submit a claim from home without the need to travel.
- 4.3 It is proposed that an electronic claim form will be made available on the CBC website as soon as it is configured and tested. Residents will not be required to create an online

account at this stage but will access the form via a URL from the Benefits web page.

- 4.4 Electronic applications should primarily be made by the resident themselves online. However, if they are unable to do so, claims can be made over the phone with a Council officer, or face to face in the Customer Service Centre in the future. CBC should also accept electronic claims that have been completed via an 'agent' on behalf of the resident, such as Citizens Advice or Social Services.
- 4.5 It is proposed that any changes in circumstances should be reported via a new electronic form where possible. CBC should continue to accept changes over the telephone, via e-mail and face to face when possible.
- 4.6 The authority may accept digital photographic and scanned images of notices, forms, evidence and information. If this cannot be verified by a Council officer or agent, CBC may request to see the original where its authenticity cannot be verified by other means.
- 4.7 It is recognised that not all residents will be able to communicate electronically. In exceptional circumstances, we will continue to issue paper forms.
- 5.0 **Financial implications**
- 5.1 There are no additional financial implications when introducing electronic claims. The technology used has already been budgeted as part of the ICT Improvement spend.
- 6.0 **Legal implications**
- 6.1 The proposal will be delivered in accordance with
- Paragraph 2 of Schedule 11 of the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006

- Paragraph 2 of Schedule 10 of the Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained the qualifying age for state Pension Credit) Regulations 2006
- Paragraph 2 of Schedule 9 of the Council Tax Benefit Regulations 2006
- Paragraph 2 of Schedule 8 of the Council Tax Benefit (Persons who have attained the qualifying age for state Pension Credit) Regulations 2006
- Schedule 7, part 4 of the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) Regulations 2012

7.0 **Consultation**

7.1 The Benefits service is currently delivered by Arvato on behalf of Chesterfield Borough Council. Arvato have been consulted and welcome the introduction of electronic claims.

8.0 **Risk management**

8.1 The key risk associated with electronic claims is around increased potential for fraud and error. Risks will be managed by:

- Using third party systems (DWP etc) to verify identity and earnings
- Requesting original documentation to support claims where it is not possible to verify using other means

9.0 **Alternative options and reasons for rejection**

9.1 The only alternative option available is to continue processing claims using paper forms. This does not support the Council's Digital Improvement objectives and is difficult to maintain whilst residents are being asked to remain in their homes.

10.0 **Recommendations**

10.1 To approve the use of electronic claims in the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support.

10.2 To approve the acceptance of photographs and scanned documents as evidence in support of claims.

11.0 **Reasons for recommendations**

11.1 Allowing residents to apply for benefits electronically will ensure that they can do so without leaving the home, which is especially important in the current climate.

11.2 It is estimated that the demand for the benefit service will be high over the coming days and weeks, therefore services need to be easily accessible.

11.3 There are longer term financial benefits to implementing an electronic claim solution, reducing visits to the Customer Service Centre and reducing the cost of postage and printing.

Decision information

Key decision number	953
Wards affected	All
Links to Council Plan priorities	Improving the quality of life for local people and providing value for money services.

Document information

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