



Winchester City Council Housing Benefit Reporting 2022/23

March 2024

Housing Benefit Reporting 2022/23

Introduction

In accordance with the DWP's Housing Benefits Assurance Process, the Council is required to have an annual review of its Housing Benefit Subsidy claim.

Our work on the Council's Housing Benefit claim is carried out in accordance with the DWP's prescribed process and includes:

- Agreeing parameters within the Council's housing benefits system to the DWP's published standard rates for the year;
- Checking that the subsidy claim has been prepared using the specified version of the benefits software;
- Sample testing claims to check the calculation of benefit entitlement and (and that it was supported by evidence);
- Undertaking testing over modified schemes payments.

Work undertaken

Tested 20 individual cases for the following cells on the claim form:

- 055 (rent rebates);
- 094 (rent allowance); and
- 225 (modified schemes).

Additional focused testing is either based on our findings in the prior year (2021/22) or by the results of our initial testing in the current year. We undertook additional testing on three areas:

- Cell 094: Assessment of private pension income;
- Cell 214/225: Assessment of war pension income; and
- Cell 067: Assessment of overpaid expenditure where the claim was cancelled and rent account ended.

Testing was carried out on 51 benefit cases across the three error types.

The results of our testing are outlined overleaf.

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Findings

Errors (Appendix A)

- Initial testing of 20 cases within rent allowance, did not identify any errors in respect of the assessment of private pension income. Due to an error reported in the prior year HBAP accountants report, an extended sample of 40 cases selected from cases in Cell 094 with private pension income were tested. The additional testing identified one claim where the authority has incorrectly assessed private pension income. The impact of the error found was a £67 overpayment of benefit.
- Out of total subsidy claimed in Cell 094 of £9.6m, in our sample, an overpayment error totaling £67 was found in one case. As required overpayment errors are extrapolated using the DWP's prescribed method. This resulted in a reported extrapolated figure of an overstatement of £210.

Observations (Appendix B)

- Initial testing of three cases within modified schemes (war pensioners) identified no errors in respect of the assessment of war pension income. Due to an error reported in the prior year HBAP accountants report, an extended sample of 10 cases (100% of the population) from Cell 214/225 was tested. The additional testing identified two claims where the authority incorrectly assessed war pension income. In both of these cases, the finding had no impact on the on the value of housing benefit paid to the claimant or the amount of subsidy claimed, and was reported as an observation only.

Amendments to the claim form (Appendix C)

- Initial testing of 20 cases within rent rebates identified one case where the housing benefit system incorrectly classified overpaid expenditure as claimant error rather than technical error, where the claim has been cancelled and the rent account has ended. The Local Authority ran a report which checked all claims where the claim was cancelled due the rent account closing. This identified one further case where the housing benefit system has incorrectly classified overpaid expenditure as claimant error rather than technical error, where the claim has been cancelled and the rent account has ended. In both cases, the errors identified do not effect the value of housing benefit paid to the claimant. The Local Authority have introduced an in-year process to routinely check and correct any misclassifications of this nature going forward.
- The total impact of the two errors was to overstate subsidy in cell 067 by £152, and understate subsidy in cell 066 by £152. The impact of the errors identified has been reflected in an amendment made to the final Form MPF720A dated 20 December 2023.

Other Matters (Appendix D)

No other matters were reported.



Thank you



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