

Verification Policy for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support

April 2015



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Introduction

Securing the Gateway to Housing Benefits and Council Tax Support by verifying claims is essential. Preventing fraud and error and ensuring applicants receive what they are entitled to, is a key element of assessing claims.

Verification is about reducing risk of fraud and error. It will never eliminate it. The verification process needs to add value to the assessment of claims and be proportionate to that risk.

Background

Previous verification policies have ranged from manual checking of copies of paper documents to a DWP prescribed Verification Framework where every process, from opening post, checking and returning documents to the types of acceptable documents, was subject to overly stringent processes which added very little value.

The Department for Work and Pensions no longer issues guidance or best practice on security against fraud and error. It is up to Local Authorities to determine how they verify claims.

Research has shown that fraud relating to altered documentation happens rarely and the risk of this is very low given the other checks that are made to claims. Additionally, many “original” documents are now e-payslips and internet bank statements. This removes the validity of requiring original documents.

The DWP are increasingly turning to electronic and automated forms of verification of national welfare benefits.

Many Local Authorities have scaled down their verification processes to a more manageable level. Measures in place include:

- Removing the requirement to open all post in a secure environment,
- Accepting photocopies of supporting documents;
- Accepting scanned electronic images through secure uploads and unsolicited emails

The world has moved on and more recently Risk Based Verification through a 3rd party supplier has been employed. RBV is a costly service.

Verification of claims needs to be:

- Cost effective;
- Secure; and
- Proportionate to the risk.

The purpose of this policy

This policy describes the verification process for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims. It replaces the Risk Based Verification policy from 1st April 2015.

The policy is supported by procedures which provide instructions on each element of the policy.

Supporting evidence

The following information will require evidence to support the claim for HB or CTS in most cases, however, where an officer determines the risk of fraud or error is negligible they may seek authorisation from a senior officer to accept the information declared on the claim without evidence.

- Identity
- National Insurance number
- Immigration status
- Occupation of the home
- Household members
- Income and relevant out goings of all household members
- Savings and capital
- Rent

The evidence may take the form of:

- Photocopies of documents
- Scanned images of documents
- Photographs
- original documentation and
- Phone calls to landlords or claimants or employers noted on the claim diary.
- Statements from professional staff supporting the claimant e.g. social workers, GP, Housing Team.

Handling supporting evidence documentation

- Documentation received for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claims may be opened in either the main Civic Centre Post room or in the Revenues and Benefits section offices.
- Where no staff are available to supervise the security of the information, all documentation containing personal information, including any original documents, must be kept in a secure location.
- Any original documents that need to be returned will be recorded in accordance with the Verification Procedures and returned in standard 2nd class post.