

Department of Community Services

Housing Benefits Section

Housing Benefit Overpayment Strategy

Introduction

Housing and Council Tax Benefit is paid to many thousands of claimants and landlords. It is inevitable therefore that some payments will be made to people where there is no entitlement.

An overpayment may be defined as where Benefit has been paid to which there is no entitlement. This overpayment strategy and the overpayment policy aim to explain how the Council will deal with this issue.

Objectives

The two main aims of this strategy are:-

- ❑ To prevent overpayments occurring in the first place; and
- ❑ When they do occur, to recover them in accordance with the Council's Overpayment Policy.

Prevention of Overpayments

The Council will aim to prevent overpayments by ensuring that:-

- ❑ All teams in the Benefits section and other departments and agencies work together in an attempt to prevent overpayments occurring.
- ❑ Through correspondence, liaison, publications and meetings, claimants and landlords are aware of the duty they have to notify us of changes in circumstances. We will also make them aware of the penalties for not doing so and take the appropriate action where necessary.
- ❑ Publicise the Council's drive against fraud as an aid to prevention and to assist in the detection and sanctioning of offenders.

Recovery of Overpayments

The Council will aim to do this by:-

- ❑ Liaising with our customers with regard to the rates of repayments of overpayments
- ❑ Liaising with other departments and external agencies in order to improve the level of recovery of overpayments.

- ❑ Making one to one contact with our customers, where appropriate, by using the telephone, face to face, including a visiting officer making home visits when considered necessary.
- ❑ Having regular meetings with the other sections of the authority to discuss the recovery processes and how performance can be improved e.g. Legal and Housing.
- ❑ Ensuring that fraudulent overpayments and associated administrative penalties where applicable are actively pursued, prioritising these cases for urgent recovery action taking all legal steps available.

Training

All overpayment recovery staff will receive relevant training to ensure that they can carry out their duties effectively.

All other relevant appropriate staff shall visit the Overpayment recovery Team and receive an overview of the functions and duties of the team as part of the induction process.

Liaison with the Benefits Training Officer identifying new working practices and training needs for overpayment recovery to ensure staff are made aware of any new procedures and working practices etc.

Procedures

All working practices will be documented and maintained within the Housing and Council Tax Benefit Section's procedural manual which all staff have a copy of. To ensure a consistent approach is being maintained.

Targets – Monitoring and Reporting

Regular team meetings will be held to discuss the performance of the recovery team. This will include the monitoring of the BVPI performance indicators and also performance against recovery targets set by management via the Housing Benefits Annual Service Plan.

In addition the level and age of debts outstanding will be monitored on an ongoing basis by the Senior Control Officer and will be reported to the Housing Benefits Manager on a regular basis.