

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

Housing Benefit & Council Tax Support

Electronic Claims Policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This document details Barnsley Council's policy on the use of electronic communications in relation to claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support

2. Background

2.1 Claims, notifications of changes in circumstances and amendments have traditionally been made by hard copy claim form which are scanned and automatically loaded into the Benefits Document Image system. To aid Barnsley Council's channel shift, and support the outcomes of Future Council and the Customer Services Programme, electronic claims will be made available to residents.

2.2 Legislation and local policy allows the Council to implement electronic claiming for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support for new claims, changes in circumstances and amendments to a claim. In choosing to use electronic communications in the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, Barnsley Council must follow statutory requirements. Statute allows for an individual to communicate electronically with the local authority when making a claim or notifying a change in circumstance or amendment, provided that they use a method approved by the Council.

2.3 Barnsley Council's electronic claims policy also includes tele-claims (i.e. claims made over the telephone)

3. Legislation

3.1 This policy complies with the relevant Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support (Reduction) electronic communications legislation, local policy and Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) guidance as follows:

Housing Benefit

- Schedule 11 of the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006
- Schedule 10 of the Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained the qualifying age for State Pension Credit) Regulations 2006
- Direction from the Chief Executive authorising use of electronic communications in the administration of Housing Benefit
- Department of Work & Pensions circular A18/2006

Council Tax Support

- Electronic claiming of Council Tax Support is enabled by the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Regulations) Regulations 2012 which is incorporated into Barnsley Councils Council Tax Support Scheme Paragraph 2 Schedule 1
- Direction from the Chief Executive authorising use of electronic communications in the administration of Council Tax Support

3.2 The Direction of the Chief Executive can be viewed at Appendix A

4 Electronic Claiming

4.1 Electronic claiming will be implemented across all of the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support caseload from April 2015.

4.2 It is acknowledged that some client groups will find it easier to make an electronic claim than others. Through communication with stakeholders and customers, support will be given to residents to ensure that all can continue to access Housing and Council Tax Support. This will include

- Facility to make assisted claims via PC's located in Barnsley Libraries Information Services (BLIS) offices with advisor guidance
- Facility to make assisted tele-claims with Benefits, Taxation and Income contact centre staff.

4.3 If customers are not able to make a claim via one of the above methods they should contact the Benefits, Taxation and Customer helpline for further advice.

4.4 The Housing Benefit Regulations 2006, the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) Regulations 2012, and the Council Tax Support scheme will continue to give the statutory framework for the administration of benefits. This policy only affects the process by which a claimant may communicate with the Council.

4.5 The manner in which an individual may make an electronic communication for a claim or notification of a change in circumstance is detailed in the Chief Executives Direction (Appendix A) which states:

(a) The claim form/change in circumstance/amendment form to be used must be that provided on the Councils website;

(b) The form must be completed to such an extent as to be deemed acceptable by the Council

(c) The sender of the electronic communication will be authenticated by provision of the following information

(i) the claimants full name

(ii) The claimants full address; and

(iii) The claimants date of birth and national insurance number

4.6 The method for submission of electronic applications, changes in circumstances and amendments must be made using the relevant Councils online application form directly, via the Councils website, the Customer Services Team -Benefits, Taxation and Payments Contact Centre on 01226 787787, or a face to face assisted interview at one of the Councils BLIS offices

4.7 Where evidence is required to support the application the Council may accept digital photographic evidence and scanned images of notices, forms evidence and information provided by a claimant. However where original documents are requested these must be supplied in accordance with the instructions provided to them.

Appendices to Electronic Claims Policy

Appendix a – Direction of the Chief Executive