



Certification of Claims Report

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Purpose of the report

1. This report introduces the annual report from our external auditors Grant Thornton on their findings from the signing off of the Housing Benefit Subsidy Claim for 2020/21.

Recommendation

2. That Audit Committee notes the contents of the Certification of Claim Report for 2020/21.

Introduction

3. The Certification of Claims Report is included within the remit of the Audit Committee under its terms of reference as follows:

“To consider the effectiveness of the Council’s risk management arrangements, the control environment and associated anti-fraud and corruption arrangements and seek assurance from management that action has been taken”

“To consider the reports of external audit and inspection agencies and seek assurance from management that action has been taken”

Subsidy Claim

4. The external auditors certify the subsidy claim for the Housing Benefit Scheme. The report from Grant Thornton is attached at Appendix A. The total claim was £28,038,385 and as a result of the findings through the audit process, an amendment to the claim is required to the value of £10,963. This sum is due to be paid to the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP).

5. In accordance with the Housing Benefit Assurance Process (HBAP) modules an initial sample of cases was completed for all general expenditure on the subsidy claim. Given the nature of the population and the errors found in the previous claim, additional samples of 40 cases were tested.
6. The areas where errors were found were, where the additional testing was required was: -
 - a. Earned income
 - b. Self-employed income
 - c. Tax credits
 - d. Pension credit savings
 - e. Classification of overpayment
 - f. State Retirement Pension
7. Where errors were found and it was possible to identify and check all the claims which may be affected by the same error, all claims were checked and the claim was amended to take into the result of the checking.
8. Where 100% checking was not possible due to the number of claims that needed to be checked, extrapolation then takes effect. Extrapolation is where a % error rate found, when testing a sample of 40 claims for that error, is applied to the total amount which may be affected by the error.
9. The errors found, where 100% checking couldn't be carried out, totalled £10,963 and the total sample value was £7,008,275. As explained above the % error rate for each category has to be extrapolated, resulting in an overall impact on SSDC of £10,963.
10. An example of how extrapolation works is shown in the table below:

Sample	Movement / brief note of error	Sub population total (CT)	Sample error (SE)	Sample value (SV)	Percentage error rate (SE/SV)	Cell adjustment (SE/SV) x CT
Combined sample – 60 cases	Incorrect application of tax credits	£7,250,259	£173	£148,933	0.12%	£8,700

11. So, in the example above, when testing tax credits, errors totalling £173 were found, which is 0.12% of the total value of benefits in the sample. The error rate i.e. the 0.12% has then been extrapolated against the sub population value of £7.25 million and the resulting £8,700 is the amount the claim has to be adjusted for in respect of the error.



Financial Implications

12. The final outcome of the claim is an additional payment of £10,963 due to the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP).
13. Whilst we owe the DWP £10,963, we have sufficient funds in the Council Tax and Housing Benefit Reserve to cover. The DWP provide an incentive to Local Authorities (LA) whereby depending on the amount of the LA overpayments on the final subsidy claim when compared to the 100% expenditure on the final claim form we receive either nil, 40% or a 100% of the LA overpayments. This sum is put into a reserve account pending the outcome of the audit.
14. The agreed fee for certifying the Housing Benefit return in 2020/21 audit is £8,000 plus £2,500 per 40+ samples, subject to PSAA (Public Sector Audit Appointments) approval. Work undertaken is subject to a fee variation due to extra work being carried out. With additional work and sample testing, the total fee for certifying the Housing Benefit return in 2020/21 audit is £23,000.

Background Papers

Housing Benefit Subsidy Claim
