

Chichester District Council

THE CABINET

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Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Risk Based Verification Policy 2019-2020

1. Contacts

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2. Recommendation

- 2.1. **That the Cabinet (1) approves the Risk Based Verification (RBV) Policy for 2019 to 2020 for the purpose of assessing claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction and (2) authorises delegated powers to the Director of Residents Services to approve future amendments to the RBV Policy in consultation with the Section 151 Officer.**

3. Background

- 3.1. The Revenues Service introduced a Risk Based Verification (RBV) Policy with effect from 1 December 2017. Since this date all new claims and changes in circumstance have been risk scored in accordance with the Policy and the level of verification applied to a claim or a change of circumstance has been determined by the level of risk. The adoption of this Policy has allowed the revenues team to focus its resources on claims that are higher risk, enabling the service to reduce the level of fraud and error within the housing benefit and council tax reduction caseload as well as improving efficiency of administration and processing times.

4. Outcomes to be Achieved

- 4.1. That Cabinet approve the Policy for 2019 - 2020. The Policy remains unchanged since the implementation of the Policy in December 2017. However Officers have updated the Policy with distribution of risk data, as per the data that has been collected since the introduction of the Policy and made what is considered a change of circumstance for the purpose of the Policy clearer.

5. Proposal

- 5.1. It is proposed that Cabinet approve the RBV Policy attached in appendix 1 to commence from 1st April 2019 and run through to 31 March 2020. Officers are also recommending that Cabinet authorise delegated powers to the Director of Residents Services to approve future amendments to the RBV policy, in consultation with the

Section 151 Officer.

- 5.2. To satisfy audit requirements the RBV Policy must be revised, updated and agreed annually by the Council's Section 151 Officer. Therefore the Policy will be further reviewed and revisions made annually.

6. Alternatives Considered

- 6.1. The adoption of an RBV policy is not compulsory, therefore the alternative is to no longer follow the RBV process.

7. Resource and Legal Implications

- 7.1. The Policy must be complied with in order to satisfy external auditors. Audit guidance states that it needs to ensure that:
- (a) A report from the Section 151 Officer (Section 85 for Scotland) was made to Members before the RBV policy was approved;
 - (b) The RBV policy has been formally approved by Members;
 - (c) The RBV policy has been reviewed annually (after the first year of introduction) and not changed in year; and
 - (d) The RBV claim or RBV change of circumstance has been verified in accordance with the Local Authority's RBV policy.

8. Consultation

- 8.1. No formal consultation with internal or external stakeholders is relevant to this Policy.

9. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

- 9.1. The users of the benefits service will continue to experience a more efficient service. Claims that are considered low risk will have to provide less evidence to support their application or their declared change in circumstance. This will enable claims to be decided quicker and therefore payments made on time. Those claims deemed to present a higher risk will be scrutinised more closely, however as the resource is less stretched this should be more efficient, the risk of fraud and error particularly in these high risk cases is also greatly reduced.
- 9.2. There is a risk that fraud and error will remain this is mitigated by monitoring. A sample of low risk cases continue to be checked to ensure that fraud and error is at an acceptable level.

10. Other Implications

	Yes	No
Crime and Disorder	X	
Climate Change		X
Human Rights and Equality Impact		X
Safeguarding		X

11. Appendices

11.1 RBV policy document

12. Background Papers

12.1 None