

**Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support
Draft Electronic claims policy**

DRAFT

Harrow Council Electronic Claims Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This document details Harrow 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, notification of changes of circumstance and amendments have traditionally been made by hard copy claim form which is scanned and automatically loaded into the assessment system. To aid Harrow Council's channel migration strategy and support provision of efficient service delivery, whilst increasing opportunities to access Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, electronic claims will be made available to residents.
- 2.2 Legislation and local policy allows the local authority to implement electronic claiming for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support for new claims, changes in circumstance and amendments to a claim. In choosing to use electronic communications in the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, Harrow 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 of circumstance or amendment, provided that they use the method approved by the local authority.
- 2.3 Harrow Council's electronic claims policy does not include 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 and 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 Acting Head of Paid Services 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 Requirements) Regulations 2012

Harrow Council Electronic Claims Policy

which is incorporated into Harrow Council's Council Tax Support Policy Schedule 1 Part 4.

- Direction from Acting Head of Paid Services authorising use of electronic communications in the administration of Council Tax Support

3.2 The Direction by the Acting Head of Paid Services 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. In March 2014 electronic new claims will be implemented in a controlled environment within Access Harrow to monitor for any previously unforeseen impacts. In a phased approach the system will then be rolled-out with the intention of all new claims being made electronically by April 2015. The Implementation Plan (Appendix B) details which groups will be incorporated at each stage.

4.2 It is acknowledged that some client groups will find it easier to make an electronic claim than others. Through liaison with stakeholders and partner organisations, support will be given to residents to ensure that all can continue to access Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support. Detail is given in the Implementation Plan which includes:

- Ability to make assisted claims via Access Harrow self-serve terminals with advisor guidance
- Training of stakeholder organisations to assist clients in submitting on-line claims
- Sign-posting to IT literacy training courses within the borough
- Provision of hard copy claim forms where no other option is available

4.3 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 local authority.

4.4 The manner in which an individual may make an electronic communication for a claim or notification of a change in circumstance or amendment is detailed in the Acting Head of Paid Service's Direction (Appendix A) which states:

- (a) The claim/change of circumstances/claim amendment form to be used must be that provided on the authority's website;

Harrow Council Electronic Claims Policy

- (b) The form must be completed to such an extent as to be deemed acceptable by the authority;
- (c) The sender of the electronic communication will be authenticated by provision of the following information:
 - (i) the claimant's full name; and
 - (ii) the claimant's full address; and
 - (iii) the claimant's Housing Benefit/Council Tax Support reference number or Council Tax account number;or
 - (iv) submission of electronic communication via the claimant's My Harrow Account

Appendices to Electronic Claims Policy

Appendix A – Direction by Acting Head of Paid Services

Appendix B – Implementation Plan