



Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council Housing Benefit Reporting 2022/23

March 2024

Housing Benefit Reporting 2022/23

Introduction

In accordance with the DWP's Housing Benefits Assurance Process, the Council is required to have an annual review of its Housing Benefit Subsidy claim. Our work on the Council's Housing Benefit claim is carried out in accordance with the DWP's prescribed process and includes:

- Agreeing parameters within the Council's housing benefits system to the DWP's published standard rates for the year;
- Checking that the subsidy claim has been prepared using the specified version of the benefits software;
- Sample testing claims to check the calculation of benefit entitlement and (and that it was supported by evidence);
- Undertaking testing over modified schemes payments.

Work undertaken

Tested 20 individual cases for the following cells on the claim form:

- 011 (Non HRA)
- 055 (rent rebates);
- 094 (rent allowance); and
- 225 (modified schemes).

Additional focused testing is either based on our findings in the prior year (2021/22) or by the results of our initial testing in the current year. We undertook additional testing on six areas:

- Cell 011: Assessment of earned income;
- Cell 033: Overpayment misclassification;
- Cell 014: Expenditure misclassification;
- Cell 055: Assessment of capital tariff (where additional property);
- Cell 094: Assessment of capital tariff; and
- Cell 102: Calculation of rent.



Housing Benefit Reporting 2022/23

Our work on the 2022/23 audit, including all procedures required by the DWP is complete. We submitted our final report on 16th February 2024.

The results of our testing are outlined below:

Findings

Errors (Appendix A)

No matters were reported.

Observations (Appendix B)

We reported three observations:

- A statement to outline that we have been unable to obtain prime documentation showing that the Authority's local modified discretionary scheme has been agreed by full council, owing to significant time lapse since this scheme was originally approved.
- An issue with the assessment of capital tariff income in rent allowance cases. Our testing identified one case where the authority had incorrectly assessed the claimants capital tariff. In this case, the error had no impact on the value of benefit paid or subsidy claimed.
- A statement to outline that our initial testing noted that in two cases the Local Authority has continued to uprate the claimant war pension income using the annual circulars for several years without periodically requesting and checking updated evidence to support the war pension. Whilst we did not identify any errors in the calculation of the uprating based on the evidence held, following discussions, the authority has written out to all their modified scheme claimants to request updated war pension evidence.



Housing Benefit Reporting 2022/23

Amendments to the claim form (Appendix C)

- Testing in 2021/22 identified that the Local Authority had assessed earned income incorrectly. Whilst no errors were identified from our initial testing in 2022/23, given the nature of the population and the errors reported in the 2021/22 HBAP report, the Local Authority tested 100% of cell 011 cases with earned income to confirm if the assessment was correct. This testing identified: one case where housing benefit was overpaid by £358; two cases where housing benefit was underpaid by a combined value of £137, and one case where the incorrect assessment made had no impact on the value of housing benefit paid or subsidy claimed.
- Initial testing of twenty cases within non HRA identified one case where the Local Authority had misclassified prior year technical overpaid expenditure. The impact of the error was to misclassify expenditure of £543 as technical overpaid expenditure rather than claimant error overpaid expenditure. In line with DWP guidelines, the Local Authority tested 100% of cell 033 cases to confirm whether the overpayment classification made was correct. The additional testing identified no further errors.

Other Matters (Appendix D)

No other matters were reported.





Thank you



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