

CABINET

18 May 2021

REVOCATION OF RISK BASED VERIFICATION POLICY

Report of the Strategic Director for Resources

Strategic Aim:	All	
Key Decision: No	Forward Plan Reference: FP/120321	
Exempt Information	No	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Cllr Payne. Portfolio Holder for Finance	
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Ward Councillors	N/A	

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet approves the revocation of the Risk Based Verification Policy with immediate effect.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to seek revocation of the Risk Based Verification Policy for the administration of Housing Benefit (HB) and Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) with immediate effect.

2 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 Risk Based Verification (RBV) is a method of applying different levels of checks to different claimants depending on their circumstances using a risk matrix. The higher the risk the higher amount of resources will be used to establish that the claim is genuine.
- 2.2 In March 2017 (Report 52/2017) the Council approved a Risk Based Verification Policy for the administration of new claims and changes in circumstances for the administration of HB and LCTS. This has been reviewed annually in accordance with the requirements of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (Report 49/2020 and Report 58/2019).

2.3 We have been advised that the RBV software we use is being withdrawn during 2021 as the product is no longer sustainable to maintain due to lack of demand. This is because:

- Councils are moving away from RBV due to the progression of the information that has been made available in the last few years from DWP and HMRC e.g. Real Time Information relating to income and pensions.
- The migration to Universal Credit means that the reduction in the number of HB claims renders the risk profile unreliable due to the low numbers so it is difficult to set a baseline.

2.4 We also consider that RBV is no longer cost effective. This is because the DWP have asked us to use a different model of verification during the pandemic called 'trust and protect' This means that we have not been able to use RBV since the start of the pandemic. The trust and protect model is designed to support the safety of claimants and officers by utilising electronic methods to supply evidence rather than face to face.

3 VERIFICATION PROCESS

3.1 RBV will therefore be replaced with a request for reasonable evidence from the claimant that is deemed appropriate to administer HB based on the requirement contained in the Housing Benefit Regulations 2002, section 86 as follows:

“a person who makes a claim, or a person to whom housing benefit has been awarded, shall furnish such certificates, documents, information and evidence in connection with the claim or the award, or any question arising out of the claim or the award, as may be reasonably be required by the relevant authority in order to determine that person’s entitlement to, or continuing entitlement to housing benefit and shall do so within one month of being required to do so or such longer period as the relevant authority may consider reasonable”

3.1.1 Similar regulations apply for Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) for pensioners and in our LCTS scheme for working-age claimants. This means that claimants who apply for both only need to provide the evidence once.

3.1.2 This mirrors the approach that was adopted prior to the introduction of RBV in 2017.

3.1.3 Any dispute regarding what is 'reasonably required' are addressed locally in the first instance. If a dispute cannot be settled, then the claimant has the right of appeal to a first tier tribunal. Such instances are infrequent.

4 CONSULTATION

4.1 Consultation is not required for any decision being sought in this report.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

5.1 The Council could retain RBV, but it would need to find another software provider that can integrate with our current systems, this is not recommended as it is likely to be expensive and not viable in the long term.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The cost of the software was met from existing budgets. Revocation would result in a saving of c£25k per annum from 2021 onwards.

7 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 The Council is required to formally revoke RBV in accordance with DWP guidance to review the policy annually.

8 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) has not been completed because there are risks/issues to the rights and freedoms of natural persons.

9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Questionnaire has been completed and there are no specific issues arising from the revocation of the Risk Based Verification policy.

10 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no community safety implications arising from this report.

11 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no health and wellbeing implications arising from this report.

12 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 Members are required to revoke the Risk Based Verification policy in accordance with DWP guidance.

13 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1 Report 52/2017

14 APPENDICES

- 14.1 There are no appendices.

A Large Print Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.