

Vale of White Horse District Council – Certification of Claims and Returns – Annual Report – Action Plan

Para no.	Finding	Recommendation	Responsible Officer	Agreed Action	Deadline
	Specific Claims				
16.	There was one adjustment to the claim for disabled facility grants. The officer preparing the claim had not realised the full amount paid up to the grant ceiling of £510,000 was claimable in 2008/09 (as opposed to 60% in 2007/08). This increased the amount of grant support to the Council in year by £23,554.	R1 The role of the Council in monitoring the accuracy of benefits processing to support correct payment of benefit during the year, and in completion of the housing benefit claim, should be strengthened	William Jacobs	Chief accountant to review completed claims and associated guidance notes before claims submitted	From Feb 2010
	Inadequate evidence to support earnings				
19.	It is recommended that, unless there are good grounds to assume that earnings do not fluctuate, a minimum of two salary slips and five wages slips be used to calculate earnings for benefit calculation purposes. We identified a general issue across all benefit types where only one salary or wage slip was being used without any evidence that there was good grounds to do so.	R2 Issues arising from the certification of the benefits claim should be raised with Capita via the contract for the provision of benefit processing.	Paul Howden	It was discussed and agreed at a meeting with the Audit Commission on 24 February 2010 that these two recommendations could be clearer. The issue highlighted was around the lack of a visible audit trail and documented reasonable reasons for those cases where less than the recommended number of payslips were used. It was also accepted that under the benefit regulations there are many allowable reasons that less	
20.	In a number of cases, further wage or salary slips were found which showed that earnings did vary, which resulted in both under and overpayment of benefit to claimants. As we were unable to quantify the effect of this in the wider benefit population we included this	In particular the Council should require: Use of good practice for evidencing earnings unless there is recorded evidence to say why this is not necessary;			

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	information within our qualification letter.			<p>than the 2months/5weeks would be used but to pass for subsidy purposes there has to be a clear explanatory audit trail.</p> <p>It is however agreed that Capita will ensure that where less than 2/5 slips are used that an obvious clear explanatory trail will be documented to try to reduce the risk of subsidy loss and loss of the council's prestige in the future.</p>	This has already been communicated to staff and will be reiterated in future training sessions.
Inadequate trails to support pensions or state benefits					
21.	Recording of evidence to support pension or other state benefit payments within the housing benefit system was incomplete (partly due to a change in document imaging system), and when amounts were cross checked to the DWP system, the amounts used for benefit calculation was found to be inaccurate in a number of cases. This resulted in both under and overpayment of benefit to claimants. As we were unable to quantify the effect of this in the wider benefit population we included this information within our qualification letter.	In particular the Council should require: Better accuracy and recording of pension entitlements; and	Paul Howden	It was discussed and agreed at a meeting with the Audit Commission on 24 February 2010 that this issue highlighted was around the lack of a visible audit trail. It was also accepted that under the DWP's own guidance, the claimant group involved in these cases are deemed low risk and therefore could acceptably not be reviewed	

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				<p>for a number of years. It is therefore quite possible that pension figures may well show small variances from our systems and that these would only be corrected upon review.</p> <p>It is however agreed that Capita will ensure that where amendments have been made that an obvious trail will be documented for audit purposes.</p>	<p>This has already been communicated to staff and will be reiterated in future training sessions.</p>
Misclassification of errors leading to overpayment of benefit					
25.	As in 2007/08 we identified a number of cases within council tax benefit overpayments that had incorrectly been left as claimant error, when they should have either been local authority error, or a mix of the two. We therefore took a sample of a further 40 cases of claimant error overpayments (as required by the Department for Works and Pensions) to be checked initially by Capita.	In particular the Council should require: Improved accuracy in classification of benefit overpayments	Paul Howden	Capita has taken on board the lessons learned from the 08/09 subsidy review and the highlighted areas of error have been addressed with all assessment staff. The council's benefit team include subsidy classification within its own checking mechanism and errors are brought to the attention of Capita in order to identify training needs	<p>This issue was addressed with staff in October 2009 and again in January 2010.</p> <p>Checking processes are ongoing and Capita's Contract</p>
26.					

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	<p>They identified 17 cases where they considered the claimant error classification was incorrect. We sampled their results, and as we found errors in their testing we reviewed all 40 cases ourselves. We confirmed that 20 of the 40 cases were incorrectly classified.</p>			<p>etc. Capita will conduct a review of the previously identified areas of incorrect coding prior to the submission of the 09/10 claim. With the combined efforts of both the council's 10% check, Capita's 35% check and the effective use of a newly introduced user/error matrix, coding errors should see a major improvement for the 09/10 subsidy claim.</p>	<p>Manager will be reviewing the specific subsidy cells before the grant claim is audited in May/June 2010.</p>