

REPORT TITLE: DIRECTION UNDER HOUSING BENEFIT (ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS) ORDER 2006 AND COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEMES (PRESCRIBED REQUIREMENTS) (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2012
MARCH 2017

REPORT OF Denise Sadler, Head of Benefits and Welfare, Winchester City Council

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Purpose

In order for Winchester City Council to accept Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support claim forms, change of circumstances forms and other notifications from benefit and support claimants it must have a legal 'direction of travel' document signed by the Chief Executive.

Background

Winchester City Council Benefits and Welfare Team will be launching online claim and change in circumstances forms for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support claimants.

The Council has previously accepted online claim forms but these still require a claimant signature, so the form needs to be printed and signed before being accepted.

The Council has not previously accepted online notification of change events or other information from HB or CTS claimants.

The Benefits and Welfare Team are launching a campaign with Housing colleagues at the Discovery Centre (28th July) and Party in the Park (29th July) to remind claimants of the importance of letting us know as soon as they have a change in circumstances. The online change in circumstances form will be promoted in a press release as part of this campaign.

Recommendations

Request for Chief Executive of Winchester City Council, Laura Taylor, to sign appendix 1 – Direction of Travel document to agree to accept online forms.

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL STRATEGY

1.1 The proposal is aligned to the Winchester City Council Strategy as part of delivering an entrepreneurial approach and Digital Transformation for public services.

1.2 Communications and Circulation

1.3 Documents reviewed and confirmed by Fiona Sutherland, Planning and Information Solicitor, Winchester City Council.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

2.1 None. However, the Benefits and Welfare service expects to make savings on printing and postage as part of moving to a self serve/assisted self serve claims process.

3 FURTHER INFORMATION

3.1 Winchester City Council district is due to enter full Universal Credit (UC) service from April 2018.

3.2 From that date it is important for working age customers to be able to make a successful claim online, since UC can only be claimed online and applicants will need a valid email address. Whilst our process will also offer an assisted self serve option (a telephone interview with an officer assisting with the completion on an online form) this will allow the Council to determine those within the district who may have problems with claiming online when they move to UC.

3.3 Winchester City Council is also looking at improvements to self service within City Offices which will include the facility for applicants to upload their supporting documents.

3.4 The team expect to improve service delivery times for both new claims and changes for all applicants. Those applicants who are able to self serve will be encouraged to do so but an enhanced service via assisted telephone appointment will be offered to those who require assistance.

3.5 The new online forms are also available to colleagues, partners and stakeholders who are assisting clients, including Housing and Homelessness Officers who will be able to complete the form online and see it immediately uploaded into Benefits processing systems.

DIRECTION UNDER THE HOUSING BENEFIT (ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS) ORDER 2006 AND COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEMES (PRESCRIBED REQUIREMENTS)(ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2012

Winchester City Council (“the Authority”), acting by its Chief Executive, in accordance with:

For Housing Benefit:

- Part 2 of Schedule 11 to the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006,
- Part 2 of Schedule 10 to the Housing Benefit (Persons who have attained the qualifying age for state pension credit) Regulations 2006,

For Council Tax Reduction:

- Part 4 of Schedule 7 to the Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements)(England) Regulations 2012
- Sections 101-106A (Electronic Communication) of the Winchester City Council Council Tax Reduction Scheme

Hereby makes the following Directions:

1. Provided an approved method is used, electronic communication may be used in the following circumstances:
 - (a) Making a claim for Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support under the authority’s Council Tax Support Scheme;
 - (b) Amending a claim for Housing Benefit and/or or Council Tax Support under the authority’s Council Tax Support Scheme;
 - (c) Notifying a change of circumstances for Housing Benefit and/or or Council Tax Support under the authority’s Council Tax Support Scheme.
2. The methods approved by the Authority for using electronic Communication are as follows:
 - (a) the claim/application form used for new claims must be the one provided on the Authority’s web-site: www.winchester.gov.uk
 - (b) the claim/application form must be completed in accordance with the instructions set out on the form and the web-site
 - (c) notification of a change of circumstances or any other electronic communication about Housing Benefit and/or Council Tax Support, may be sent by using the Authority’s electronic change in circumstances form or by email to: benefits@winchester.gov.uk
 - (d) any person sending an electronic communication must clearly state their name, full postal address and application/claim reference. Any

communication where the Authority is unable to authenticate the identity of the sender shall be deemed invalidly made and will be treated as not having been received by the Authority

(e) any person sending an electronic communication must keep a record of the communication which may be required in case of query or appeal.

3. These Directions supersede previous Directions made under the above Regulations. These Directions may be withdrawn or superseded at any time by making a further Direction.

Signed:



Laura Taylor
Chief Executive
Winchester City Council

Dated: 17 July 2017