

Appendix 4 – Draft Principles for administration of the Brighton & Hove Council Tax Low Income Discount Scheme

Details contained in this appendix are subject to, and may be amended to reflect, further government requirements, consultation responses and emerging Universal Credit obligations.

Council Tax Low Income Discount Scheme

1 Principles for administration

Customers will continue to be required to make applications and evidence their circumstances. Likewise there will be obligations on the council to assess those claims, verify the details provided, to give clear decisions and to offer a route for a customer to appeal if they do not agree with the decisions that have been made.

At present Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit claims are administered by the Revenues and Benefits team within City Services. It is proposed applications for Council Tax Discount are administered by the same team.

2 Claim process

2.1 Applications

At present the council accepts applications for Council Tax Benefit (CTB) and Housing Benefit (HB) on the same form (either paper or electronic). In addition the council accepts applications made via Job Centre Plus and the Pension Service.

The information requested in current HB/CTB application forms is likely to be very similar if not identical to the information requested under Council Tax Discount (CTD)

The council proposes to change its own stationary so that customers can make joint application for HB and CTD.

The council will try to engage the DWP and HMRC to work with them to allow their stationary to be used for CTD claims.

2.2 Evidence

Customers for CTD will be required to verify their income, capital, and identification. Where possible the council will use its internal systems, where this is not possible customers will be asked to provide satisfactory documents which do this. If there is good reason a person cannot provide these

documents the council will consider making payment of CTD on account until they can be provided.

2.3 Time scales

The council will set clear targets for processing claims and monitor against them. Where insufficient information has been provided to allow a claim to be assessed a member of staff will contact that customer by phone to explain what information is needed and when it should be provided.

2.4 Notification

Once the council has made a decision and the outcome is that the person is entitled to some award, they will be sent a new Council Tax Bill which shows the amount of award and confirms the reduction in their liability. In the case where the application is not successful a letter will be sent to that person explaining this decision.

In both cases rights of appeal will be set out

2.5 Appeals

Any possible scheme will contain a right to appeal. The Government has yet to stipulate whether there will be a statutory route for appeals; at present Housing and Council Tax Benefit appeals are heard by the Tribunals Service and appeals over Council Tax liability are heard by the Valuation Office Tribunal.

In any case the first stage of appeal will be review by a council officer who was not involved in the original decision. Further appeal will either be via a statutory route or via a further internal Council process.

2.6 Complaints

If a Council Tax Discount applicant wishes to complain for any reason about the Council Tax Discount scheme or their application the council's normal complaints channels will be open to them.