

Arrangements for Assessing Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Claims

At its meeting in April 2013, the Board heard a representation from a member of the public on the costs and impacts of re-assessing claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit following periods of short-term employment (in particular in relation to claimants who took repeated temporary contracts). It was requested that the Board consider reviewing this issue as it was felt that it was particularly pertinent given the nature of the current employment market in Torbay.

The Board agreed that the request be considered as part of the development of the Board's Work Programme for 2013/2014.

The Revenue and Benefits Group Manager has confirmed that:

- Torbay Council administers claims for Housing Benefit on behalf of the Department of Work and Pensions in accordance with the Department's guidance and regulations.
- The Council is under an obligation to deal with all claims fairly and does so in order of receipt. Therefore separating out claims from those undertaking periods of short-term employment would raise issues of equality.
- Further, logistically it would be extremely difficult to separate out claims from those undertaking periods of short-term employment.
- In order to minimise the impact of changes in circumstances, the Council endeavours to process claims received as quickly and as accurately as possible. However, as the resources available to the Council continue to shrink and the numbers of claims increase due to the current economic climate, claims are taking longer to process than in previous year.

Taking account of the above, the Board are asked to consider whether it wishes to review this matter further.