ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF THE
CABINET
ON 9 DECEMBER 2019

SUBJECT: Revenues & Benefits: Risk Based Verification Policy

REPORT AUTHOR: Andrew Dale Revenues & Benefit Manager
Satnam Kaur, Group Head of Residential Services
DATE: 14 November 2019
EXTN: 37630
PORTFOLIO AREA: Residential Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report seeks Cabinet approval for the adoption of Risk Based Verification in the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction claims.

RECOMMENDATION:

Cabinet is requested to:

1. Approve the use of Risk Based Verification and the Risk Based Verification policy in the administration of new claims and changes in circumstance for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction from 13 January 2020

2. Grant delegated authority to the Group Head of Corporate Support
    (Section 151 Officer) and Group Head of Residential Services to make minor amendments to the Risk Based Verification policy following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Audit & Governance and Cabinet Member for Residential Services.

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1. BACKGROUND:

1.1. RBV is a method of applying different levels of checks to a Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction claim based on the level of risk associated with a particular claim. The adoption of an RBV policy allows an authority to allocate its resources to those claims that are considered to be higher risk. This enables Councils to improve claim processing times, improve efficiency in administration and to reduce fraud and error.

2. PROPOSAL:

2.1. It is proposed that Cabinet approves the RBV Policy attached in appendix 1 to commence on 13 January 2020 until 31 March 2021. Although the policy will be updated annually, as it will commence mid year, it is proposed that initially it will run through the next financial year (2020/21). This will allow enough time to monitor and test its effectiveness and subsequently propose changes in future annual updates

2.2. Adopting the Policy on 13 January 2020 enables ADC to gain the maximum benefit from CA-Bens (a Northgate software product which enables claimants of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction to self-serve). This will ensure that the Revenues Department remain on target in terms of digitalisation.

2.3 The efficiency savings achieved in terms of administration will enable resources to be directed at reducing fraud and error.

3. OPTIONS:

3.1 To approve the use of RBV and RBV policy in the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction applications and subsequent changes in circumstance.

3.2 The adoption of RBV is not compulsory and therefore we could stay as we are. However, this is not considered to be the preferred approach as it gives limited scope to improve efficiencies and performance and would not be making the best use of resources to reduce fraud and error.

4. CONSULTATION:

Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		x
Relevant District Ward Councillors		x
Other groups/persons (please specify) Citizens Advice		x

5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial	x	
Legal	x	
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment		x
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		X
Sustainability		X
Asset Management/Property/Land		X
Technology		X

Other (please explain)		**X**

6. IMPLICATIONS

6.1. The Policy must be complied with in order to satisfy external auditors. Audit guidance states that it needs to ensure that:

 a) The Policy has Section 151 Officer approval;
 (b) The RBV policy has been formally approved by Members;
 (c) The RBV policy will be reviewed annually (after the first year of introduction) and not changed in year; and
 (d) The RBV claim or RBV change of circumstance has been verified in accordance with the Local Authority's RBV policy.

6.2. It is noted by the audit guidance that a local authority can introduce RBV at any time during the financial year provided the effective date of introduction is clear and the Local Authority keeps a clear record of the verification conducted and can identify the different sub-populations of RBV cases.

7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:

7.1. The users of the benefits service will experience a more efficient service. Claims that are considered low risk will have to provide less evidence to support their application or their declared change in circumstance. This will enable claims to be decided quicker and therefore payments made on time.
Those claims deemed to present a higher risk will be scrutinised more closely, however, as the resource is less stretched this should be more efficient, the risk of fraud and error particularly in these high-risk cases is also greatly reduced.

8. EFFECTIVE DATE OF THE DECISION: 18 December 2019

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

8.1 RBV policy document