

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 24th March 2015

Lead Member / Officer: Julian Thompson-Hill / Paul McGrady

Report Author: Rod Urquhart

Title: Council Tax and National Non Domestic Rates Moves, Discounts, Exemptions and Reliefs Telephone Call Recording Policy

1. What is the report about?

To seek approval for a new policy dealing with Revenues Services changes in address, changes in circumstances and claims for discounts and reliefs. This will enable further efficiencies in processing and better customer service levels to our citizens.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

To introduce the Council Tax and National Non Domestic Rates Moves, Discounts, Exemptions and Reliefs Telephone Call Recording Policy, enabling more efficient working practices and better customer service.

3. What are the Recommendations?

Members approve the revised 'Council Tax and National Non Domestic Rates Moves, Discounts, Exemptions and Reliefs Telephone Call Recording Policy' as shown in Appendix A to this report.

4. Report details.

Background

The Revenues Services functions deals with the billing, collection and enforcement of Council Tax, Business Rates, Housing Benefit Overpayments and Sundry debts. On an annual basis there are a significant amount of changes such as people claiming a discount or relief, moving in or out of our area or setting up payment plans.

The service receives notifications of changes in a number of ways either by post, email, face to face or by telephone. The service has also gone live with a number of web portal forms that will automatically update the back office systems from our corporate website.

Denbighshire County Council like all other public sector organisations is facing significant financial challenges and there is both a desire and necessity to change the way we interact with our customers, by offering an immediate service but at a reduced cost.

4.1 Issues for consideration

Most Local Authorities and Government Departments have an electronic forms and e-enablement, their customers are accessing these channels as a first choice in a greater number than in previous years, however the alternative channels still remain.

Whilst Denbighshire County Council offers all of these access channels there is still a very large proportion on our customer base that comes into reception areas to see an advisor.

The Council is changing the way it interacts with our customers, through the digital choice project. By putting in place an assisted moves, discounts and exemptions process and using the technology we have already invested in, we will be providing a more efficient and effective customer service. It is anticipated that this service will reduce the number of face to face enquiries to complete forms or changes in circumstances.

Currently we will action from a customer over the telephone, however the information could be challenged at a later date eg if a Single Person Discount was claimed fraudulently. This could lead the authority open to abuse of its taxbase, which in turn could lead to a drop in income levels.

Denbighshire County Council is investing in a new telephony system, which has call recording capabilities. It is anticipated the new system will be rolled out across the Council by 1st April 2016. The Revenues and Benefits Service has volunteered to be an early pilot.

The evidence from other Local Authorities who use a telephone recording process have seen a decrease in the levels of fraud as the customer is advised their change in circumstances will be recorded and could be used as evidence in any investigation and subsequent prosecution.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

By offering more choices to for customers to claim discounts, exemptions or report changes we will help vulnerable people more promptly by speeding up the claim process, ensuring they live as independently as possible.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

There is no additional cost, apart from the amounts agreed for the new telephony system. It will have a direct impact on customer services as we will be providing a better and more efficient service as well as paying the most vulnerable citizens more quickly.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

This policy and the assisted changes service will enhance the customer journey and will be beneficial to all elements of society.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

The draft policy has been issued to Customer Services, Housing Department, Social Landlords, the third sector, stakeholders and partners. To date no requests have been received to change any part of the policy. The organisations have given their support to the policy, indicating it will have a positive impact on the residents of Denbighshire.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

There are no financial implications directly related to this report, however, this new approach to Revenues changes will improve customer service and act as a deterrent to fraudulent claims.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

Not applicable as the telephone recording process may reduce the likelihood of fraud

11. Power to make the Decision

- Council Tax Regulations 1992
- Business Rates Regulations (Local Government Finance Act 1988).