

Grant certification work plan for Cheltenham Borough Council

DRAFT

This version of the report is a draft. Its contents and subject matter remain under review and its contents may change and be expanded as part of the finalisation of the report.

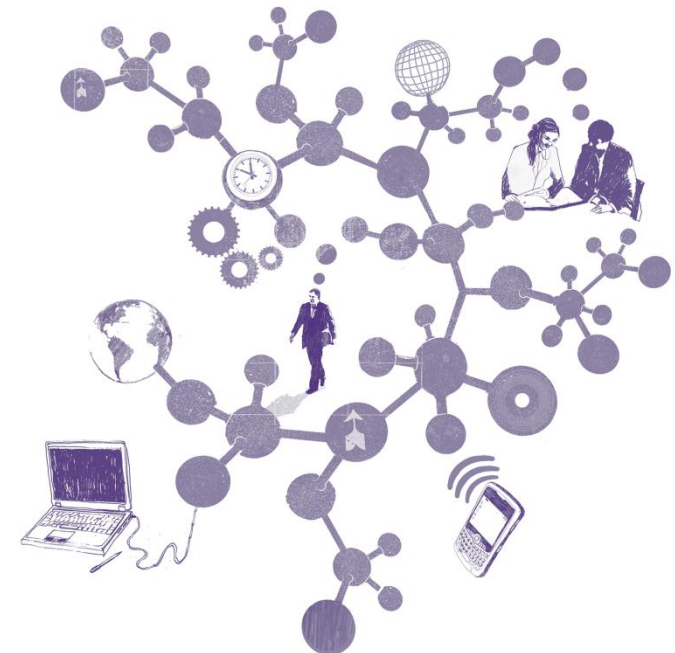
Year ended 31 March 2013

25 September 2013

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Our approach to grant certification work

Introduction

Various grant-paying bodies require external certification of claims for grant or subsidy and returns of financial information.

The Audit Commission makes certification arrangements with grant-paying bodies, including confirming which claims and returns require certification and issuing certification instructions. These instructions are tailored to each scheme and set out the specific procedures to be applied in examining the claim or return. The Audit Commission agrees the deadline for submission of each claim by authorities and the deadline for certification by auditors.

As the Council's appointed external auditor, we undertake grant certification work acting as an agent of the Audit Commission.

Certification arrangements

The Audit Commission's certification arrangements are designed to be proportionate to the claim or return. The arrangements for 2012-13 are:

- for claims and returns below £125,000, certification by us is not required, regardless of any statutory certification requirement or any certification requirement set out in grant terms and conditions
- for claims and returns above £125,000 and below £500,000, we are required to perform limited tests to agree entries on the claim or return to underlying records, but are not required to undertake any testing of the eligibility of expenditure or data

- for claims and returns over £500,000, we are required to assess the control environment for the preparation of the claim or return and decide whether or not to place reliance on it. Where reliance is placed on the control environment, we are required to undertake limited tests to agree entries on the claim or return to underlying records but not to undertake any testing of the eligibility of expenditure or data. Where reliance is not placed on the control environment, we are required to undertake all the tests in the relevant certification instruction and use our assessment of the control environment to inform decisions on the level of testing required.

In determining whether we place reliance on the control environment, we consider other work we have undertaken on the Council's financial ledger and any other relevant systems, and make appropriate use of relevant internal audit work where possible.

Role of all parties

The table below summarises the respective roles and responsibilities of the parties involved in the certification process.

Party	Role & responsibility
Grant paying body	Sets conditions of grant and deadline for submission for pre-certified and certified claims
Audit Commission	Issues certification instructions for auditor work
Council	Submits claims for certification to the Appointed Auditor within grant paying body submission deadlines
Appointed Auditor	Certifies claims in accordance with Audit Commission certification instructions and within certification deadlines

The Council's role is set out in more detail below:

- the Director of Resources is responsible for ensuring that supporting accounting records are sufficient to document the transactions for which claims are made. These records should be maintained in accordance with proper practices and kept up to date, including records of income and expenditure in relation to claims and returns
- the Council should ascertain the requirements of schemes at an early stage to allow those responsible for incurring eligible expenditure to assess whether it falls within the scheme rules and to advise those responsible for compiling claims and returns to confirm any entitlement
- the Council should ensure all deadlines for interim and final claims are met to avoid sanctions and penalties from grant paying bodies
- grant-paying bodies usually require the Council's certificate to be given by an appropriate senior officer. This is typically Director of Resources or an officer authorised by written delegated powers
- the Council should monitor arrangements with any third parties involved in the certification process.

Claims history

The most significant claims and returns in 2011-12 were:

- housing and council tax benefit claim
- national non-domestic rates return
- pooling of housing capital receipts

Due to changes in government funding, there are a number of schemes that either finished in 2011-12 or where funding is no longer ring-fenced. For the Council this means that there will be no certification of the following schemes this year:

- HRA (Housing Revenue Account) subsidy

Our certificate

Following our work on each claim or return, we issue our certificate. The wording of this depends on the level of work performed as set out above, stating either the claim or return is in accordance with the underlying records, or the claim or return is fairly stated and in accordance with the relevant terms and conditions. Our certificate also states that the claim has been certified:

- without qualification
- without qualification but with agreed amendments incorporated by the Council or
- with a qualification letter (with or without agreed amendments incorporated by the Council).

Where a claim is qualified because the Council has not complied with the strict requirements set out in the certification instruction, there is a risk that grant-paying bodies will retain funding claimed by the Council or claw back funding which has already been provided or has not been returned.

In addition, where claims or returns require amendment or are qualified, this increases the time taken to undertake this work, which may impact on the certification fee.

Certification work fees

The Audit Commission sets an indicative scale fee for grant claim certification based on 2010/11 actual certification fees for each Council. The indicative scale fee for the Council is £12,750 for 2011/12. This fee is based on the following assumptions:

- there will be no change in the scope of our work due to the control environment in place during the year
- the Council provides adequate working papers to support each entry in the claim/return
- the Council's staff are available to deal with our queries in a timely manner and provide such explanations and supporting evidence necessary to support entries.

Where there is any significant variation from these assumptions, we will discuss a variation to the indicative scale fee with the Council and the Audit Commission.

The Council has identified all claims and returns requiring certification and this information is incorporated into Appendix A to this plan.

Administration

When each expected claim or return is completed, a copy of the signed claim should be sent to Peter Smith at the following address:

Grant Thornton UK LLP
The Canterbury Business Centre
18 Ashchurch Road
Tewkesbury
GL20 8BT

- The **original** claims and returns should be retained by the Council.
- If additional claims and returns are identified by either us or the Council they will be incorporated into the appendix in this plan
- All claims and returns listed in appendix A should be sent to us, even if below the de minimis limit so that we can confirm that no certification is required. We are required to report the value of these claims to the Audit Commission in our annual certification report.

Managing the certification process – our role

- We intend to certify all claims and returns in accordance within the deadlines set by the Audit Commission. If we receive any claims after the Council's submission deadline, we will endeavour to certify them within the Audit Commission deadline but, where this is not possible, within three months from receipt
- A copy of each certified claim or return will be sent to the relevant named contact when the certification process is complete, along with a copy of the qualification letter, where applicable
- Copies of the certification instructions can be provided on request for any new claims or returns
- We expect to complete the certification of all claims by late 2013 and will issue a grant certification report highlighting any issues that need to be brought to the Council's attention.

Appendix A: Summary of expected claims & returns for the year ended 31 March 2013

Claim (CI reference)	Authority deadline	Certification deadline	Claim certified in prior year	Prior year outcome
Housing and council tax benefits scheme (BEN01)	30/04/13	30/11/13	Yes	
Pooling of housing capital receipts (CFB06)	28/06/13	27/09/13	Yes	
National non-domestic rates return (LA01)	28/06/13	27/09/13	Yes	



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