

Our ref: 2166134  
23 August 2018

**Duncan Smith**  
???

Account reference:xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx.xxx

## **Freedom of Information Act 2000**

Dear Sir/Madam

This request is being handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

### **Request**

Dear Birmingham City Council,

Verification of information about the claimant's income from employment and self-employment?

Dear Dudley MBC

Setting the scene

The eligibility for Housing Benefit (HB) depends on several factors including income, capital, and the circumstances of the claimant (for example who lives at the property with the claimant i.e. partner, relatives and loggers), the size of household, and age.

HB Fraud and error can arise in different ways. Fraud due to claimants can occur when claimants deliberately have provided false or inaccurate information about their circumstances or failed to report a change in their circumstances to maximise their benefit entitlement

My request will focus only on whether you have control systems in place to prevent, identify and detect HB overpayments due to claimants' fraud and when the claim is made initially, and subsequently after the benefit has been awarded.

According to the National Audit Office 'The Department and local authorities manage HB. The Department sets policy, entitlement rules and shares data and guidance with local authorities. Local authorities have a statutory duty to undertake the day-to-day administration of Housing Benefit and pay claimants' (The NAO, 2014).

However, it is not clear whether the local authority or the DWP is responsible for having control systems/ procedures in place to prevent, identify and detect housing benefit fraud. And whether any of them has any forms of systems/ procedures in place at all!!

In fact, a 2011 National Audit office report states that: 'In our view, the Department has not established sufficiently clear responsibilities to tackle fraud

and error in partnership with local authorities'. I believe this lack of clear responsibilities has created loopholes in the assessment of housing benefit which enabled many claimants to exploit the system to their advantage. I would like to ask some questions about the verifications of information provided by the HB claimants which aim to test whether you verify some of the factors that affect the claimants' eligibility to housing benefit.

Q1- How do you verify the information that HB claimants provide about their employment status?

Q2- if HB claimants declare that they do not work for an employer and not self-employed, regardless of whether receiving benefits or waiting to hear about a claim, do you always verify their employment/self-employment status with HMRC?

Q3- If you do you verify their employment status based on the level of risk and other factors, out of the housing benefit applications processed by you in each of the last three financial years (or at least in one financial year), what is the percentage of the applicants that you verified their employment status with HMRC?

Yours faithfully,

Duncan Smith...

## **Response**

Please see attached.

If you have any questions, please contact me on 0121 464 2152 or [xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxx.xxx.xx](mailto:xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxx.xxx.xx).

Please quote the reference number 2166134 in any future communications.

If you are dissatisfied with the handling of your request, you have the right to ask for an internal review. Internal review requests should be submitted within two months of the date of receipt of the response to your original letter and should be addressed to:

Corporate Information Governance Team  
PO Box 16366  
Birmingham  
B2 2YY  
Email: [xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxx.xxx.xx](mailto:xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxxxxxxxxx.xxx.xx)

If you are still dissatisfied with the Council's response after the internal review you have a right of appeal to the Information Commissioner at:

The Information Commissioner's Office  
Wycliffe House  
Water Lane  
Wilmslow  
Cheshire SK9 5AF.  
Telephone: 01625 545 700  
Website: [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)

I will now close your request as of this date.

Yours faithfully

### **Benefit Service Policy Team**

XXXXXXXX.XXXXXXX.XXXXXX@XXXXXXXXXXXX.XXX.XX

#### **Re Use of Public Sector Information**

Where Birmingham City Council is the copyright holder of any information that may be released, re-use for personal, educational or non-commercial purposes is permitted without further reference to the City Council. Where the re-use is for other purposes, such as commercial re-use, the applicant should notify the City Council in writing to seek approval or agree terms for re-use