

Appendix 2 Action Plan

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Parameters

- Ensure these are entered correctly as soon as possible in the year
- Ensure that this is independently checked.
- Maintain documentary evidence of this - so that further audit queries can be dealt with efficiently and quickly.

Responsibility Benefit Service Manager

Priority High

Date March

Comments The year end process on the Northgate system will be complete by the 3/4th of March. The parameters are hard coded into the system. Parameters will be checked by the senior assessment officer leading on this work, subsequently checked by the Benefit Service Manager and subsequently sample checked by the Chief officer. Housing against the Circular HB/CTB A26/2010

Recommendation 2

Take urgent action to reduce the level of errors found in classifying expenditure. Carry out staff training and stress the importance of coding expenditure correctly to staff, particularly overpayments. Carry out test checking of cases to assess progress made and any further action including training needs.

Responsibility Benefit Assessment Manager

Priority High

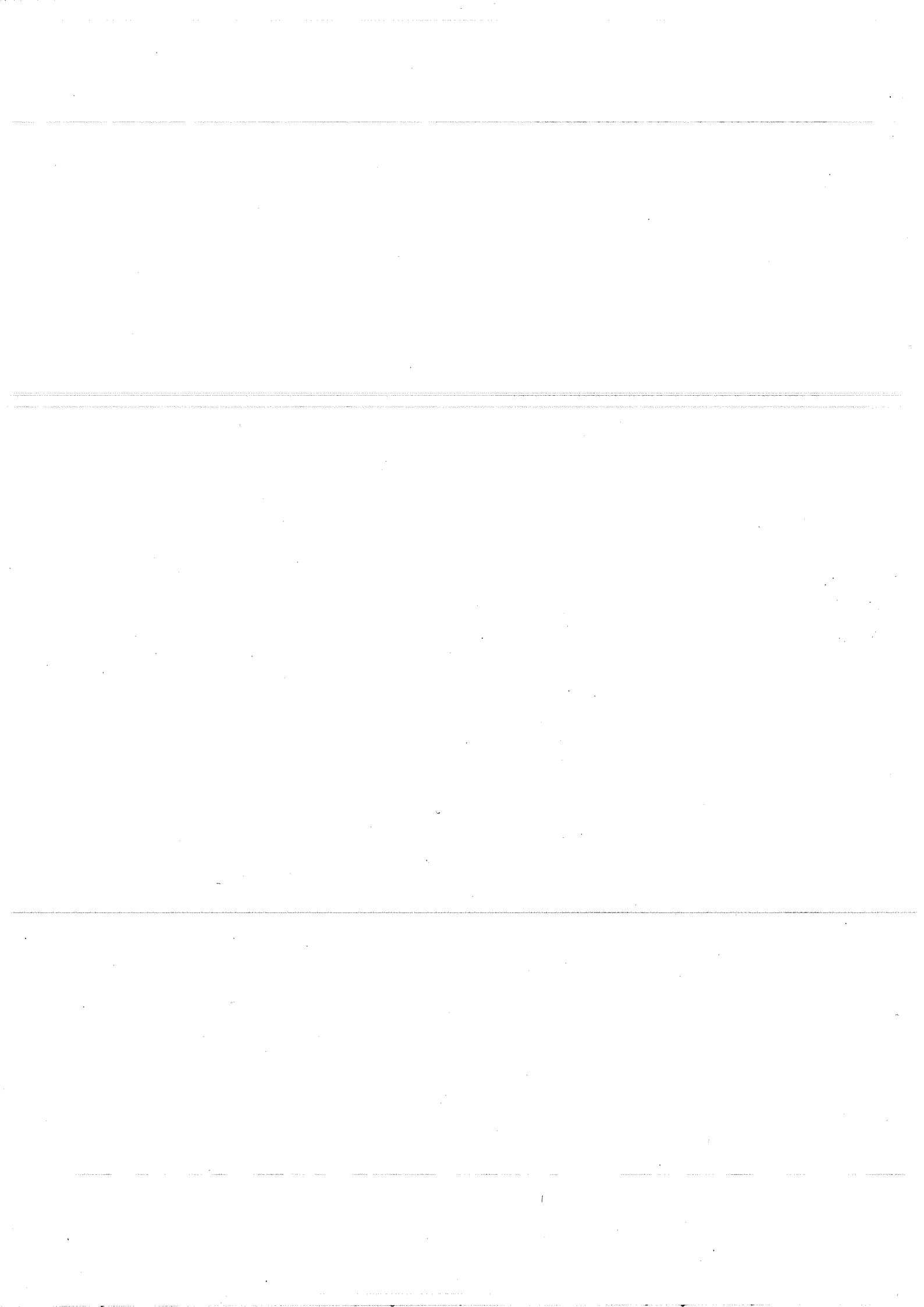
Date March 2011

Comments All assessment staff will be advised in writing by end of February of expenditure classification requirements. Training will take place on the 3/4 March to reinforce requirements. Sample checking of 10% Assessment Officer work will take place each month and issues identified fed back via the supervision process so that support and training is offered where required; at least 5% new claims and 5% Change of Circumstances.

Recommendation 3

Review non HRA cases in advance of certification work to ensure they are correctly classified. Ensure there is evidence on file to support their classification.

Responsibility Control & System Support Officer



Priority	Medium
Date	March 2011
Comments	<p>All existing Non-HRA expenditure has been reviewed and classified in line with the appropriate code on the Northgate system.</p> <p>All non-HRA rent rebate expenditure cases will be reviewed on a monthly basis to ensure correct classification.</p> <p>Housing Options Service to review notification of temporary accommodation to Benefit Service in line with subsidy classifications via a proforma in line with expenditure classification from beginning of March to ensure consistency of approach.</p>

Recommendation 4

Take urgent action to reduce the level of errors found calculating earnings. Carry out test checking of cases to assess progress made and any further action including training needs.

Responsibility	Benefit Assessment Manager
Priority	High
Date	
Comments	Staff have received refresher training in October 2010. Checking of work undertaken monthly and issues fed back via supervision process.

Recommendation 5

Ensure there is a clear audit trail on the benefits system of how assessors have reached judgements on benefits entitlement.

Responsibility	Benefit Assessment Manager
Priority	High
Date	
Comments	Staff have been advised of need to provide full breakdown on reasons for benefit entitlement and to ensure this is adequately reflected in notebooks. Sample checking to be undertaken on earned income benefit claims on a monthly basis.

Recommendation 6

Carry out risk based checking of claims to assess if benefit entitlement has been correctly calculated.

Responsibility	Benefit Assessment Manager
Priority	High
Date	
Comments	Checking of all benefit assessment will be undertaken for all new assessment staff for their probation period of six months. All payments of over £ 1,000 will be checked before payment.

Recommendation 7

Ensure that benefit managers are able to interrogate the Northgate system adequately for their own

management purposes and also to allow errors found as part of certification testing to be quantified.

Responsibility Benefit Service Manager

Priority Medium

Date March 2011

Comments All managers have received training on the new Northgate system to enable interrogation. Additional support and training will be required for the Control & System Support Officer when she returns from maternity leave and this has already been arranged.

Recommendation 8

Allocate staff of sufficient skill and experience early in the certification work to ensure that queries are dealt with adequately and promptly, and to carry out 40 plus testing to the required standard.

Responsibility Benefit Service Manager

Priority High

Date

Comments The timetable for the certification work has been provided by the auditors. Staff with appropriate skills will be available to support the auditors at the appropriate times. Initial work and support has already been agreed.

Recommendation 9

The Council should establish an action plan with clear timescales and responsibilities to:

- address the findings of this report;
- ensure there is a clear audit trail for the entries for the 2010/11 claim; and
- ensure there is a timetable to meet the certification deadline

Responsibility

Priority High

Date April 2011

Comments The response to the recommendations is set out above. A plan of support for the Audit Commission has been agreed to support the audit based on their draft timetable

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