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Private & confidential

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Our ref tc/sg/HB15-16

Contact Sundeep Gill
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16 February 2017

Dear Simon

Harborough District Council - Certification of claims and returns - annual report 2015/16

Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) requires its external auditors to prepare an annual report on the claims and returns certified for each audited body. This letter is our annual report for the certification work we have undertaken for 2015/16.

In 2015/16 we carried out certification work on only one claim/return, the Housing Benefit Subsidy claim. The certified value of the claim was £11.7 million, and we completed our work and certified the claim on 30 November 2016.

Matters arising

Our certification work on Housing Subsidy Benefit claim included:

- agreeing standard rates, such as for allowances and benefit incomes, to the DWP Circular communicating the value of each rate for the year;
- sample testing of benefit claims to confirm that the entitlement had been correctly calculated and was supported by appropriate evidence;
- undertaking an analytical review of the claim form considering year-on-year variances and key ratios;
- confirming that the subsidy claim had been prepared using the correct benefits system version; and
- completing testing in relation to modified schemes payments, uncashed cheques and verifying the accurate completion of the claim form.

Our certification work on Housing Subsidy Benefit claim resulted in a small amendment of £1,248 and was subject to a qualification letter.

- The claim was amended to correct errors relating to the assessment of Rent Allowance childcare costs cases. Following 100% testing of these cases, undertaken by your officers, an amendment to the claim of £1,248 was made.

A qualification letter was required, due to a number of issues, as set out below:

- Rent Allowance - inclusion of incorrect earnings in the benefit entitlement calculations;
- Rent Allowance - Inclusion of incorrect childcare costs; and
- Rent Allowance - Inclusion of incorrect Employment Support Allowance (Contributions based).

Consequently we have made one recommendation to the Authority to improve its claims completion process, which is included in Appendix 1.

In our 2014/15 Certification Annual Report we raised one recommendation relating to the improvement of claims completion process, which is outstanding as at January 2017 and has been included in 2015/16 recommendation.

Certification work fees

PSAA set an indicative fee for our certification work in 2015/16 of £14,335. Our actual fee was the same as the indicative fee, and this compares to the 2014/15 fee for this claim of £20,890. Our 2015/16 fee is lower due to the Authority completing the initial testing, whereas we had done so previously.

Yours sincerely

Tony Crawley
Director

Appendix 1 – 2015/16 Certification of Claims and Returns Action Plan

Priority rating for recommendations		
<p>❶ Issues that are fundamental and material to your overall arrangements for managing grants and returns or compliance with scheme requirements. We believe that these issues might mean that you do not meet a grant scheme requirement or reduce (mitigate) a risk.</p>	<p>❷ Issues that have an important effect on your arrangements for managing grants and returns or complying with scheme requirements, but do not need immediate action. You may still meet scheme requirements in full or in part or reduce (mitigate) a risk adequately but the weakness remains in the system.</p>	<p>❸ Issues that would, if corrected, improve your arrangements for managing grants and returns or compliance with scheme requirements in general, but are not vital to the overall system. These are generally issues of best practice that we feel would benefit you if you introduced them.</p>

Number	Issue	Recommendation	Priority	Comment/Responsible officer/Due date
1	The inclusion of incorrect claimant data included in the benefit entitlement calculations. This is a recurring issue from 2014/15.	Review and improve the process for the inclusion of claimant data in the benefit entitlement calculations to reduce the level of errors being repeated in subsequent years.	❷	

This report is addressed to the Authority and has been prepared for the sole use of the Authority. We take no responsibility to any member of staff acting in their individual capacities, or to third parties. We draw your attention to the Statement of Responsibilities of auditors and audited bodies, which is available on Public Sector Audit Appointment's website (www.psaa.co.uk).

External auditors do not act as a substitute for the audited body's own responsibility for putting in place proper arrangements to ensure that public business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

We are committed to providing you with a high quality service. If you have any concerns or are dissatisfied with any part of KPMG's work, in the first instance you should contact Tony Crawley, the engagement lead to the Authority, who will try to resolve your complaint. If you are dissatisfied with your response please contact the national lead partner for all of KPMG's work under our contract with Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited, Andrew Sayers, by email to andrew.sayers@kpmg.co.uk. After this, if you are still dissatisfied with how your complaint has been handled you can access PSAA's complaints procedure by emailing generalenquiries@psaa.co.uk, by telephoning 020 7072 7445 or by writing to Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited, 3rd Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ.