



# Grant certification work plan for North Somerset Council

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**Year ended 31 March 2014**

22 May 2014

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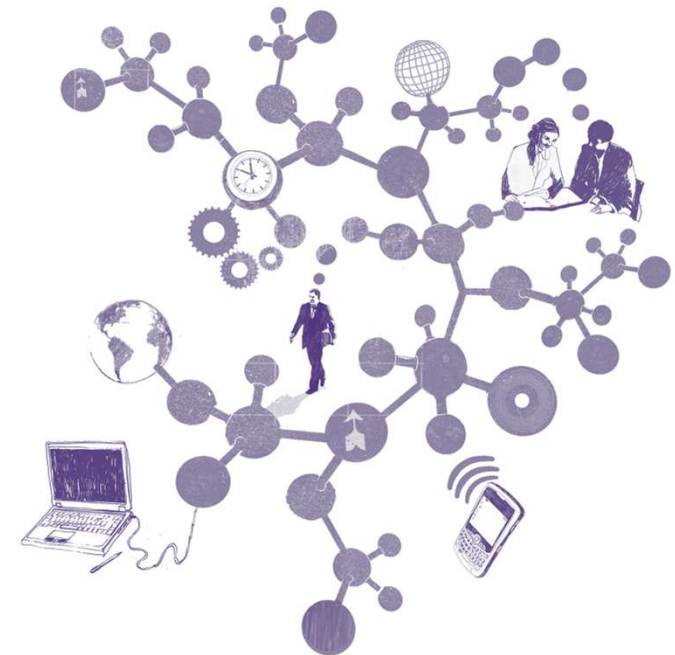
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# Our approach to grant certification work

## 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 2013/14 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 Head of Financial Management 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 the Head of Financial Management or an officer authorised by written delegated powers
- the Council should monitor arrangements with any third parties involved in the certification process.

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## Claims history

The most significant claims and returns in 2012/13 were:

- housing and council tax benefit claim
- national non-domestic rates return
- teachers' pensions return
- local transport plan: major projects.

Due to changes in government funding, there are a number of schemes that either finished in 2012/13 or where funding is no longer ring-fenced. For the Council this means that there will be no certification under the Audit Commission regime of the following schemes this year:

- council tax benefit (previously part of the housing and council tax benefit claim)
- national non-domestic rates return
- teachers' pension return.

## 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 set an indicative fee for 2013/14 grant claim certification based on the 2011/12 actual certification fees for each council. The indicative fee for the Council is £18,616.

This fee relates only to the certification of housing benefit subsidy claims. The fee has been reduced by 12 per cent, to reflect the removal of council tax benefit from the scheme. Fees for the national non-domestic rates return and the teacher' pension return schemes no longer requiring certification have been removed.

The 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
- 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. Our expected variations are included on page 6 of this Plan.

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

## Expected fee variations

We expect to issue 2 fee variations due to changes in the scope of our work. See table below.

Claim (CI reference)	Reason for variation
Local transport plan: major projects (TRA11)	New claim in 2012/13 The audit fee is not included in the Audit Commission fee scale.
Housing and council tax benefits scheme (BEN01)	Our approach is to test an initial sample and then extend testing where errors are found. The fee assumes that the Council will carry out this extended testing for us.  The Council has requested that we carry out this extended testing on its behalf should it be required.

## Administration

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

**Grant Thornton UK LLP**  
**Suite 4**  
**Stowey House**  
**Bridport Road**  
**Poundbury**  
**Dorchester**  
**Dorset**  
**DT1 3SB**

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 2014 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 2014

Claim (CI reference)	Authority deadline **	Certification deadline **	Claim certified in prior year	Prior year outcome
Housing benefits subsidy (BEN01) *	30/04/14	30/11/14	Yes	Claim qualified
Local transport plan: major projects (TRA11)	30/09/14	31/12/14	Yes	No significant issues were noted on this audit.

\* No certification of council tax benefit is required in 2013/14



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