**Meeting:** Policy Development and Decision Group (Joint Operations Team)

**Date:** 14 September 2016

**Wards Affected:** All Wards

**Report Title:** Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support Risk Based Verification Policy (Mayoral Decision)

**Is the decision a key decision?** No

**When does the decision need to be implemented?** 1 October 2016

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## 1.     Proposal and Introduction

1.1     The Council has been given the opportunity to implement Risk Based Verification into its Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support assessment processes by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP).

1.2     Currently when a resident applies for these benefits they must provide a substantial amount of original evidence. The same level of verification is applied to all customers, irrespective of their circumstances and this is both costly and inefficient.

1.3     Risk Based Verification assesses the information provided on the application form and allocates the case to a risk category. If someone is in a low-risk category they may only be required to submit basic identification and National Insurance Number information. This targeted approach has shown to be more effective at identifying fraud and error, whilst also reducing costs and improving the customer journey.

1.4     To introduce this new approach the Council is required by the DWP to have a Risk Based Verification Policy in place that is approved by the Mayor and the Section 151 Officer.

## 2.    Reason for Proposal

2.1    Implementing Risk Based Verification will reduce the necessity for customers to contact the Council through more expensive methods such as face to face, and decrease the need to produce original documents to support their claim resulting in a reduction in the number of customer contacts, lower volumes of scanning and indexing and less information requests.

2.2    To summarise, the main reasons for implementing Risk Based Verification are as follows:

- Introduce a more efficient administration process that will result in a reduction in officer time.  This will allow resources to be deployed more effectively and result in a reduction in administration costs.

- Significantly reduce the claim verification process for customers, which will improve processing times.

- Supports the cross-skilling of customer service advisors as the administration process is simplified for low risk cases.

- Improves customer satisfaction as on average Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support will be paid much quicker, duplication reduced and fewer avoidable calls.

- Identify potentially fraudulent cases and taking the appropriate action.

## 3.    Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

3.1    That the Risk Based Verification Policy for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support set out at Exempt Appendix 2 to the submitted report be approved.

## Appendices

Appendix 1:  Supporting Information and Impact Assessment
Appendix 2:  Risk Based Verification Policy (Publication - exempt under paragraph 7 Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as it contains information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime)
Appendix 3:  Department of Work and Pensions Circular S11/2011