

Key Decision Required	No	In the Forward Plan	No
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CABINET

20 NOVEMBER 2015

**REFERENCE REPORT FROM SERVICE DEVELOPMENT
AND DELIVERY COMMITTEE OF 2 NOVEMBER 2015**

**A.1 RESIDENTS IN TENDRING BEING CONTACTED BY TENDRING DISTRICT
COUNCIL OVER THE MAKE-UP OF THEIR HOUSEHOLD**

(Report prepared by Janey Nice)

BACKGROUND

At its meeting held on 2 November 2015, the Portfolio Holder for Revenues and Benefits (Councillor Hughes) and the Revenues and Benefits Manager (Harry Bates), accompanied by the Fraud, Counter Fraud and Compliance Manager (Clare Lewis) attended the meeting at the request of the Chairman (Councillor Griffiths) who had raised concerns over the Council's practice of phoning single-person households during the evening.

At the invitation of the Chairman, a resident of Tendring, Mr Dave Bolton, addressed the meeting and explained how the practice was causing concern to residents, particularly elderly residents, especially during the evening and with the type of questions being asked.

Members discussed the issue and asked a number of questions concerning:

- (a) How many set questions were asked;
- (b) Did the caller identify themselves before asking questions;
- (c) Were claimants of the single-person discount made aware that they must contact the Council if their circumstances changed;
- (d) Would a letter be more effective at identifying changes of circumstance for single-occupancy households; and
- (e) Was data matching available.

Mr Bates answered the above questions informing the Committee that there were three set questions asked after the caller had informed the recipient that they were calling from the Council but the caller did not give their name. He informed Members that when the annual Council Tax was sent to residents there was a provision asking residents to notify the Council of any change in circumstance, including a change in single-person occupancy. He added that data matching was not available at the present time but this was a possible step for the future.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS TO CABINET

Cabinet is now asked to consider the comments of the Service Development and Delivery Committee.

The Committee **RECOMMENDED TO CABINET** that:

- (a) Revenues and Benefits give consideration to a two-yearly renewal rate in which residents have to inform the department whether they wish to retain the single-person discount, if this was not done, the single person discount would go back to the full Council Tax charge;

- (b) The questions to residents were changed especially the 'are you on your own' question which could cause alarm and worry as to whether the call to them was genuine; and
- (c) When residents were completing the application for single occupancy discount that there was an area where the resident could advise the department of the best time that they could be contacted if required.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

Comments will be provided directly at the meeting.