

Simplified CTR Application Processing System

**Radically simplifying the
administration of Council Tax
Reduction in parallel with the
introduction of banded CTR schemes**

OCTOBER 2019

**Victoria
Forms**

Council Tax Reduction in 2019

CTR Administration with Banded Schemes

In April 2019, a small number of English Councils have started to use income banded schemes for Council Tax Reduction (CTR). Many more are looking on with interest, with a substantial number actively working towards introducing a banded scheme themselves from 2020 onwards.

The most obvious advantage with income banded schemes, when compared to schemes based on the Council Tax Benefit (CTB) taper model, is that the managing of a caseload subject to high volumes of small income changes is much easier under a banded scheme. Most fluctuations in income will keep an account within a band, and so will not affect the award, and will not require the issuing of a new council tax bill.

A less obvious advantage is also offered: With banded schemes being a major departure from the highly complicated Council Tax Benefit type means test, councils are free to re-imagine the whole process: from application right through to the ongoing management of CTR accounts.

A banded scheme can be introduced alongside a whole new way of working.

Victoria Forms recognises that every council is likely to take a unique approach to how they implement banded scheme application processing and that these requirements will change over time.

In this expectation, Victoria Forms has designed a general purpose CTR application processing solution, developed in partnership with Basildon Borough Council. The system can be tailored and refined however a council wishes to administer CTR applications.

Victoria Forms CTR Solution

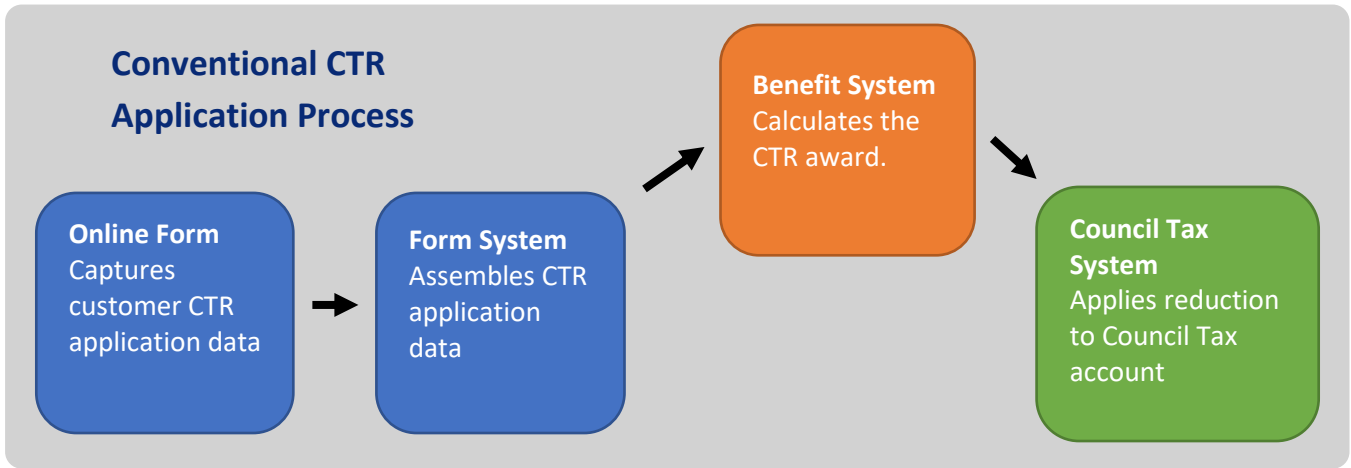
Advanced CTR Processing

In building a bespoke CTR application processing solution we have developed a wealth of modules that can be assembled and configured to build a system that enables any Council to optimise their CTR administration, however they wish to work. Features include:

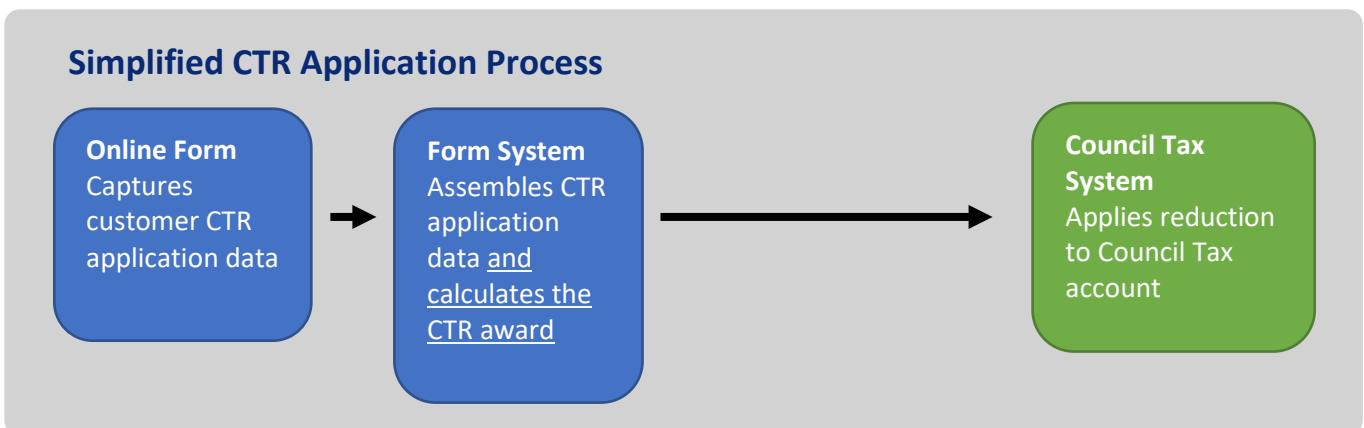
- **Front End-Entitlement Filtering:** Direct users to the most appropriate help.
- **Advanced CTR eForm:** Super smart online form, built to your specification, including calculations to assist the user.
- **Localised Data Capture:** Capture only the data you need to operate your own scheme.
- **Declaration Page:** Legal text and custom information built to your specification.
- **ESignatures:** Legally valid signatures for user authentication and consent.
- **Localised Verification:** Dynamic evidence list, built to your business rules. Request as much or as little evidence as you find useful for your way of working.
- **Document evidence upload:** Users attach evidence to online form, for 100% paper free applications.
- **Calculation Processing:** Our processing system verifies data and calculates band/award according to your scheme.
- **Confirmation screen:** provide custom award information.
- **Letter Generation:** Auto generate letter stating award and basis for calculation.
- **Document System Import:** Forms and attachments pass straight into your workflow.
- **Automated In-Claim Review Process:** Target groups of applicants for review, with online submission of review forms.

Benefit System and Council Tax System

With the conventional application process (below), the benefit system is needed to gather customer information, and then do the calculation. The award itself is dealt with separately in the Council Tax System.



With the Victoria Forms system calculating the Council Tax band (below), the only requirement is to apply the appropriate discount to the account in the council tax system. With minor modifications to the council tax system, in order to deal with CTR bands, this can be done either manually by a member of staff, or where API functionality is in place, the Victoria Forms system can apply the discount directly.



In a radical departure from convention with the new Victoria Forms processing system there is no need to send data into the benefit system, and no need for complicated and time-consuming data entry.

Case Study: Basildon Borough Council

A Radically different Approach to CTR



Basildon Council serves a population of 185,000 citizens in South Essex. Victoria Forms is a long-standing supplier to the Council – providing online forms to the Revenue and Benefits service since 2006.

The first council in the UK to take the lead and fully embrace the entirely new CTR administration method is Basildon Borough Council. From the start of 2018, Victoria Forms worked with Basildon Council to develop a system to deal with the new method. They launched the new process in April 2019. The new way of working is offering much, much easier and much faster processing.

The Application Process

The Basildon CTR process works as follows: When a customer is interested in CTR, they are directed to the council website. Customers are then filtered, to ensure that CTR is appropriate for them. If so, they are then taken to the Victoria Forms online application form.

The CTR application form is far simpler than the traditional 30-40 page form needed to process a claim under a traditional CTB style scheme.

The customer fills in their basic details in the online form. They are then taken through a series of simple questions about their earnings, benefit awards, other income, savings, and the basic circumstances of other household members.

Basildon Council do not require customers to provide information in detail, rather, customers are only required to provide aggregate information (e.g. total net earnings from employment rather than specific details of each job).

- The form provides on-screen calculations to assist the applicant.
- The form checks itself for errors to ensure it is filled-in correctly.
- The user then uploads document or photo evidence of their NINO onto the form.
- The user then views a summary of the application details, and they are presented with a legal declaration to consent to.

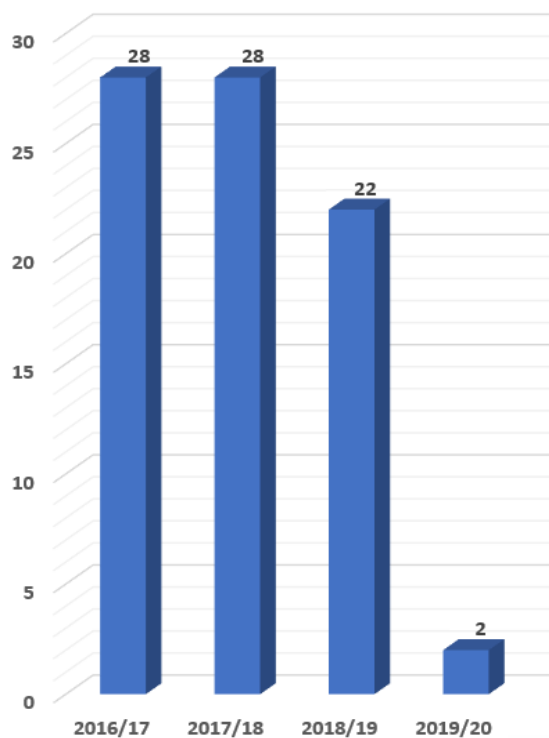
Processing the Reduction

On submission, the Victoria Forms system checks the data, and then runs it through an algorithm designed by Victoria Forms' developers, based on Basildon's CTR scheme. This establishes which income band the applicant falls within. This information is then presented to the applicant, informing them of the value of the monthly bill reduction. The form and attachments then pass into the document workflow system for staff to process.

The unique approach at Basildon is to have the Victoria Forms processing system calculate the CTR Band and appropriate discount code, avoiding the need for a complicated and cumbersome means test. With the discount code confirmed, staff then apply the code directly to the applicant's Councils Tax account. This process completely bypasses the benefit system - a radically simplified process.

Basildon staff are then freed up to provide additional resources in other areas, with a much greater emphasis on in-claim reviews to ensure that those in receipt of CTR are receiving reductions legitimately.

Results



The average time for processing new claims compared to the previous CTB style scheme are shown (left).

In the 3 years before the new scheme, the processing time for new claims averaged 26 days. The 2019/20 figure* fell to just 2 days!

This dramatic shortening of the time between applying for CTR and receiving a revised bill has led to a significant increase in collection rates and a reduction in arrears. Where customers have to wait a whole month or more before receiving a revised bill, they are more likely to struggle to make

a timely first payment. A very quick award applied to the account allows customers to budget effectively and make payment immediately.

**19/20 estimate based on first three months of new process*

Summary of Benefits

This new way of working offers many benefits over the traditional Council Tax Benefit style means test:

- Brings great simplification to administration, dramatically reducing administrative costs.
- Much easier for claimants – greatly simplifying the application process.
- Much, much quicker to process and apply the discount leading to applicants paying their bills more quickly, increasing collection rates.
- More resources focused on in-claim reviews can increase identification of erroneous claims.

Why Victoria Forms?

Victoria Forms has been supplying UK local councils with benefit form systems for 16 years. In building our new CTR solution, we have some key advantages:

- Rapidly developing suite of products built around CTR processing, enable form and process built to Council's exact specifications. Designed to be very flexible to match a council's evolving requirements.
- Victoria Forms unique forms design software and expert forms design team. Highly responsive, knowledgeable, and helpful.
- Have gained great experience in developing and enhancing UKs first simplified CTR processing scheme at Basildon Council.
- Wide range of other products designed to bring efficiencies to Revenue and Benefit Departments.

Simplified CTR Application Processing System

Want to know more?

Please contact the Victoria Forms sales team for an informal discussion about your requirements:

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Email: vfSales@VictoriaForms.com

The logo for Victoria Forms, featuring the company name in white, bold, sans-serif font inside a dark blue oval shape.

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