

# Council

## recoups

### £225k tax

ARUN District Council has recouped £225,000 in tax payments following checks carried out on residents claiming the single person discount.

A total of 24,000 people living in Arun currently claim the 25 per cent tax discount, which is granted to residents aged 18 or over who live by themselves.

Working with the credit reference agency Experian to verify claimants were living alone, the council cancelled tax reductions of 500 people who were found to be incorrectly claiming the discount.

Eighty per cent of the £225,000 pot goes to West Sussex County Council while Arun and Sussex Police get £22,500 apiece.

The checks were carried out between August and November.

Cllr Dudley Wensley, deputy leader of the council and cabinet member for corporate governance, said: "I am delighted the council has recovered such a large amount of money, which can now be ploughed back into the local authorities and police services. The council takes seriously its obligation to be responsible with taxpayers' money by ensuring discounts are claimed fairly."

Arun provides assistance for those struggling to pay council tax. Find out more at [www.arun.gov.uk/counciltax](http://www.arun.gov.uk/counciltax)

# Fraud investigator is off to a flying start, according to the council

A housing fraud investigator was appointed in January and since then has had a real impact on tenancy fraud in the district, according to Arun District Council.

The role of housing fraud investigator is to check applications to join the housing register to see if they are genuine, conduct unannounced visits to tenants suspected of subletting property and carrying out court-approved surveillance.

A council spokesman said: "When appointed in January the aim was for up to ten properties in the Arun district to be brought back into lawful use over a 12 month period."

"Five months on and already nine properties have been recovered. A number of factors have contributed to this result: properties where the tenant was no longer in



Trevor Bence, cabinet member for housing

residence, subletting, alleged housing benefit fraud or single occupancy discount claims from Council Tax.

"We have also prevented two fraudulent applications to the Arun housing register

and a fraudulent right to buy application."

Councillor Trevor Bence, cabinet member for housing at Arun District Council, said: "I am delighted to see the success of this vital role in

action and the positive effect it is having. Social housing is a scarce resource, and homelessness is increasing. Therefore every property we get back from fraudulent use will be allocated to a

household in acute housing need from the Arun housing register.

Arun District Council welcomes help from the public in reporting housing fraud.

You might know somebody who has a home that the Council doesn't know about or has given false information in their housing application.

You might suspect someone of housing fraud having seen them collect rent from neighbours or be suspicious because the tenants of a property are changing frequently.

"You can see what is going on in your neighbourhood and if any of these signs strike a chord, please let the housing fraud team know."

People who live in the Arun district and suspect tenancy fraud should contact the housing fraud investigator on 01323 737878 or email them at [housingfraud@arun.gov.uk](mailto:housingfraud@arun.gov.uk)

## Council first to recover unpaid debt

A woman has been ordered to vacate her property unless she pays £48,923.67 by November 17, in order to repay the debt owed to Arun District Council – the first time the council has taken this step.

Grace Susan Peek, 59, of Shalbourne Road, Gosport, was previously prosecuted by Arun District Council for Housing Benefit fraud for homes in Holtam Gardens and Northcliffe Road, Bognor Regis. This action resulted in a large benefit overpayment, which is due to be paid back to the council.

Peek failed to make any payments, and despite the council having exhausted all options to gain payment, including external bailiffs, the debt remained unpaid. Peek then moved out of the district to Portsmouth where she bought a property outright.

She did not engage with attempts to communicate with her so the council applied for an Order of Sale, which means that Mrs Peek must leave her property in order for it to be sold to repay the debt owed.