

## Housing Benefit Circular

Department for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA

# HB A5/2014

### ADJUDICATION AND OPERATIONS CIRCULAR

<b>WHO SHOULD READ</b>	All Housing Benefit staff
<b>ACTION</b>	For information
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Housing Benefit operational information, performance support and inspection in 2014/15

### Guidance Manual

The information in this circular does not affect the content of the HB/CTB Guidance Manual.

### Queries

- **extra copies of this circular/copies of previous circulars** can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/housing-benefit-for-local-authorities-circulars-2014>
- about the
  - **technical content of this circular**, contact Louise Hughes  
- Email: [Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)
  - **distribution of this circular**, contact  
[housing.correspondenceandpqs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:housing.correspondenceandpqs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

### Crown Copyright 2014

Recipients may freely reproduce this circular.

**Contents**

paragraph

**Housing Benefit operational information, performance support and inspection in 2014/15**

Introduction.....	1
Inspection and reporting arrangements for 2014/15 .....	2
Areas of importance and DWP interests.....	5
Sources of HB operational information .....	6
DWP support to LAs .....	7
Further information .....	9

## **Housing Benefit operational information, performance support and inspection in 2014/15**

### **Introduction**

1. This circular advises that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is proposing no changes to its arrangements for Housing Benefit (HB) in relation to its use of operational performance information, the support it provides or its approach to inspection. We will continue to keep arrangements under review in the light of developments in respect of the delivery of Welfare Reform and the Fraud and Error Strategy.

### **Inspection and reporting arrangements for 2014/15**

2. DWP carried out no inspections in England in 2013/14 but we may do so in 2014/15 should circumstances warrant it:
  - where performance is causing concern and it is considered necessary
  - to produce a report for the Secretary of State; and
  - after a local authority (LA) has been allowed time to improve.
3. If an inspection is undertaken, it will normally be focused on critical issues rather than an assessment of the entire benefit service. Decisions to inspect will be taken separately from those related to the provision of free consultancy support. (For more on support see paragraph 7 below).
4. In Scotland and Wales decisions on audit/inspection and the production of reports rest with the relevant audit bodies. DWP liaises with these audit bodies, as necessary, but assessment and reporting rests with them.

### **Areas of importance and DWP interests**

5. Whilst it is for LAs to decide how best to deliver their HB services, DWP's interests arise from:
  - its funding responsibilities
  - its need to deliver welfare and fraud and error reforms

- the continuing need to ensure the right benefit goes to the right people at the right time, in particular that:
  - HB claims and changes of circumstances are processed speedily and accurately
  - that claims are kept right – to help provide a good service and, in due course, a smooth migration of HB claims to Universal Credit
  - ensuring benefit fraud and error is being tackled – taking action to prevent, detect, correct, punish and deter
  - LAs can provide assurance on the service through their own performance management arrangements and through their provision of information to DWP.

### **Sources of HB operational information**

6. To decide if there is a need to open up any discussions with a LA on HB operational and delivery matters, DWP will draw on the following sources of information:
  - Single Housing Benefit Extract data (e.g. caseload and speed of processing statistics)
  - subsidy returns and any audit qualifications
  - HB Recoveries and Fraud statistics – fraud and overpayment data
  - information on DWP HB data-matching exercises, including LA returns for these
  - national information on the overall monetary value of HB fraud and error
  - other information, such as any relevant reports produced by the audit bodies, correspondence received in DWP and press/media stories.

### **DWP support to LAs**

7. Whilst it is for LAs to decide what sources of support they may wish to draw on to deliver any necessary improvements to their HB service, DWP continues to offer free consultancy support. The Performance Development Team (PDT) can provide support to LAs in England, Scotland and Wales. To find out more about possible PDT support please contact Jacqueline Reed on 07771 844176 or email [jacqueline.reed@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jacqueline.reed@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

8. We will continue to support LAs as they become increasingly involved in the expansion of Universal Credit and will refine our approach in the light of learning from this.

### **Further information**

9. Please send any questions about this circular to [Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)