

Housing Benefit Direct issue 177 July 2017



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Editorial

We are finally out the other side of (double) Purdah and, although work didn't stop for any of us in the interim, certain aspects may have been paused; so it's good to be able to now push on without distraction. Since the last edition of HB Direct, and during this 'downtime', I myself have been out and about meeting and talking to many of you through various forums including the IRRV Spring Conference in Leeds and more recently a Welsh Local Government Association Conference in Cardiff. I find these opportunities really helpful and interesting, particularly in hearing your views and concerns first hand. Not surprisingly there is much reflection on the impact of Universal Credit Full Service from local authorities (LAs). At these events it is encouraging that some LAs are showing that they are adapting to the change and that the impacts have not been as negative as first anticipated. I sense a real willingness from the LAs to make Universal Credit work.

In this edition you'll find more details around the continued rollout of Real Time Information (RTI) through the Wider Use of RTI Project and products made available to you in supporting this. This solution is at the forefront of supporting LAs to effectively tackle Housing Benefit Fraud and Error and both the project and our own LA Support and Security Team are always on hand to help you with its implementation. We're also kicking off the subsidy workshops again, which were a tremendous success previously. I urge anyone new to subsidy to register and, indeed, those seasoned veterans who wish to contribute to continuous improvement in this area.

As previously mentioned, we currently have secondees working on LA performance support, data security and the Public Sector Audit Appointments replacement project and there are opportunities to get involved in these roles as well as funding, communications, and data sharing projects. Across the department, there are secondees working on Universal Credit development and Housing Policy. If you want to know more, please see the call to register your interest below.

Clare Elliott
Head of Housing Delivery Division

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Update: Real Time Information rollout

The Real Time Information (RTI) service is being rolled out across the local authority (LA) network between April and November 2017. To date, 101 LAs have worked with the Wider Use of RTI (WURTI) Project to implement the service.

This article sets out the action that has been taken by LAs to prepare for go-live with the support of the WURTI Project:

- LA Sponsors and Agents were required to authenticate users so that assessors would be able to access the RTI service
- call conferences were provided to talk both Sponsor and Agent through their actions as well as supplying written guidance
- Implementation Managers from the Project team also worked with nominated LA Single Point of Contacts (SPoCs) to ensure that authentication action had been taken and provide LAs with a named contact point
- call conferences were made available to discuss the background and purpose of the RTI service; including information on what the service can and cannot be used for. The required action to be taken by the SPoC in preparing for rollout of the service into their LA was also discussed
- further call conferences took place demonstrating the RTI service. Team leaders and assessors were invited and all attendees found it very useful in showing them what the service looked like and how to use it
- training material was provided in advance of rollout to allow assessors to be trained in readiness for go-live

Feedback from LAs regarding this approach has been positive with all calls being well attended. Feedback has been used to update training material with the updated versions now available in Glasscubes.

The next 51 sites to rollout have already been contacted by Implementation Managers from the Project, in readiness for their go-live date of 17 July 2017. Conference calls have been booked and will be taking place in early July.

If you have any questions regarding the content of this article you can email rtiprojects.portfolioqueries@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

RTI awareness aid for LAs

RTI is the HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) system for collecting Pay as You Earn information from employers and pension providers, who are required to provide HMRC with income details immediately after each payment they make.

The Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP's) business rules supporting the collection of RTI data from HMRC has been running for a number of years; with the latest issue of the mandatory Bulk Data Match and Optional RTI referrals recommencing in May 2017.

In response to feedback from LAs we have developed an RTI awareness aid which will provide LAs with clear up to date information on how the process works and in doing so, help support staff in the processing of RTI referrals.

The awareness aid has been published on www.gov.uk. If you have any enquiries about the RTI process please contact us by email la-sst.hdd@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Glasscubes

We would like to remind all LAs to use our online communication tool 'Glasscubes' in order to keep up to date with the latest information surrounding data sharing with DWP. You can find the information in the 'local authority data share (all LAs) workspace'. Glasscubes also provides a forum to start and join in discussions between LAs, DWP and LA software providers.

Important documents, learning and development packs and frequently asked questions are regularly posted in the 'local authority data share (all LAs) workspace' in the 'Files' section of Glasscubes. Each data sharing strand has a separate folder in the 'Files' section with important documents saved in each.

We encourage LAs to review their members and ensure they are making good use of the facilities.

If you have any feedback or suggestions on how we can improve Glasscubes please contact la-sst.hdd@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Memorandum of Understanding between DWP and LAs

We recently gained agreement from the Practitioners' Operational Group to extend, until further notice, the duration of the current 'Handling and protection of Department for Work and Pensions' customer data' Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between DWP and LAs, which was set to expire on 31 March 2017. Therefore the current version of the MoU will remain in force until superseded.

Our reason for doing this is that in recent months, government-wide reports of impending changes to the Public Service Network (PSN) connection has meant that some LAs have been exploring alternative email solutions. DWP is currently progressing urgent work to fully understand the implications of a move away from the PSN, whilst continuing to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the information shared over the internet.

For further information on the content of this article please contact hbsdsecurity.team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

LA subsidy workshops

We are proposing to hold a series of subsidy workshops in 2017/18. Subject to expressions of interest, we hope to hold these workshops in geographically convenient locations for attendees.

As in 2016/17, we intend to hold separate workshops for LA staff new to subsidy and for LA staff more experienced in subsidy. Each type of workshop is dealt with separately below.

Workshops for LA staff new to subsidy

These workshops will provide an introduction to subsidy, focusing on:

- the arrangements for claiming and payment of subsidy
- applicable deadlines
- the mechanics of the final subsidy claim form
- the responsibilities of LAs, including the completion and oversight of subsidy forms
- the department and auditors
- an overview of certification arrangements

Anyone wishing to attend one of these workshops should email Michael Mina at michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk and confirm that interest is being expressed in the workshop for LA staff new to subsidy.

Workshops for LA staff more experienced in subsidy

It is intended that these workshops will focus primarily on certification/assurance issues but we are keen to also address those issues of concern to LAs.

Anyone wishing to attend one of these workshops should email Michael Mina at michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk and confirm that interest is being expressed in the workshop for LA staff more experienced in subsidy. Additionally, we would be grateful if these expressions of interest could also suggest specific subjects/issues which you would like to discuss.

Secondment Opportunities: DWP HDD

The department is currently undertaking a huge programme of welfare reform. Working with LAs, who are one of our major stakeholders, continues to feature heavily and for this reason we value the expertise and knowledge that LA Housing Benefit (HB) experts can bring to the team. These secondment opportunities will in turn provide an opportunity to gain an insight and experience of policy development and workings of central government.

DWPs' Housing Delivery Division (HDD) has had a programme of bringing HB experts from LAs in to work alongside Data Sharing, Subsidy, Change and Performance teams on secondment. We are now looking to register your interest for further secondment opportunities over the coming months.

HDD comprises of approximately 100 staff. The division is responsible for overseeing the performance of LAs in their delivery of HB (circa £24 billion), allocating HB administration subsidy (circa £260 million) and Discretionary Housing Payments (circa £125 million). HDD monitor a range of performance data including how quickly and accurately HB is paid and the prevention and detection of fraud and error. HDD offer support and challenge to those LAs not meeting performance expectations.

It also supports a large program of data sharing activity that is paramount in helping LAs pay the correct amount of HB and is heavily involved in managing change activity supporting the welfare reform agenda.

This is an exciting opportunity to play a leading role in maintaining and improving stakeholder relationships between DWP and LAs and in designing innovative opportunities for closer working during this busy and complex period of welfare reform.

Personal requirements

Candidates should possess the following:

- good understanding of HB procedures and regulations
- good drafting and communication skills
- ability to build and maintain effective working relationships with LAs and other stakeholders
- ability to work with people at different levels in the organisation and to work as part of a team to achieve results
- ability to deliver work at pace and with successful, quantifiable outcomes

Further Information

Secondment posts would be offered for 6 months initially but this would be reviewed at the end of the period and could be extended for up to a maximum of two years. The posts would be full-time and based across the country, although no moves at public expense would be considered. These opportunities will be determined by business need so your CV will be kept on file and you will be contacted once a suitable opportunity arises.

If you are keen to register your interest and are at S01/S02/SO3 and Pay Band level 4 or equivalent, (roughly equates to civil service HEO/SEO/G7 grades) please:

- check with your LA that you could be released; and then
- send your CV by email to Philip.j.sharples@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

If you would like to have a chat about this opportunity you can telephone Phil Sharples on 0113 23 24905.