

## Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Circular

Department for Work and Pensions

1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA

# HB/CTB A2/2012

### ADJUDICATION AND OPERATIONS CIRCULAR

<b>WHO SHOULD READ</b>	All Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) staff
<b>ACTION</b>	For information
<b>SUBJECT</b>	HB/CTB operational information, performance support and inspection in 2012/13

### Guidance Manual

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

### Queries

If you

- want **extra copies of this circular/copies of previous circulars**, they can be found on the website at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/user-communications/hbctb-circulars/>
- have any queries 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)

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## **HB/CTB operational information, performance support and inspection in 2012/13**

### **Introduction**

1. This circular has been prepared to advise that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is proposing no significant changes to its arrangements for inspection or its use of operational performance information in respect of Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB). We will keep the arrangements under review however to take account of developments in respect of Welfare Reform and the delivery of the Fraud and Error Strategy.
2. It reflects the fact that local authorities (LAs) will need to deliver an effective benefit service through a period of change and into 2017/18.

### **Inspection and reporting arrangements for 2012/13**

3. In summary, in England we will carry out an inspection of an HB service:
  - where performance is causing concern and it is considered necessary to produce a report for the Secretary of State; and
  - after an LA has been allowed time to improve.
4. Inspections will normally be focused on critical performance issues rather than an assessment of the entire benefit service.
5. Decisions to inspect will be taken separately from those related to the provision of free consultancy support. (For more on support see paragraph 9 below).
6. 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**

7. Whilst it is for LAs to decide how best to deliver their HB/CTB services, DWP has interests because of its funding responsibilities and the need to deliver overarching policies and strategies. There is a continuing need to ensure the right benefit goes to the right people at the right time, in particular that:
  - claims and changes of circumstances are processed speedily and accurately and are kept right – balancing speed of processing with efforts to keep the gateway secure and minimise incorrect payments during the course of a claim;
  - ensuring 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 operational information**

8. DWP will continue to use the following information to inform on operational and performance matters to open discussions with LAs:

- Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) data (e.g. caseload and speed of processing statistics);
- subsidy returns and any audit qualifications;
- HB Recoveries and Fraud statistics – fraud and overpayment data;
- DWP data-matching exercises - LA returns for these;
- National level information on the overall monetary value of fraud and error;
- other information, including any relevant reports produced by the audit bodies, Local Government Ombudsman, correspondence received in the Department, press/media stories, any information LAs or the Local Government Group may choose to publish themselves or provide directly to DWP.

### **Performance Development Team (PDT) support**

9. Whilst it is for LAs to decide what sources of support they may wish to draw on to deliver any necessary improvements to their benefit service, DWP continues to offer free consultancy support. PDT can provide support to LAs in England, Scotland and Wales.

### **Further information**

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