

Editorial

Lots of progress to report on in this month's HB Direct. The Local Authority (LA) - led pilots are well underway and the Local Support Services Framework has been published. Both of these initiatives provide the opportunity for LAs to show just how much value they can add in ensuring the successful launch and delivery of Universal Credit. This recognition of the importance of LA involvement is the result of a lot of collaborative working and tireless input from your national representative groups and individuals who have participated on various working groups and project boards. A big thank you to all concerned. We can now start making Universal Credit even more of a reality through the development of local partnership agreements.

Everything looks set for the launch of localised welfare support in April. It will be important for DWP and LAs to work together closely to ensure claimants know how the new arrangements affect them but everything I've seen suggests these relationships are working effectively. We've also ensured you have the data sharing arrangements you need to deliver this new service.

We've also got another secondment opportunity. I can't under emphasise how invaluable it is to have recent Housing Benefit expertise directly informing our data sharing work. I appreciate it is not easy to release staff when we are going through so much change and financial pressures but I'd really appreciate your support on this please. I have been incredibly impressed by the standard of secondees we've had thus far and I'd like to think they always return to their authority with a wider range of skills that benefit them as individuals and the Council as a whole.

Finally, you can't deliver all of this without funding so don't forget to return your subsidy and Discretionary Housing Payment claims by 30 April!

Very best wishes.

Bill Hern

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Distribution enquiries

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Changes to the Loss of Benefit penalty regime

The HB/CTB General Information Bulletin G1/2013 alerted you to the publication of a Loss of Benefit Factsheet to provide you with more information on the new tougher penalty regime. This is now available here;

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/loss-of-benefit-changes-for-claimant-fraud-jan13.pdf>

If you have any queries or feedback please email:

Fraudanderror.lossofbenefits@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS)

From 01 February 2013 LAs will no longer be able to contact the HBMS team on the old Helpline telephone number. If you need to speak to one of the team please call directly on one of the following numbers and we will be happy to help-

Jenny Nugent	01253 688505
Angie Parkinson	01253 688506
Anne Scott	01253 688519

We are also recommencing the issue of Risk Scored Review reports and Personal Details Verification reports from the beginning of February. You should have already received updates about these reports; but if you have any queries please contact us.

hbms@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Universal Credit LA-led pilots

In August 2012, Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform, announced Birmingham City Council as one of the 12 successful LAs to undertake one of the Universal Credit (UC) LA-led pilots initiatives, since then things have been moving at pace within Birmingham City Council.

On 6 February an article was published in DWP's Touchbase <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/touchbase-ezine-february-2013.pdf> on-line magazine about the LA-led pilot in Birmingham City Council.

If you want to find out more about the pilots, or have a question about the work that is being undertaken in the pilot authorities, why not drop us an email at laled.pilots@dwp.gsi.gov.uk or check the DWP Local Authority web pages

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local%2Dauthority%2Dstaff/universal%2Dcredit%2Dinformation/>

Universal Credit Local Support Services Framework

The Government has published the “Universal Credit Local Support Services Framework”, the result of careful working between the DWP and colleagues in the Local Government Association (LGA), Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and Welsh Local Government Associations (WLGA), and with input from LA representatives.

The Framework will be put in place for the launch of UC in 2013, to help claimants who may require extra support to access UC. The Framework explains who may need help; what services they may need; and how, through locally developed partnerships, these services will be provided.

The Framework can be viewed on: www.dwp.gov.uk/ucla

The Framework will go live from October 2013 till 2014, and will be refined and updated over the coming months to create a refreshed version for 2014/15. This will be informed by feedback from LAs and other delivery partners; learning from the 12 LA-led pilots, the six demonstration projects and our experience of the Pathfinder operating in the North West. The Framework applies to Great Britain as a whole, but as it develops we expect it to start to reflect any varying needs and conditions, regionally and in Scotland and Wales.

We welcome your comments on the framework. These can be sent to localservices.framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Call for ideas

DWP ministers launched a call for ideas <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2013/labour-market-interventions.shtml> on 21 January on helping people in work to increase their earnings.

UC will ensure work always pays, and as people work more, they are able to keep more of their increased earnings. It also means DWP will work with a wider group of claimants than ever before, including people who are working but earning less than could reasonably be expected.

There is little evidence on what approach would be most effective to help people increase their earnings. We plan to test a range of approaches to develop an understanding of what works well.

This work will benefit from your ideas and expertise. Your comments on the following be very useful:

- What ideas could DWP trial to best support people in work, in receipt of UC, to:
 - increase their earnings, where they could reasonably be expected to earn more?
 - develop their skills and qualifications?
 - take positive steps to achieve financial independence, both in the tax credit system and when UC is introduced?
- How could DWP trial ideas that would support employers to promote training, development and progression opportunities for low paid employees who are claiming UC or tax credits, and have the potential to work more?

Please send your responses to uc.newapproaches@dwp.gsi.gov.uk by 25 March.

Local Authority Data Sharing (LADS) Delivery Team update

The Team is currently on schedule to deliver the following

- Benefit Cap data – 15 April 2013 to the initial four LAs, with other LAs coming on board in a staggered approach. You will be notified directly by the Benefit Cap project of your go-live date in due course
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP) – 28 May 2013. Implementation has been delayed due to an issue being identified in internal DWP testing. PIP will still go-live 8 April 2013.
- Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD) Replacement, using the existing ATLAS infrastructure. This is scheduled for 28 May 2013 go-live as agreed with LAs and IT suppliers at the LADS Delivery Team Subgroup
- ATLAS CIS interest refresh – This is currently scheduled by early April (exact weekend to be confirmed). Please ensure appropriate processes are put in place locally to keep these interests maintained.

NB: Please liaise directly with the PIP or Benefit Cap project if you have any queries that do not relate to the ATLAS/Data Sharing aspect.

ATLAS notifications will include ETD data from 28 May 2013 and will use both ATLAS and ETD CIS interests. To ensure the correct customer data is provided LAs must maintain both interests until the interest reconciliation scheduled for late 2013. More information on the HB/Local Council Tax Reduction CIS interest reconciliation work will be provided in due course. See Huddle for guidance

about current interest maintenance, included in the Revised Awareness Pack.

If you have any queries please use the LA Data Share (All LAs) Huddle workspace, or contact us via: LADS.DELIVERYTEAM@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK, using your GSx/GCSx.e-mail, or use the contact details on the LADS ATLAS webpage <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/claims-processing/hb-information-flows-programme/atlas-project/>.

Fraud on the Knowledge Hub

As part of the development of the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), we have decided to use Knowledge Hub as a primary communications channel. Knowledge Hub is the LGA's professional social network which helps people in local government connect and share online in a secure environment. With a large volume of LA staff already benefiting from membership of Knowledge Hub, it is the ideal vehicle for SFIS to reach relevant stakeholders and share information. The SFIS group contains a range of FAQ documents and SFIS newsletters, and is updated on a regular basis.

If you are not already a member of Knowledge Hub, membership is free and can be gained by registering at <http://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk> - the SFIS group can be located by clicking on 'Groups' in the top right of the page and then entering 'SFIS' in the search box.

For further information contact singlefraudinvestigationsservice-queries@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

DWP Huddle Cloud Based Collaboration update

Further to our letter of Friday 25 January 2013 about an issue with Huddle which required a housekeeping exercise to remove duplicate, but unaccepted, invitations. This action was completed by Huddle support on Monday 28 January. No invitations issued prior to Tuesday 29 January will now work. To activate your access to Huddle please follow the following steps:

1. We suggest using the e-mail address you most use to register your Huddle. This often is the standard (non-GSX/GCSX) e-mail. Send a Huddle invite request to LADS.DELIVERYTEAM@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK. We will then send a new invitation.
NB: Each user needs an individual invitation – you cannot send on your invitation to another user.
2. If you have received a new invitation (issued from Tuesday 29 January) but the invitation link does not work, try the following before e-mailing the team for more help:
 - a. If you have received the e-mail to a GSx/GCSx e-mail address, forward the invitation e-mail to another e-mail address and accept from there. You can register to any e-mail address, but it must be an address which shows your LA, or the account could be deleted;
 - b. Check to see if you can access this webpage: <https://dwp.huddle.net>. If you cannot you need to liaise with you local LA IT as it is probably your local settings/firewall preventing you from accessing the page. *If you cannot access this page there is no further help we can give.*
 - c. If you can access the page, but the invitation link does not work your local IT should be able to help. However if there are still problems please contact the LADS Delivery Team and provide some details of your issue and we will get back to you.

We will be using Huddle as an important communication route between DWP, LAs and your IT Suppliers, so please gain access as soon as possible. Please note, there is no cost to the LA in using Huddle. Please ensure you have read and understood the conditions of use document available on the Huddle workspace.

Further Workspaces

Once we have ensured all LAs have signed up to the LA Data Share (All LAs) workspace we will begin to issue invitations to your individual LA IT Supplier workspaces (Civica, Northgate, Northgate Orbis and Capita).

If you wish to receive an invitation to Huddle please e-mail your request to the LADS Delivery Team. If you are an e-SEF user please contact the LA-ST team on: LA-SST.HDD@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK to arrange Huddle access.

If you have any queries about Huddle please use the discussion functionality. If your issue is with accessing Huddle please contact Glen via: LADS.DELIVERYTEAM@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK, using your GSx/GCSx.e-mail, or by telephone: 01253 689482.

Reminder – Subsidy/Discretionary Housing Payments Deadline 30 April 2013

Subsidy Claims

The deadline for LA submission of the 2012/13 HB/CTB initial final subsidy claim is **30 April 2013**. All LAs should take appropriate action to ensure that this deadline is met. Usual subsidy withholding arrangements will apply for any LA which does not meet the deadline and extensions will be granted in exceptional circumstances only. The subsidy-related deadline for referral of cases to the Rent Officer is also **30 April 2013**. The deadline for auditor-certified final claims remains 30 November 2013.

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) Claims

The deadline for the submission of the 2012/13 DHP final claim is **30 April 2013**. Again, LAs should take appropriate action to ensure that this deadline is met.

DHP Funding

In the previous financial year LAs were permitted to carry-over unspent 2011/12 DHP funding into 2012/13 due to transitional protection measures which delayed the impact on LAs. For the financial year 2012/13, no similar delayed impact on LAs resulting from welfare reforms is expected, so for 2012/13, we will not permit any carry-over of unspent DHP funding into 2013/14.

The deadline of **30 April 2013** for subsidy and DHP claims will help ensure that wider governmental accounting arrangements are satisfied and HM Treasury requirements are met.

Any enquiries should be e-mailed to: michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Social Fund Reform

With April fast approaching we continue to work closely with English upper tier LAs and with the Scottish and Welsh Governments over their plans to introduce new provision following the abolition of Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants (as outlined in the March and November 2012 issues of HB Direct).

Last year we held a series of workshops with representatives from 150 English LAs and associated DWP districts. The purpose of these workshops was to share information, discuss plans and to develop local contacts between DWP and LAs. Separate liaison meetings have also taken place between DWP and the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

Since the workshops we have:

- obtained approval for current LA HB staff who have access to CIS to be able to use the details held in respect of applications for the new provision
- obtained permission from HM Revenue & Customs that any of their data held on CIS can also be shared for the new provision
- made preparations to update the relevant data sharing Memorandum of Understanding between DWP and LAs
- published additional information on our Social Fund Reform internet page (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/social-fund-reform/>) to help LAs and the Devolved Administrations develop your plans
- transferred 'start-up' funding for the new provision to English upper tier LAs and to the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

The Government's localism agenda provides the opportunity for LAs and the Devolved Administrations to be innovative over the new support they will provide. So far some of the ideas for this provision involve grant, voucher, or loan schemes, with delivery being directly by LAs, through third sector organisations or via contracted partners. We are working with LAs and the Scottish and Welsh Governments to ensure that the position in each area is understood by LAs and DWP so that customers are given the right support, from the right person at the right time.

From February 2013 we will begin informing anyone enquiring about Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants that these will no longer be available from 1 April 2013. We will also be advising customers of services still available to them (from DWP) before signposting them to other provision available within their local area.

These changes involve England, Scotland and Wales. Information on the position in Northern Ireland can be obtained from the Department for Social Development's website at: www.dsdni.gov.uk.

For further information or any queries please contact Social.Fund@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Secondment Opportunities: Business, Change Security and Support Team

There are secondment opportunities within the Business Change, Security and Support Team, which feeds into the LA Data Sharing Programme.

We recognise that there are areas where LAs would find it useful to have access to DWP data and some areas where DWP would benefit from access to LA data. We have a programme to bring the delivery of data sharing initiatives together within Housing Delivery Division.

The immediate tasks in hand are to enhance current data sharing arrangements to:

- smooth the introduction of UC by making sure LAs know when to stop paying HB and when UC has started
- smooth the introduction of Pension Credit Plus (PCP) by making sure LAs know when to stop paying HB and when PCP has started
- ensure LAs know when payments of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) cease and PIP/Armed Forces Independence Payments start
- help with the delivery of the benefit cap
- share data with LAs to help them administer Localised Council Tax Reduction (LCTR) schemes
- share data with LAs to help them administer DHP and the Local Welfare Provision
- ensure we have staff available to deal with an increase in enquiries due to the new data-sharing arrangements

The team need to:

- fully understand the requirements and how they will affect LAs
- impact the change across DWP by drafting High Level Business Requirements
- understand the current data-sharing arrangements and consider how they can be enhanced
- act as LA Subject Matter Experts at UC, PCP, LTSR, PIP workshops
- answer enquiries from LAs accurately and provide support

We need people with a good working knowledge, from the LA perspective, of the current data sharing arrangements to assist with this work. A range of skills, experience of working on project teams would help, but essentially we need people with good communication skills who are able to understand complex issues; explain themselves clearly in writing and orally and who are good team workers able to work collaboratively and productively with a range of partners.

The team is based in Blackpool and posts are available immediately and are offered for an initial period of six months. If you are interested in this career development opportunity please check with your LA that you can be released and then submit your CV to brian.brighthouse1@dwp.gsi.gov.uk by 28 February 2013. If you would like to know before applying please feel free to speak to Brian on 01253 689434