

Housing Benefit Direct issue 135 March 2013



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Editorial

Welcome to another edition of Housing Benefit Direct. By the time of the next edition we'll be well underway with the biggest changes to the welfare state in over 60 years.

We've articles about Personal Independence Payment, Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap below but I'm conscious that this is also a huge month in terms of the introduction of local welfare support, local council tax reduction schemes, the removal of the spare room subsidy (under-occupancy measure) a much increased Discretionary Housing Payment budget and, of course, the Universal Credit Pathfinder starts. Also, let's not forget you need to continue providing an essential service to around 5 million people who are dependent on you for prompt and accurate payment of Housing Benefit.

These really are historic times and pose unprecedented challenges to benefit services across Great Britain. I'd like to thank you all for the planning and preparation that you've put in place in order to deliver all of this change. Particular thanks go to those local authorities who volunteered to test some of these changes or supplied secondees. Thanks also to individuals who have given up their time to attend meetings, comment on papers and so on. I'm conscious that this editorial is starting to read like an Oscar acceptance speech but I'd like to end by giving thanks to the various national representative groups such as the Local Authority Associations Steering Group and the Transition Working Group who have represented Housing Benefit interests by providing vigorous challenge, expertise and insight as well as their valuable time. We couldn't have delivered such a momentous amount of change without your input.

We've lots of challenges ahead but I'd like to think the fact that we've got to where we are represents the very highest level of close and effective partnership working between central and local Government. Many thanks.

Bill Hern

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[Distribution enquiries](#)

DWP Huddle update

Huddle is a Cloud Based Collaboration tool which the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has utilised to assist local authorities (LAs) in respect of Housing Benefit/local Council Tax reduction (HB/LCTR) customer data sharing. The majority of LAs are now registered and using Huddle. The immediate benefits of Huddle are the library of documentation available in one place, and the discussion forum to quickly highlight and address issues and incidents, as well as to share best practice.

The “LA Data Share (All LAs)” workspace now has nearly 1,000 LA staff registered and for this reason the Local Authority Support Team (LAST) will now **only** issue any Customer Information System (CIS), Data Transport Appliance (DTA), Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD) or Automated Transfer to Local Authority Systems (ATLAS) ‘global’ email notifications via the ‘Whiteboard’ on Huddle. This will continue to provide all users who are registered with an email prompt, albeit via Huddle.

A selection of LAST forms/templates are now available via the ‘Files’ tab on Huddle. The specific Information Technology (IT) supplier (Northgate, Northgate Orbis, Civica and Capita) workspaces will be made available by mid-March 2013. Please remember to use the same username and password for all Huddle invitations.

We wish to remind all LA users not to add any sensitive/restricted data or full Internet Protocol (IP) addresses to Huddle or send similar from their non-secure “gov.uk” email addresses. These must be sent via GCSX/GSX/GSE and GSI domains.

If you would like further information about Huddle or additional invites, please send your requests to:

la-sst.hdd@dpw.gsi.gov

Preparing for the introduction of Personal Independence Payment

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will be replaced by Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for people aged 16 to 64 on or after 8 April 2013. From 8 April, new claims for PIP start for people living in a controlled start postcode: BL, CA, CH (except CH1 and CH4-8), CW, DH, DL (except DL6-11), FY, L, LA (except LA27, LA28, LA62, LA63), M, NE, PR, SR, TS (except TS9), WA and WN.

From 10 June 2013, new claims for PIP will start for the remaining parts of the country. There will be no new claims to DLA for people aged 16 to 64 years of age.

Order a stock of new and updated [DWP leaflets](#) in time for new claims in your area and please stop issuing ‘DLA 1A Adult’ and ‘DLA 1 Adult’ forms. Don’t forget to stop issuing the old DLA leaflet (code *DWP016* or *DWP016w*) at the same time. You can still use DLA forms for children.

Direct claimants should go to www.gov.uk/pip or telephone 0845 850 3322, textphone 0845 601 6677 (Monday to Friday 8am to 6pm) for the latest PIP information.

The [PIP Toolkit for support organisations](#) can help your organisation prepare for PIP. Send any questions or comments to:

pip.feedback@dpw.gsi.gov.uk

The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendment) Regulations 2013

A package of amendment regulations have been published, which include a number of provisions affecting HB and Council Tax Benefit (CTB). A full copy of the regulations can be found at:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2013/443/made>

The provisions that specifically relate to HB/CTB are as follows:

- Following the introduction of new local schemes providing support with Council Tax and local welfare provision, regulations are updated to ensure that such support is disregarded as income and capital.
- To correct an omission, HB Regulations for people of pension age now confirm that arrears of Social Fund award are fully disregarded.
- Claimants who are delayed moving into a new tenancy following an application for local welfare provision can receive payments for any housing costs for which they would be entitled to at the new address, for up to four weeks prior to moving in.
- To ensure regulations meet the policy intent, regulations are corrected to confirm that where a HB claimant is simultaneously remanded while serving a sentence for another offence, the claimant should only receive HB for a maximum of 13 weeks.
- To ensure regulations meet the policy intent, regulations are corrected to confirm that where an Employment and Support Allowance credits-only claimant is entitled to HB and is placed in the work-related activity group or the support group they should be entitled to the corresponding component in HB.

Universal Credit Workshops

On 1 February a Universal Credit (UC) workshop took place between DWP and LAs in order to actively involve LAs in the design of UC where LAs could be involved. Sixteen LAs from across Great Britain attended.

We highly value the expertise and insight that LAs can bring to the design of UC especially around:

- Signposting of claimants
- New Claims to UC
- Change of circumstances for UC claimants
- Fraud and error in UC
- Data sharing between LAs and DWP in UC
- Personal budgeting proposals for claimants

We are delighted to confirm a further workshop will be held on 20 March 2013 with other workshops to be conducted shortly.

If you would like to keep in touch with this work as it develops, please contact:

uclocalauthority.liaison@wp.gsi.gov.uk

Universal Credit Chief Executive

David Pitchford has started work as the interim Chief Executive for the UC Programme.

David, Head of the Major Projects Authority in the Cabinet Office, has been appointed to the role following the death of Philip Langsdale at Christmas. He is a highly experienced leader of major projects on a global scale.

The move will help ensure the continued preparation for the early roll-out of Pathfinder in April, the progressive national roll-out from October, and plans for full migration to UC by 2017.

During the next three months, David's main objective is a clear blueprint and transition plan that will enable the safe and successful completion to UC by 2017, working closely with LAs as one of our key delivery partners.

David has a number of set priorities to drive forward the delivery of UC. These include making sure no stone is left unturned in preparing for the pathfinder, ensuring the right leadership and capabilities are in place in the Programme and ensuring there is a smooth and controlled migration to UC.

LAs will have a crucial role in ensuring UC is a transformative change for their better. The Programme will continue to work closely with LAs in the design and delivery of UC, drawing on their skills and expertise to support claimants back into work, for example through accessing on-line services, budgeting support, and support for claimants with complex needs.

Housing Benefit Matching Service

Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) needs your help!

With the end of the financial year fast approaching we are keen to receive all outstanding results, to accurately reflect our performance for the past year. Please ensure you have returned all your results so we can upload them before year end. If you need to speak to a member of the team regarding this or any other matter please call us on one of the numbers below:

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

hbms@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Benefit Cap Update

Phased roll-out of the benefit cap from April 2013

The four LAs involved in the phased roll-out from April 13 are Bromley, Croydon, Enfield and Haringey. The DWP Benefit Cap Calculation Team will work out of the Belfast Benefit Centre and provide benefit cap notifications via ATLAS. This team will be in place for the 15 April 2013 “go live” date.

Named LA contacts will be issued with the next data scans from 13 March 2013, they contain a full list of all claimants potentially affected by the cap at the time the scans were run. Data for these scans will be sourced from the 31 January 2013 Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE). If you do not receive yours by 19 March 2013 please contact benefit.cap@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Direct Mail letters have been sent to individual claimants providing information about how the benefit cap may affect them, and identifying potential cap amounts within set bandwidths. In early February Direct Mail letters were sent to all claimants in the 4 phased roll-out LAs. At the same time, a Direct Mail letter was sent to all new (onflow) claimants not linked to the four phased roll-out LAs. A further Direct Mail will be sent to all national stock and on-flow claimants (identified on March 2013 scan) in March 2013 advising them of the national roll-out programme. Further decisions on any additional letters will be communicated separately.

We are working with the 4 LAs that are going live in April 2013 to determine any issues of accuracy with the data scan. We will communicate the findings from this exercise in a future publication.

The Benefit Cap project team are working closely with the LA IT suppliers as each of the main 3 suppliers have at least one LA going live in April 2013. The timeline to deliver the LA IT remains unchanged since the announcement of phased roll-out. However, phased roll-out clearly provides us with the opportunity to test the IT in a controlled environment.

National roll-out of the benefit cap

The remaining LAs will start to implement the cap from the 15 July 2013, with all appropriate households capped by the end of September 2013. The cap will start to be applied through Universal Credit when claimants make new claims or are migrated to that benefit from October 2013.

If you have any questions please email:

benefit.cap@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Secondment Opportunity: DWP Housing Policy Division

An opportunity has arisen in the Housing Policy Division (HPD) for up to three LA employees to join us on secondment. The work will involve supporting various teams in this Division.

There is a huge programme of welfare reform already underway and ensuring this is delivered on time presents a big challenge to the Department. Working with LAs who are one of our major stakeholders features heavily within this. The value you can bring to the team will be in your understanding of how LAs are organised and being able to provide a LA perspective. This will also provide you with an opportunity to gain experience of the role of central government.

Some of the work involves supporting policy teams on the change agenda. The successful candidates can expect to learn a great deal about how Ministers and officials develop policy options, consult and reach agreement on them across government, with the sector and with LAs across Great Britain and will be expected to use and develop a wide range of skills to analyse, develop, compare explain and defend policy options. In addition there will be work relating to liaison with stakeholders, particularly LAs, and helping to update HB Guidance in preparation for a redesign of the website.

Person requirements

- Good understanding of income related benefits such as HB
- 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

The posts are being offered for 6 months initially but this will be reviewed at the end of the period and could be extended for up to a maximum of two years. The posts are full time and based in Caxton House, Westminster. We do not want to deter candidates from outside of London applying, and therefore will consider some remote working where this fits in with the business need. In addition we are able to offer some help with travel expenses if additional costs are incurred.

We would like the successful candidates to be able to start at the end of April or early May 2013. If you are interested in applying, and are at S01/S02/PO1/PO2 level or equivalent, (roughly equates to civil service HEO grade) or can demonstrate that you have the necessary skills, please send your CV by email to me by **28 March 2013**. Interviews will be held during the first week in April.

Carol.Foster-Middleton@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

If you would like to have a chat about this opportunity please call me on 0207 449 5325