

Housing Benefit Direct issue 139 July 2013



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Editorial

This edition of HB Direct includes news about the expansion of the Universal Credit pathfinder. There's also a content outline of the recently published Benefit cap statistics for the first authorities in the phased rollout which you can access from the newsletter.

News too of more changes to the Government Secure Internet (GSI) systems through the summer. There will be work to do in each local authority to meet the necessary compliance standards ahead of the transition to the Public Services Network (PSN).

Lastly Lord Freud set out the process for safeguarding rent payments in Universal Credit from the Direct Payment Demonstration Projects.

This will be my last editorial for HB Direct as I'll be moving on from the team this month. Clare Elliott will be taking on the Housing Delivery role in my stead. Clare has lots of relevant experience of working across the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and with local government and is looking forward to meeting many of you over the summer. I have very much enjoyed working with you over the last two years as we've continued to improve the delivery of Housing Benefit alongside preparing for, and delivering, significant housing costs policy change and welfare reforms. I wish you well in the continuing journey.

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[Distribution enquiries](#)

Universal Credit: protection for tenants and landlords

Speaking at the Chartered Institute of Housing Annual Conference in Manchester, Lord Freud outlined the support for Universal Credit claimants who will receive direct housing payments, how DWP will work with social landlords to identify tenants who should be exempt and when action will be taken if tenants fall into arrears.

Lord Freud said:

“Letting claimants pay their own rent is an important way of breaking down barriers to help people into work. I believe that these measures strike the right balance between ensuring that both the tenant and landlord are protected, but also gives individuals some time to get to grips with direct payments.”

Three levels of protection will exist:

- decisions about whether tenants should receive direct payments will be made in collaboration with social landlords
- if arrears build up to the equivalent of 1 month’s rent the decision to make direct payments will be reviewed
- if arrears reach the equivalent of 2 months rent, the claimant will have housing payments switched to the landlord, or managed payments

Lord Freud added:

“The key to making direct payments work will be our on-going collaboration with landlords, but I am determined that managed rent payments should not be a permanent solution. Once arrears have been paid, we will look to return tenants to direct payments, with the right support in place.

Once arrears have been cleared, the DWP will work with landlords to return tenants to direct payments.

In most cases, following the tenant being offered budgeting support, they will return to direct payments within 6 months of the arrears being paid off.”

These safeguards were developed following findings from the Direct Payment Demonstration Projects that are currently running in 6 areas across Britain.

For more information about Universal credit go to <https://www.gov.uk/universal-credit>

Universal Credit Pathfinder expansion

The Universal Credit Pathfinder in the North West has been expanded following the successful launch of the Pathfinder on 29 April. Wigan Jobcentre started accepting claims to Universal Credit on 1 July. Warrington and Oldham Jobcentres will take claims from 29 July. Telephony and processing support for the Pathfinder is being delivered through Bolton and Glasgow Service Centres

For more information about the expansion of the Universal Credit Pathfinder take a look at [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

Publication of official statistics on the Benefit cap

Two sets of Official Statistics relating to the Benefit cap were published on Wednesday 3 July, including the first set of official statistics on numbers of households capped in each of the four phased rollout local authorities (LAs).

The first set of statistics relates to the four LAs who implemented the cap from 15 April 2013. The statistics for each LA show the number of households capped in April and May 2013. These figures are broken down by cap banding, number of children and household type.

The second set of statistics relates to Jobcentre Plus activity regarding claimants who have been identified as potentially impacted by the Benefit cap. The statistics update the ad-hoc statistics previously released in April 2013, and include new cumulative totals for Great Britain for:

- the number of claimants identified as potentially affected by the Benefit cap who then found work
- the number of claimants identified as potentially affected by the Benefit cap who were offered and accepted employment support
- the number of claimants identified as potentially affected by the Benefit cap who have participated in employment support

These publications have been produced by departmental statisticians to adhere to the UK Statistics Authority protocols and can be accessed using the link below:

Benefit Cap Statistics

If you have any queries please email benefitcap.external@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Public Services Network – raising the bar on compliance

Cabinet Office (CO) continue to push the pace of work to transition the current secure connectivity of the Government Secure Internet (GSI) Convergence Framework (GCF) (which covers GSI, GCSX, GSX, GSE) services over to the Public Services Network (PSN).

Before your organisation can be connected to PSN or use it to receive PSN services, it must be accredited and achieve the new PSN compliance standard. CO has raised the bar on this and is not intending to issue any further extensions to deadlines or accept remedial plans against actions outstanding. The Information Technology (IT) areas of your LA will have had detailed communications on this and been offered specialist support.

Failure to achieve compliance before expiry of an existing Code of Connection means that an LA could be placed into an escalation process leading potentially to removal of connectivity. Expiry dates are fast approaching. A number of LAs could find themselves in this position during July (with more to follow in August). You won't need to be reminded of how serious the implications of being cut off from access to DWP data would be so it's worth checking that all the necessary action is hand for your organisation.

General advice and support is available by visiting the [PSN webpage](#) or by emailing the [PSN mailbox](#).

Housing Benefit Unit change of address

The Housing Benefit Unit, which deals with subsidy and Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) final claims and initial and mid-year estimates, will be moving on 15 July 2013. The new postal address will be:

Housing Benefit Unit
Room B120D
Warbreck House
Blackpool
Lancashire
FY2 0UZ

The subsidy mailbox address will not change

The contact details which will apply from 15 July, including new telephone numbers and one change of subsidy contact point are detailed below:

Unit Manager

Michael Mina 01253 337697
Michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Subsidy (by LA)

Aberdeen to Hastings
John Darrell 01253 337972
John.darrell@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Havant to Spellthorne

Angela Hoole 01253 337763
Angela.hoole@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

St Albans to York

Ian Fensome 01253 337975
ian.fensome1@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

DHP/Ad-Hoc Payments (all LAs)

Ian Fensome 01253 337975
ian.fensome1@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Julie Rawlings 01253 337979
Julie.rawlings@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

The new fax number will be 01253 331017.

If you have any questions regarding this move, please email the subsidy contact point who deals with your LA.