

# Housing Benefit Direct issue 142 November 2013



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## Editorial

Last month, I mentioned that we were eagerly awaiting the publication of the Housing Benefit (HB) Speed of Processing statistics on 22 October. I have to admit, I was slightly apprehensive as I opened the document with the key figures in. With so many welfare reforms kicking in from April, there had to be a risk this would put pressure on HB delivery performance. I am therefore delighted to see that performance held up well which is, no doubt, a credit to everyone involved in delivering the service.

Of course that doesn't mean that there aren't challenges and there is still quite a high degree of variation in performance across local authorities (LAs). As ever, we are keen to hear about your good practice and challenges and to support you in continuous improvement. We are already engaging with over 100 LAs across Great Britain on performance. We are also working with LAs progressing towards Public Service Network (PSN) compliance and are keen to hear from you about your experiences of this.

Hopefully, you will have seen the invites to our regional data sharing workshops on Huddle. At these we will be updating you on future data sharing initiatives and discussing how best these could be implemented as well as covering current initiatives and improvements including Automated Transfer to Local Authority Systems (ATLAS).

Finally, thank you for your patience as we procure a new collaboration tool to take us forward once our current contract with Huddle ends. We have managed to secure the services of Huddle until the end of November at which point we should be able to migrate onto a new service. We will keep you informed.

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## Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) reassessment begins

Reassessment for PIP began on Monday 28 October 2013. We are inviting DLA claimants living in Wales, West Midlands, East Midlands or East Anglia, to claim PIP:

- if a change in the claimant's care or mobility needs is reported
- when claimants reach the end of a fixed period DLA award
- where claimants turned 16 years old on or after Monday 7 October 2013

Alongside the phased introduction or reassessment activity, we will continue to take new PIP claims across Great Britain.

Further decisions on extending reassessment to the rest of the country using these natural triggers will be taken and communicated in due course. They will be informed by the experience of introducing reassessment in a gradual way first.

From October 2015, we plan to start inviting everyone else receiving DLA to claim PIP. We will write to individuals in plenty of time and they do not need to contact the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) now. We expect to have contacted everyone who needs to claim PIP by late 2017.

For more information, visit the updated [PIP toolkit](#), which includes [materials tailored for LAs](#) and a [PIP postcode map](#), or email: [pip.feedback@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:pip.feedback@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## HB Speed of Processing: April 2013 to June 2013

The HB Speed of Processing statistics for the 1st quarter of 2013/14 were released on Tuesday 22 October 2013. These are the first Speed of Processing statistics released since Council Tax Benefit was abolished in April 2013 and replaced by a system of localised support, and relate to HB only. Key findings for the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2013/14 are:

- the average time taken to process new HB claims was 24 calendar days, compared with 25 days in quarter 1 of 2012/13
- the average time taken to process changes of circumstances for HB claims was 11 calendar days, compared with 10 days in quarter 1 of 2012/13

Given the amount of change facing LAs at the moment these results are a testament to the hard work going on in Benefit Services to maintain performance. Where individual LAs have high processing times the DWP Performance Team will make contact to find out more and offer consultancy support where appropriate. However, feel free to contact us directly for further help and support on any performance issues.

Please email: [jacqueline.reed@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jacqueline.reed@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

The statistics can be found online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-and-council-tax-benefit-statistics-on-speed-of-processing-2013-14>

## Benefit Cap – National Implementation Successfully Rolled Out

The Benefit Cap has been successfully rolled out to all LAs across Great Britain to the agreed timescales. There have been considerable efforts across DWP and by our colleagues in LAs to ensure that affected customers have been supported throughout the process. Having a phased rollout in April 2013 provided the opportunity to ensure that continuous improvement and lessons learned were included in national implementation.

Moving forward, there will be changes of circumstance cases to handle and also monthly data provided on new cases that may need to be capped. These arrangements will continue until Universal Credit is fully in place and the cap from HB is no longer required.

We have committed to a full evaluation of the Benefit Cap and we expect this to be published during autumn 2014.

For further information email [benefitcap.external@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:benefitcap.external@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Universal Credit expands to London

On Monday 28 October the next stage of the delivery of Universal Credit began with Hammersmith Jobcentre accepting claims from new jobseekers.

As part of the progressive roll out of Universal Credit, we will also expand to a further five Jobcentres: Rugby, Inverness, Harrogate, Bath and Shotton, between now and spring 2014. This is the next important step in the safe and managed roll out of Universal Credit, building on the solid foundations of our early success in Pathfinder.

Take a look at the [press notice](#) for more information or [GOV.UK](#)

## ATLAS notifications for Pensions Strategy Computer System (PSCS) benefits update

The bulk uprating for the following benefits will not occur this year:

- State Retirement Pension
- Incapacity Benefit
- Severe Disablement Allowance
  
- Bereavement Benefit
  
- Widows Payment

Please use the same method you have used for previous years, but only for the above listed PSCS benefits.

As per the ATLAS Awareness Pack v2.1, Section 8, the other benefit uprating notifications will be delivered via ATLAS as usual.

We are continuing to address current ATLAS system capacity to ensure these uprating notifications can be delivered for 2014.

More detail about uprating can be viewed in the ATLAS Awareness Pack, v2.1 on request from [LA-ST](#).

## Local Authority Data Sharing (LADS) workshops

A series of DWP full day workshops have been organised across the United Kingdom to continue the ongoing support and engagement between DWP and all LAs. They will commence on 11 November 2013 in Manchester and will run up to 10 December 2013, finishing in Edinburgh. The dates and venues of all the planned events have been posted on Huddle.

The workshops will provide an update on the future data sharing initiatives between DWP and the LA, help us to obtain information on what the Housing Delivery Division (HDD) can do to help LAs implement these changes, as well as continuing the support and improvement of current initiatives, including ATLAS.

We will be running a number of sessions with the main aim of the day to concentrate on interactive sharing of good practice using valuable insight and experience from LAs, Information Technology (IT) suppliers and ourselves. We will be looking at possible improvements to existing and future data feeds, considering the pros and cons collectively and looking to improve existing collaborative working. This will help us to drive out future data sharing opportunities in the process and collate thoughts about the LADS commissions.

Other aspects will be an update on the PSN migration and any particular issues that LAs are encountering with the Cabinet Office accreditation.

The expertise and informed feedback that can be obtained from such events by actively involving LAs is extremely valued by DWP management teams and helps build a better understanding of the reality across both workplaces.

Please support the event by sending appropriate staff (maximum of 2 from each LA) with the knowledge and skills to participate and

share the current and future experiences at your LA with other authorities, while benefiting from the discussions in order to take and feed any information back to the appropriate teams at your LA.

LA users who wish to attend must contact the LADS Delivery Team to confirm attendance as numbers are limited.

Please note travel and accommodation cost is at the LA's expense.

Please contact the DWP LADS delivery team on the following email address: [lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) if you require more information.

## Secure Email Addresses for LAs

We sent out a letter on Monday 5 August 2013 to all Benefit Managers asking them to provide us with a secure email address to be used for correspondence with Universal Credit and to date we are still waiting for a number of responses.

### What we need you to do

We need all LAs to set up a generic email address for correspondence with Universal Credit.

You may need to speak to your own IT department to understand the implications of using secure email and also what training will need to be completed prior to using these communications routes.

Once you have set up your new email account please can you send the address through to: [sheena.parker@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:sheena.parker@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)