

Housing Benefit Direct issue 143 December 2013



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Editorial

We are sending this edition slightly later than planned as it includes information on recent developments and announcements. There seems to be a lot going on right now.

You'll have seen the highlights from the Autumn Statement made on 5 December, this edition includes additional background on some of the key announcements, including Discretionary Housing Payments, Universal Credit roll-out and the Local Support Services Framework. Also recently published are the results of the Universal Credit Claimant Survey which compares the perceptions and behaviours of Universal Credit clients with comparable Jobseekers Allowance claimants.

We also have an article on Fairer Charging and a request for the contact details of your Fairer Charging lead. This is an area where data sharing has real potential for delivering efficiency savings for both central and local government. The Local Authority Data Sharing (LADS) Team has taken a new commission to deliver a more streamlined and effective process in future.

You will all be aware of the issue that has arisen with the Interest Indicator refresh scan that we ran where the Local Council Tax Replacement/Council Tax Benefit (LCTR/CTB) interests were all deleted. We have identified the cause and are working with suppliers to look at the option of re-opening all the closed interests for 23/24 November. This will ensure that any ATLAS transactions relating to an "LCTR LA only" customer are delivered. However this will open up any legitimately closed interest, e.g. where the Housing Benefit is no longer in payment. We have confirmed with IT suppliers that these can be dealt with, with no user action/auto processed as not required, as the IT system checks that there is not a live claim. As the solution is developed we will keep you informed. We can only apologise for the disruption this has caused but please be assured we are doing everything we can to resolve this matter as quickly as possible.

Many of you will have attended the LADS workshops which have been taking place over the last few weeks. An evaluation sheet has been posted on Huddle and we would very much appreciate your feedback. On which, hot off the press, we have just signed a 12 month contract for our new collaboration tool, which will be Huddle!

I hope you have the opportunity of a good break over the Christmas and New Year period.

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[Distribution enquiries](#)

Universal Credit update

On Thursday 5 December, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Ministers announced [plans](#) for the next phase of delivery of Universal Credit, focused on the continued safe and secure roll out. The announcement builds on early successes including the launch of the Pathfinder, continued expansion to a further six sites and rapid progress in rolling out the Claimant Commitment.

Also recently published are the interim results from the Universal Credit Pathfinder [claimant survey](#).

Universal Credit expands to Rugby and Inverness

From 25 November 2013 Rugby and Inverness became the next two jobcentres to take claims for Universal Credit from new jobseekers, continuing the controlled approach to the introduction of Universal Credit.

New jobseekers in these jobcentres are also required to sign the new Claimant Commitment which sets out more fully what they must do to receive their benefit and the work activities they have agreed to do in order to get into paid work quickly.

Universal Credit started in Hammersmith in October. It will expand to Harrogate, Bath, and Shotton by the spring of 2014.

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

Local Support Services Framework

The Universal Credit programme has released an update and trialling plan for local support services. This builds on many months of effort by the Local Authority Associations (LAAs) working with the DWP task force. It also reflects input from a number of authorities on the LA Reference group, set up to inform and challenge the department as it develops this important work.

The new local support services document updates the Local Support Services Framework (LSSF) published last February. It describes some of the work done and decisions made since the Framework came out. It provides dozens of good practice examples from the Pathfinder and pilots, and other research. It also sets out what DWP will do over the next few months to trial aspects of LSSF. DWP wants LA colleagues to get involved to help make sure that the partnership models, as well as new or enhanced services, will work in practice.

The update describes innovative ways of addressing many of the challenges that Universal Credit may pose, particularly around digital and financial inclusion. The programme will need to work closely with LAs to make sure that claimants get the help and support they need to make the transition.

Lord Freud, Minister of State for Welfare Reform, has written to all LA Chief Executives and you can read the update document at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-local-support-services-update-and-trialling-plan>

Fairer Charging

Please arrange for this update to be brought to the attention of your Fairer Charging lead and also your HB Team

Fairer Charging covers the services that LAs provide and, subject to a financial assessment, may charge for. For example adult domiciliary care (e.g. things like home helps). The financial assessment may be done based on information collected by LA staff in an interview but will often involve contacting DWP to obtain some of the information regarding the person's financial circumstances.

LA staff phone or email DWP and request data. Confirmation would be required that the LA officer is on the approved list to receive DWP data. The requested data is extracted from the Customer Information System (CIS) by DWP staff and may then be given to the LA either over the phone or in writing. We estimate that DWP receives approximately 1 million contacts of this type per year.

The current system of asking DWP staff for information is not working as well as it should be and is taking up more LA and DWP staff time than should be needed.

Delays in gathering data often leads to LAs providing services free (or at reduced cost) while they carry out the assessment.

The current process cannot make use of other financial information which DWP holds but is not on CIS.

There are overpayments of DWP benefits (for example Disability Living Allowance/Attendance Allowance) where an LA has information that should trigger a reduction

Action is therefore now being considered to resolve these problems to ensure a more streamlined and efficient data sharing process is introduced. This will be progressed in liaison with the LADS Programme Team

Next Steps

An updated HB circular will be issued to clarify the existing data share process with a similar update being provided to DWP staff, this should help to address some of the issues that have been identified. These communications should address some of the issues identified above.

DWP are developing plans to address the other issues and would ask the Fairer Charging lead to provide the following information:

- name
- area
- email
- telephone

So that we can work together to establish detailed data sharing requirements.

Please send this information by email to Kevin Hopley by Friday 10 January 2014, or earlier, using the contact details below.

If you have any queries or require further information please contact: kevin.hopley1@dwp.gsi.gov.uk.

Autumn Statement

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne has presented the Autumn Statement.

Announcements that affect DWP include:

- the intention to introduce a new class of voluntary National Insurance contribution, to be known as Class 3A, to allow current pensioners and those who reach state pension age before 6 April 2016 to top up their Additional State Pension
- that the Government believes future changes to State Pension age should be based on the principle that people should expect to spend, on average, up to one third of their adult life in receipt of the State Pension
- further details about how the Welfare Cap, a limit on total welfare benefits expenditure, will operate, including how it will be assessed and what action will need to be taken if there is a breach of the cap
- the intention to run a pilot for skills support and mandation to skills provision for 18 to 21 year olds, as well as pilot of support for 16 to 17 year olds who are not in education, employment or training through Jobcentre Plus
- confirmation of an extension of the New Enterprise Allowance into 2015/16
- £40 million of additional Discretionary Housing Payment expenditure in both 2014/15 and 2015/16

A number of previously announced measures were also included on the Autumn Statement scorecard. For more information, go to the [Autumn Statement on GOV.UK](#).

Housing Benefit Matching Service

We have recently become aware of issues surrounding transfer of Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) encrypted emails containing Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) referrals. The issue was with the email programme that was preventing delivery but has now been rectified.

If there are any expected batches of referrals from HBMS since July 2013 that have not been received, please let us know by emailing hbms@dwp.gsi.gov.uk and we can arrange for them to be sent.

Following delivery of all future files, you will be contacted to confirm successful receipt in accordance with security protocols for the transmission of data.

If you need to speak to a member of the team regarding this or any other matter please call us on one of the following numbers:

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| Jenny Nugent: | 01253 688506 |
| Anne Scott | 01253 688519 |