

Housing Benefit Direct issue 158 April 2015



ISSN 2045-6131 (Online)

Editorial

As I write this it is 1 April and a typical spring day of sunshine and showers in Sheffield. The good news is that the merger of ETD and ATLAS files seems to have gone live today without incident. The road to get us here has been a bumpy one and we could not have achieved this without the tremendous support of our early adopter sites. Our thanks go to them for their input and patience. We have not quite uncrossed our fingers yet as experience has taught us to be cautious but (touching wood) if all has gone to plan our hope is that this helps alleviate some of your work pressures by reducing duplicate notifications.

I met with Sue Foster and Martin Phillips from Sheffield Revenues and Benefits today. Twinning with the service has been invaluable to me in helping me understand some of your processes and challenges. Sheffield went live with SFIS in February and so I was keen to hear about their experiences to date. We also talked through their experience of RTI and FERIS. The discussion served to remind me just how much is going on in this space and how well Local Authorities do in managing to continue to deliver for customers within an ever-changing landscape.

In this month's edition we feature the movement of responsibilities for the appointment of local auditors in England to Public Sector Appointments Limited following the demise of the Audit Commission. DWP will be working with them to ensure we have an efficient and effective system of HB subsidy audit for the future. We have published a best practice guide on subsidy claims and have included a link on the following pages. We also feature information on changes to the use of HBMS codes and the format of referrals, and information on a policy change which will allow for higher rates of deductions from earnings where there has been a successful fraud prosecution.

Higher rate deductions via Direct Earnings Attachment for Housing Benefit overpayments where there is convicted fraud – new legislation from 6 April 2015

New legislation will come into effect on 6 April 2015 which will increase the rate of deduction that can be made by a Direct Earnings Attachment (DEA) for debtors who have a debt for which they have been successfully prosecuted. This must only be used in cases where the claimant has been convicted of fraud for that particular overpayment. This cannot be used where the claimant has accepted an Administrative Penalty.

The DWP will not be implementing these changes immediately as we have to work with the payroll software industry to minimise impacts on business. We would also advise that Local authorities do not implement these changes until those negotiations have been completed, we will send further guidance at that time.

Any queries should be addressed to the following email address:
HBANDCTB.OVERPAYMENTS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

Qualified HB Subsidy Claims

Most of you will be aware that we carried out a series of workshops recently which culminated in the creation of a Subsidy Claims Best Practice Guide, as mentioned in our article in [Bulletin HB G3/2015](#). The [best practice guide](#) has now been published on GOV.UK. We will work with Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA) and other stakeholders to consider improvements to the current assurance regime. Any proposed changes will be discussed with local authorities and their representative bodies in due course.

If you have any queries about this matter, please contact us by email at: hbsubsidy.queries@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Public Sector Audit Appointments

Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA) was incorporated by the Local Government Association in August 2014. It will be responsible for the appointment of auditors to Local Government, Police and local NHS bodies under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 from 1 April 2015. These responsibilities were previously discharged by the Audit Commission.

PSAA has been tasked with ensuring that the company delivers the following objectives:

- Supporting a smooth transition to the new audit regime, ensuring that public money continues to be properly accounted for and protected during the life of the company;
- Discharging its statutory functions to appoint auditors and set audit fees;
- Overseeing the delivery of consistent, high quality and effective audit services to local public bodies;
- Ensuring effective management of contracts with audit firms;
- Being financially responsible having regard to the efficiency of operating costs and transparently safeguarding fees levied from audited bodies; and,
- Leading its people as a good employer, ensuring that it continues to be fit-for-purpose; motivating and supporting staff; communicating with them in an open, honest and timely way.

For further information about PSAA please contact info@psaa.co.uk

Local authorities should see no difference to the way that Housing Benefit subsidy assurance work is carried out.

Important Information Regarding HBMS Referrals

From the 1 April 2015 our IT Systems are changing.

As a result of this IT change we will no longer have the ability to produce HB referrals in a RTF/ Word Document format. We will still be able to provide your information in the Notepad format which we currently produce. This process/format mirrors the RTI Referrals and the decision has been made to align the HB Referrals output format with RTI.

NINO Sifts, RSR and outstanding lists information will remain unchanged.

The following is what will be issued -

- Notepad File containing Referrals
- RSR File
- NINO Sift (Customer, Non Customer)
- Results Spreadsheet

This change is as a result of IT changes and as such is beyond our control. We are aware that this may cause inconvenience and if you wish to discuss this further you can contact:

REBECCA.DICKINSON@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK
EMMA.BOWEN1@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK
NIKKI.RICHARDSON@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

PGP Queries

Please be aware that HBMS do not deal with all PGP Queries. If your query is regarding PGP key exchanges/ new keys please contact: HBMS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

We do not deal with internal Local Authority PGP issues. In these instances please contact your IT Department.

HB Result code change

HBMS have been contacted by a number of Local authorities recently concerning HB referrals that have / will be transferred over to the DWP fraud units.

As a result of these changes, you have been advised that the likelihood of Local authority staff receiving results from the DWP teams to return to HBMS is limited.

We have looked into this issue and have decided that for any referrals that fit these criteria a code 4E should be used. On the Result code meaning list the description of this code is '**IS or JSA has been paid, or is currently being paid clerically.**' As this code is very rarely used we have decided to use this code to cover this situation.

Should you have any further queries in this matter please do not hesitate to get in touch at: HBMS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK