

# Housing Benefit Direct issue 160 July 2015



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## Editorial

Welcome to issue 160 of Housing Benefit Direct. It's incredible that we've been going for almost 14 years, how time flies. Generally speaking HB Direct has always been very well received but those of you who have seen the latest Local Authority Insight Survey will know that we are carrying out a review of our communications. Results should be out soon and if we can improve things we'll certainly do so. Feedback is always welcome.

This edition covers Housing Benefit subsidy, Personal Independence Payment and Single Fraud Investigation Service.

The subsidy workshops that we held over the past 9 months or so were a huge success. I have to confess I wasn't certain that there would be sufficient interest in the workshops. I couldn't have been more wrong! I was pleasantly surprised at the incredibly positive response. Staff working on subsidy whether that be in a local authority (LA) or Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have an amazing amount of enthusiasm and passion for this important subject. One of the nice things about the workshops was that LA staff were able to meet their DWP subsidy colleagues face-to-face for the first time. Feedback was very positive and there was a demand for further workshops hence us arranging a further 12 workshops over the coming months. I look forward to meeting many of you again at those workshops.

I hope you all have a good summer and are enjoying the current sunshine. Let's hope it lasts.

Best wishes.

**Bill Hern**

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## Local Authority Subsidy Workshops

June's HB Direct explained that further local authority (LA) subsidy workshops will be held in 2015/16. We are considering holding these workshops in the following locations:

- Perth – September 2015
- London (Ilford) – September 2015
- Monmouthshire – October 2015
- Salisbury – October 2015
- London (Ilford) – November 2015
- Birmingham – November 2015
- Newcastle – December 2015
- Leeds – January 2016
- London – January 2016
- Birmingham – February 2016
- Manchester – February 2016
- Cambridge – March 2016.

As in 2014/15, we are keen to work with LAs to address and hopefully improve the level of qualification of subsidy claims. The workshops will discuss the issues leading to subsidy claim qualification and the means of addressing these issues, particularly with regard to the most recent certification exercises. It will be important for the success of the workshops that a range of LAs attend, i.e. those which are qualified annually to those which have made improvements in the level of qualification to those which are not qualified.

The holding of workshops in the above locations and/or dates will, of course, depend upon sufficient expressions of interest being shown in each.

Any LAs wishing to attend the workshops or obtain further information should contact Michael Mina at the following email address: [michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) In submitting expressions of interest, it would be particularly helpful if those interested could confirm whether they attended a workshop in 2014/15.

## Rollout of Personal Independence Payment Continues

Alongside the processing of new claims to Personal Independence Payment (PIP), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has been taking a phased approach to the reassessment of some existing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) claimants with fixed term awards, those reaching age 16 or those reporting a change of circumstances.

The DWP will now be rolling out the final phase of PIP reform the reassessment of all remaining people on DLA, including claimants with a long-term or indefinite award. This was due to start in October 2015, but will now commence on 13 July 2015.

In line with the way that PIP has been introduced to date, this reassessment will be phased in slowly in order to continue to provide the best possible service to claimants.

From 13 July 2015 3,000 claimants, chosen at random from postcodes in the North-West and Midlands, will be invited to claim PIP. The postcode areas included are:

Blackburn (BB), Bolton (BL), Derby (DE), Leicester (LE)  
Manchester (M), Oldham (OL), Preston (PR), Stoke on Trent (ST),  
Warrington (WA) and Wigan (WN).

These postcode areas have been chosen as DWP and their assessment providers have sufficient capacity to handle the increased volumes.

Operating on a smaller scale initially will enable DWP to monitor the service closely to ensure an efficient reassessment process is in place and test key parts of the PIP process, such as communications with claimants.

If you have any queries on this article please email [margaret.birchall@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:margaret.birchall@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Single Fraud Investigation Service fraud referrals

Following the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) rollout LAs may continue to receive allegations of fraud and to identify internally cases that may require investigation.

To help in identifying which cases are appropriate to send to the DWP the following criteria have been developed which focus on cases where there has been no prior notification of a change or where the offence suspected has been occurring throughout the period of an HB award:

- cases with details of any income or savings that affect the amount of Housing Benefit (HB) payable and that have never been declared by the customer
- cases with details of any potential partner or any undisclosed person living in the house that have never been declared by the customer that could affect the amount of HB payable
- anything else which comes to light about any false statements the customer has made regarding their circumstances which affects the amount of HB payable; this could include people joining or leaving the household, earnings, other income including pensions or savings.

LAs need to be clear before sending any fraud referral to the Fraud and Error Service that the customer has either failed to disclose a change in order to get benefit or has deliberately lied at the beginning or during the period of their HB claim in order to gain.

If you have any queries on this article please email [mark.anderson@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:mark.anderson@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## SFIS Project LA Service Provision Review

The SFIS Project has undertaken a review of the LA Service Provision process for Single Fraud Investigations and the supporting products and agreements have been amended. Both new and updated documents have been made available on the Knowledge Hub within the SFIS Communications Hub.

Please ensure that any previous versions of these documents you hold are replaced with the new versions.

LA HB teams remain responsible for the administration of HB. It is important that any requests for information to support investigations under the DWP Service Provision process are dealt with quickly. Failure to provide the required information has a direct impact on HB error and successful criminal action.

To access the Knowledge Hub you will need to register if you are not already a member and then search under “Groups” and request to join the SFIS Communications Hub Group.

<https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/home>