

# Housing Benefit Direct issue 162 October 2015



ISSN 2045-6131 (Online)

## Editorial

Welcome to October's Housing Benefit (HB) Direct and thank you for your continued readership. HB remains a hugely important benefit for millions of households and I am proud of all the work you do to help customers and prevent homelessness. Despite financial pressures you continue to deliver a great service and have maintained and even improved customer service.

We published [HB recoveries and fraud data](#) on 9 September. This data shows the stock of debt, new debt, recoveries and write-offs for each local authority (LA) per quarter. What is really interesting to see is the significant increase in overpayments in the second half of 2014/15 which is almost certainly related to Real Time Information referrals and a greater focus on fraud and error.

This month we have an article written by the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN). As part of Housing Delivery Division's (HDDs) commitment to support LAs in administering secure verification processes and recovering HB debt, my Performance Development Team (PDT) have been working in partnership with NAFN to identify opportunities to reduce fraud and error and to trace and recover monies owed from HB debtors. I hope you find the article useful.

Continuing on the fraud and error theme, we also have a reminder about the 'campaign in a box' toolkit we have made available via Glasscubes to support your own local publicity campaigns. It would be great to get feedback from anyone who is making use of this facility. We also have an update on Fraud and Error Incentive Scheme (FERIS) performance to date and a reminder about the information we have issued to Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and Benefit and Revenues Managers about a new indicator we are developing on the level of caseload changes being made by each LA compared with expectations.

From October 2015, Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is being rolled out to claimants who have a long-term or indefinite award of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) after a trial period. The rollout will be managed carefully and we provide more information on communications with claimants in this month's HB Direct. We also have information on Fit for Work which provides occupational health assessments for people absent from work, or likely to be absent from work, for four weeks or more.

I also hope you find the update on the national expansion of Universal Credit expansion helpful.

**Clare Elliott**

[Clare.elliott@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Clare.elliott@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

[Distribution enquiries](#)

## NAFN Services available to HB teams

NAFN is a well established shared service operating in local government. For many years we have supported the work of fraud teams but we also provide a range of services to assist other benefit teams, in particular overpayments. Subscription is corporate and around 90% of LAs are members. You may have access to our services but unaware of the full range of tools on offer.

### What are the benefits of using NAFN?

- we offer a range of services to assist you with your work - all from one point
- we are experts in data gathering
- NAFN provides a comprehensive help and guidance service delivered via our secure website and webinar training as part of your membership fee
- membership removes the need to procure individual service contracts
- we often provide access to services at a lower cost
- there is no limit to the number of registered users.

### What does NAFN offer?

Some of the key services we offer to benefit teams include:

- Credit Reports: NAFN have access to all three main credit referencing agencies with live online retrieval via our secure website via Equifax and Callcredit. These reports can provide an excellent source of information to aid you in many ways including; financial information to identify accounts, public information and credit history to assist in determining an individual's 'lifestyle'. They can also identify if others are resident at the address as well as providing previous and forwarding addresses. We also have reports to support identity validation
- Consented Numbers Database: Start your search with a fast and free intelligence search of the consented numbers database. With just a telephone number, street name or postcode, we search millions of records obtained from application forms, surveys and other consented sources, providing an excellent source of intelligence
- Land Registry: We offer access to Land Registry in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
- Utilities Data: Online access to meter point companies enables NAFN to identify the utility supplier at an address and submit a request for information to that provider. This can show whether there is any usage at a property, who is paying the bill and can provide payment information
- Batch Services: We offer competitive solutions to assist in tracing your debtors.

If you have any queries about accessing our service please contact [general@nafn.gov.uk](mailto:general@nafn.gov.uk) or call our office on 0161 342 3480.

## HB fraud and error 'campaign in a box'

As part of our on-going commitment to support LAs to respond effectively to FERIS we have developed an HB fraud and error 'campaign in a box'.

It provides tailored resources and written guidance to allow LAs to download templates from our existing HDD Glasscubes portal and develop your own local publicity campaigns to encourage HB claimants to report changes of circumstances and encourage the public to report potentially fraudulent HB claims.

Staff should use existing access rights when registered for Glasscubes to download and save the material rather than requesting additional access rights. You will likely need to seek support from your design/technical staff to easily access the appropriate file.

The toolkit explains how to use the materials for your campaigns. More detailed technical details, including which font should be used, are embedded in the actual template files.

Briefly the campaign in a box consists of guidance and templates:

- campaign toolkit, guidance for LAs
- campaign Message Matrix ( English and Welsh versions)
- posters
- leaflets – used as door drop and insert
- bus adverts – bus shelter, internal passenger panel & back panels
- pull-up banner artwork – for local events
- social media assets/basic content, for e.g. Facebook
- digital online banners
- press adverts.

If you have any questions please contact [alan.sullivan@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:alan.sullivan@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Fit for Work service now live across Great Britain

Fit for Work is now available across Great Britain (GB) with both GPs and employers able to refer employees facing long-term sickness to an assessment with an occupational health professional. Fit for Work is for employed people if they have been, or are likely to be, off work for four weeks or more.

It is estimated that long-term sick leave costs British businesses around £9 billion annually and further reduces GB's economic output by £15 billion per year.

On average, there were almost one million employee sickness absences of four weeks or more between October 2010 and September 2013. England had 815,000, Scotland had 95,000 and Wales had 50,000 during this period.

Fit for Work provides an in-depth occupational health assessment followed by a personalised Return to Work Plan and managed support to get back to work. Individuals must give their consent to participate and for their plans to be shared with their employer and GP.

The service is particularly helpful for small and medium-sized businesses with no or limited occupational health support. It is also available to larger employers, where it complements existing occupational health services.

Businesses also benefit from a tax exemption of up to £500 a year per employee for medical treatments recommended by Fit for Work.

People can be referred to the service via the online referral form available on the Fit for Work [website](#).

## Reminder for LAs to report Discretionary Housing Payment expenditure

As requested in circular HB [A9/2015](#), this is a reminder for LAs to report on their Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) expenditure from 1 April 2015 to 30 September 2015.

### Reporting measures simplified

We advised you in circular HB [A6/2015](#) that the DHP reporting arrangements were to be changed so that it was no longer required to record the number of awards and, instead, only details of the amount of DHP paid should be provided.

The reporting spreadsheet has been simplified for ease of use. It asks for the value of DHP paid, broken down into welfare reform impact (e.g. benefit cap) and purpose of award (e.g. to help secure and move to alternative accommodation). It no longer records the number of awards. If a breakdown of expenditure by purpose of award within each welfare reform impact is not available, LAs should just record the total DHP paid for each column.

You should complete and return the form which can be found [here](#) by 16 October 2015. Returns and any queries regarding the form should be sent to [dhp.monitoringinbox@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dhp.monitoringinbox@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## FERIS – 63% of LAs improve their performance

Despite the short notice between the FERIS launch (on 24 November 2014) and the first performance period of 1 December 2014 to 31 March 2015, 239 LAs (63%) increased performance against their baseline during this period. 94 LAs (25%) improved their performance by more than 8%, exceeding the lower threshold and receiving incentive scheme payments totalling £2.25 million. Of these, 12 LAs improved their performance by more than 18%, exceeding their upper threshold. The average improvement against baseline by all LAs during December 2014 to March 2015 was 3.4%.

We would like to say a big thank you to all LAs who were “quick out of the blocks” and found more HB reductions during 2014/15.

During the first quarter of 2015/16, 212 LAs (56%) increased their performance against baseline during this period. 64 LAs (17%) improved their performance by more than 10%, exceeding the lower threshold and receiving incentive scheme payments totalling £1.15 million. Of these 12 LAs improved their performance by more than 20% exceeding their upper threshold. The average improvement against baseline by all LAs during Quarter 1 2015/16 was 2.6%.

PDT engagements with LAs performing below baseline have shown that additional activities and actions have been implemented, albeit delayed for various reasons, and that there is a high level of confidence that performance will improve in the coming months.

Further feedback indicates that the vast majority of LAs would like to see FERIS continue beyond March 2016. We will keep you informed of progress.

If you have any enquiries please email PDT at [feris.team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:feris.team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Caseload Management Information

Letters have been delivered to your LA CEO and Benefit & Revenues manager on 30 September, providing detail on the Caseload Management Information (CMI) implementation.

CMI will provide information showing each LA’s level of success in identifying changes which, if remain undetected, could lead to fraud and error. This will be shown as the percentage of the actual value of HB reductions against the expected value of HB reductions based on the caseload composition of each LA.

With the September letter we also provided a copy of each LA’s historical 2014/15 data. This will help you to understand how each LA is performing and the format of the information.

On 28 October 2015 your Benefit & Revenues manager will receive:

- 2015/16 Quarter 1 CMI, along with
- additional information, obtained via your Single Housing Benefit Extract, to be used in conjunction with the CMI to help you identify where improvements can be made in addressing any inaccuracies in your caseload.

Please ask your Benefit & Revenues manager for more detail.

If you have any queries regarding CMI following your review of the letter please email [HBFE.performance@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HBFE.performance@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Universal Credit update

The national expansion of Universal Credit began in February 2015 and since then two of the four tranches have gone live as planned. The completion of Tranche Two in July 2015 saw Universal Credit live in 50% of all jobcentres covering nearly 50% of all LAs across GB.

The latest Universal Credit statistics, released on 16 September, show that 112,180 people were on the Universal Credit caseload, as of 13 August 2015. Of these, 34,611 (or 31%) were in employment and 77,571 (or 69%) were not in employment.

More details on the latest Universal Credit statistics can be accessed [here](#).

On 21 September, Tranche Three of the national expansion began and will run until the end of November. This will see more jobcentres and LAs start to take new claims from single people who would otherwise have been eligible for Jobseeker's Allowance. More information on this can be found in the [press release](#).

Details of when the jobcentres and LAs within Tranche Three and Four will go live with Universal Credit can be found [here](#).

## Further rollout of PIP

Since July 2015 we have been reassessing small numbers of existing DLA claimants in a limited number of postcodes. This has allowed us to monitor the service closely and we are now in a position to extend the rollout of PIP further.

From October 2015, PIP will be rolled out across GB to claimants that have a long-term or indefinite award of DLA.

The rollout will be carefully managed to make sure that the volume of invitations issued to claimants in each postcode matches the capacity of the assessment providers in that area.

In support of rollout we are testing a range of communications and channels to raise awareness about the changes to see if they help claimants make a decision about whether to apply for PIP, and how to do so at the right time.

More information about full PIP rollout is available in the [PIP Toolkit](#). You can also find more information about DLA ending [here](#).