

Housing Benefit Direct issue 163 December 2015



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Editorial

It won't have escaped your attention that the Autumn Statement was delivered on 25 November (I think that still counts as autumn!) and, as ever, there is plenty in there of interest to local authorities and revenue and benefits departments. You can find the whole statement [here](#). We will be communicating more on the new measures over the coming months and consulting the Associations as the new measures are rolled out.

I am pleased that we managed to secure on-going funding for the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS). We have learned a lot about what works since the scheme was launched just over a year ago and will be taking this into account as we redesign the scheme for the next two years. It is clear that FERIS and Real Time Information have made a big difference to the detection of fraud and error and we're keen to continuously build on this success and improve incentives.

I'm looking forward to the Scotland IRRV Benefits conference and the opportunity to talk to colleagues there. I'll be going into some of the Spending Review announcements and Adrian Shooter will be talking about FERIS and Caseload Management Information (CMI), both of which are covered in this edition of HB Direct. The plan is to publish CMI data in January having revised the methodology in response to feedback. We are also coming out on the road to talk about FERIS.

This month's edition also includes an update on the National Fraud Initiative. There has been a further bulk data match which will lead to you getting additional referrals in December/January. Hopefully, these will give you some good changes which will count towards your FERIS thresholds. We also have updates from Cambridge City Council and Enfield on the IT enhancements to the Northgate and Civica systems which were supported by the FERIS bid fund (we hope to bring one covering Capita enhancements in a future edition).

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to work for the Department for Work and Pensions? Well, we have the perfect opportunity for any of you who would like the experience of working for us to support our data sharing programme while keeping your current position, terms and conditions. Posts are initially open on a secondment basis for six months though could be longer. Why not give us a call to find out more (details included).

Finally, I wish you all a refreshing and enjoyable Christmas break.

Clare Elliott

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[Distribution enquiries](#)

‘Disability Living Allowance is ending’ communication network

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has formed an online ‘Disability Living Allowance is ending’ communication network to help local authorities (LAs) and disability organisations support people aged 16 to 64 who claim Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

As part of the final phase of the rollout of Personal Independent Payment (PIP) we are writing to claimants, who were in receipt of an indefinite or lifetime DLA award and aged 16 to 64 on 8 April 2013 to tell them that their DLA is ending.

We want to ensure that welfare rights teams and others who give benefits advice to DLA claimants have the opportunity to join this online group.

Membership ensures you have:

- access to up-to-date information and products about DLA ending and PIP
- an opportunity to share knowledge via an online forum and identify new channels
- the option to feed back in real time to help DWP improve and refine communications

The ‘Disability Living Allowance is ending’ communication network is hosted on khub.net, membership is by invitation only, you should contact claire.howard@dwp.gsi.gov.uk to request access.

You will be sent an email so you can register with the Knowledge Hub. Registration is a quick and simple process that will enable you to access relevant groups on the site.

You can find more information about DLA ending at www.gov.uk/dla-ending

The [PIP toolkit](#) on GOV.UK provides useful information to individuals and organisations that support PIP and DLA claimants. The toolkit includes a PIP handbook and quick guide, PIP claim forms, examples of letters and a PIP claimant journey for advisers.

Documents and supporting evidence for electronic claims

The information included in [HB G11/2015](#) regarding supporting documents for electronic claims has attracted some interest and was discussed at the Practitioners’ Operational Group (POG) on 25 November. We are working with LA representatives who sit on POG to issue further clarification on the position and to answer the points that have been raised with us.

Amendment to Information in HB Direct April 2015

In April’s [HB Direct](#) we incorrectly advised that new legislation coming into effect from 6 April 2015 would increase the rate of deduction that can be made by a Direct Earnings Attachment (DEA) for debtors who have a debt due to fraudulent activity for which they have been successfully prosecuted. However, we made it clear in that newsletter that LAs should not use the higher rate until such time as they are advised. To clarify, the DEA higher rate legislation excludes the recovery of Housing Benefit (HB) or Council Tax Benefit (CTB) overpayments.

If you have any queries about HB or CTB recovery please email hbandctb.overpayments@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Automation of data sharing from Universal Credit to support claims to Local Council Tax Reduction

The way Universal Credit shares claimant data to support Local Council Tax Reduction Schemes (LCTR) is changing. From 14 December 2015 an automated system will replace manual processes in live service locations.

The benefits of the automated data sharing process are that it removes the manual intervention and the need for separate data gathers by LAs to assess LCTR, the aim being an improved claimant experience.

In order to enable the data sharing to happen, new questions have been introduced to the Universal Credit online claim to establish if the claimant has council tax liability and also either an intent to make a claim for LCTR or has a live claim for LCTR.

The new automated data sharing process will be slightly different from current processes, with three instances where data sharing will happen during a Universal Credit claim in live service:

- at the new claim stage when the claimants identity has been verified
- the end of the first assessment period on a new claim, where any changes to the claim gather have been made
- when changes of circumstances including terminations and changes to payment information occur

The LA support pack has been updated with detailed guidance and has been issued to all LA sites currently live with Universal Credit.

The new notifications will be shared with LAs via the new Data Hub, which is being rolled out to replace the current Data Transport Appliances. LAs will be sent the notifications on a daily basis and will be able to download them in a PDF format.

Guidance on how to access the Data Hub and download information will be issued before 14 December 2015. The LA Data Sharing programme is also working with LA IT suppliers to introduce functionality from spring 2016 to automate the transfer of the notifications directly into LA processing systems.

Please email lads.delivery@dwp.gsi.gov.uk if you have any queries about the new Data Hub.

Enquiries about the automated process for sharing data from Universal Credit to support claims to LCTR please email la.universalcredittransition@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Caseload Management Information

We wrote to all LAs on 30 September 2015 outlining our plans to publish HB Caseload Management Information (CMI). The information will enable DWP and LAs to identify and share good practice to help reduce the level of HB fraud and error.

We have now refined the CMI methodology to incorporate comments from LAs. The revised 2014/15 information, together with Quarter 1 information for 2015/16, will be sent to LAs shortly and will also be published on GOV.UK.

It is our intention to also provide additional data sets in January 2016 to help LAs identify good practice and develop plans to identify HB fraud and error. This information will not be published.

Please email hbfe.performance@dwp.gsi.gov.uk if you have any queries.

Refreshed National Fraud Initiative data matches

As most readers will be aware, the National Fraud Initiative (NFI) is normally a two-yearly national data matching exercise; the last national exercise being 2014/15.

This article is to notify you that a further bulk data match was carried out in October 2015 on certain datasets within the NFI. Referrals should become available in the next few weeks. They will be accessible through the normal ways of accessing NFI cases.

The datasets refreshed by NFI this time will include Home Office immigration and UK visas, student loans, Amberhill fraudulent identities and deceased person's data. HB data will also be refreshed from the Single Housing Benefit Extract and where relevant, will include enhanced data from four key legacy benefits: Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance and Pension Credit.

The volume of referrals generated by the match will not be known until the data are released to view in the NFI portal at some point between mid-December 2015 and mid-January 2016. However, we can use the volumes of referrals issued to LAs in the 2014/15 national exercise as a guide. This gives an estimate of 18 referrals per 1,000 HB caseload. We would expect volumes to be lower than this though, as this data match is a year ahead of normal schedule.

It goes without saying that not all NFI identified discrepancies will result in a change to the HB award. However the datasets mentioned above have historically been productive. So actioning these referrals may well be a useful additional source of changes that will help contribute to the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) payment thresholds. In addition, LAs may welcome this data match to reduce losses in non-social security benefits, for example, LCTR schemes.

Finally, in actioning any NFI cases, please remember to send appropriate cases to the DWP Fraud and Error Service (FES), for potential prosecution, if your LA has completed Single Fraud Investigation Service rollout. You should use the same criteria you always apply in deciding which cases to refer to FES, using the nationally agreed template.

If you have any questions about this article you can email paul.selby@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme 2

Following the Spending Review that was delivered on 25 November, we can confirm that we will be extending FERIS for a further 2 years.

We are engaging with LAs and your representative groups and in light of comments received we are currently reviewing elements of the scheme. Further details of the new scheme including 2016/17 baselines and thresholds will be provided early in 2016.

It is important that we continue to work together to tackle benefit fraud and error, so I urge you to take into account the additional FERIS funding, when you are undertaking your financial and resource planning for 2016/17 and 2017/18.

Please email feris.team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk if you have any queries.

FERIS bid funded IT tools the LAs' view

Three of the successful FERIS bid fund applications were put forward by lead LAs for the main HB software providers for FERIS tools. This means that almost all LAs have the opportunity to benefit from the enhancements provided by the main software providers.

The lead LAs for these bids were:

- Breckland for Capita Users
- Cambridge for Northgate Users
- Enfield for Civica Users

Following delivery of these FERIS tools, both Cambridge and Enfield have given us an overview outlining their experiences and the benefits of using the supplied tools. We hope to provide an update from Breckland in a future publication.

Cambridge City Council FERIS bid for Northgate users

The Northgate solution allows the customer to do most of the work, significantly saving precious resources within pressured benefits teams. We are all looking to encourage channel shift of customers to self-serve as budget pressures take hold and this really works.

A single letter is sent telling the customer that they must log in and review their details. There is a high level of security with customers being given a unique reference number and have to supply other identifying information so that log on is secure. The responses have to be made via the FERIS software, eliminating paper responses.

It is a relatively easy process and uses real time data; asking the customer to indicate if information is still correct, if anything has changed customers have to enter the date of change and provide

details of this. A positive response is needed and customers cannot simply just click next. Once complete, a call to obtain a Risk Based Verification (RBV) score is made. Depending on the returning score and our RBV policy, a message is displayed informing the customer of what evidence is required, if any. All changes in circumstances and the RBV scores are sent to the back office application in real time and a task is created that assessors pick up; they then check the details and calculate entitlement, dealing with overpayments in the normal way.

After a month, if the customer fails to respond, a process will suspend the claims. The normal suspension letters are sent giving them the appropriate timescales to respond to the suspension and if they still do not respond, the claim is automatically ended.

The solutions promotes self-serve, which is central to our desire for appropriate channel shift, and the flexibility of the campaign designs mean that you can exclude more vulnerable customers who would not be able to self-serve easily. The solution is flexible, allowing us to manage workloads and staff availability and there is no charge to individual authorities until September 2016.

So, has this made a difference? Yes, without this we would not have been able to resume the volume of risk based reviews that many of us aspire to do. Have we reached our target threshold? No, but that is due to the way the thresholds work based against previous years' work, and the delay in counting a reduction or cessation of HB. But we are getting closer!

Naomi Armstrong, Benefit Manager, Cambridge City Council
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Enfield Council FERIS funding bid for Civica users

Enfield had been keen for some time to streamline its interventions programme, but had found that the existing interventions software did not allow for all of the categories of review that we required.

When the FERIS funding was announced, we welcomed the idea that we could bid on behalf of other Civica LAs for additional functionality that would save us, and other authorities, time and effort when designing intervention campaigns. Additionally, it was a great opportunity to update the means by which reviews could be issued and returned, and allowed us to maximise the use of emails, texts and customer self-service, all of which are becoming increasingly important to LAs.

Previous experience of working with Civica as a pilot site on the Benefit Cap and the latest phase of Automated Transfer to LA Systems, meant that we had confidence that Civica would be able to work with us to develop and deliver on time incorporating good practice in terms of holding workshops, agreeing specifications, rolling out training and testing with allocated specialist resources and specific releases.

We knew the product would need to build on what was already there whilst being flexible enough for each customer to use in their own way; either complementing their existing practices or providing new ways of working. For Enfield, that meant addressing issues of improving the automation of interventions and providing tools that enabled each campaign to be carried out within the system using multiple methods of contact and easy reporting.

We are now able to target those interventions that prove to be most valuable in terms of achieving reductions in weekly benefit payments. The dynamic reporting tools allow us to see very quickly how successful or otherwise a campaign is proving. The modern communications options fit exactly with Enfield's other electronic service delivery aspirations and are at the forefront of our Council's transformation agenda.

Our next campaign will focus on reviewing income levels for non-dependents, particularly those currently on the lowest level of deduction. This is a campaign that would not have been easily possible in the past, when reviews were typically aimed at the circumstances of the claimant and partner.

Whilst there are inevitably some teething problems manifesting themselves as a result of testing, we have no doubt that once resolved this software will allow LAs to undertake reviews in a far more effective and efficient manner than in the past.

L K Gallivan, Head of Benefits and Divisional Services, Enfield Council lesli.gallivan@enfield.gov.uk

Secondment opportunities for LA staff: Housing Delivery LA Data Sharing Programme

There are secondment opportunities for talented individuals who want to come and work on the LA Data Sharing (LADS) Programme, as part of the Delivery Team. This is a key role within Housing Delivery Division to ensure that LAs receive appropriate data from other systems.

The LADS programme is now firmly established and has a wide portfolio of data sharing demands from major programmes and projects. We are currently working on various initiatives to deliver Universal Credit data to support the administration of LCTR schemes, both in the short term and longer term under Digital Services. After transferring data sharing to a new cloud-based Data Hub, we will be developing solutions to enable recovery of HB and looking at how we make the most of data held in different locations.

For this and other work, we need people with a good working knowledge of some or all of: debt arrangements, benefits and housing data. Knowledge of the existing data sharing arrangements would be desirable and current experience of dealing with HB and LCTR schemes/systems would be an advantage. This is a real opportunity to influence the requirements and outcomes for data sharing and learn new skills.

Essential / desirable skills:

- experience of working in a project environment
- recent HB knowledge/experience
- good communication skills and the ability to understand complex issues
- good team working and the ability to work collaboratively and productively
- enthusiasm and commitment.

At least part of the working week will need to be in Leeds, although we will consider people based in Blackpool/Preston and London. There will be an expectation to be available to travel to some meetings and workshops in relation to your role.

Posts are available immediately and are offered for an initial period of six months. Successful applicants will retain current terms and conditions and be reimbursed salary and work-related expenses through current arrangements. Some assistance with travelling to work may be available subject to individual circumstances and budgetary constraints.

If you are an LA employee and interested in this career development opportunity (additional project training may be available) please check with your LA that you can be released and then submit your CV to lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk by 14 December 2015. If you would like to know more or discuss your suitability before applying please feel free to speak to Paddy Wild on 0113 2327327, Jo Wood on 0113 2327634 or Sue Shillito on 0113 2327133.