

Editorial

The Housing Delivery team in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has been very busy this January. Any hopes of easing into 2016 after the Christmas and New Year break soon faded as we got back into the swing of things, developing the new Fraud and Error Reduction Scheme (FERIS) design and business case and finalising our plans for the publication of Caseload Management Information (CMI).

We are really grateful to all the local authorities (LAs) who have helped us with these. We have talked to very many LAs over the year about what has and hasn't worked under FERIS 1 and we are reflecting all of the feedback in the design for FERIS 2. In particular, we recognise that the first threshold was set too high and was seen as a significant barrier for some. We should be able to share the details with you mid-February and, as you will see, we are really keen for you to start to think about how you might use the funding available to continue to tackle fraud and error in 16/17. We've already made a lot of progress in the national statistics with FERIS and Real Time Information both contributing to this so let's keep up that focus.

The CMI was published on 27 January 2016, at the same time as Q2 Speed of Processing Statistics. The fact that processing times have stayed stable over 2015/16 (23 days for new claims and 10 days for changes), despite all of the pressures you are under to reduce costs and implement welfare reforms, is a huge achievement. The CMI data was published as experimental statistics given it has not previously been released. We are keen to get feedback before these become a standard publication so please let us know what you think. Again, my thanks go to all those LAs who worked with us in developing the statistics.

We're also really keen to get your input on the Housing Benefit (HB) pages on GOV.UK (see below) before we review the material.

All the best for 2016.

Clare Elliott

[Distribution and newsletter enquiries](#)

Caseload Management Information

Further to our update in December's [HB Direct](#) we are now in a position to confirm the publication of the 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 received from LAs. The revised 2014/15 information was issued to LAs on 25 January. The quarter 1 & 2 information for 2015/16 has been published on [GOV.UK](#).

We will also provide your individual LA's CMI broken down by the component risk groups in February 2016, along with your expected CMI for the next available quarter, to further help LAs identify good practice and develop plans in reducing HB fraud and error in your caseload. This further information will not be published on GOV.UK.

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

Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme 2

Following the Spending Review that was delivered on 25 November 2015, we have already confirmed that we will be extending the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) for a further 2 years.

Having engaged with LAs and your representative groups we have reviewed the scheme including the way we calculate the baselines and thresholds. Further details of the new scheme including 2016/17 baselines and thresholds and the methodology applied when calculating these will be provided in February 2016. We will also provide a copy of the new application form with details of deadlines for applying as well as aspirational timelines for appropriate payments. The timescale will be tight; therefore we encourage you to consider your innovative fraud and error reduction activities with a view to applying to the scheme for assistance. Our Performance Development Team (PDT) consultants will be on hand to support you through the process.

It is important that we continue to work together to tackle benefit fraud and error, so we 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.

State Pension Online - changing channels, changing lives

The new State Pension is a regular payment from the government that people can claim when they reach [State Pension age](#) on or after 6 April 2016. Amongst other channels, it can also be claimed digitally using [State Pension Online](#).

State Pension Online is a digital service, hosted on GOV.UK, which is available to people living in the United Kingdom.

A [video](#) has been produced to enable LA staff and customers to understand the benefits of the online service: that it is secure, easy to use and available 24/7 at a time that is convenient to the user.

As the customers using the service are potentially likely to require support with their online claim, an 'Assisted Digital' solution is in place which is currently provided by the DWP Online Helpdesk.

Staff can also inform customers that an additional social media contact channel is being piloted, which provides real-time assistance to users of the State Pension Online service between 9am and 5pm.

Customers enquiring about the support available to them when using the digital service should be directed as follows:

- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ClaimPensionDWP>
- Telephone: **0345 604 3349**
- Telephone: **0345 604 3412 (Welsh)**
- Textphone: **0345 604 0523**
- Email: dwponline.helpdesk@dpw.gsi.gov.uk

Carer's Allowance and the benefit cap

After careful consideration and in recognition of the hugely important contribution carers make to society, Lord Freud, Minister for Welfare Reform announced in Parliament on 25 January during the passage of the Welfare Reform and Work Bill that **all recipients of Carer's Allowance will be exempted from the benefit cap later this year.**

Around 98% of Carer's Allowance claimants who have benefit incomes above the cap level are currently exempt from the cap, primarily because they are in the same household as someone receiving an exempted benefit such as Personal Independence Payment or Disability Living Allowance.

An exemption for all recipients of Carer's Allowance fits in with the wider government strategy to support and invest in carers.

Further details and regulations will be published in due course. **The benefit cap remains in place as currently until those regulations are brought forward.**

Planned review of HB pages – your views welcomed

In January's Housing Benefit (HB) bulletin [G1/2016](#) we told you about our planned review of our HB pages on [GOV.UK](#). We also provided you with a signposting document with essential links to up to date guidance to use in the interim.

Our pages were created for LA staff and we, therefore, welcome and value your opinions on them. So, if you have anything you would like to share with us regarding the existing pages and our planned housekeeping exercise please email Valerie.hunt@dpw.gsi.gov.uk.