

# Housing Benefit Direct issue 168 June 2016

**ISSN 2045-6131 (Online)**

## Editorial

There has been a lot of change in Housing Delivery Division over the last few weeks. We said goodbye to Bill Hern, David Gleave, Chris Wood, Alby Stone and Shirley Collins on retirement. I'm sure those of you who have worked with them will join me in wishing them well. Bill, David and Chris between them had clocked up nearly 140 years of service (not all on Housing Benefit (HB), but quite a lot of it) and their knowledge and experience will be hard to replace. You may be aware that we have also restructured so that Adrian Shooter now leads on subsidy, change and communications, Paul Selby leads on all things to do with data and Jonathan Bottomer heads the Performance Development Team which includes our performance monitoring and reporting team. On behalf of the senior team, I'd like to say how much we are looking forward to working with you over the rest of the year and beyond.

On the subject of experience, you will see we are looking for secondees from local authorities (LAs) to help us manage the replacement of the current certification arrangements from April 2017. This is a fantastic opportunity to influence how the shape of these arrangements will work in future. I would say that the certification arrangements are the thing I have received the most correspondence about over the three years I've been working on HB so I am sure this will generate a lot of interest. Longer term, we are considering establishing a register of potential LA secondees to work across DWP who could be drawn from for different length secondments. We'll let you know more about this in due course.

You may have spotted that the preliminary fraud and error statistics were published on 19 May. On face value, these show a small reduction in the monetary value of fraud and error from 5.3% to 5.2% though I would urge caution reading too much into this as the reporting periods overlap. What they do suggest however is that there is a continuing rise in fraud. We know some of this is down to changing definitions used by our survey team but it is a cause for concern. We'll need to reflect on this as we look at the future Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) design.

Finally, can I just signpost you to the final article which sets out how to ensure you continue to receive regular updates from us in case there is a gap in service while we change mass mailing provider.

**[Distribution and newsletter enquiries](#)**

## Optional Real Time Information update

On 23 May we wrote to all LAs to explain that Housing Delivery Division is commencing the delivery of Optional Real Time Information (RTI) referrals to LAs with the June Bulk Data Match (BDM) referrals. This is scheduled to be from 16/17 June 2016.

We would like to thank all the LAs that have responded within the very challenging timescales that were set to opt-in to receiving the files; this was required to adhere to Data Protection regulations.

This optional data, delivered in addition to the existing BDM referrals as separate files, will provide similar data to the BDM files. It is envisaged that in completing these additional referrals LAs will be able to further reduce HB fraud and error. This should also help you to achieve increased FERIS incentive payments, as well as improving your Caseload Management Information score.

More guidance will be provided prior to the launch, including an Adjudication Circular, which will provide the detail you need to administer the Optional RTI referrals.

**Please note:** It will not be possible to use the automation developed for RTI BDM. The Optional file has an additional field to rank the referrals in order of value that will mean that the optional files cannot be loaded. Any queries regarding Optional RTI will need to be sent to us using the contact details provided below and not to your LA IT supplier.

If you have any queries about the Optional RTI initiative in the meantime please email: [lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) and a member of the team will contact you.

## Funeral Payments team sharing of information

This is to provide further clarification of an article we first published in Bulletin [HB G4/2016](#), paragraph 14, regarding Funeral Payments team sharing of information

In May 2015 the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Funeral Payments team and the LA Practitioners' Operational Group agreed a new process to obtain HB information from LAs.

The preferred method for the Funeral Payments team to obtain HB information from LAs is over the phone. The team will use the contact number provided on the individual LA website or GOV.UK to contact the relevant LA by phone when they require HB information for a customer.

Where an LA is unable to share the HB information over the phone due to requiring a written request, template SFF001 will be used. A specimen version of the template was provided at [Appendix C](#) of HB G4/2016.

The Funeral Payments team will ask the LA to provide a secure email address for the SFF001 template to be sent to. For an email address to be classed as secure it must be either: gcsx, gsx, gse, gsi.

LAs will send the completed template back to the Funeral Payments Team within 10 working days using the email address provided on the SFF001 template.

Please send any queries to [katie.wells@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:katie.wells@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## HB subsidy – Initial estimate forms, mid-year estimate forms and final claim forms data

The HB expenditure and subsidy data reported by (LAs in initial and mid-year estimates and initial final and audited final claims has previously been available under Freedom of Information arrangements but DWP has decided to make this data publicly available.

As from 1 June 2016 we have begun to make this data readily available by publishing it on [GOV.UK](http://GOV.UK) in the form of Excel spreadsheets. These spreadsheets contain all the data reported at individual LA level. The associated estimate/claim forms and guidance notes are also provided for information.

We have initially published 2013/14 data and will publish future years as and when are in a position to do so.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this article please email [michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk).

## Subsidy and Discretionary Housing Payment final claims

In the March issue of [HB Direct](#) we reminded LAs about the deadline for submitting 2015/16 HB initial final subsidy claims and Discretionary Housing Payment final claims by 30 April 2016. This deadline was set in order to meet wider governmental accounting and HM Treasury requirements. Once again, the vast majority of LAs succeeded in submitting their claims by the deadline which enabled DWP to comply with these requirements. The Department recognises LAs' considerable efforts and is extremely grateful to those LAs that provided these claims.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this article please email [michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk).

## Data Transport Appliance decommissioning

Housing Delivery Division is scheduling the decommission of all DWP owned Data Transport Appliance (DTA) servers from all LA sites, now that all files are being sent through the Data Hub to LAs.

DWP is arranging the collection and disposal of DTA servers by our contracted supplier Northern Realisations. A communication was issued on Glasscubes for all LAs to arrange for their IT teams to switch off and unplug the DTA server and to ensure all data had been downloaded before disconnection. Confirmation of all contact details for LA staff has also been requested.

We envisage that the collection of all servers will commence from 14 June 2016. We have arranged for our supplier to contact the named person within LA sites to confirm a suitable time/date for collection during office hours (9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Thursday and 9.00am until 4.30pm Friday). A proposed schedule will be posted on Glasscubes to allow authorities to plan for the pick-up.

Our supplier will confirm arrangements with the points of contact prior to the actual date of pick-up. The contact from our supplier to LAs is expected to start from the 6 June 2016.

If the contact details for any LA have changed since the last correspondence concerning Data Hub implementation, please advise immediately.

If you have any further queries please contact Mark Browne via [lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) and a member of the team will contact you.

## Updated Discretionary Housing Payments Guidance Manual

The Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) Guidance Manual, including Good Practice, has been recently updated and can be found on [GOV.UK](http://GOV.UK)

The updates, in the main, fall out of the 2015 summer budget and the passage of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 and include:

- the benefit cap changes that are due to take effect later in the year including forthcoming exemption for those getting Carers Allowance (or the Universal Credit equivalent) or Guardians Allowance
- additions to the non-exhaustive list of groups who are likely to be particularly affected by the benefit cap, at which DHP Government funding is specifically aimed
  - Women within 11 weeks of the expected week of childbirth
  - Households with a child aged 9 months or under
- the previously announced total DHP government contribution level of £870 million over the course of this Parliament.

If you have any queries regarding this article please email [carol.krahe@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:carol.krahe@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## HDD secondment opportunities

We are looking to recruit three LA employees to work on designing and delivering the new HB certification arrangements that will be rolled out from April 2017. In case you haven't already seen it, the advert appeared in [HB G5/2016](#), there is still time to apply as the closing date for applications is not until Friday 17 June 2016.

## Housing Benefit communications products

If you are reading this newsletter then there is a very good chance that you've received it directly from DWP as you are listed on one of our mass mailing distribution lists. Over the coming weeks we expect to move to a new mass mailing provider but there may be a temporary period where we will not have access to any mass mailing solution at all. If that happens we will be publishing all of our routine Housing communications directly to [GOV.UK](http://GOV.UK), by routine we mean

- Housing Benefit Direct Newsletter
- General and Urgent Information Bulletins
- Housing Benefit Adjudication and Subsidy circulars

In order to continue to receive our Housing communications you will need to set up an email alert subscription on [GOV.UK](http://GOV.UK), all you need to do is

- provide your email address
- set the frequency of emails (immediately, daily or weekly)
- provide a password, but this is optional

You will receive details of all DWP announcements as it isn't possible to send you Housing communication alerts only but these can be deleted if not relevant.

Any other non-routine official communications will be sent to LA Chief Executives and/or Revenues and Benefits managers via Microsoft Outlook for onward cascade.

We will keep updated on any developments via this newsletter and the General Information Bulletin but in the meantime if you have any further enquiries please email the [LA Gateway](#) team.