

Housing Benefit Direct issue 169 July 2016



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Editorial

As the Single Fraud Investigation Service project draws to a close, Housing Delivery Division has been working closely with the Fraud and Error Service to ensure we streamline and improve the end to end Housing Benefit (HB) fraud referral service. We appreciate that this was not working as well as it could have been and, in consultation with local authorities (LAs), we have identified the key issues and have developed a plan to resolve them. This month's edition of HB Direct reports on the great progress made by the Fraud Issues Progression Group which has been set up to ensure this plan is delivered. Hopefully, you will already have seen some of the benefits of the improvements we have put in place. We do sometimes still hear of issues but my expectation is that these substantially relate to referrals made some time ago. We'll continue to update you and to continue to listen to any concerns raised through the Local Authority Associations Steering Group and Practitioners' Operational Group.

You may be aware that the National Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee have been raising concerns about the levels of underpayments and about people not taking their entitlement to benefits. While we are clearly concerned about the loss made as a result of overpayments and the implications for both individual LA debt, our objective is to encourage accuracy in payments and we continue to explore new sources of data to support this. Statistics were published last month on the take-up of income related benefits. While the HB statistics showed good take up relative to other benefits, we can see that there are many households not taking up their entitlement, particularly people in work and in the private rented sector. We'd be interested in any information you have on why this is the case and for any good practice you could share with us.

Our data sharing team has been exceptionally busy bringing in the Data Hub and the various data shares it enables. From experience, we tend to find glitches when we bring in new systems, most of which are very hard to anticipate in advance of go-live. We appreciate your patience while we resolve issues but please be assured we are working as quickly as we can to ensure the process runs smoothly and efficiently in the future. I am confident the benefits will be worth it. This month we have an update on the improvements we are making as well as further information on the Payment Deduction Programme interface which is due to go live on 1 August.

We are relieved that we will continue to be able to use our existing mass mailing solution throughout July: you can look forward to several communications on FERIS 1 and 2! Who knows, the sun might also make an appearance too.

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Data Hub update

Retrieval of files

We would like to take this opportunity to thank LAs for their continued support and efforts with the implementation of the Data Hub.

Following our update in the March 2016 edition of Housing Benefit Direct, you may be aware that the Data Hub on-boarding process is complete and the Data Hub is now fully rolled out. We have now arranged the collection and disposal of the Desk Top Appliance servers by our contracted supplier Northern Realisations to be completed before August.

Based on feedback received by LAs since April, we are working with our suppliers to provide a solution to some of the issues experienced by LAs in handling the files.

We are proposing to amend the file name of the ATLAS data file. Currently the ATLAS filename is similar to that containing the LACI forms. We are aware that this is problematic for LAs and are arranging for the file name to be changed to make the ATLAS content easily identifiable. This change will be implemented as soon as possible.

We are also aware that the current process of resending files to all LAs is causing duplication for LA staff. We are working with our suppliers to provide a solution which will allow data to continue to be available in an LA message queue for a period of time after it is downloaded by an LA user. Further information on the progress of this solution will be provided in due course.

Data issues

Universal Credit implemented a number of fixes over the weekend 4/5 June and 11/12 June to improve the quality of the data they are providing via the Data Hub to support localised Council Tax Reduction (LCTR) schemes. The main fix was to provide the breakdown of the earnings amounts considered as part of the Universal Credit claim. There is still a problem with the 'Net Amount' this is due to be fixed on the 11 July 2016, but in the meantime guidance has been provided via Glasscubes to LAs on how to manually calculate this from the other information provided on the notification.

Again, we would like to thank LAs for your continued support throughout this period and remind you to raise incidents on any problems downloading files. If you are having any session timeout problems, your local IT support may be able to change local settings to help.

If you have any questions please email la-sst.hdd@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Payment Deduction Programme Interface

Further to Bulletin [HB G5/2016](#), work continues to gather pace within the Payment Deduction Project (PDP) and the go-live remains on track for 1 August 2016. From 1 August 2016 the new interface will be used by LAs for sending referrals to Debt Management (DM) for the recovery of HB debt including revisions and recalls. The interface will also be used to send cessations and payment schedules to LAs via the Data Hub.

The project is currently in the test phase working closely with the LA IT suppliers to ensure a robust test of the new software is performed. Once completed and any final changes have been applied (as appropriate) the software will then be ready for further testing by LAs. For most LAs the bulk of the new PDP functionality should already be in place, delivered as part of previous releases. Please refer to release notes provided to you by your IT supplier.

The project has also written to all LA staff that have 'Administrator' level access to the Data Hub to identify and establish the personnel who will be undertaking PDP related activities within each LA to download/upload files, set up/enrol any new users to the Data Hub as appropriate and to provide details to the project. Thank you to those who have responded to this request and may we remind those who haven't yet done so to respond by the 4 July 2016.

If it will be your role to upload and download PDP files for your LA and you haven't been contacted by your Data Hub administrator, please contact them as soon as possible to arrange access.

From 1 August 2016 the existing manual process will cease to operate, detailed guidance will be issued to you shortly, the guidance should be used in conjunction with any user notes provided to you by your individual IT supplier. We have also posted some frequently asked question on Glasscubes which you may find helpful.

If you have any queries please contact us via email at la-sst.hdd@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Memorandum of Understanding between DWP and LAs 2016/17

The 2016/17 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was issued to all LAs on Friday 10 June 2016 requiring sign-off by Friday 24 June 2016. To ensure continued access to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenue & Customs data each LA is required to fully complete, sign and return the necessary declaration, found on pages 28 and 29 of the MoU. Many thanks to those LAs who have already responded. Could we please urge those LAs who have not yet returned their declarations to do so as soon as possible.

In the meantime if you have any issues/queries concerning the signing of the 2016/2017 MoU, please e-mail the [DWP Security Team](#)

Formation of HB Fraud Issues Progression Group

We have set up an HB Fraud Issues Progression Group (FIPG) following feedback about the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) Project migration of fraud work from LAs to DWP's Fraud and Error Service (FES). This group will act as a central point for the collation of significant HB fraud process issues and monitor and progress those issues moving forward. It is chaired by DWP's Housing Delivery Division (HDD) and will consider and resolve a number of issues that have been identified in connection with the HB fraud referral process. It will also act as a forum to discuss, prioritise and manage those issues through the full end to end fraud referral process.

The group includes representatives from across FES, HDD and other relevant DWP areas. The group will feed back to both the LA Practitioners' Operational Group and the Local Authority Associations (LAA) Steering Group, if decisions made on specific issues need to be ratified and will take commissions from them. The formation of this group **does not** replace local arrangements that are already in place or change DWP's relationship with the LAAs.

The group meet monthly with some very positive outcomes from the first two meetings held to date; we have focused on developing and improving channels of communication between LAs and FES to enable visible service delivery improvements. Initial results include:

- appointment of DWP single point of contact to lead coordination for strategic relationships between FES and LAs
- planned review of the LA Information Exchange Form (LAIEF) process, could lead to a reduction in the volume of LAIEFs being issued to LAs from FES Low Level Fraud teams
- FES beginning to collate data on the common causes of rejecting referrals from LAs, which we will feed back both nationally and locally shortly
- FES confirming that they are now promptly clearing LA referrals in the Central Referral Service (CRS) part of FES, for all referrals sent by LAs using the correct process
- tentative agreement between HDD and FES about a process for dealing with historic LA referrals to ensure that LAs receive a definitive outcome, which we will discuss and communicate with LAs in the near future
- a review of processes relating to the CRS inbox which receives all LA referrals, with the aim of giving a more specific response to LAs when a referral is received; amongst other improvements
- progress on an early draft of management information (MI) covering the end to end process that, once it has been quality assured, could be useful to both FES and LAs
- identified issues affecting both LAs and FES, relating to LAs pre-calculating the overpayment, prior to a fraud referral to FES. The root causes have been identified and options for the solution are being discussed internally before discussion with LAs.

We will continue to update LAs about relevant progress through HB Direct and professional magazines such as IRRV Insight.

If you have any questions regarding the content of this article please email paul.selby@dwp.gsi.gov.uk or Alan.d.brown@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Housing Benefit communications products

In previous issues of HB Direct and the General Information Bulletin we explained that we would be moving to a new mass mailing solution and for a temporary period we would have to put contingency arrangements in place to ensure you continued to receive HB communications. Due to an unexpected temporary extension to the current contract we will continue to have access to our existing mass mailing solution until 31 July 2016.

We do expect to move to a new mass mailing solution over the summer months and it is still possible that we will not have any access to a mass mailing solution for a temporary period, so it has not been a waste of your efforts to set up the email alert subscription on [GOV.UK](#).

It is also our intention to carry out a major housekeeping exercise on all of our mailing lists so we will continue to restrict access to our lists for those communications products that are available on [GOV.UK](#)

We will continue to keep you 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.

Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) Communication Update

The administration of FERIS 1 is drawing to a close and therefore over the coming weeks we intend to issue various email updates.

Below is a summary of the communications your FERIS contact will receive:

- FERIS 1 - Final quarter 4 performance notification, detailing performance against baseline and any incentive payments due in relation to quarter 4 performance
- FERIS 1 - End of year adjustment notification, detailing performance for the 16 months of the FERIS scheme against your 16 month baseline and any additional incentive payments due
- FERIS 2 - Scheme update, including detail on the relationship between FERIS 2 and Caseload Management Information.

If you have any FERIS queries or changes to contact details, please email the FERIS Team

feris.team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Housing Benefit take-up 2014/15

DWP published the official statistics for estimates of take-up by caseload and expenditure for income related benefits for 2014/15, including HB on 28 June. They are available on the [GOV.UK](#) website.

For HB the figures show that

- 79% of those entitled to HB claimed the benefit
- 86% of the total amount of HB that could have been claimed was claimed.

However, up to 1.4 million families who were entitled to receive HB did not claim it, meaning that up to £4.6 billion of available HB went unclaimed. On average this amounted to around £3,000 per year for each family entitled to receive HB who did not claim the benefit.

The detailed breakdowns of the figures show that the groups for whom take-up is lowest are those in work at 55% of those that could have claimed, couples with children at 61% and those in the private rented sector at 66%.

HB take-up amongst those in work has significantly increased over time, rising from 38% in 2009/10 to 55% in 2014/15.

We would be interested to know if these overall figures reflect individual authorities experience locally and would like to hear of any successful initiatives to increase take-up in your communities. We can be contacted via email at hdd.pdtconsultants@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

HB Fraud and Error Good Practice Workshops

If you haven't yet booked your place on a workshop but would be interested in attending there is still time as the workshops are running up until 27 July 2016. Full details about the dates and venues are available on [GOV.UK](#). All you need to do is email your confirmation and delegates names to hamish.j.robertson@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank all those LAs who have provided a venue and facilities for the events.

Correction - reminder to appeals writing teams

Unfortunately the article 'A reminder to appeals writing teams' first published in [HB G6/2016](#) contains an error in the third paragraph which deals with where appeals are listed to be heard.

If a party to the appeal wants the case to be heard at a venue other than the one where the appeal has been listed then that party may apply to the Tribunal for a change of venue **not** to the Upper Tribunal, as stated in error.

We apologise for any confusion this may have caused.

Any enquiries relating to this article or the original item should be sent to

SSCSA-consumer-services@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk