

# Housing Benefit Direct issue 171 October 2016

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## Editorial

I'm very much looking forward to the IRRV conference in Telford in a couple of weeks. For me, it's a very important opportunity for DWP to engage with local authorities (LAs), to find out first hand about current issues and share ideas. I count my days there as personal learning and development time as I always learn so much which helps me in my role overseeing the delivery of Housing Benefit (HB). Even with the roll-out of Universal Credit, there are around 9.5 million people living in homes where some or all of the rental costs are covered by HB. We know that Universal Credit won't be fully rolled out until 20/22/23 and that we won't be looking to bring housing costs into DWP benefit for pensioners in this Parliament; so effective HB delivery is going to be critical to millions of people's lives for quite some time to come.

My Housing Delivery team has expanded over the last couple of years reflecting how important HB is to so many people and to enable us to engage more effectively with local government. An example of this is the 21 workshops we held over the summer looking at good practice on fraud, error and debt which were attended by over 570 delegates from most LAs. I was really pleased to see such good feedback on these and hope everyone who attended was able to take back and implement some of the ideas which were shared. We won't know until November whether or not our increased focus led to further falls in Fraud and Error in 2015/16 but the evidence we are getting from both the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) and Real Time Information (RTI) suggests you are making real progress despite the increasing complexities in people's lives and therefore claims. The early outcomes from FERIS 2 look promising – more on this can be found below.

As part of our endeavours to improve engagement and to reinforce the importance of HB, we are opening up new lines of communication with Chief Finance Officers (CFOs). This is not to replace existing channels but to ensure they are sighted on important HB related issues, particularly around funding and, hopefully, to engage them more in the policy development process. We do not have a complete list of CFOs so this month's HB Direct includes a request for these to be shared with us if you haven't yet done so.

Increasingly, DWP projects are adopting an agile approach. This includes greater involvement of users to specify their needs at the outset. We are always looking for LAs to get involved in helping us get things right from the start. For example, we are working with six LAs on the replacement for RTI Bulk Data Match. This month, we are seeking volunteers to help us develop a new service for reporting alleged benefit fraud. We are also still keen to bring in experience and expertise from local government through secondments, so please let us know if you are interested. I appreciate that these are all big asks at a time when you are coping with a huge agenda of change and pressure on resources but there are real dividends from helping us to get things right first time. Your expertise matters.

**Clare Elliott**  
**Head of Housing Delivery Division**

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## Fraud Referral Capture project: A service to allow benefit fraud to be reported on-line

The Referral Capture (RC) service is a new user-friendly, confidential way to report benefit fraud on-line; which is currently available to only a limited number of citizens to use. This new service will replace the current on-line Fraud Referral Form which customer insight found:

- is not intuitive
- requests information which may not be relevant to the allegations being made.

As part of the development of this new service we are looking to introduce a new Housing Benefit (HB) section to be used by all citizens and LA staff. To achieve this it is important that the needs of the users are understood and those needs are taken into account when designing the service.

The project team is seeking LA volunteers to help develop this new fraud type using their knowledge and views on HB frauds, such as Contrived Tenancies / Landlord Fraud, etc., to influence the development of this service. Initially this will involve the volunteers attending two or three full day workshops. As the service develops, their involvement is likely to increase and may require them to test the service and provide feedback.

These workshops will provide an:

- introduction to the RC project
- overview of the new on-line Report Benefit Fraud service
- opportunity for LA staff to help in the development of an on-line HB fraud service for LAs and citizens to use

If you would like to be involved in the development of this new service or would like to know more about it please email [david.spence@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:david.spence@dpw.gsi.gov.uk) or [steve.taylor1@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:steve.taylor1@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

## Communications with Chief Finance Officers

In a recent communication with Chief Executive Officers we explained that we are keen to expand our engagement with local authorities (LAs) to include Chief Finance Officers (CFOs) which will help us to better target our communications. In that letter we asked for LAs to provide us with their relevant CFO details so that we could build a database of contacts. Over the past couple of weeks almost half of all CFOs have responded but we are keen to have a comprehensive contact list.

We would be grateful if those CFOs, who haven't yet had time to let us know their contact details, provide us with the following information

- Name
- Job title
- Email address and telephone number
- LA name and postal address

Please send this information to [housing.correspondenceandpqs@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:housing.correspondenceandpqs@dpw.gsi.gov.uk) by 14 October 2016, if possible.

## Update to the Housing Benefit Review Good Practice Guide

The Housing Benefit Review Good Practice Guide has been updated to include details of the LA Electronic Prints Transfer Process. It can be found [here](#) on GOV.UK.

If you need further information, please contact [hamish.j.robertson@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hamish.j.robertson@dpw.gsi.gov.uk).

## Pension Credit Savings Credit uprating

Identifying cases for uprating has always been problematic and even more so in the last 12 months following the integration of the Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD) into the Automated Transfers to Local Authority Systems (ATLAS) notifications.

2015/2016 uprating was a particularly difficult time with many LAs reporting problems with identifying Pension Credit savings credit uprating cases.

We have commissioned our suppliers to put an enhancement in place for uprating 2016/2017 which will allow authorities to automate the majority of these uprating cases. The software changes are currently due to be deployed before December 2016.

If you have any questions please email [lads.deliveryteam@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lads.deliveryteam@dpw.gsi.gov.uk).

## State Retirement Pension Uprating

Providing uprating details for State Retirement Pension customers via the ATLAS notification has always been an aspiration and, despite attempts over the past few years, the complex nature of this improvement has meant that we have been unable to provide you with the uprating details.

Unfortunately, we will not be able to provide the State Retirement Pension uprating details again for 2016/2017. However, we are continuing to work with our suppliers to investigate whether a newly suggested solution could be implemented in time for 2017/2018 uprating.

If you have any questions please email [lads.deliveryteam@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lads.deliveryteam@dpw.gsi.gov.uk).

## Reminder: DHP mid-year monitoring returns 2016/17

As requested in Bulletin [G8/2016](#), this is a reminder for LAs to report on their Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) expenditure 1 April 2016 to 30 September 2016.

You should complete and return the form which can be found [here](#) by 14 October 2016. Returns and any queries regarding the form should be sent to [dhp.monitoringinbox@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dhp.monitoringinbox@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

## Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme 2 Quarter 1 2016/17 performance headlines

We are pleased to report that the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme 2 (FERIS 2) quarter 1 performance across all LAs, after caseload adjustments have been applied, is 5.5% above baseline. As a result 183 LAs (48%) have achieved their Lower Threshold, and will receive a combined total of £2.33million in incentive payments.

When compared to the same quarter in FERIS 1 (quarter 1 2015/16), overall performance across all LAs is up by 3% and 119 additional LAs will receive incentive payments.

Performance notifications were issued to LAs during the week of 26 September 2016.

If you have any queries regarding the above information, please contact [feris.team@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:feris.team@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

## Reminder of secondment opportunity: DWPs Housing Delivery Division

The Department is currently undertaking a huge programme of welfare reform. Working with LAs, who are one of our major stakeholders, continues to feature heavily and for this reason we value the expertise and knowledge that LA HB experts can bring to the team. These secondment opportunities will in turn provide an opportunity to gain an insight and experience of policy development and workings of central government.

Housing Delivery Division (HDD) has begun an on-going programme of bringing HB experts from LAs in to work alongside Data Sharing, Subsidy, Change and Performance teams on secondment. We are looking to recruit a number of LA employees onto the programme over the next 12 months.

HDD comprises of approximately 100 staff. The Division is responsible for overseeing the performance of LAs in their delivery of HB (circa £24 billion), allocating HB admin subsidy (circa £260 million) and DHPs (circa £125 million). HDD monitor a range of performance data including how quickly and accurately HB is paid and the prevention and detection of fraud and error. HDD offer support and challenge to those LAs not meeting performance expectations.

It also supports a large program of data sharing activity that is paramount in helping LAs pay the correct amount of HB and is heavily involved in managing change activity supporting the welfare reform agenda.

This is an exciting opportunity to play a leading role in maintaining and improving stakeholder relationships between DWP and LAs and in designing innovative opportunities for closer working during this busy and complex period of welfare reform.

## Personal requirements

Candidates should possess the following:

- good understanding of HB procedures and regulations
- good drafting and communication skills
- ability to build and maintain effective working relationships with LAs and other stakeholders
- ability to work with people at different levels in the organisation and to work as part of a team to achieve results
- ability to deliver work and pace and with successful, quantifiable outcomes.

## Further information

Secondment posts would be offered for 6 months initially but this will be reviewed at the end of the period and could be extended for up to a maximum of two years. The posts are full time and based across the country, although no moves at public expense would be considered. The roles in question will be determined by business need so your CV will be kept on file and you will be contacted once a suitable opportunity arises.

If you are keen to register your interest and are at S01/S02/SO3 and Pay Band level 4 or equivalent, (roughly equates to civil service HEO/SEO/G7 grades) please:

- check with your LA that you can be released; and then
- send your CV by email to [philip.j.sharple@dwpgsi.gov.uk](mailto:philip.j.sharple@dwpgsi.gov.uk)

If you would like to have a chat about this opportunity you can telephone Darren Baker on 020 7449 5375.