

Housing Benefit Direct issue 173 December 2016



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Editorial

Welcome to the December edition of Housing Benefit Direct, I have the honour of being guest editor for this Christmas issue.

The Autumn Statement was delivered on 23 November 2016, the main announcement affecting the Department for Work and Pensions, local authorities (LAs) and our customers is an improvement in the Universal Credit taper rate which will fall from 65% to 63% in April 2017. The Chancellor also confirmed that the government has no plans for further welfare savings measures in this parliament beyond those already announced. You can find the whole statement [here](#).

For those of you attending the IRRV Scottish Benefits and Welfare Reform Conference & Exhibition look out for Clare Elliot who will be presenting on some key areas of Housing Benefit (HB) and Adrian Shooter who will be talking about Fraud and Error. They are always keen to catch up with colleagues at these events, so please say “hi” if you see them about and have the time.

This month we also have articles on the benefit cap, specifically around new processes to accommodate those Universal Credit cases where Managed Payments to Landlords may be impacted. We have a link to the latest Practitioners’ Operational Group and LA Associations Steering Group minutes of meetings. I attended the latest meeting of the former of these two and I continue to be impressed by the level and breadth of knowledge LA colleagues display and the good nature of the working relationship we have - there is a genuine desire to work together to solve issues and overcome challenges to successfully deliver change.

Finally, a mention that brings me back to why what you do in delivering your service is so vital; improving people’s lives. A while back I had an apprentice work for me from a government scheme for students from under privileged backgrounds. She explained to me that her extremely helpful LA HB team had ensured her parents got the support they required, leading to a stable home life and ultimately providing her with the educational opportunities leading to being placed on the scheme and coming to work for DWP prior to university. It’s easy to forget the impact your work can have sometimes, particularly when there is so much going on, so I just wanted to mention that.

I hope you all have nice plans for the break and wish you all a Merry Christmas.

**Darren Baker (on behalf of Clare Elliot,
Head of Housing Delivery Division)**

[Distribution and newsletter enquiries](#)

Benefit cap: Universal Credit cases and Managed Payments to Landlords

On 7 November 2016 the legislation around the benefit cap changes came into effect. As part of this process we wrote to all local authority (LA) Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) to provide more details on the implementation of the changes.

For Universal Credit claimants, the implementation of the benefit cap changes apply in the claimant's first full assessment period following the regulations coming into force. This means that all these claimants will move onto the changed levels by early January 2017 at the latest.

Under Universal Credit, when a claimant is subject to the benefit cap due to the changed cap rates, and a Managed Payment to Landlord (MPTL) is in place, they will be advised to speak to their Jobcentre Plus work coach. The work coach will discuss how the cap interacts with the MPTL and, in a limited number of cases, the claimant may decide that it is in their best interests to end the MPTL to allow them to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) from their LA.

The claimant can reinstate the MPTL at a later point, however, this cannot be done whilst they are in receipt of DHP. The landlord will be informed of a decision to end or re-instate an MPTL. Once a claimant has decided to end an MPTL the landlord cannot ask for it to be re-instated unless the benefit cap no longer applies.

We only expect this particular set of circumstances to apply in a small number of MPTL cases, and any action would only take place after the claimant has discussed it with their work coach and agreed that this would indeed be in their best interests. Most arrangements of MPTLs will continue and DWP has not issued guidance to stop all MPTLs.

More information on the benefit cap including applicable benefits and the cap amounts can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)

Practitioners' Operational Group

The Practitioners' Operational Group discusses operational issues relating to HB and reports to the joint DWP and LA Associations Steering Group. Both of these Groups meet separately on a bi-monthly basis and summary minutes of those meetings are published on GOV.UK regularly. They can be found through the following links:

- www.gov.uk/government/groups/dwp-and-local-authority-associations-steering-group
- www.gov.uk/government/groups/dwp-and-local-authorities-practitioners-operations-group

If you have any questions please email mont.goldman@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Additionally, we'd like your views on how Housing Delivery Division can better inform or engage with you on key HB issues including HB finance matters. Please contact us by email at housing.correspondenceandpqs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk. We look forward to hearing from you.

Supporting disabled people to work consultation

On 31 October 2016, “[Improving Lives](#)” The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper was published setting out proposals and seeking views across a range of health, employer, welfare and societal issues focusing on what more can be done to transform the employment prospects of disabled people and those with health conditions. We would welcome your views as part of this consultation process.

Community Partners

The new Community Partner role will build on expertise within Jobcentre Plus and strengthen understanding of the needs of disabled people and those with health conditions to ensure support is tailored to customer requirements.

Community Partners will have a lived experience or expert knowledge of disability and will bring this to enhance disability understanding in partnership with third sector organisations. They will shape services to meet the needs and aspirations of disabled people and those with health conditions, support development of a national mentoring network and build relationships with specialist organisations in the area. Roles are available on secondment or fixed-term appointment for 12 months with a possible extension for further 11 months.

For further information email community.partners@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Journey to Employment job club

Often, the best advocates of the positive impact of being in work are people who themselves have had the experience of managing a serious health condition, or overcoming an employer’s prejudice about disability.

We have already tested Journey to Employment peer support job clubs on a small scale, offering personalised support in a group environment delivered by people who have personal experience of disability, drawing on research by Disability Rights UK and the Work Foundation.

These clubs often take place outside a Jobcentre as this provides an alternative setting which may be more effective for some individuals with health conditions.

We are extending our Journey to Employment job clubs to 71 Jobcentre Plus areas with the highest number of people receiving Employment and Support Allowance, to further test the effectiveness of peer support job clubs at supporting those with health conditions.

For further information email Journeyto.Employment@dwp.gsi.gov.uk.

Local Supported Employment provision

DWP will work closely with LAs to pilot an approach to deliver Local Supported Employment targeted at those with a learning disability or autism known to Adult Social Care, or those in contact with secondary mental health services. We will contact LAs shortly.

Update: Payment Deduction Project

The Payment Deduction Project (PDP) interface between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and LAs, allowing the two-way transfer of Housing Benefit (HB) debt overpayment files, is now fully live.

The project formally closed at the end of November 2016 and the PDP interface is now classed as business as usual activity. The LA Security and Support Team and Debt Management will continue to provide support to you as per the Service Level Agreement.

Guidance has been published in circulars [HB A6/2016](#) and [A11/2016](#). Supporting guidance and Frequently Asked Questions can also be found on Glasscubes.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank LAs for your patience and resilience demonstrated in the implementation of this project; which we appreciate has posed some challenges. From these challenges, we have captured valuable lessons which we will use to improve the experience of future initiatives.

For any technical enquiries about the interface contact la-sst.hdd@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Reminder: Funeral Payments Team request for contact details

In November's issue of Bulletin [HB G11/2016](#) LAs were asked to provide the Funeral Payments (FP) team with a contact phone number and secure email address to enable continued sharing of HB information between us. This request followed the removal of these details from some LA's web pages.

We also provided a list of secure email addresses that can be accepted by the FP team:

- [@.gcsx](#)
- [@.gsx](#)
- [@.gse](#)
- [@.gsi](#)

Please note that list should have also included [@.gov.uk](#). We apologise for any inconvenience this may have caused.

If you haven't yet provided your LA's information, please send it via email with 'LA contact details' in the subject header to katie.wells@dwp.gsi.gov.uk by Friday 9 December 2016.