

SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

between

*Department for Work and Pensions
Debt Management*

and

**Local Authorities
(LA)**

For the provision of the following services:-

- Recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments

Agreement date 01 April 2014

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CC	Contact Centre
CCG	Contact Centre Group
DM	Debt Management
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
FCG	Finance Control Group
HB	Housing Benefit
LA	Local Authority
MP	Member of Parliament
OP	Overpayment
POG	Practitioners Operational Group
S of S	Secretary of State
SLA	Service Level Agreement
UC	Universal Credit

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Version Control

Distribution (final agreed version)

Name	Role
Sue Ritson	Debt Management Infrastructure Team

Document History

Version	Date	Reason for issue
1.0	18/05/2012	Annual Review
2.0	01.4.14	Sign off of revised SLA
3.0	24.11.14	Contact details for CC Porth changed.

SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

1. Introduction

This Agreement is made on *insert date*

BETWEEN

(1) ***DWP, Debt Management (DWP DM)***

and

(2) **Local Authorities LA (LA)**

2. Background to Agreement

- 2.1 Housing Benefit (HB) is a tax-free, income related social security benefit paid by the Local Authority (LA). It is intended to help towards housing costs for rented accommodation, for Council, Registered Social Landlord or Housing Association tenants on low incomes. Council Tax Benefit (CTB) may also be referred by an LA and recovered by Debt Management via the same process but these overpayments are less frequent.
- 2.2 An overpayment arises where someone is paid more HB than they are legally entitled to claim. A change of circumstances for the customer may have reduced their entitlement to benefit in an earlier period. If there is no current award of HB from which recovery can be made, the LA can refer the overpayment debt to Debt Management. The LA should only do this once they have established that their customer is in receipt of another prescribed social security benefit. (see Appendix 4).
- 2.3 Debt Management does not recover HB/CTB overpayment debt when the customer is not in receipt of a prescribed benefit. Debt Management is only responsible for recovering LA debt when that debt has been referred to them by the LA. Debt Management is a third party recovery agent only, and as such, pursues recovery of HB overpayment debt on behalf of the LA. Debt Management does not have the authority to decide upon the recoverability or otherwise of LA debt.
- 2.4 The Welfare Reform Act 2012 introduces new powers that permit Local Authorities to impose a Civil Penalty on a customer if they are negligent or fail to disclose further information; recovery of a Civil Penalty is to be treated exactly as the associated overpayment, and is subject to the same requirements and standards set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of this SLA.
- 2.5 As the recovery of Universal Credit (UC) uses a different process than the recovery of other benefits, the recovery of UC is not included within this SLA.

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3. Definitions

3.1	"Agreement" means this Service Level Agreement (SLA), including all Appendices and related documentation.
3.2	"Authorised Officer" means that person or persons whom DWP DM advises LA in writing is/are authorised to administer this Agreement on behalf of DWP DM or those nominated by the Authorised Officer to act on his behalf.
3.3	"Charges" means any charges that may be made for the provision of the Services under the arrangements set out in Appendix A.
3.4	"Conditions" means the terms and conditions in this Agreement and in any amendments and variations that may be agreed from time to time between DWP DM and LA and detailed in this Agreement.
3.5	"Key Personnel" are those staff of the Service Provider who are performing crucial roles and are listed in the Agreement.
3.6	"Management Information" means the information to be provided by DWP DM and LA as per Schedule C.
3.7	"Service Provider" means DWP Debt Management
3.8	"Service(s)" means the services described in the Agreement.
3.9	"Service(s) Standards" means the agreed Service and Quality Standards summarised in the Schedules to this Agreement.
3.10	A "Variation" shall mean an agreed variance of the requirements as stated in the Agreement.

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4. Status of Agreement

4.1 The Agreement is a formal and mutually agreed statement of the business relationships between DWP DM and LA for the delivery of specific activities. Save where otherwise provided for in this Agreement, the terms of this Agreement may be varied with the agreement of both DWP DM and LA.

5. Term of Agreement

This agreement will run for a period of 3 years, with an option to terminate or extend. During the period covered by this agreement, both DWP DM and LA have the right to terminate this agreement under the conditions set out in Section 14 to this agreement.

6. Variation

6.1 Both parties can request a variation to the existing agreement via existing channels.

6.2 All changes will be discussed between the Authorised Officer and LA. Changes will be documented as an appendix and incorporated into this Agreement at the next revision.

6.3 Both parties to this agreement are expected to make every effort to ensure that the arrangements envisaged by this clause are operated amicably, with minimum disruption to work processes.

7. The Service

7.1 Prior to referral to Debt Management, the LA will check CIS to establish the customer's current address, and also that the customer is in receipt of a prescribed benefit, so that the referral is appropriate and the details are correct on the referral form. LAs send all HB/CTB overpayment referrals to one Contact Centre (CC) - CC Porth - using a standardised referral form (see Appendix 6). Referrals must be sent via secure email or a dedicated postal address (see Appendix 9)

E-mail is the preferred and most secure option. LAs can set a read receipt using this method which will confirm receipt at CC Porth.

7.2 Upon receipt at CC Porth, referrals are scrutinised by nominated staff at CC Porth to check for:

- Non Quality referral
- Customer not in receipt of benefit
- If there's a current instalment plan on Debt Manager
- Duplicate

A clerical notification is sent on all of the above scenarios.

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7.3 All other notifications are loaded onto Debt Manager, generating an automatic notification to the LA to confirm that the referral has been accepted for recovery.

Once loaded onto Debt Manager, these cases can be actioned by any of the CCs and Recovery Agents consider recovery by deductions from benefit as they would for any other overpayment.

8. Data Protection and Security

8.1 Both parties agree to comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 as amended from time to time.

9. Business Continuity

Both Parties will at all times act with reasonable care and skill. DWP DM undertakes to have sufficient quality checks and financial controls in place to minimise the risk of financial error:

- a) DWP DM provides a Business Continuity service to ensure that normal business operations are restored as soon as is possible following a major service failure or disruption.
- b) All business continuity and disaster recovery arrangements will be dealt with on an individual basis and clients informed of all action, including priorities, as quickly as possible.

10. Liability

10.1 DWP DM shall not be liable for any loss or damage incurred by LA, unless that loss or damage is incurred as a direct result of the negligence of DWP DM or its employees.

11. Performance Review

Both organisations will review progress and performance against the agreed standards on an informal basis and as directed by the method of control set out in the schedules. Where necessary a more formal review will be arranged at the request of either party. Otherwise the Service Level Agreement will be formally reviewed against its objectives periodically.

11.1 Where either party considers that services are not being delivered to the required standard, issues should be raised via the escalation procedures described at para 13.1 et al.

11.2 Responsibility for this will lie at local management level. Nominated Coordinators will ensure that this activity takes place. Either partner may negotiate ad-hoc variations on individual services within the agreement via the relevant nominated co-ordinators.

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- 11.3 Where both partners agree on a variation to specified services, the nominated coordinators shall revise the agreement to a specified format subject to appropriate document control procedures and re-issue the amended agreement to staff.

12. Liaison Meetings

- 12.1 Formal reviews of the Services and Service Standards being achieved by DWP DM shall take place between DWP DM and LA periodically.
- 12.2 Debt Management will attend liaison meetings with groups of Local Authorities if required.

13. Dispute Resolution

- 13.1 There may be occasions of disagreement or dispute. To ensure the service will be delivered, both partners will notify each other immediately on identification of an error or problem with any aspect of business that may impact on this Agreement. In this event both partners commit themselves to finding a solution at the closest level to the disagreement or dispute that is acceptable to all as quickly as possible.
- 13.2 It is important that disagreements are resolved at the **lowest practicable level**, i.e. Contact Agent. It is expected that most issues, which arise, will be resolved through informal discussions with colleagues. Where it does not prove possible to resolve an issue through these means, it should be referred to the CC nominated liaison officers as defined in Appendix 3 who may need to escalate to national level to ensure consistency of approach (DM and LA).

14. Termination

- 14.1 This Agreement may be ended by the agreement of both parties.
- 14.2 DWP DM / LA may terminate the Agreement if the other party is in default of any of the Conditions of the Agreement or of the Service Standards contained therein, and have not remedied the default(s) to the satisfaction of the other party within a period of 30 days of written notification of the default(s).
- 14.3 DWP DM / LA will give the other party notice of termination arising from default of any of the Conditions of this Agreement or of the Service Standards contained therein, such termination to take effect at the expiry of a period of 90 days from the date of service of such notice of termination.

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- 14.4 Both DWP DM and LA reserve the right to terminate this agreement for operational or for any other reasons whatsoever, such termination to take effect at the expiry of a period of 90 days from the date of service of such notice of termination.
- 14.5 Discussions will commence within 6 months of the expiry of the 3 year agreement to agree any extension.

15. Charges

No charges are applicable for either party

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16. Nominated Representatives

DWP DM (Authorised Officer)

Name: **Julie Thompson** Job Title: **Debt Management Infrastructure and Commercial Manager**

Location: **DWP, Norcross** Telephone: **01253 339057**

LA (LA)

Name: Job Title: **LA**

Location: Telephone:

17. Parties to the Agreement

DWP DM

Signed

Name

Date

LA

Signed

Name

Date

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Service and Performance Requirements for Debt Management and the Local Authorities

The following table lists the services and performance requirements against which standards will be measured and reports made.

No	REQUIREMENT	MINIMUM STANDARD	BY WHOM	METHOD OF CONTROL
1	DM and LAs to provide a mechanism for local contact to deal with enquiries between LAs and DM for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual cases with CC Group (excluding CC Porth) sites to include enquiries relating to Debtor accounts and repayment to LA • CC Porth for Non- compliance of Service Level Agreement. 	The agreed structure for communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular telephone contact via CC Group sites (LAs and CCs to provide contact details) • Nominated Officers for formal escalation (CC Group sites and LAs to provide contact details) 	CC Group sites, LA Manager and staff	Shared Issues log for non-compliance of SLA. (Appendix 3)
2	Referrals to be made on the National Standard OP Referral form. Copy attached at Appendix 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals only to be sent to CC Porth via secure e-mail or post. • All post to be sent to CC Group sites (excluding CC Porth) 	<p>LA's to use the National Referral form when requesting DM to recover HB debt</p> <p>LAs to check CIS if debtor is at address stated and in receipt of a prescribed benefit prior to issue</p>	CC Group sites, LA Managers and staff	Quality referral log. (Appendix 2)
3	Respond to initial requests from LA made on the National Referral form to recover HB	Notify LA that recovery is not appropriate or not possible or recovery will commence from a	Contact Centre	Analysis of Debt Management Statistical

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No	REQUIREMENT	MINIMUM STANDARD	BY WHOM	METHOD OF CONTROL
	debt	given date and at a given rate within 20 working days of original request	Group	Data (Appendix 2)
4	Standardise deduction rates and application of Income and Expenditure decisions	<p>DM will decide all rates of recovery for HB debts in accordance with S of S standards</p> <p>DM to process and decide all Income and Expenditure applications for debts being recovered by DM on behalf of LA. Requests received by the LA to be forwarded to DM</p>	Contact Centre Group	Appropriate Management Control by CCs
5	LA to notify CCG (excluding Porth) of all changes of circumstances relating to a HB debt, which is being recovered by DM	<p>National proforma to be sent to CC within 5 working days of the overpayment team being notified of the change of circumstance (appendix 7)</p> <p>DM to appropriately action change of circumstances notification within '2 week Head of Work' target.</p>	CCG/LA	DM Business Reports for CCs. Appropriate Management Control by LAs (Appendix 2)
6	Notify LA when recovery complete or recovery ceases for a specified reason	<p>By using automated Debt Manager notifications (Appendix 8), DM to inform LA within 10 working days of identification when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full recovery has been achieved • Recovery ceases for a specified reason 	CCG	Analysis of Debt Management statistical data (Appendix 2)
7	Make repayments to the LA's of money recovered on their behalf	<p>DM to repay any debt recovered on behalf of LAs at monthly intervals one month in arrears. All payments to be accompanied with a schedule itemising amounts appropriate to individual debtors</p>	CCG/FCG	Appropriate Management control by CCG/FCG (Appendix 2)
8	CCG to forward customer complaints and	CCG to forward customer complaint to LA	CCG/LA	Appropriate

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No	REQUIREMENT	MINIMUM STANDARD	BY WHOM	METHOD OF CONTROL
	MP enquiries relating to HB Debt to LA. LA can request a sequence of events from CCG to complete LA response.	within 7 working days. CCG to respond to LA request for sequence of events within 7 working days		Management Control by CCG/LA (Appendix 2)

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Monitoring Guidance for the Debt Management and Local Authorities Service Level Agreement

In setting up the SLA the aim should be to adhere, where at all possible, to the service provisions specified in the SLA as set down in the regulations. Where there is any deviation from that standard, discussion should take place at POG to put in place a target and timescale acceptable to both DM and LA. Details of any such agreement should be included within the end of year statement of performance. The guidance should therefore be used to inform discussions between DM and LA with a view to putting in place monitoring arrangements which are acceptable to both sides and which satisfy current legislation.

Service Provisions within the SLA are the minimum requirements needed to support the SLA. Any local deviation from the minimum standards can only be in excess of those given and must be documented and agreed by both DM and the LA.

Service Provision Target/Standards and Data Stream

REQUIREMENT	No	TARGET/STANDARD	DATA STREAM	AVAILABILITY
Input referral onto Debt Manager	3	CC Porth – within 10 working days	DM Business Reports	Immediately
Final outcome of referral to notify that case has been put into recovery or returned to LA	3	CCG - within 10 working days	DM Business Reports	Immediately
LA to notify CCG of change of circumstances	5	LA - within 5 working days of the HB overpayment team being notified of change.	Management Control by LAs.	Immediately
CCG to process change	5	CCG – within ‘2 week Head of Work target’.	DM Business Reports	Immediately
REQUIREMENT	No	TARGET/STANDARD	DATA STREAM	AVAILABILITY

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Recovery complete or deductions cease	7	CCG sites - within 10 working days of identification	Debt Management Statistical Data	Immediately
Payment to LA	8	DM Finance division. Periodicity - one month Due date - one month in arrears	Appropriate Management Control by FCG	Immediately
HB customer Complaints/MP enquiries	9	CCG sites to forward HB customer complaint to LA - within 3 working days	Appropriate Management Control by CCG	Immediately
CCG to provide LA with a sequence of events in respect of a HB customer complaint/MP enquiry involving DM	9	CCG to supply information - within 7 working days	Appropriate Management Control by CCG/LA	Immediately

Appendix 3

Nominated Officers Supporting the Debt Management and Local Authorities Service Level Agreement

Each party to the SLA will provide nominated contact points within their organisation. The role of the officer will be to:

- Deal with queries effectively
- Resolve problems by contact with opposite number in LA or DM.
- Provide up to date lists of telephone numbers and contact points
- Gather information and statistics to monitor SLA performance.

3.1 CC Porth – will deal with queries relating to non-compliance of the Service Level Agreement.

Nominated Officer	Duties.	Contact details
Mark Harman	DM HB Referral Manager	T/N 01443 688624 E-mail: Mark.Harman@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

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Emma Owens	SLA Liaison Officer	T/N 01443 688604 E-mail: Emma.Owens@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
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3.2 CCG – will deal with queries for individual cases, to include enquiries relating to Debtor accounts; repayment to LA and sequence of events for LA for HB Customer Complaints/MP enquiry involving DM.

Nominated Officer	Duties	Contact details.
Contact Centre Agents	Individual Case enquiries	T/N 0845 8500293 or 0345 8500293
Emma Owens	Complaints for individual cases	T/N 01443 688604 E-mail: Emma.Owens@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

3.3 The escalation route for Local Authorities to Debt Management will be:

ISSUE	RESPONSIBILITY
Unsatisfactory response by Contact Agents	T/N 01443 688604 E-mail: Emma.Owens@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Delays in payment to LAs	T/N 01443 688604 E-mail: Emma.Owens@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

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Customer Complaints sequence of events	T/N 01443 688604 E-mail: Emma.Owens@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Unsatisfactory compliance with the Service Level Agreement	T/N 01443 688604 E-mail: Emma.Owens@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

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Appendix 4

Deductions for HB debt can be made from any current award of a benefit as listed below:

- Income Support (IS)
- Attendance Allowance (AA)
- Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Employment & Support Allowance (ESA)
- Disability Living Allowance (DLA)
- Incapacity Benefit (IB)
- Industrial Death Benefit (IDB)
- Carers Allowance (CA)
- Maternity Allowance (MA)
- Retirement Pension (RP)
- Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA)
- Pension Credit (PC)
- Bereavement Benefits (BB)
- Bereavement Allowances (BA)

DEFINITION OF DEBT MANAGER NOTIFICATIONS TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The following notifications are automatically issued by the Debt Manager Computer System to inform Local Authorities of the progression and outcome of the Housing Benefit Overpayment Referral.

HBPIF	Paid in full notification to LA
HBREC	Recovery start letter to LA
LAHSAG	Recovery reduced hardship notification to LA
LARET	Overpayment return letter to LA
LARETM	Missing data return letter

Appendix 6

Department for Work and Pensions Shared Services, Debt Management (P) HBEN PO Box 171 Mitcheldean Gloucester GL17 OXG	Adran Gwaith a Phensiynau Gwasanaethau a Rennir, Rheoli Dyled (P) HBEN PO Box 171 Mitcheldean Gloucester GL17 OXG
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LA address: <i>Address 1</i>	Date:
<i>Address 2</i>	
<i>Address 3</i>	
<i>Address 4</i>	
<i>POST CODE</i>	Tel:

APPLICATION FOR RECOVERY OF HOUSING BENEFIT

I am referring this over payment to you in accordance with Housing Benefit Regulation 102 for recovery from Social Security Benefits Subject to the provisions of the Housing Benefit Regulation 105.

CIS Checked On:
Customer's name: <i>Name</i>
Customer's current address: <i>Address 1</i>
<i>Address 2</i>
<i>Address 3</i>
<i>Address 4</i>
<i>POST CODE</i>
N.I. Number: <i>NiNo</i>
Date of birth:
LA reference number: <i>LA reference</i>
LA code: <i>LA code</i>

An overpayment of Housing Benefit has occurred as (Tick one)

- a) **A result of failure to disclose or**
- b) **A misrepresentation of a material fact.**

Fail to Disclose – this occurs after the claim has started and the customer has a change of circumstances which materially affects the payment of HB.

Misrepresentation – this occurs when the customer has signed the claim form and the information given is incorrect at the time of signing.

Overpayment classification:	Error: <input type="checkbox"/>	Fraud: <input type="checkbox"/>
Reason for overpayment: <i>Please select from list</i>		
If other, input reason here:		
Periods of overpayment	From:	To:
Amount already recovered by LA:	£0.00	
Outstanding balance:	£0.00	

Local Authority

Change of Circumstances Notification

From: (LA)

To: Debt Management
Contact Centre

Customer Name: _____

NI Number: (NiNo) _____

LA Reference Number: _____

The following change of circumstances has occurred:

- Customer repaid in full
- Customer now in receipt of Housing Benefit
- LA have made own arrangements for repayment
- Customer has appealed / disputed OP decision
- Other

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix 8

Contact details – Referrals

All referrals are to be sent via either:

- Secure email using Government Connect (GC to a dedicated address within CC Porth. To be able to attach the referral to an email the customer's NINO should replace the existing file name.

Email is the preferred and most secure option. LAs can set a read receipt using this method which will confirm receipt at CC Porth.

- a dedicated postal address:

Local Authority	Type	E-mail address	Postal Address
Welsh LAs	Referrals only	porth.housingbenefitwales@dwp.gsi.gov.uk	Debt Management(P)HBEN PO Box 171 Mitcheldean Gloucester GL17 OXH
Scottish LAs	Referrals only	porth.housingbenefitscotland@dwp.gsi.gov.uk	Debt Management(P)HBEN PO Box 171 Mitcheldean Gloucester GL17 OXH
English LAs	Referrals only	porth.housingbenefitengland@dwp.gsi.gov.uk	Debt Management(P)HBEN PO Box 171 Mitcheldean Gloucester GL17 OXH

Change of Circumstances form – Appendix 7 of the SLA

Send all Appendix 7s and any other post to the Contact Centre identified on the notice of recovery. Postal addresses are included in HB/CTB bulletin G20/09.

However, if no notice of recovery is held send Appendix 7 to Dearne Valley Contact Centre.

As an alternative you can use the following e-mail addresses, provided your LA uses Government Connect

CCBradford CCBRADFORD.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

CCCorby CCCORBY.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

CCDearneValley CCDEARNEVALLEY.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

CCNuneaton CCNUNEATON.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT
FOR SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS

BETWEEN

**THE DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS' SERVICE DELIVERY
BUSINESSES**

AND

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (LA)

National Framework Agreement (Background)

1. This National Framework Agreement recognises that there will be a requirement for a number of the businesses that collectively form The DWP to enter into Service Level Agreements (SLAs) that describe the day to day working practices and standards between those businesses and LAs.
2. This Framework document lays down the overarching common principles that should be embraced in each of the individual SLAs. This will help to create a greater focus on working together to understand any issues that may arise, and promoting liaison as the means of resolving them, rather than merely laying down standards that are required to be met.
3. DWP SLAs that are covered by these overarching principles are:
 - The Pension Service (TPS)
 - Jobcentre Plus (JCP)
 - Disability Carers Service (DCS)
 - The Appeals Service (until transfer to DCA)
 - Financial Services Division – Debt Management (DM)
 - Rent Service (DWP Agency from 01/04/2004)

This document has been endorsed by the Local Authority Associations (LGA, WLGA, ALG, and COSLA)

Local Authorities

4. **The LA have a key role in supporting government objectives in relation to placing people in work and removing people from poverty through delivery of Housing Benefit (HB). HB is an important part of welfare provision designed to enable people on lower incomes access to a decent home. It also plays a key part in enabling people to make the transition from welfare into work.**

Department for Work and Pensions

5. DWP is committed to eradicating poverty for children, combating pensioner poverty and sustaining a higher proportion of people in work than ever before, whilst providing security for those who can't work. DWP has been created specifically to improve and tailor services to customers.

The Pension Service

6. The aim of The Pension Service is to combat poverty and promote security and independence for today's and future pensioners. In addition, The Pension Service will develop and implement local services through a local service plan that will be co-terminus with LA boundaries. These plans will involve a range of partners including LAs.

Jobcentre Plus

7. The aim of Jobcentre Plus is to help more people into work, help employers fill their vacancies, and to provide people of working age with the help and support to which they are entitled. An important feature of the organisation will be the alignment of Jobcentre Plus and LA boundaries. This development should bring benefits for DWP, LAs and our common customers.

Disability and Carers Service

8. Disability and Carers Service (DCS) exists to support disabled people and their carers, whether or not they are able to work, by providing an efficient and customer-focused delivery of Disability and Carer Benefits, payable to just under 4.5 million customers.

The Appeals Service

9. The Appeals Service hears appeals on decisions on Social Security benefits, Child Support, Vaccine Damage, Tax Credit, HB, CTB and Compensation Recovery questions throughout Great Britain and on decisions under the Road Traffic Act in England and Wales.

Financial Services Division – DM

10. DM is the organisation responsible for delivering debt management and recovery service for the DWP; this responsibility includes, in certain circumstances, the recovery of HB/CTB overpayment on behalf of LAs. DM has overall responsibility to support the DWP in the reduction in losses from fraud and error in programme spends, by the efficient and effective collection of debt. Service delivery requirements and standards are in the attached appendices.

The Rent Service

11. The Rent Service (TRS) is an executive agency of the DWP. We aim to be England's leading provider of impartial, professional rental valuation services

that are fair to our customers and other stakeholders. TRS makes fair rent evaluations for regulated and secure tenancies, and determines whether HB customers (and prospective customers) are being asked to pay more rent than their landlords might reasonably expect in open market conditions.

The Purpose of SLAs

- 12. The SLAs described in this document are intended to improve quality of services and secure application of minimum standards by the parties to the agreements. The SLAs also encourage closer working through dialogue and liaison and the development of a better understanding of our procedures in order to provide the best possible customer experience. Whilst individual SLAs will set out the minimum standards but both parties are encouraged to build on the SLAs to reflect local needs.**

Reviews and Disagreements

- 13. All SLAs must contain arrangements for monitoring performance throughout the year plus arrangements for a full joint review of progress at the end of the business year. SLAs should run from April to March. It is important that a process for resolving disagreements at the lowest practicable level is described in all SLAs.**

Monitoring Arrangements

- 14. Monitoring of the arrangements set out in the SLA in relation to performance against minimum standards and day to day liaison arrangements is essential. It is important that where minimum standards are not being achieved that this is not used as a reason to refuse to sign the SLA. The SLA should be used as a vehicle to promote dialogue to achieve the minimum standards or to agree the actions required to reach the standards as soon as possible. Liaison arrangements are the key feature of all SLAs and these arrangements should be regularly monitored to ensure that in ever changing circumstances they meet the needs of all parties.**

Nominated Officers

- 15. Each party to an SLA should appoint a nominated officer to whom day-to-day problems can be addressed. This officer can also be the conduit for ensuring that any disagreements are handled at the most appropriate level. The appointed officer should also take responsibility for ensuring that full contact details are provided where issues need to be escalated. This will allow day to day business between the parties to be expedited in the most efficient manner.**

Cross Referral to other SLAs

16. All parties need to note that where it is necessary to cross refer to arrangements specified in another organisation's SLA it is not acceptable to say "See SLA". The actual process to be conveyed must be detailed in each SLA.

Principles of Sign-Up

17. **All parties should do everything in their power to establish the necessary dialogue and create the correct circumstances that will lead to sign-up of the SLAs. This must involve discussion regarding day-to-day liaison, minimum standards, monitoring and disagreement procedures.**

Future Arrangements

18. **As individual DWP Businesses evolve and closer working arrangements between DWP Businesses and LA become better established, individual SLAs and this framework document will need to change. It is important that the Businesses recognise that changes to individual model SLAs or this document require clearance through the Practitioners Operational Group (POG).**