

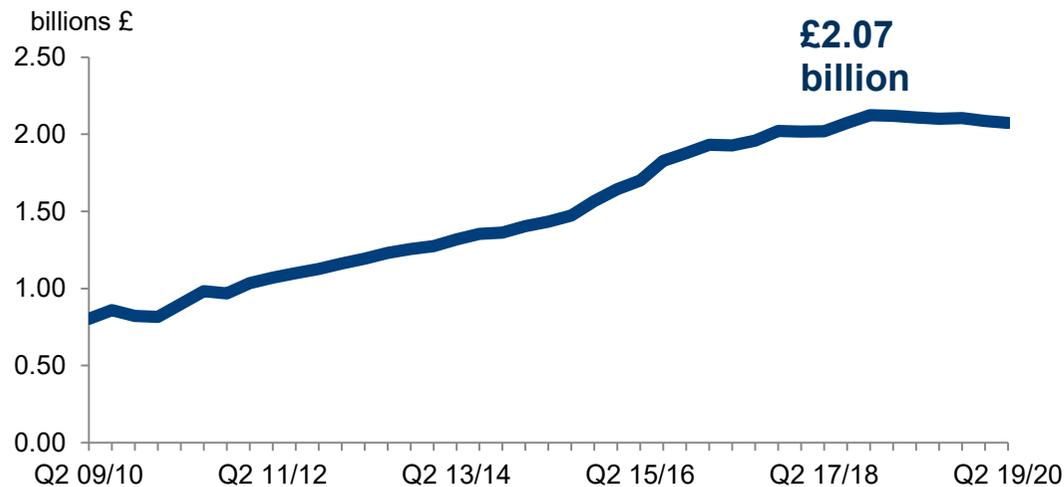
Housing Benefit is an income related benefit that is intended to help meet housing costs for rented accommodation. The statistics in this release capture information on the amount of Housing Benefit that is overpaid to claimants, the subsequent recoveries and amounts written off.

Main stories

During Quarters 1 and 2 of 2019/20:

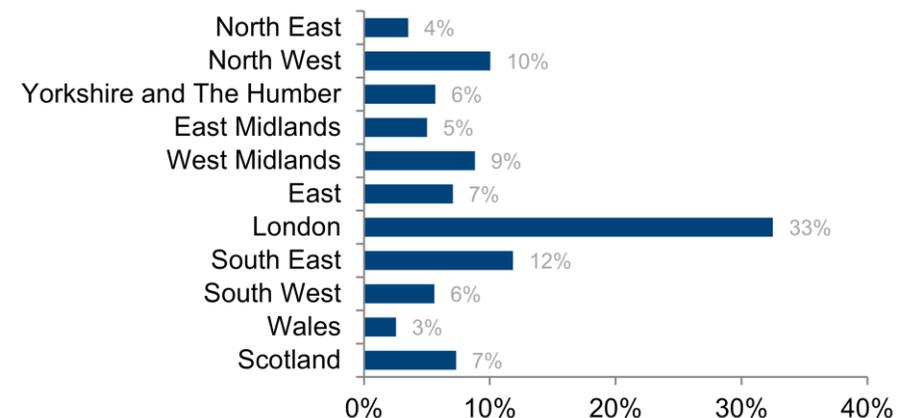
- £329 million Housing Benefit overpayments identified.
- £297 million Housing Benefit overpayments recovered.
- £37 million Housing Benefit overpayments written off.

£2.07 billion Housing Benefit overpayments outstanding at July 2019 (the beginning of quarter 2 of 2019/20).



At July 2019 (the beginning of quarter 2 2019/20) the total value of outstanding debt was around £2.07 billion, a decrease of 37 million (2%) on this point the previous year.

At July 2019 London accounted for 33% of the national total amount of outstanding HB overpayment.



At the start of quarter 2 of 2019/20 the value of HB overpayment outstanding in London accounted for 33% of the total Great Britain figure, while the value of HB overpayment outstanding in Wales accounted for 3% of the national total.

Contents

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What you need to know

HB overpayments outstanding	3	This release contains statistics relating to amounts of incorrectly overpaid Housing Benefit (HB). Following the introduction of the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), which is now live in all 377 Local Authorities (LAs), from quarter 1 2016/17 this publication no longer includes fraud data . The publication has been renamed from 'Housing Benefit Recoveries and Fraud (HBRF) statistics' to 'Housing Benefit Debt Recoveries (HBDR) statistics' to reflect this change.
HB overpayments identified	4	
HB overpayments recovered	5	HBDR data is aggregate level data received on a quarterly basis from each LA, but published bi-annually each March and September. The March publication provides provisional data for the first two quarters of the year (April to September) and the publication in September covers finalised data for all four quarters of the year.
HB overpayments written off	6	The amount of outstanding debt at the beginning of a quarter is a sum inherited from the amount of debt outstanding at the beginning of the preceding quarter and the debt recovery activities (as measured by the remaining three measures included in this publication) during the quarter. E.g. The amount of debt outstanding at the beginning of quarter 2 is the sum of the amount of debt outstanding at the beginning of quarter 1 and the amount of debt identified during quarter 1 less the amount of debt recovered and written off during quarter 1. In principle the amount of debt outstanding at the beginning of any given reporting quarter could be estimated from the released figures of the preceding quarter's publication. However, LAs usually identify debt that relates to historic periods and if this historic debt identified relates to quarters for which data is already returned these new identified sums are applied to the outstanding amount of the next reporting quarter. These retrospective updates on the amount of outstanding debt lead to differences between the outstanding amount of debt estimated from the data based on the preceding quarter and that recorded in the current quarter.

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Comments? We welcome feedback

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Some LAs do not send completed data forms every quarter, or cannot supply data for all fields. This produces missing data in the returns which, in turn, affects the reported Great Britain totals. In previous publications of these statistics, statisticians have been filling the gap created by missing data though imputing or estimating what the missing value might have been. Our methodology for this can be found [here](#). However, in recent years the number of non-returned LAs have reduced to the point that the effect on the GB totals is insignificant and therefore the imputation is no longer necessary. From September 2017 all published figures in this statistical summary are based on the actual returned data.

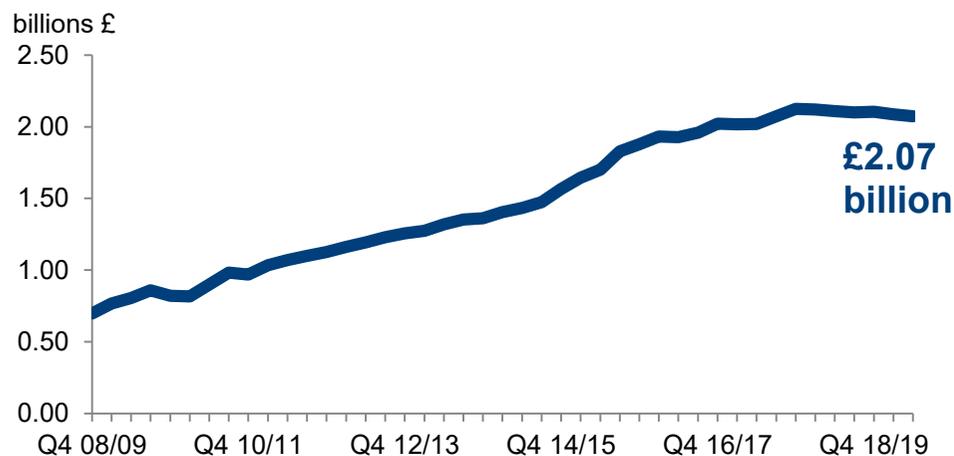
The number of people claiming HB has been gradually decreasing and will continue to fall as Universal Credit replaces HB for Working Age claimants. In line with this, we expect to see decreases across all HB debt recovery measures that LAs record and report to DWP.

Tables containing the data that underlies the charts and figures featured in this statistical summary are also [published](#).

Note: Percentage figures provided in this document are based on data rounded to the nearest thousand (please see [accompanying Excel data tables](#)). Recalculating the same percentage figures from data in this document might yield different results due to differences in rounding order.

Housing Benefit Overpayments Outstanding at the Start of the Quarter

The total value of HB overpayments outstanding in Great Britain continued to decrease during the first two quarters of the financial year 2019/20



During the first two quarters of 2019/20, the total value of outstanding overpayments continued to follow a decreasing trend.

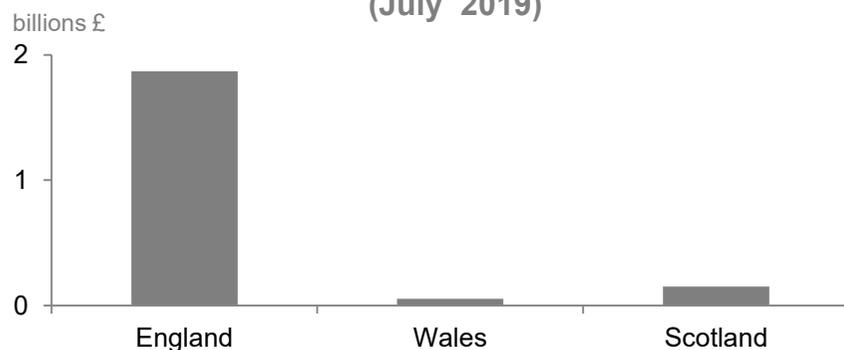
The total GB value of HB overpayments outstanding at the beginning of July 2019 (quarter 2 of 2019/20) was around £2.07 billion; a decrease of £37 million (2%) on this point the previous year.

Please see [Additional Information](#)

Amount of Outstanding HB overpayments by region at the start of quarter 2, 2019/20

Regions	Outstanding at start of quarter 2, 2019/20 (£ thousands)
North East	72,797
North West	208,227
Yorkshire and the Humber	117,775
East Midlands	104,106
West Midlands	182,918
East	146,278
London	674,148
South East	245,672
South West	116,193
Wales	52,884
Scotland	151,846

HB overpayments outstanding by country (July 2019)

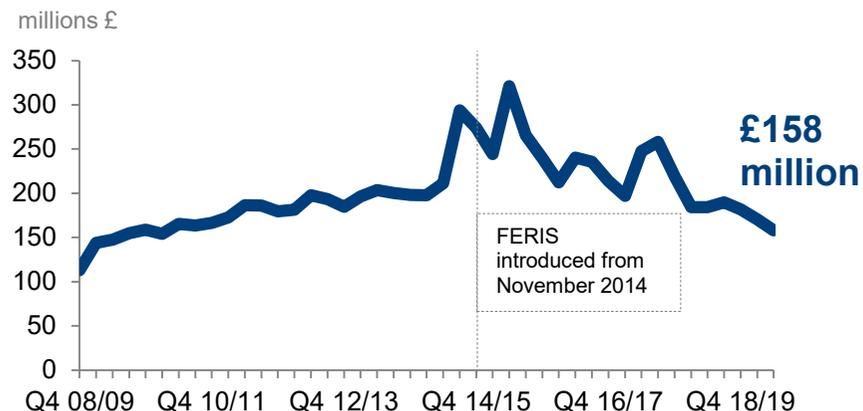


At July 2019, the outstanding HB overpayment in England was £1.87 billion. This accounted for 90% of the total national figure of £2.07 billion.

At the start of quarter 2 2019/20, £920 million of Outstanding HB overpayments were accounted for by London and the South East. This represents 44% of the total Great Britain Outstanding HB overpayments.

Housing Benefit Overpayments Identified During the Quarter

The total value of HB overpayments identified in GB continues to fluctuate



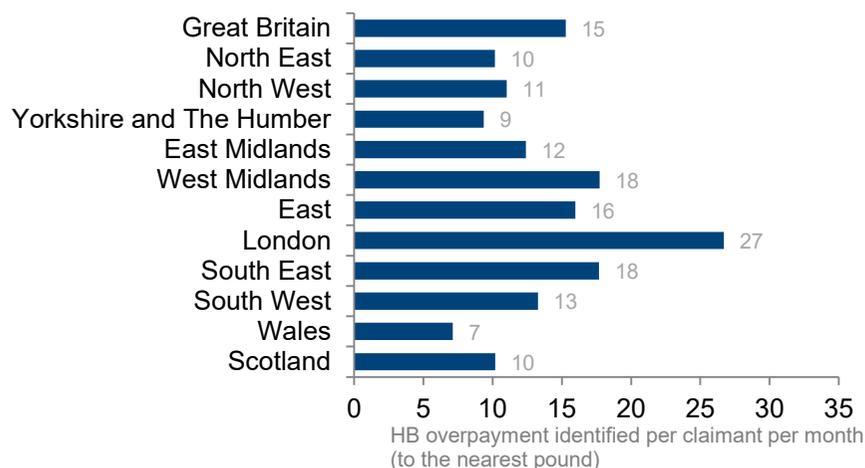
During the first two quarters of 2019/20 the total value of HB overpayments identified was £329 million; a decrease of £40 million (11%) in comparison to those overpayments identified in the first two quarters of 2018/19.

The total value of overpayments identified decreased in quarter 1 of 2019/20 from £182 million at March 2019 (quarter 4 of 2018/19) to £171 million at June 2019 and decreased further in quarter 2 of 2019/20 (to £158 million). In quarter 1 of 2019/20, 56% of all Local Authorities recorded a drop in identified amounts from those recorded during quarter 4 of 2018/19. Over a half of these Local Authorities recorded an increase during quarter 2 2019/20, to the same level of Q4 2018/19 or above.

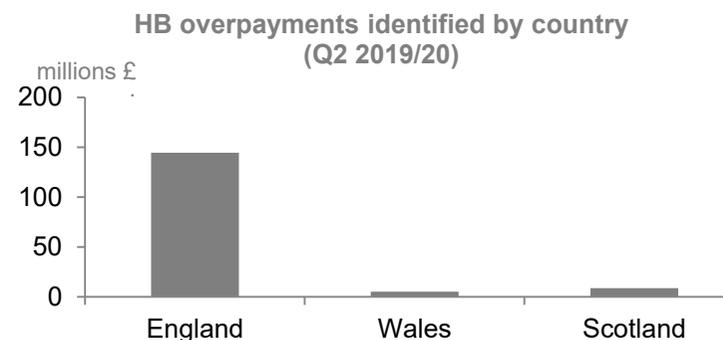
The total amount of HB overpayments identified in quarter 2 of 2019/20 was £158 million. This represented a decrease of £26 million (14%) from the same quarter of the previous year, and was the lowest amount identified in a quarter since quarter 1 of 2010/11.

There was an increasing trend on the amount of overpayments identified from 2008/09 to Q2 2015/16 where the amount identified in one quarter reached record high of £321 million. 2015/16 was an exceptional year, with the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) and Real Time Information (RTI) identifying historic overpayments of long duration through stock cleanse. Since then there has been an increase in the volatility of quarterly amounts of overpayments identified. This increase in volatility reflects pauses in RTI to allow LAs to manage the financial year end activities. Q2 2015/16 has been followed by a decreasing trend of quarterly identified amounts, with the amount identified in Q2 2019/20 being the lowest identified in a quarter for the last 9 years.

In quarter 2 of 2019/20 the average amount of identified HB overpayment per claimant per month in GB was £15



Please see [Additional Information](#)

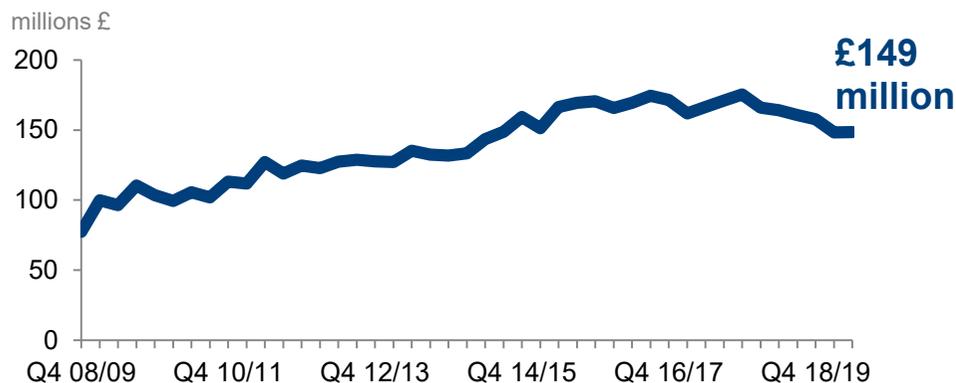


Of the £158 million of HB overpayments identified in Great Britain during quarter 2 of 2019/20 £144 (91%) million were identified in England, £9 million (6%) in Scotland and £5 million (3%) in Wales.

During quarter 2 of 2019/20 London had the largest average amount of identified debt per claimant per month (£27), while Wales had the lowest amount (£7), (based on HB caseload figures during this quarter, as published in [Stat-Xplore](#)).

Housing Benefit Overpayments Recovered During the Quarter

There was a decrease in overpayments recovered during the first half of 2019/20 compared to the first half of 2018/19.



Amount of HB overpayments recovered by region, during the first half of 2019/20

Regions	Recovered during quarters 1 and 2, 2019/20 (£ thousands)
North East	10,611
North West	28,084
Yorkshire and the Humber	18,091
East Midlands	16,777
West Midlands	34,549
East	24,198
London	80,287
South East	38,511
South West	20,159
Wales	9,396
Scotland	16,317

During quarter 1 and 2 of the 2019/20 financial year, London and the South East accounted for 40% of the total amount of HB overpayments recovered in Great Britain.

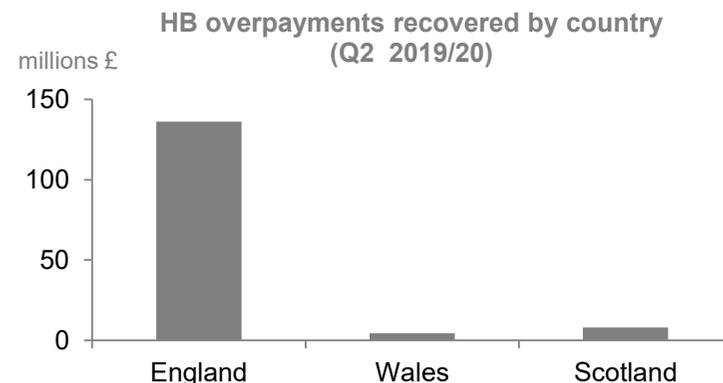
Historically, the total value of overpayments recovered has tended to vary seasonally between quarters, however overall it followed an upward trend, reaching a historic high of £175 million in quarter 4 2017/18. 2018/19 was the first financial year where the amount of overpayments recovered have seen a decreasing trend. The first half of 2019/20 sees a continuation of this decreasing trend.

In the first two quarters of 2019/20 the total GB value of HB overpayments recovered was £297 million, a decrease of £33 million (10%) in comparison to overpayments recovered during the first two quarters of 2018/19.

The total value of overpayments recovered decreased in quarter 1 of 2019/20, from £158million at March 2019 (quarter 4 of 2018/19) to £148 million at June 2019. The figure of overpayments recovered increased very marginally (by less than a quarter of a million) between quarter 1 and quarter 2 of 2019/20.

The total value of overpayments recovered in quarter 2 of 2019/20 was £149 million. This was a decrease of £16 million (9%) from quarter 2 of 2018/19.

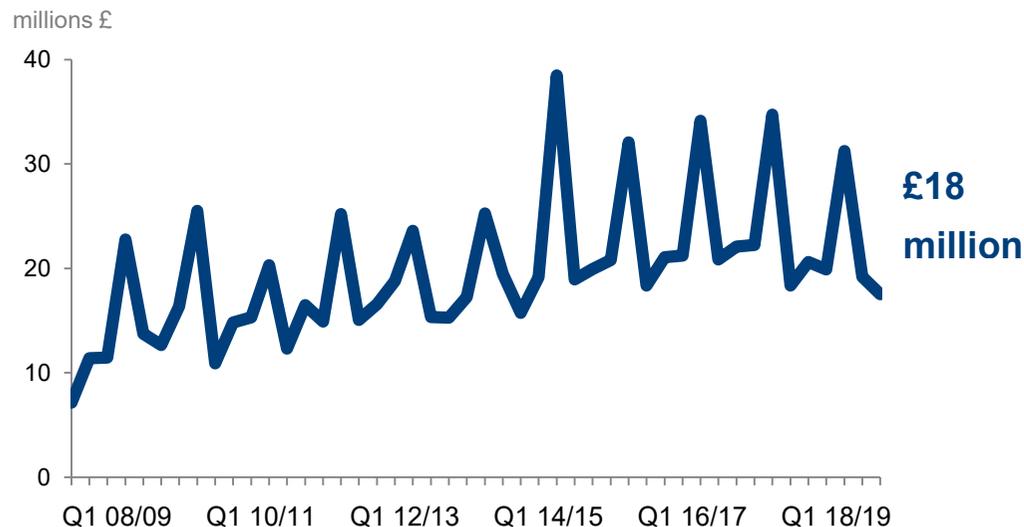
Please see [Additional Information](#)



In quarter 2 of 2019/20 out of the £149 million of HB overpayments recovered in Great Britain, £136 (92%) million were recovered in England, £8 million (5%) in Scotland and £4 million (3%) in Wales.

HB Overpayments Written Off During the Quarter

The total value of HB overpayments written off in GB continues to fluctuate



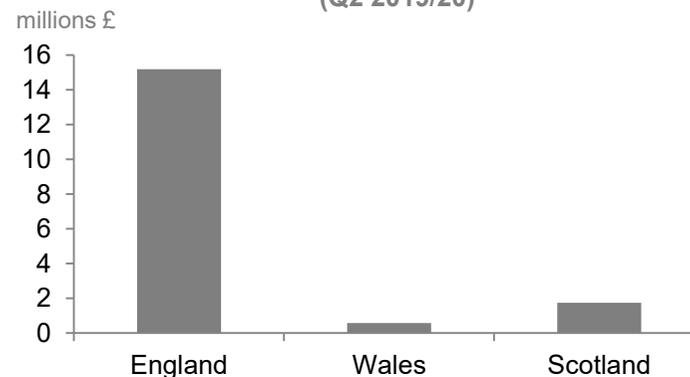
The total GB value of HB overpayments written off during the first two quarters of 2019/20 was £37 million; a decrease of £2 million (6%) in comparison to those overpayments written off during the first two quarters of 2018/19.

The amount of overpayments written off changes throughout the year. It is generally highest in quarter 4 (March) of each collection year followed by a sharp decrease during quarter 1 of the following year. In line with this there has been a decrease in the total amount of overpayments written off from £31 million at March 2019 (quarter 4 of 2018/19) to £19 million in June 2019 (quarter 1 of 2019/20).

The total value of HB overpayments written off in quarter 2 of 2019/20 was £18 million. This was a decrease of £3 million (15%) from the total amount of HB overpayments written off in quarter 2 of 2018/19.

Please see [Additional Information](#)

HB overpayments written off by country (Q2 2019/20)



In quarter 2 of 2019/20, of the £18 million of written off HB overpayments in Great Britain, £15 million (87%) were identified in England, £2 million (10%) in Scotland and £1million (3%) in Wales.

HBDR Data – Collection Processes and Accuracy

Data Collection

The table below details the list of questions asked to LAs as part of the data collection process.

Field	Overpayment Questions
1	Total value of HB overpayments outstanding at the start of the quarter
2	Total value of HB overpayments identified during the quarter
3	Total value of HB overpayments recovered during the quarter
4	Total value of HB overpayments written off during the quarter

Average Data Return Rates

Collection Period	Average LA Return Rate (across all quarters)
2008 – 2009	89.7%
2009 – 2010	99.2%
2010 – 2011	99.5%
2011 – 2012	99.6%
2012 – 2013	99.8%
2013 – 2014	99.7%
2014 – 2015	99.3%
2015 – 2016	99.9%
2016 – 2017	99.5%
2017 – 2018	100%
2018 – 2019	100%
2019 – 2020 (quarter 1 & 2)	99.6%

Some LAs cannot complete certain questions. Hence, the question level completion rate has, in the past, often been lower than the values quoted here. Therefore, we used to publish additional estimates, allowing for imputation (at a Great Britain level only) to account for LAs which could not provide data. These additional figures gave a sense of scale of this impact. However, in recent years the number of non-returner LAs have reduced to the point that the effect on the GB totals is insignificant and therefore the imputation is no longer necessary. From September 2017 all published figures in this statistical summary are based on the actual returned data.

Additional Information

HBDR is aggregate level data received from each LA, and as such, is subject to a significant degree of variation both in and between different LAs. From 2014 we have observed a significant amount of variation in the overpayment data. This could be due to a wide range of factors such as: variations and issues with different authorities' software suppliers; changes in LA return rates; additional side effects due to the phased implementation of Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), the implementation of the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) and Real Time Information (RTI) and factors unique to each LA (e.g. increases/decreases in resources, bulk clearing of historical overpayments).

About these statistics

Known Issues, Changes and Revisions

Our **Methodology** and **Background Information Note** provides further information on DWP HBDR statistics, including some of the processes involved in developing and releasing these statistics: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/housing-benefit-recoveries-and-fraud-data-methodology-and-definitions>

Following the introduction of a new Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), which has now gone live in all Local Authorities, this publication (from quarter 1 of 2016/17) only includes information on Housing Benefit overpayments. The publication has been renamed to 'Housing Benefit Debt Recoveries statistics' to reflect this change.

Other National and Official Statistics

Details of other National and Official Statistics produced by the Department for Work and Pensions can be found on the DWP website via the following link:

- A schedule of statistical releases over the next 12 months and a list of the most recent releases: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/about/statistics>
- Detailed background notes and methodology relating to this First Release can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/housing-benefit-recoveries-and-fraud-data-methodology-and-definitions>

Feedback

Specific HBDR statistics feedback can be submitted via our [HBDR user questionnaire](#).

Completed questionnaires can be returned by e-mail to stats-consultation@dwp.gsi.gov.uk or by post to the following address:
Client Statistics, Data and Analytics, Department for Work and Pensions, Room BP5201, Benton Park Road, Longbenton, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, NE98 1YX

Users can also join the "Welfare and Benefit Statistics" community at: <http://www.statsusernet.org.uk> DWP announces items of interest to users via this forum, as well as replying to users' questions.

About these statistics

Supplementary Statistics

Tables containing the data that underlies the charts and figures featured in this statistical summary are [available](#). These include information by local authority on outstanding overpayments at the beginning of each quarter and identified, recovered and written-off overpayments at the end of each quarter.

Uses and Users

HBDR is aggregate level data received on a quarterly basis from each LA. This data is used to produce established statistics on the amount of HB overpaid to claimants. The statistics also provide a means of comparing and contrasting information between LAs.

The data will also be used to feed into a range of briefings for Ministers and other senior officials and will be used to answer Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information requests. It will also be used for other policy functions including monitoring and informing changes to related policies.

National Statistics Status

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, at June 2012, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of:

- trustworthiness;
- quality;
- public value.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

Since the assessment date the following improvements have been made to this publication.

- Statistics have been made more accessible through improvement in presentation of the first release and formatting of supporting data tables.
- Value has been added by including Housing Benefit caseload data to calculate regional average HB overpayments amounts per HB claimant, and by introducing interactive visualisations of regional and Local Authority data.
- Quality Assurance processes have been strengthened by optimising automation in implementing analyst checks and by putting in place a thorough peer review process for each publication cycle.
- Increased user and stakeholder engagement activities by setting up working groups with participants from across policy and operations.
- In 2019, HBDR users were consulted on the frequency of publishing for these statistics. The outcome of this consultation can be found [here](#).

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