

## Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Circular

Department for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA

# HB/CTB A7/2013

### ADJUDICATION AND OPERATIONS CIRCULAR

<b>WHO SHOULD READ</b>	All Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) staff
<b>ACTION</b>	For information
<b>SUBJECT</b>	HB/CTB operational information, performance support and inspection in 2013/14

### Guidance Manual

The information in this circular does not affect the content of the HB/CTB Guidance Manual.

### Queries

If you

- want **extra copies of this circular/copies of previous circulars**, they can be found on the website at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/user-communications/hbctb-circulars/>
- have any queries about the
  - **technical content of this circular**, contact Louise Hughes  
Email: [Performance-framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Performance-framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)
  - **distribution of this circular**, contact [housing.correspondenceandpqs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:housing.correspondenceandpqs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

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**HB/CTB operational information, performance support and inspection in 2013/14**

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## **HB/CTB operational information, performance support and inspection in 2013/14**

### **Introduction**

1. This circular has been prepared to advise that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is proposing no significant changes to its arrangements for inspection or its use of operational performance information in respect of Housing Benefit (HB). We will continue to keep the arrangements under review however to take account of developments in respect of Welfare Reform and the delivery of the Fraud and Error Strategy.
2. It replaces HB/CTB Circular A2/2012 and takes account of the fact that:
  - Council Tax Benefit is replaced by local Council Tax reduction schemes in April 2013
  - Local authorities (LAs) need to continue to deliver an effective HB service through a period of significant change.

### **Inspection and reporting arrangements for 2013/14**

3. In England we will carry out an inspection of an HB service only
  - where performance is causing concern and it is considered necessary to produce a report for the Secretary of State; and
  - after an LA has been allowed time to improve.
4. If an inspection is undertaken, it will normally be focused on critical issues rather than an assessment of the entire benefit service. Decisions to inspect will be taken separately from those related to the provision of free consultancy support. (For more on support see paragraph 8 below).
5. In Scotland and Wales decisions on audit/inspection and the production of reports rest with the relevant audit bodies. DWP liaises with these audit bodies as necessary, but assessment and reporting rests with them.

### **Areas of importance and DWP interests**

6. Whilst it is for LAs to decide how best to deliver their HB services, DWP's interests arise from:
  - its funding responsibilities
  - its need to deliver welfare and fraud and error reforms
  - the continuing need to ensure the right benefit goes to the right people at the right time, in particular that:

- HB claims and changes of circumstances are processed speedily and accurately and that claims are kept right – to help provide a good service and, in due course a smooth migration of HB claims to Universal Credit (UC)/Pension Credit (PC);
- ensuring benefit fraud and error is being tackled – taking action to prevent, detect, correct, punish and deter;
- LAs can provide assurance on the service through their own performance management arrangements and through their provision of information to DWP – this aspect may increase in importance as we work with LAs to plan for the future migration of HB claims over to UC/PC.

### **Sources of HB operational information**

7. To decide if there is a need to open up any discussions with a LA on HB operational and delivery matters, DWP will draw on the following sources of information:
  - Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) data (e.g. caseload and speed of processing statistics);
  - subsidy returns and any audit qualifications;
  - HB Recoveries and Fraud statistics (HBRF) – fraud and overpayment data;
  - information on DWP HB data-matching exercises, including LA returns for these;
  - national information on the overall monetary value of HB fraud and error;
  - other information, including any relevant reports produced by the audit bodies, Local Government Ombudsman, correspondence received in the Department, press/media stories, any information LAs or the Local Government Association may choose to publish themselves or provide directly to DWP.

### **DWP support to LAs**

8. Whilst it is for LAs to decide what sources of support they may wish to draw on to deliver any necessary improvements to their HB service, DWP continues to offer free consultancy support. The Performance Development Team (PDT) can provide support to LAs in England, Scotland and Wales. To find out more about possible PDT support please contact Jacqueline Reed on 07771 844176 or e-mail [jacqueline.reed@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jacqueline.reed@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)
9. In addition to information and guidance already available on DWP's web site for LAs, DWP is developing a Transition Guide and Checklist to help LAs prepare for the migration of HB claims to UC and PC. More information on this will be available in the Spring of 2013.

**Further information**

10. Please send any questions about this circular to [Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)