

Freedom of Information request 2855/2011

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Information request

Please treat this letter as a request under the Freedom of Information Act for disclosure of data collected on the single housing benefit extract relating to payments direct to the landlord on the grounds of unlikely to pay, unable to manage their financial affairs and as a result of the application of the 8 week rule, identifying the different categories please. These should relate to each of the years please for each authority, subsequent to the date when housing allowance was introduced for that area up to the present time.

I appreciate that the statistics may not have been verified but you can, of course, issue this information with a suitable caveat and the information would be acknowledged and accepted on that basis.

DWP response

The Local Housing Allowance (LHA) was introduced nationally on the 7 April 2008 to customers making new claims and moving address in the deregulated private rented sector. One of the aims of LHA was to improve financial inclusion and help tenants develop the skills needed for work by, wherever possible, paying benefit direct to claimants.

Although the original policy intention was to have LHA paid directly to tenants as much as possible, some safeguards were put in place to protect tenants and landlords from rent arrears and enable payments to be made to landlords instead. These are:

- if a tenant is considered to be unlikely to pay rent, for example if they have poor rent payment history, and
- if a tenant is considered to have difficulty paying rent, for example if they have a learning disability or an addiction problem.

Additionally, there is a statutory requirement for local authorities to make payments to the landlord where the customer is in arrears with their rent by eight weeks or more, unless it is in the interest of the customer not to do so.

Information is collected on the Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) to detail payment destination. However, this information is not included in datasets underpinning routine publication of Housing Benefit statistics for the years 2008 and 2009 that you have requested. We estimate that the cost of retrieving and extracting this information, in addition to the information provided for 2010 and 2011, from the raw SHBE scan would exceed the appropriate limit of £600. The appropriate limit has been specified in regulations and for central Government it is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3.5 working days in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting the information. Under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act the Department is not obliged to comply with your request and we will not be processing your request further.

Information for 2010 and 2011 is available and is provided in the attached Excel spreadsheet and CSV files. As discussed in previous correspondence the information provided has not been quality assured to National Statistics standards. For example, there are concerns around the 2010 figures for Sedgemoor.