

Housing Benefit Circular

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

HB A4/2016

ADJUDICATION AND OPERATIONS CIRCULAR

WHO SHOULD READ	All Housing Benefit staff
ACTION	For information
SUBJECT	Housing Benefit operational information, performance support and engagement 2016/17

Guidance Manual

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

Queries

extra copies of this circular/copies of previous circulars can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/housing-benefit-for-local-authorities-circulars>

- about the
 - **technical content of this circular**, contact Email: Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
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Housing Benefit operational information, performance support and engagement 2016/17

Introduction

1. This circular outlines the Department for Work and Pension (DWP) approach in relation to its use of Housing Benefit (HB) operational performance information, the support it provides to local authorities (LAs) and its engagement work. It takes account of on-going reforms and the increased focus on the need to reduce HB fraud and error.

Inspection and reporting arrangements for 2016/17

2. Due to LAs' willingness to work in partnership with DWP and deliver change and improvements to their HB services, DWP hasn't needed to carry out any HB inspections in England since 2012. However, we reserve the right to inspect in 2016/17 should circumstances warrant it and a report to the Secretary of State on any areas of concern is considered necessary.
3. If an inspection was to be undertaken it would normally be focused on critical HB issues rather than an assessment of the entire benefit service. Any decision to inspect would be taken separately from those made regarding the provision of free consultancy support, although it would take account of any DWP involvement with the LA in question, including any liaison regarding improvement plans and the outcome of any consultancy support. For more on support see paragraph 7 below.
4. 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 and continues to offer and provide free consultancy support to LAs in Scotland and Wales.

Areas of importance and DWP interests

5. Whilst it is for LAs to decide how best to deliver their HB services, DWP's interests arise from its:
 - funding responsibilities – both benefit and administration subsidy
 - need to deliver welfare reforms
 - interests in ensuring 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
 - claims are kept right, which includes finding, actioning and encouraging the reporting of changes of circumstances and making use of information

supplied by DWP (e.g. via ATLAS, data-matching and real time information notifications)

- following the roll-out of the Single Fraud Investigation Service project, LAs can continue to play their part in identifying, preventing, correcting, and deterring fraud and error
- LAs can provide assurance on the service through their own performance management arrangements and their provision of information to DWP.

Sources of HB operational information

6. To decide if there is a need to engage with an LA on HB operational and delivery matters, DWP will draw on the following sources of information:
 - HB related data published by DWP (e.g. caseload, speed of processing statistics, caseload management information, HB recoveries statistics and the national statistics on the overall monetary value of HB fraud and error)
 - subsidy returns, information used to determine any Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme payments and any audit qualifications
 - other HB information that may be supplied by LAs to DWP, including information from the Single Housing Benefit Extract, LA returns on data-matches and fraud referrals to DWP's Fraud and Error Service
 - other information, such as any relevant reports produced by the audit bodies, correspondence received in DWP and press/media stories.

DWP support to LAs

7. Whilst it is for LAs to decide what sources of support they may wish to draw on to deliver any HB service improvements, 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 Zoë Brown by email: HDD.PDT@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK or telephone 07825 255609
8. Relevant and updated good practice on key aspects of HB performance is placed on the GOV.UK website that provides HB claims processing and good practice information for LA staff.