



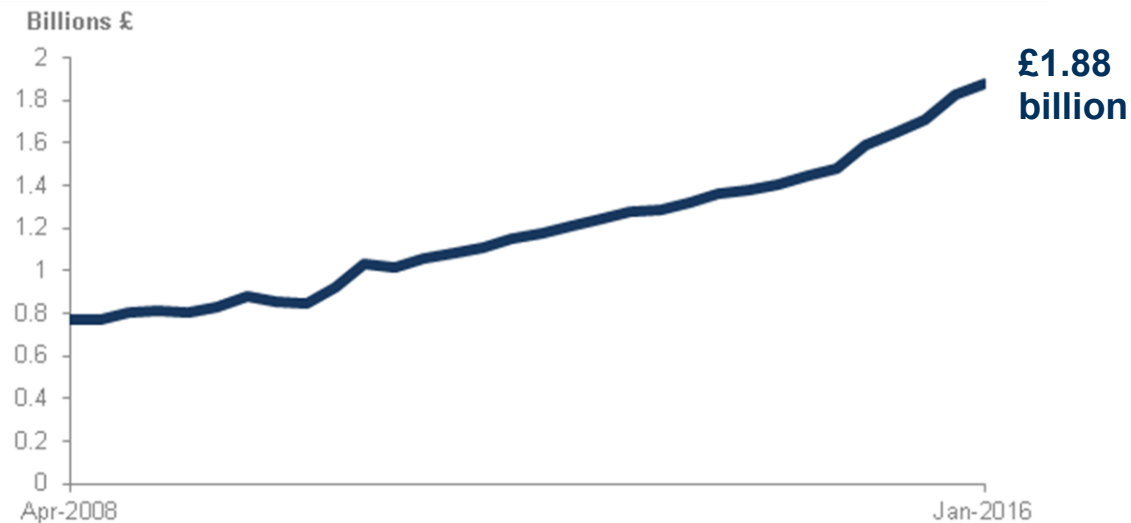
Housing Benefit is an income related benefit that is intended to help meet housing costs for rented accommodation. The statistics in this release are used to measure levels of fraud activity and to capture information on the amounts of benefit that are overpaid to claimants.

Main stories

During 2015/16:

- £1.07 billion Housing Benefit overpayments identified
- £659 million Housing Benefit overpayments recovered
- £92 million Housing Benefit overpayments written off

£1.88 billion Housing Benefit overpayments outstanding at January 2016



The total value of outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments continues to follow an increasing trend.

At January 2016 (the beginning of quarter 4, 2015/16) the total value of overpayments was around £1.88 billion.

This represents an increase of £295 million (19%) on this point the previous year.

At a glance

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Thoughts? We welcome feedback

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What you need to know

The latest National Statistics on Housing Benefit Recoveries and Fraud (HBRF) data produced by the Department for Work and Pensions were released on 7th September 2016 according to the arrangements approved by the UK Statistics Authority.

This release contains statistics relating to Housing Benefit fraud volumes and amounts of incorrectly overpaid benefit. It is aggregate level data received on a quarterly basis from each Local Authority, but published bi-annually each March and September.

These statistics provide the Department with an overview of overpayment and fraud data relating to all benefits for which it is responsible for - not just for those benefits administered by DWP. They are used to measure levels of fraud activity and to capture information on the amounts of benefit that are overpaid to claimants.

These statistics are released on a six-monthly cycle. The publication in September covers finalised data for all four quarters of 2015/16. **Note, due to the phased roll out of the *Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)*, this publication includes only partial fraud data (See [Known Issues, Changes and Revisions](#) for further information).**

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

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

Some Authorities do not send forms every quarter, or cannot answer all the questions on the form. This produces missing data in the returns which, in turn, affects the reported Great Britain totals. Statisticians can fill 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](#).

Unless stated otherwise, all figures in this statistical summary are based on imputed statistics.



Housing Benefit Overpayments Outstanding at the Start of the Quarter

The chart below shows the cumulative amount of outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments (based on current prices) in Great Britain since April 2008.

The total value of HB overpayments outstanding in Great Britain is steadily increasing

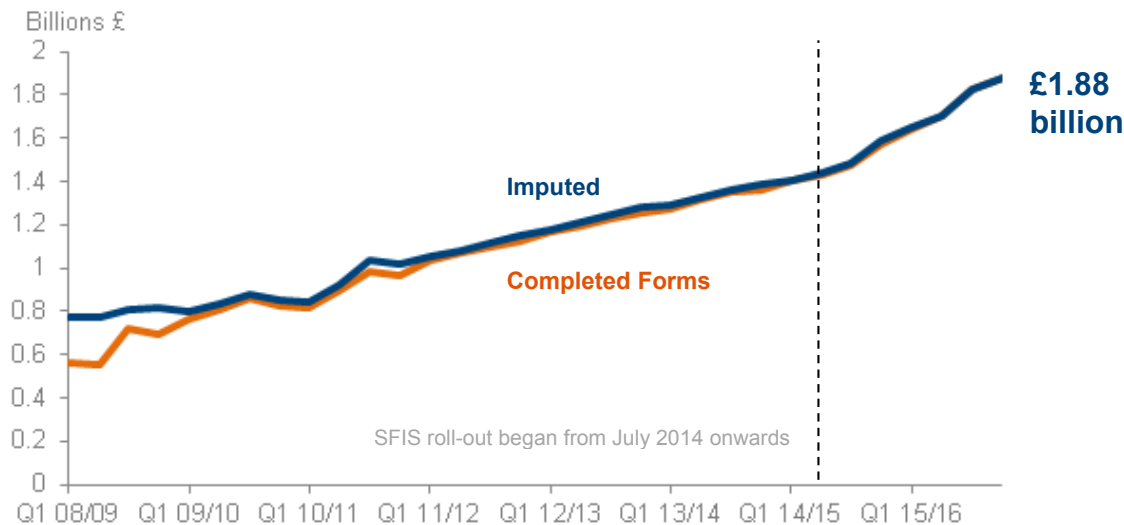
Total value of Housing Benefit overpayments outstanding at the start of the quarter

Quarter		Total of completed forms	Imputed GB total	Percentage difference
2014/15	Q3	1,473,271,000	1,481,323,000	1%
	Q4	1,566,572,000	1,585,430,000	1%
2015/16	Q1	1,644,569,000	1,646,322,000	0%
	Q2	1,700,237,000	1,705,194,000	0%
	Q3	1,827,276,000	1,827,276,000	0%
	Q4	1,876,948,000	1,880,187,000	0%

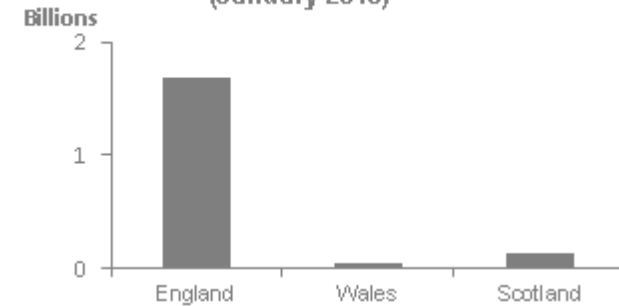
The total value of outstanding overpayments continues to follow an increasing trend.

The total GB value of HB overpayments outstanding at the beginning of January 2016 (quarter 4 of 2015/16) was around £1.88 billion; an increase of £295 million (19%) on this point the previous year.

Please see [Additional Information](#)



HB overpayments outstanding by country (January 2016)



Note: As you can see from the differences in the two time series, imputed values and non-imputed values have been much closer aligned in recent times – indicating that there has been less missing data within recent [LA returns](#).



Housing Benefit Overpayments Identified During the Quarter

The chart below shows the value of Housing Benefit overpayments identified in each quarter going back to April 2008.

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

Total value of Housing Benefit overpayments identified during the quarter

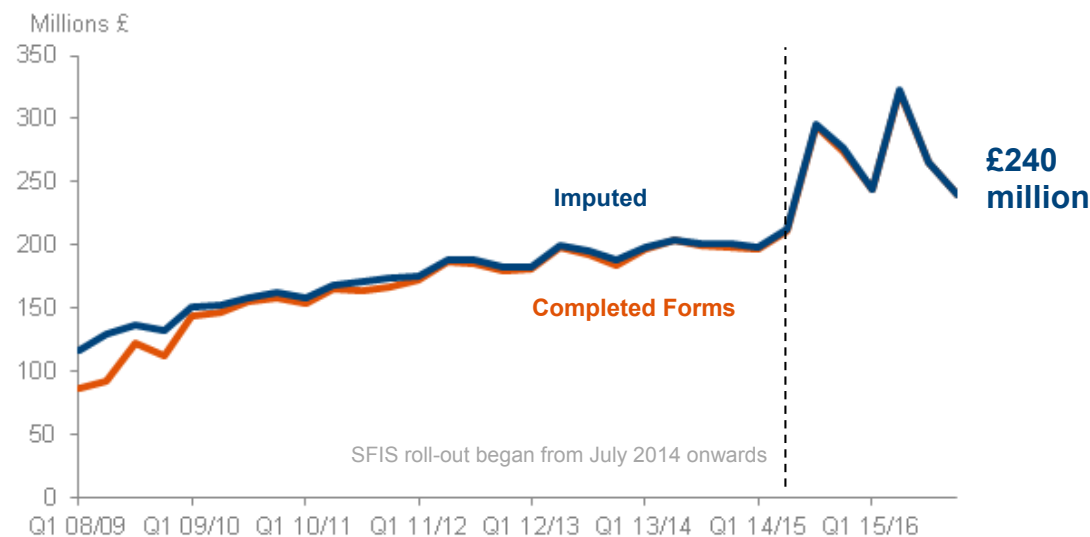
		£		
Quarter		Total of completed forms	Imputed GB total	Percentage difference
2014/15	Q3	293,862,000	295,468,000	1%
	Q4	273,833,000	277,129,000	1%
2015/16	Q1	244,313,000	244,573,000	0%
	Q2	321,233,000	322,170,000	0%
	Q3	265,268,000	265,268,000	0%
	Q4	239,549,000	239,963,000	0%

Generally, an upward trend is seen in the total value of overpayments identified with more overpayments being identified in the middle of each year.

During 2015/16 the total value of HB overpayments identified was £1.07 billion; an increase of £88 million (9%) in comparison to those overpayments identified in 2014/15.

The total value of overpayments identified increased sharply from £245 million at June 2015 (Q1 of 2015/16) to £322 million at September 2015 (Q2 of 2015/16). This trend was observed over a large number of LAs: Based on the raw data the values increased for around 76% of LAs, with 19 of them seeing increases of over £1 million.

The total value of overpayments identified decreased sharply from £322 million at September 2015 (Q2 of 2015/16) to £265 million at December 2015 (Q3 of 2015/16). Again, the trend was observed over a large number of Local Authorities (LAs): Based on the raw data the values decreased for around 71% of LAs, with 18 LAs seeing decreases of over £1million.



Please see [Additional Information](#)



Note: As you can see from the differences in the two time series, imputed values and non-imputed values have been much closer aligned in recent times – indicating that there has been less missing data within recent [LA returns](#).



Housing Benefit Overpayments Recovered During the Quarter

The chart below shows the total value of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered each quarter since April 2008.

The total value of HB overpayments recovered in GB is rising

Total value of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered during the quarter

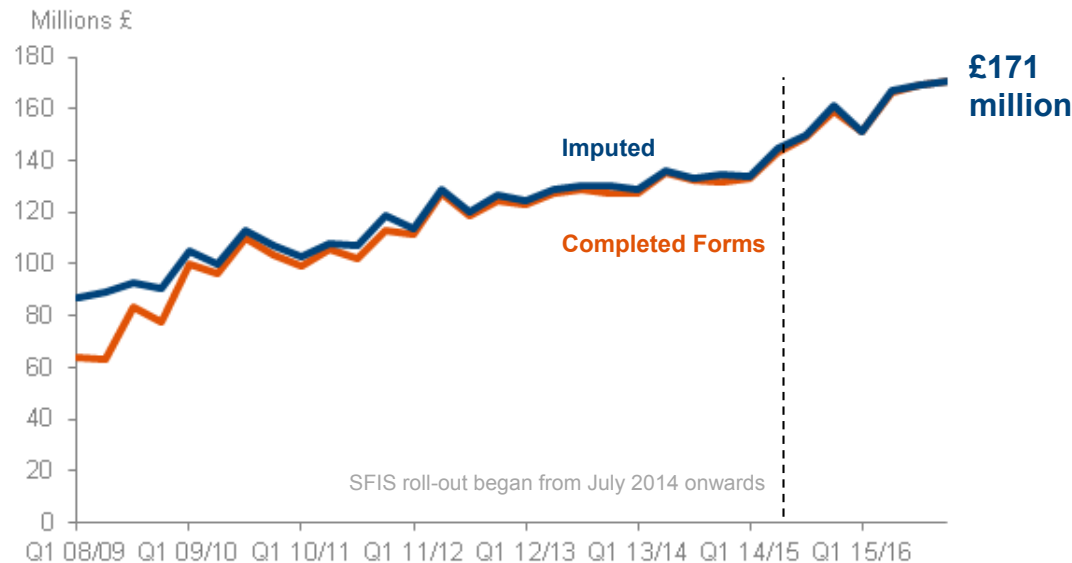
		£		
Quarter		Total of completed forms	Imputed GB total	Percentage difference
2014/15	Q3	148,658,000	149,471,000	1%
	Q4	159,300,000	161,217,000	1%
2015/16	Q1	151,185,000	151,346,000	0%
	Q2	166,479,000	166,964,000	0%
	Q3	169,376,000	169,376,000	0%
	Q4	170,584,000	170,879,000	0%

Historically, the total value of overpayments recovered has tended to vary seasonally between quarters, however overall it follows an upward trend.

During 2015/16 the total GB value of HB overpayments recovered was £659 million; an increase of £70 million (12%) in comparison to those overpayments recovered in 2014/15. The total value in the latest quarter (January to March 2016) at 171 million is the highest recorded so far.

The total value of overpayments recovered decreased from £161 million at March 2015 (Q4 of 2014/15) to £151 million at June 2015 (Q1 of 2015/16). This trend was observed over a large number of Local Authorities (LAs): Based on the raw data the values decreased for approximately 64% of LAs, with 34 of them seeing decreases of over £100 thousand.

Please see [Additional Information](#)



HB overpayments recovered by country (Q4 2015/16)



Note: As you can see from the differences in the two time series, imputed values and non-imputed values have been much closer aligned in recent times – indicating that there has been less missing data within recent [LA returns](#).

HB Overpayments Written Off During the Quarter



The chart below shows the total value of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered each quarter since April 2008.

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

Total value of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered during the quarter

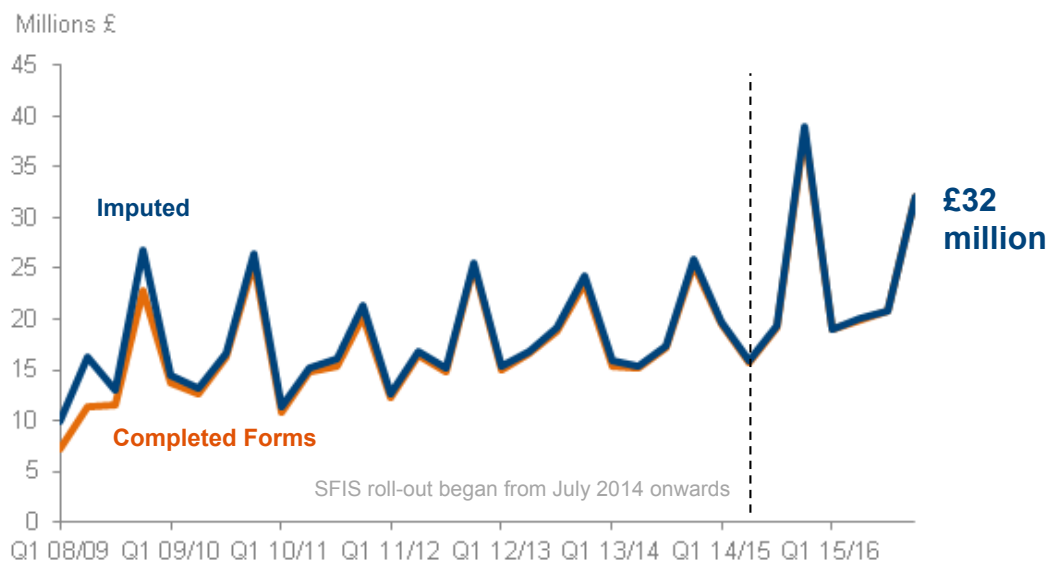
		£		
Quarter		Total of completed forms	Imputed GB total	Percentage difference
2014/15	Q3	19,170,000	19,275,000	1%
	Q4	38,486,000	38,950,000	1%
2015/16	Q1	18,953,000	19,068,000	1%
	Q2	19,939,000	19,997,000	0%
	Q3	20,780,000	20,834,000	0%
	Q4	32,087,000	32,143,000	0%

The total GB value of HB overpayments written off during 2015/16 was £92 million; a decrease of £2 million (2%) to those overpayments written off in 2014/15.

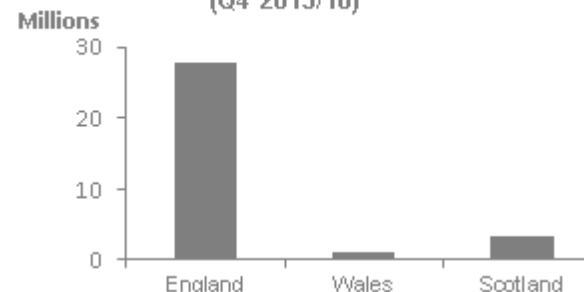
Historically, the total value of overpayments written off constantly changes throughout the year. It increased sharply at March 2015 (Q4 of 2014/15) when five LAs had overpayment amounts written off exceeding £1 million.

The total value of overpayments written off is generally highest in the fourth quarter (March) of each collection year. In line with this, March 2016 at almost £32 million is the second highest recorded so far.

Please see [Additional Information](#)



HB overpayments written off by country (Q4 2015/16)



Note: As you can see from the differences in the two time series, imputed values and non-imputed values have been much closer aligned in recent times – indicating that there has been less missing data within recent [LA returns](#).

HBRF Data – Collection Processes and Accuracy

Data Collection

The table below details the list of questions asked 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 HBRF 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%

Some Authorities cannot complete certain questions. Hence, the question level completion rate is often lower than the values quoted here. Therefore we publish additional estimates, allowing for imputation (at a Great Britain level only) to account for Authorities which could not provide data. These additional figures give a sense of scale of this impact.

The latest year has seen the highest average LA Return Rate from 2008/09.

Impact of Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

Statistics at lower geographical levels are available via a set of separate [statistical tables](#). Due to the phased implementation of SFIS, the fraud statistics within this release will become less well populated – Great Britain summary information has been removed from this publication. Further information on this change can be found [here](#).

Additional Information

Housing Benefit Recoveries and Fraud is aggregate level data received from each Local Authority, and as such, is subject to a significant degree of variation both in and between different Local Authorities. In addition to fraud data, 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; reduced LA return rates; additional side affects due to the phased implementation of SFIS 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 **HBRF Background Information Note** provides further information on DWP National and HBRF 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>

Further presentational changes have been made to the release. The introduction of a new Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), which has now gone live in all 379 areas, has had a major impact on fraud statistics within this release. As a result of data collection and reporting timescales, **only partial Fraud statistics are available**. DWP is considering how best to approach the delivery of future fraud statistics (currently provided in separate summary tables). We will inform users of any changes accordingly in line with UKSA guidelines.

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

DWP would like to hear your views on our statistical publications. If you use any of our statistics publications, we would be interested in hearing what you use them for and how well they meet your requirements. Please email DWP at stats-consultation@dpw.gsi.gov.uk

An on-going questionnaire, enabling DWP to target future consultations at interested users; shaping the future direction of statistics development to address user needs; and helping ensure value for money, whilst giving users a structured way of expressing their views is available at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/205190/statistical_summary_questionnaire.doc

Completed questionnaires can be returned by e-mail to stats-consultation@dpw.gsi.gov.uk or by post to the following address:

Dissemination Team, Data and Analytics
Department for Work and Pensions
Room BP5201
Benton Park Road
Longbenton
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE
NE98 1YX

Specific HBRF statistics feedback can also be submitted via our [HBRF user questionnaire](#)

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.

A range of fraud specific measures, including the number of full time fraud investigators, the number of fraud cases referred/closed, number of cautions offered and accepted, number of administrative penalties offered and accepted, number of cases accepted for prosecution (including guilty outcomes) are available for a small number of LAs. Breakdowns into cases with a DWP interest are also featured.

Uses and Users

Housing Benefit Recoveries and Fraud is aggregate level data received on a quarterly basis from each Local Authority (LA). This data is used to produce established statistics on measures of activity to detect fraud and to capture information on the amounts of benefit that are overpaid to claimants. They also provide a means of comparing and contrasting information between Local Authorities.

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. It will also be used for other policy functions including monitoring and informing changes to related policies.

Future Releases

The next release will be in March 2017. This will contain overpayments for the period April 2016 to September 2016 (quarters 1 and 2).