

## Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Circular

Department for Work and Pensions

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# HB/CTB A1/2011

### 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>	Future Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit inspections in England

### 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**  
Email: [Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)
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# **Future Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit inspections in England**

## **Introduction**

- 1 This circular advises local authorities of changes to inspection arrangements for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB) in England from April 2011. The changes, which have Ministerial approval, reflect the
  - improvement in HB/CTB performance at a national level in recent years
  - Government's localism agenda, which includes maximising accountability to communities and abolishing the Audit Commission, which currently carries out HB/CTB inspections
  - continuing need to reduce costs across the public sector

## **The changes**

- 2 To help minimise the need for inspections, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will continue to engage with, and offer free consultancy support to, local authorities who are underperforming on HB/CTB. While financial pressures oblige us to cut our funding for this support, we will try to minimise the impact of this, for example by working more with groups of local authorities. We will also continue to ensure our support complements, rather than replaces, other sources of support available.
- 3 To reduce the burden on local authorities
  - we plan to have a maximum of 15 inspections next year, rather than the 25 at present
  - inspections will focus on critical performance issues, particularly those that cause fraud and error, rather than provide a comprehensive assessment of performance
  - inspections will only take place after local authorities have had a chance to improve
  - inspection visits will involve two staff and take no longer than one week
- 4 We will ensure inspection reports balance a description of any problems found with practical guidance on how to resolve them. The reports will also be shorter and drafted more quickly than at present.
- 5 Experienced DWP staff will carry out the inspections under the powers in the Social Security Administration Act 1992.

- 6 DWP has consulted the local authority associations on the broad direction of future inspection arrangements, and will be discussing further detail with them early in 2011. We aim to provide more information in a circular in March 2011.
- 7 Scotland and Wales are not affected by the changes outlined above as they have their own arrangements in place involving Audit Scotland and the Wales Audit Office.
- 8 Please send any questions about this circular to [Performance-Framework@dwpgsi.gov.uk](mailto:Performance-Framework@dwpgsi.gov.uk)