

## Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Circular

Department for Work and Pensions

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# HB/CTB A2/2011

### 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>	E-mailing customer information to Debt Management

### 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
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## E-mailing customer information to Debt Management

### Introduction

- 1 When the content of correspondence includes customer information, local authorities (LAs) can **only** correspond with Debt Management by email if they use the GSI route. LAs were advised of this procedure in
  - Service Level Agreement (requirement 2)
  - HB/CTB Bulletin G20/2009, and
  - HB/CTB Circular A6/2010
- 2 This refers to emailing of
  - Housing Benefit Overpayment referrals
  - Local Authority Appendix 7's, and
  - general enquiries containing customer information
- 3 This circular is being issued to remind all LA staff to follow the correct procedure.

### GSI family

- 4 GSI is the Government Secure Intranet – it is a secure network used by central Government departments. If someone has an email address that ends 'gsi.gov.uk' it means that an email sent to them from another GSI address will not have to travel over the internet, so it is more secure. As a result any customer information contained within the email is data protected.
- 5 There are other 'trusted networks' connected to the GSI
  - **GCSX** - addresses ending 'GCSX.gov.uk'
  - **GSX** – addresses ending in 'GSX.gov.uk'
  - **GSE** – addresses ending in 'GSE.gov.uk'
- 6 Information that is Protectively Marked **RESTRICTED** or **PROTECTED**, including personal data, can be sent to email addresses on any of these networks without the need for any encryption.

### Important information

- 7 Debt Management are receiving high volumes of non compliant emails and have inadvertently responded without noticing that the LA email was sent outside the GSI route. As a consequence we have had to discipline staff and issue formal warnings.

- 8 To protect Debt Management staff in Client Referral Centres, Contact Centres and Finance Division from the possibility of undergoing any future disciplinary action, which as an ultimate penalty could result in dismissal, the following decision has been made:

**Any unsecured email received containing customer information will be deleted and not processed. We will not inform you of individual cases. It is your responsibility to ensure you comply with the Data Protection Act as you are bound by these regulations.**

- 9 General email enquiries that **do not** contain customer information will be processed and a response sent to LAs.