

Housing Benefit Direct issue 176 April 2017



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Editorial

As we move into a new financial year, it feels appropriate to reflect on the successes and challenges of 2016/17 and to plan for both in 2017/18. The environment we all work in is becoming tougher so it is great testimony to your continued commitment, to delivering the right Housing Benefit (HB) at the right time, that performance is still holding strong. We aren't complacent though and appreciate the challenges you face around funding and welfare reform. We are always looking at what we can do better and more efficiently to continually improve the customer experience and help reduce costs; this includes the one to one support we offer to all local authorities (LAs), looking for opportunities to improve and automate data sharing and communicating good practice, our latest Good Practice Guide on Quality Assurance can be found on GOV.UK. I am very proud to lead HB delivery for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

I am also proud of my team for getting us to a point of being able to launch the replacement for the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme, the Right Benefit Initiative. I apologise for this being very late in the day but we effectively only had a couple of months to redesign the initiative and had to wait for confirmation of funding. I hope you will find the new design – with all funding up front and no need to bid – to be an improvement. The deadline for opting in is 21 April 2017. We've already had a great response only five days post launch.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, NatCen will be commencing the next LA Insight Survey on 5 May 2017 (post local elections). This will cover how you are preparing for Universal Credit managed migration and the impact of the reduction in the backdating period. Please do take the time to complete this. We absolutely do feed the results of the survey into our thinking and planning. Later in May, we will be progressively rolling out Wider Use of Real Time Information tool beyond the six pilot sites. We will advise you of your place in the schedule approximately five weeks ahead. If your slot has changed, you will already be aware of this.

Drawing on your skills and experience is a key way we try to ensure we get things right. We are always on the look out for secondees to bring 'real world' understanding into our business. In my team, we currently have secondees working on LA performance support, data security and the Public Sector Audit Appointments replacement project and there are opportunities to get involved in these roles as well as funding, communications, and data sharing projects. Across DWP, there are secondees working on Universal Credit development and Housing Policy. If you want to know more, please see the call to register your interest below.

Clare Elliott
Head of Housing Delivery Division

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Right Benefit Initiative launched

The Right Benefit Initiative (RBI) was launched on Monday 27 March 2017, with a start date of 1 April 2017. RBI replaces the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) for 2017/18.

A letter dated 27 March 2017 was issued with full details of the initiative, including your local authority's (LA) funding allocation and the forecasted number of Optional Real Time Information (RTI) and mandatory Bulk Data Match RTI referrals. We have also published circulars HB [A7/2017](#) (which includes frequently asked questions) and [S6/2017](#).

RBI is designed to maximise the return on investment for available funding. It will target LAs activity on ensuring Housing Benefit (HB) claimants' earnings are as up to date as possible, whilst removing the elements of the previous schemes which were unattractive to LAs.

The main differences between FERIS and RBI are:

- all available funding is made as a single upfront payment to LAs. There are no baselines and thresholds which LAs need to meet to qualify for additional incentive payments
- we are asking LAs to focus purely on combating incorrect earnings and use available funding to process as many Optional RTI referrals as possible each month. Other business as usual fraud and error activity should continue as normal
- we have simplified the funding application. There is no requirement to submit an action plan to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to apply for funding. LAs will simply have to opt-in to receive RBI funding.

You should email feris.team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk with your opt-in response. The deadline for opting-in or out to the initiative is 21 April 2017. Funding will be paid to an LA as soon as possible following receipt of your confirmation that you wish to opt-in to RBI. Late applications for funding will not be considered.

If you have any queries about the initiative that are not covered in the letter or the Circulars referred to above you should email feris.team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Universal Credit: duplication of emails

It has recently come to light that a significant number of LAs are emailing the returned **Live Service UC413** to both the universalcredit.uc413@dwp.gsi.gov.uk and the universalcredit.servicecentre@dwp.gsi.gov.uk email addresses.

By receiving two returns for the same claimant Live Service Universal Credit staff are processing the UC413 twice and duplicating effort, which reduces the amount of resource we have available.

From 1 May 2017 Universal Credit will close the Live Service Inbox universalcredit.uc413@dwp.gsi.gov.uk. Any emails received in the inbox before that date will be processed.

On receipt of this newsletter LAs should only email Live Service UC413s to universalcredit.servicecentre@dwp.gsi.gov.uk only. The Live Service LA pack will be updated at its next review.

You should note that this communication is not relevant to the Full Service MGP1 received with the 'click here to email form' button as the form will be automatically sent to the correct Full Service email address.

LA Insight Survey: next wave starts soon

DWP wants to understand the impacts of our policies and the LA Insight Survey is an opportunity for you to help us see what's happening 'on the ground'. The next wave will start on 5 May 2017, when our research contractors NatCen will send an email survey to Revenues and Benefits managers.

This time, we will be asking for your views on how:

- your LA is preparing for the managed migration of claimants onto Universal Credit and whether you need any further support
- the reduction in the backdating period for HB claims from six months to one month is impacting on claimants.

If you're a Revenues and Benefits manager and you don't have all the information needed to answer the questions yourself, we ask you to collate responses for your area from other colleagues or organisations. If you're not a Revenues and Benefits manager you might be asked to answer some of the questions.

We really appreciate your help with this survey and we'd like to use this opportunity to thank everyone who took part in the last wave. If you have not yet seen the results they are available on GOV.UK

If you have any questions about the survey please email catherine.flynn@dwp.gsi.gov.uk or call 0113 251 9047.

Update: RTI service

The RTI service is being rolled out to LAs from the 24 April 2017 starting with the 6 LAs who have been involved in testing the service:

- Flintshire
- Gateshead
- Glasgow
- Kensington and Chelsea
- Leeds
- Wrexham

There will be a review period to assess the success of the proposed approach following rollout which takes place over two weeks.

After this review, rollout will continue across all LAs from 22 May 2017. It will be split into geographical areas, with each area introducing the service based on the agreed schedule produced by the project and issued to LAs on 14 February 2017. Please note the schedule has changed slightly and the sites impacted have been notified separately.

All Revenues and Benefits managers and LA Implementation Single Point of Contacts (SPoCS) have been issued with an RTI Service Business Readiness Approach document explaining the rollout process.

Initial contact with the LA Implementation SPoCS will be made approximately 5 weeks ahead of their site's rollout date.

If you have any questions regarding the content of this article you can email rtiprojects.portfolioqueries@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Quality Assurance Good Practice Guide

As part of sharing good practice, DWPs' Housing Delivery Division's (HDDs) Performance Development Team (PDT) would like to promote the benefits of implementing and managing a robust Quality Assurance (QA) process within your HB services.

Drawing on the collaborative work we do across the HB community and examples of the good QA processes already in place, PDT has produced a good practice guide which outlines elements of good QA framework and its overall benefits. Early detection is key in the prevention of and the guide acts as a reminder and we hope LAs will use it to benchmark against.

The Quality Assurance Good Practice Guide can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

If you need further information, please contact nicola.welch@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Secondment Opportunities: DWP HDD

The Department is currently undertaking a huge programme of welfare reform. Working with LAs, who are one of our major stakeholders, continues to feature heavily and for this reason we value the expertise and knowledge that LA HB experts can bring to the team. These secondment opportunities will in turn provide an opportunity to gain an insight and experience of policy development and workings of central government.

HDD has had a programme of bringing HB experts from LAs in to work alongside Data Sharing, Subsidy, Change and Performance teams on secondment. We are now looking to register your interest for further secondment opportunities over the coming months.

HDD comprises of approximately 100 staff. The Division is responsible for overseeing the performance of LAs in their delivery of HB (circa £24 billion), allocating HB administration subsidy (circa £260 million) and Discretionary Housing Payments (circa £125 million). HDD monitor a range of performance data including how quickly and accurately HB is paid and the prevention and detection of fraud and error. HDD offer support and challenge to those LAs not meeting performance expectations.

It also supports a large program of data sharing activity that is paramount in helping LAs pay the correct amount of HB and is heavily involved in managing change activity supporting the welfare reform agenda.

This is an exciting opportunity to play a leading role in maintaining and improving stakeholder relationships between DWP and LAs and in designing innovative opportunities for closer working during this busy and complex period of welfare reform.

Personal requirements

Candidates should possess the following:

- good understanding of HB procedures and regulations
- good drafting and communication skills
- ability to build and maintain effective working relationships with LAs and other stakeholders
- ability to work with people at different levels in the organisation and to work as part of a team to achieve results
- ability to deliver work at pace and with successful, quantifiable outcomes

Further Information

Secondment posts would be offered for 6 months initially but this would be reviewed at the end of the period and could be extended for up to a maximum of two years. The posts would be full time and based across the country, although no moves at public expense would be considered. These opportunities will be determined by business need so your CV will be kept on file and you will be contacted once a suitable opportunity arises.

If you are keen to register your interest and are at S01/S02/SO3 and Pay Band level 4 or equivalent, (roughly equates to civil service HEO/SEO/G7 grades) please:

- check with your LA that you could be released; and then
- send your CV by email to Philip.j.sharples@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

If you would like to have a chat about this opportunity you can telephone Phil Sharples on 0113 23 24905.