

Housing Benefit Direct issue 144 January 2014



ISSN 2045-6131 (Online)

Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of HB Direct for 2014 and a Happy New Year to all our readers.

Having had a bumper edition not long before Christmas, this month we have fewer updates although there have certainly been many other communications you will have seen through other routes.

I am particularly grateful to the West Yorkshire authorities for sending us an update on their programme to help tenants move to more affordable accommodation in the private rented sector. The LetsHelpYou website allows tenants to search for properties within their Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and provides free advertising of properties for landlords. Congratulations to all those involved in the project.

On the digital front, our first article explains that people without Internet access can now access information on Universal Credit by pressing the red button on their TV remote controls. Through this individuals can learn if they are eligible and how to make a claim.

We have also included a final reminder to any local authorities planning to bid for an allocation from the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) Reserve Fund. The closing date is 3 February and there is still funding available.

I'm looking forward to working with you all in meeting our challenges this year.

Clare Elliott

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[Distribution enquiries](#)

Universal Credit on the red button

Millions of people who do not have internet access at home can now find information about Universal Credit by hitting the red button on their TV remote control.

The new Universal Credit information channels have seen more than 30,000 hits since they were launched at the end of October 2013, according to digital content provider Looking Local.

The new services, by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in partnership with Looking Local, have been designed to give the seven million adults who do not have home internet, access to important information about the new benefit.

Minister for Welfare Reform Lord Freud said:

“As we continue with the rollout of Universal Credit, increasing numbers of people will need to know how it affects them and how to prepare. Working with Looking Local, we have ensured as many tools as possible exist for people to find out everything they need to know about the easier to understand and more flexible benefit that is Universal Credit. We are also making sure Universal Credit is an opportunity for people to build online skills, so they can look for work and benefit from what the online world offers for 21st century life.”

Sky and Virgin customers who have interactive TV can simply scroll through the menu to the relevant page to view a raft of information, including checking their eligibility for Universal Credit and learning how they can make a claim.

For more information visit: [Looking Local](#)

or contact the Universal Credit team at:
universal.creditcomms@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Removal of the spare room subsidy – DHP bidding scheme

This is a final reminder to local authorities (LAs) about the bidding scheme for an allocation from the £20 million DHP Reserve Fund announced by Ministers on 30 July 2013 to support LAs to help people transition to remove the spare room subsidy.

Details of the scheme and how to make a bid were set out in [Housing Benefit \(HB\) Circular A18/2013](#) which was issued in September 2013. LAs should note that the closing date for this scheme is 3 February 2014 and that there are now only 3 weeks left in order to submit a bid.

Any enquiries about the bidding scheme should be sent to:
anne.p.brown@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Amendment to HB General Information Bulletin G12/2013 issued on 16 December 2013

Further to the update on LHA uprating which was included in [HB Bulletin G12/2013](#), please note that there is a correction to paragraph 16.

The new LHA rates which will apply from April 2014, will be determined and published by Rent Officers on **21 January 2014**, not 15 January as stated in the bulletin.

Apologies for any inconvenience caused. If you have any queries at all, please contact: housing.benefitenquiries@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

DWP funding creates successful housing solution

With Universal Credit and welfare reform at the top of everyone's agenda, organisations are looking for solutions to help manage the transition and encourage the hundreds of thousands of people who will be affected towards self-serve options. DWP funding helped develop a new website service: www.letshelpyou.co.uk to enable tenants to help themselves and move to more affordable accommodation in the private rental sector.

LetsHelpYou was piloted across the five West Yorkshire LAs in February 2012 and now has a network of over 20 LAs, with more in the pipeline. Over 16,000 tenants have registered; there are over 1,700 registered landlords, and to date in excess of 4,000 properties have been uploaded and advertised through the service.

LetsHelpYou specifically deals with affordable private rental properties, other property websites do not focus on this type of accommodation, certainly not to any scale. It's a multi-channel solution and the only service of this type available through SKY and Virgin Media with a potential reach of over 10.5 million homes on SKY, and 4 million homes on Virgin Media.

Through LA annual subscription LetsHelpYou works as a free service for both the tenant and landlord. Tenants use the LHA calculator, and then search for colour-coded properties within their allowance. Over 60% of advertised properties have a rent equal to or below the relevant LHA rate.

Landlords have access to free advertising reaching a wider audience and the optional smartphone tools let's them quickly and easily upload property information.

The service received a professional landlord endorsement when it was voted winner of the 2013/14 Public Sector/Not for Profit Award at the recent national Landlord & Letting Awards held at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire.

Independent research carried out in the summer shows that two thirds of tenants responding to the online questionnaire were in receipt of HB, and 33% of respondents who found accommodation through LetsHelpYou said they would otherwise have been homeless.

www.letshelpyou.co.uk is part of the Looking Local product portfolio, owned and managed by Kirklees Council.

Please get in touch to find out more about how LetsHelpYou can help with these significant welfare changes by contacting Business Development Manager: irene.zdziebko@letshelpyou.co.uk.

Contracted Operations Directorate

As from 1 January 2014 Contracted Customer Services Directorate has changed its name to **Contracted Operations Directorate**. This is part of the re-organisation that has been taking place within the Directorate of which Housing Delivery Division is part.