



Department
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Housing Benefit Direct issue 161 August 2015

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Editorial

Welcome to issue 161 of Housing Benefit Direct. We now know the outcome of the Budget on 8 July and, as expected, Housing Benefit featured prominently. There will, for example, be changes to the benefit cap, backdating and family premium. In addition 18-21 year olds who are out of work will lose automatic entitlement to help with housing costs for new claims to Universal Credit. There will also be Discretionary Housing Payment funding of £800m for the 5-year period up to and including 2020/21.

I know you will all be eager for the finer detail of these changes in order to help you plan effectively. We and colleagues in Housing Policy Division will keep you involved and updated as we progress.

This month's addition has a heavy Local Authority Data Sharing (LADS) team stance. The team has certainly been busy introducing enhancements and putting right glitches.

As ever, I hope you find the content useful and informative.

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ETD/ATLAS Merger Update

The national rollout of the Electronic Transfer of Data/Automated Transfer to Local Authority Systems (ETD/ATLAS) in April 2015 has been largely successful in reducing the duplication of data. At the time, a new validation tool was developed to identify schematically incorrect files before transmission to deliver a more effective customer service to LAs.

This was an improved step from the previous process. However, the volume of files failing the validation tool has been higher than expected. Failing the validation check does not mean that the merged files are themselves faulty, it is the checking tool that contains the faults. This means that the quality of data LAs are receiving is not affected.

Continually striving to improve our service to LAs; the LA Support Team (LAST) and the LA Data Sharing delivery team (LADS) have been in regular contact with our IT suppliers to provide a resolution to this problem. The IT suppliers have been carrying out investigations and have identified four root causes, they are developing fixes and we are working with our supplier to get them implemented as soon as possible.

LAST will continue to amend and issue the files to the affected LAs via email in this interim period. Updates from our IT suppliers will be readily communicated through Glasscubes.

We would like to thank LAs for your patience during this time. If you have any queries contact la-sst.hdd@dwpgsi.gov.uk

Payment Deduction Programme

We announced in February 2015 that the LADS delivery team were working with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Payment Deduction Programme (PDP) to introduce two-way automated interfaces between LAs and DWP to transfer the recovery of Housing Benefit (HB) debt from LAs to Universal Credit. A manual process is currently in place to facilitate the recovery of this debt from Universal Credit live service claimants and the project aim is to automate this process, which will now extend to recover HB debt from both Universal Credit live service and digital service claimants.

Work continues in this area with the LADS team currently developing Detailed Business Requirements and in the coming weeks plan to engage with all LA IT Suppliers to understand how the solution can be developed.

We remain on course to deliver the automated HB debt migration facility from **April 2016** as planned and will keep you updated with progress.

New State Pension

We advised in February 2015 that the LADS delivery team were progressing work to transfer new State Pension (nSP) information to LAs. This involves an enhancement to the existing ATLAS feed to include details of nSP awards and the project is currently in the testing phase, working closely with LA IT Suppliers. Although the nSP start date is April 2016, claimants can submit claims around four months in advance of that date so we expect the first awards to be notified via ATLAS from early December 2015.

Data Transport Appliance Replacement – introducing Data Hub

If you saw our updates in the December 2014 and March 2015 editions of HB Direct, you'll be aware that the Data Transport Appliance (DTA) servers are now due to be replaced. The servers are currently used to securely transmit DWP benefit and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) tax credit data to all LAs. A new cloud based solution for sharing data is now in development, and this will be known as Data Hub. In previous HB Direct updates the solution was referred to as Message Hub but the name Data Hub has now replaced this.

LAs will access their designated files on Data Hub using a secure web browser session. In order to meet the required security standards, each LA must have at least one computer (e.g. desktop or laptop) set up which will be able to access Data Hub using Transport Layer Security (TLS) version 1.2. You can check your TLS status by visiting <https://www.howsmyssl.com>. LAs that are not compliant will not be able to access data shared by DWP or HMRC following rollout.

We will also shortly be publishing a test site which will be an early opportunity to confirm your LA's ability to connect to Data Hub. Please look out for details about this coming soon via Glasscubes.

Current plans are that a testing/early adopter phase will commence in late September 2015. If you are interested in volunteering for this, please contact us using the details below. All other LAs will be migrated by the end of November 2015 and we will notify everyone when they will move across as soon as we have confirmation of the migration schedule from DWP suppliers.

If you'd like to volunteer for the early adopter phase or have any queries regarding Data Hub, please contact Sabby Riordan or Craig Millar by emailing lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

If you have any queries or would like to know more about any of the LADS projects please contact us at lads.deliveryteam@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Universal Credit Local Council Tax Reduction

The DWP has undertaken to share data about its Universal Credit claimants with LAs to assist with the administration of Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTR) schemes.

Currently data is shared manually between DWP and LAs where an interest for LCTR has been registered in the Universal Credit claim.

The LADS Team has been commissioned to deliver an automated solution for sharing data and has been working with Universal Credit, Housing Delivery Division transition team, DWP IT Suppliers and LA IT Suppliers to understand the requirements. LADS will continue to work with these groups to develop the solution.

Universal Credit - national expansion

National expansion sees the implementation of Universal Credit for new claims from single people, who would otherwise have been eligible for Jobseeker's Allowance, between February 2015 and April 2016 in four tranches.

Tranche One completed on 27 April 2015 and Tranche Two completed on 20 July 2015. The completion of Tranche Two means that Universal Credit is now available in half of all Jobcentre areas and nearly half of all LAs across Great Britain, with over 148,000 claims being made.

We have placed an updated Tranche Three and Four document on GOV.UK, providing precise details of when the various Jobcentre areas and corresponding LAs will go live.