

Housing Benefit Direct issue 147 April 2014



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Editorial

As I write, it is hurtling towards the end of March and Spring has arrived, though you would not guess looking out at the grey skies over Sheffield.

At the end of the financial year, it is a good time to reflect on the year gone by. 2013/14 has been a busy year, with the pace of welfare reform not abating and continuing fiscal challenges. A lot has been delivered while performance and customer service have remained good. That is a great credit to the Revs and Bens community.

In this bumper edition, we cover the updating of the Q&A document on the Local Authority Led Pilots which tested different aspects of future Universal Credit delivery; partnership working, triage, digital and financial inclusion. There have been valuable lessons learned which will feed in to future service design. A link to the document is provided.

I'd like to thank Rushmoor Borough Council for your article on ATLAS automation, and how you have embedded new processes to drive out efficiency savings. What a fantastic result to be able to notify customers of their revised benefit award within two days.

There are also some handy hints and tips on making the most of Huddle which you might want to share with your IT Departments if you are experiencing any difficulties.

This edition also includes information on the new Government Security classifications which come into effect on 2 April, information on the publication of our updated guidance on data sharing and two new contacts in the Housing Benefit Matching Service team.

I'm looking forward to facing our challenges in 2014/15 in partnership.

Clare Elliott

clare.elliott@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

[Distribution enquiries](#)

Preparing for Universal Credit Implementation

Key Questions and Answers

We have published a summary of the key learning identified by our LA led our pilots and this can be accessed on [GOV.UK](http://gov.uk)

This learning paper very much reflects the views, experiences and products from the LA led pilots, broken down into four key themes

- Partnership Working
- Triage
- Digital
- Financial Inclusion

It highlights what worked and what did not, and reflects the agreed views from all 13 LA led pilot leads, and 2 from Pathfinder, from the set-up of this initiative in September 2012 through to pilot closure in December 2013.

Direct Payment Demonstration Project

The landlords that participated in the Direct Payment Demonstration Project have written a report based on their learning gained during the Project. [This report](#) details the key considerations that other Registered Social Landlords should take into account to prepare themselves and their tenants for the introduction of Universal Credit.

Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS)

The Housing Benefit Data Matching Service (HBMS) provides information for 380 local authorities (LAs) in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We use the information provided in your Single Housing Benefit Extract to match against our benefits and other data sources, in order to produce fraud and error referrals for further investigation. So far in this financial year (2013/14) HBMS has identified in excess of £50 million pounds worth of over and underpayments for LAs.

HBMS are pleased to introduce two new members of staff to the team.

Kelly Dugdale and Leigh Park have recently joined us and will be helping to process HBMS Referrals. Please continue to direct any queries as below

Jenny Nugent	01253 688505
Anne Scott	01253 688519

hbms@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Correction to circular HB A6/2014

Unfortunately incorrect contact details for the LA Support Team were provided at paragraph 17 of circular HB A6/2014. The correct email address to use is

LA-SST.HDD@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

We are sorry for any inconvenience this has caused and have arranged for the current version of the circular that has been published on .GOV.UK to be replaced with a new version showing the correct email address.

Are you getting the most out of Huddle?

Huddle has been in place for more than a year now, and we have been looking at how you are using it to see what improvements we can make. Feedback shows that some of you are having difficulty accessing all the items on the Huddle site, especially where you need to download a letter or file. With this in mind we are republishing some information about key things that your IT department will need to know, or action, to make Huddle work at its best for you.

Firstly, you will need to make sure you have the correct web browser so that you can take advantage of all the functionality that is available. Huddle recommends the following browsers:

- Microsoft Internet Explorer 7, or higher
- Google Chrome
- Mozilla Firefox

You'll also need some specific software installed to enable you to use the active links and to open files properly. These are:

- Java Runtime Environment 1.5, or later
- Adobe Flash 10, or higher

Finally, it is likely that your system has a filtering solution in place to protect the system. These will need to be updated to unblock the following Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) or web addresses:

- my.huddle.net
- <<custom domain>>.huddle.net (Not applicable for everyone)
- files.huddle.net
- api.huddle.net
- login.huddle.net
- stracking.huddle.net
- huddle.zendesk.com
- *.rackcdn.com
- www.huddle.com

If you have been experiencing problems accessing or using Huddle fully, please ask your IT department to look at the above information.

If all of the above are in place and you are still experiencing problems, please do let us know so that we can look into it for you. Email any questions to us at: LADS.DELIVERYTEAM@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK.

ATLAS Automation – the Rushmoor experience

We love ATLAS here at Rushmoor Borough Council and we have maximised its advantages to achieve 80% automation.

Initially, like many of you, I suspect, we were nervous about what these transactions would do to our data and frankly what hassle they would cause. The specification for the software looked horrendously complicated and this just added to the frustration.

To be honest, we had a couple of goes at it but it all seemed too much trouble: why didn't we just do it all manually?

However, the potential efficiency savings seemed obvious, so with some coaxing, I got the team to have another look. We decided to take the matrix approach suggested and do one transaction at a time. We made sure we understood what the system process was and what the outcome was for the customer.

With each transaction, we analysed the risk of automation. We tested very carefully and followed the transaction through so we understood what the software would do. We decided that we would automate all transactions except for death notices and terminations, as these posed the most risk of failure or waste outcome for the customer. Getting it right first time is important for us and we felt that if we did not intervene manually with these transactions, we were unlikely to achieve this.

We automated tax credits last, after detailed analysis. This showed us that two thirds of our customers had already notified us of the change in their income or household circumstances that caused the tax credit change. Many of these changes were in the previous year but tax credits were just catching up with a new award. For us, that the risk of one third of customers failing to tell us of the change on time, and of those, the smaller percentage where HB or Council Tax Reduction is affected, is worth it, compared with the resource intensive act of checking every transaction.

The efficiencies have been significant. We process around 65% of all changes in circumstances by ATLAS. We have reduced processing times and have been able to identify overpayments and underpayments more quickly. The obvious improvement in speed of processing for changes in circumstance means that customers get their revised benefit award within two days.

We have helped a number of authorities to automate their own ATLAS transactions. We took them through our method and risk analysis and helped them with the matrix model so they could develop their own process of automation slowly, one transaction type at a time. We also felt it was crucial to understand what the outcome would be for the customer.

A good tip: We did find it extremely useful to get some technical support from our software provider.

If anyone wants any advice or support please contact: Emma.lansley@rushmoor.gov.uk or Dawn.menzies-kelly@rushmoor.gov.uk

Government Security Classifications

On 2 April 2014 a new Government Security Classification policy comes into force. This new policy describes how we in HM Government will classify information assets to ensure they are appropriately protected. It applies to all information that government collects, stores, processes, generates or shares to deliver services and conduct business.

There will be three levels of classification

- Official (Official-Sensitive) – the majority of information that is ☐ created by the public sector. Includes routine business some of which could have damaging consequences if lost, stolen or published in the media
- Secret – very sensitive information that justifies heightened ☐ protective measures
- Top Secret – the most sensitive information requiring the ☐ highest levels of protection from the most serious threats

Within the Official classification there is a new 'Official-Sensitive' category for information which is especially sensitive that will require additional controls. We are currently looking at what changes we will need to make in the way we share certain information with some of our external stakeholders and partners outside of the secure email network but we will make sure that we let you know of any changes as soon as we are able. Full details of this new policy are available on [GOV.UK](http://gov.uk)

Data Sharing Guidance Manual 2014 – coming in April

The updated guidance for LAs on the use of social security data is due for release in April 2014 and will be available on [GOV.UK](http://gov.uk).

This refreshes the original guidance published in August 2010. It aims to help you better understand some of the main considerations and constraints in using social security data.

The guidance is particularly aimed at HB teams but will also be useful to other parts of the LA. This version includes a new chapter which explains the extended data sharing powers included in the Welfare Reform Act 2012, and associated 2013 regulations.

Removal of Spare Room Subsidy toolkit

Have you explored the improved Removal of Spare Room Subsidy [advisors toolkit](#)? It has links to [factsheets](#) and [publicity materials](#) you can use to help your claimants understand the options available to them if they were affected by the changes introduced in April 2013.

It is now nearly a year since the policy was introduced, and it would be helpful to remind affected claimants of their options using targeted communications. As part of the advisors toolkit we drafted a [letter](#) for you to send to them. You can tailor the letter with your local information. We are providing funding for this direct mailing, and more details are provided in Circular [S2/2014](#) on new burdens.

We will keep you updated of the activity to support people affected by the policy through the [advisors toolkit](#). Also, look out for more information in future editions of HB direct, bulletins or circulars. If you have any further questions then please [email us](#).