

Housing Benefit Circular

Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA

HB A6/2018

ADJUDICATION AND OPERATIONS CIRCULAR

WHO SHOULD READ	All Housing Benefit staff
ACTION	For information
SUBJECT	Housing Benefit operational information, performance support and engagement 2018-19

Guidance Manual

The information in this circular does not affect the content of the HB Guidance Manual.

Queries

extra copies of this circular/copies of previous circulars can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/housing-benefit-for-local-authorities-circulars>

If you have any queries

- about the
 - **general content of this circular**, email Philip.j.sharples@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
 - **distribution of this circular**, contact, email housing.correspondenceandpqs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

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Housing Benefit operational information, performance support and engagement 2018-19

Introduction

1. This circular outlines the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) approach in relation to its use of Housing Benefit (HB) operational performance information, the key areas deemed of importance for 2018-19 and how this informs engagement with, and support offered to, local authorities (LAs). It takes account of the need to maintain levels of HB related performance throughout on-going reforms and the need to reduce HB Fraud and Error (F&E).

Inspection arrangements for 2018-19

2. DWP retains powers of inspection with regard to LA administration of HB for England. However, due to LAs' continuing willingness to work in partnership with DWP and deliver change and improvements to their HB services, DWP hasn't needed to carry out any HB inspections in England since 2012. Consequently, we are not planning to undertake any in 2018-19. However, we reserve the right to do so should circumstances warrant it and report to the Secretary of State on any areas of concern as necessary.
3. In Scotland and Wales decisions on audit/inspection and the production of reports rest with the relevant audit bodies. DWP liaises with these audit bodies, as necessary, and maintains a direct relationship with Scottish and Welsh LAs on HB related performance matters.

DWP interests

4. Whilst it is for individual LAs to decide how best to deliver HB services, DWP's interests arise from:
 - its funding responsibilities – both benefit and administration subsidy
 - the need to ensure delivery of policy intent, including welfare reforms
 - the need for the right benefit to go to the right people at the right time.

Areas of importance

5. DWP focus in 2018-19 will be on the following areas:
 - the Speed of Processing of new claims and changes of circumstance – primary source of information is the quarterly published Speed of Processing statistics.
 - action being taken to prevent fraud and error – primarily source of information is the quarterly published Caseload Management Information statistics (currently classed as 'Experimental' and under review).
 - processing of Verify Earnings and Pensions (VEP) service Alerts in line with funding provided – primary source of information is the Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) and VEP service data.
 - HB Subsidy audit and assurance – primary source of information is from LA subsidy returns.
 - Debt levels and recovery rates – primary source of information is the bi-annual publication of the HB Debt Recoveries statistics.
 - HB fraud referrals – primary source of information is the recently developed information on quarterly volumes of referrals sent to the F&E Service.
6. DWP's Housing Delivery Division (HDD) will use these sources of information to determine appropriate engagement with individual LAs and the most effective form of support to be offered.

Additional sources of HB operational information

7. In addition to the primary sources referenced in paragraph 5 above, HDD may also draw on:
 - **F&E** in the Benefit System Estimates – statistics published bi-annually, which provide an estimated indication of monetary value of HB fraud and error based on sampling of cases.
 - **other HB information** that may be supplied by LAs to DWP, including information from SHBE, LA returns on data-matches and fraud referrals made to DWP.
 - **wider information**, such as any relevant reports produced by the audit bodies, correspondence received in DWP and press/media stories.

DWP support to LAs

8. HDD has a small team of Performance Relationship Managers, who undertake ongoing liaison direct with every LA about HB performance matters and a team of HB business consultants from the Performance Development Team (PDT), who can undertake on-site performance assignments and develop good practice.
9. DWP continues to offer this free consultancy support and LAs may wish to draw on PDT to help deliver HB service improvements. PDT can provide support to LAs in England, Scotland and Wales. To find out more about possible PDT support please email: hdd.pdt@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
10. Relevant and updated good practice information for LA staff on key aspects of HB performance is placed on our HB pages on www.gov.uk
11. HDD will provide updates on LA engagement activity and good practice at regular points through the year in HB circulars, other routine publications and at external LA events.