

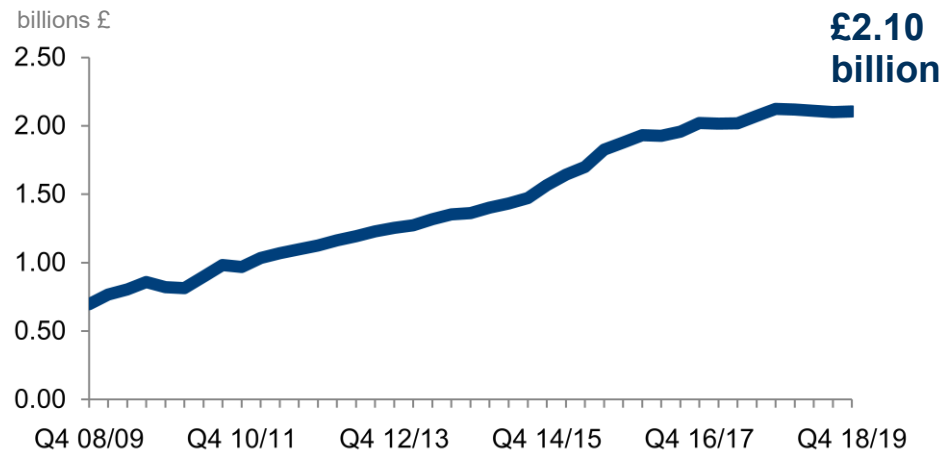
Housing Benefit is an income related benefit that is intended to help meet housing costs for rented accommodation. The statistics in this release capture information on the amount of Housing Benefit that is overpaid to claimants, the subsequent recoveries and amounts written off.

## Main stories

During 2018/19:

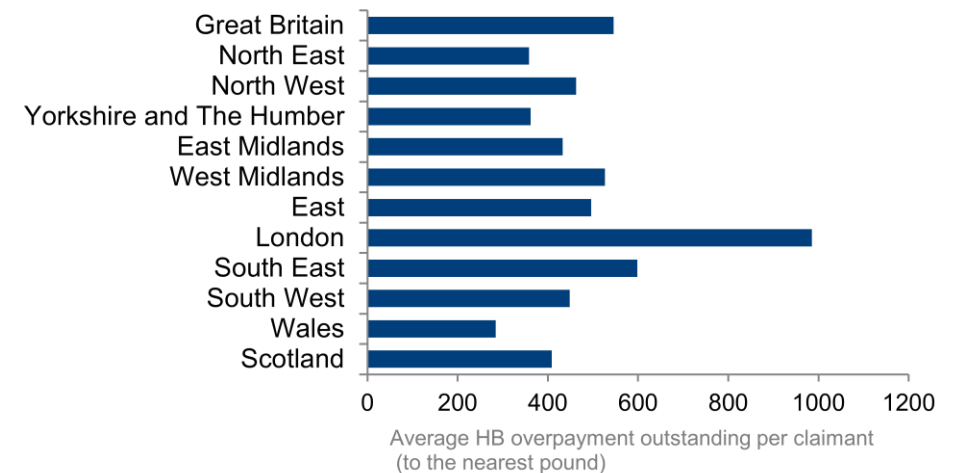
- £740 million Housing Benefit overpayments identified.
- £649 million Housing Benefit overpayments recovered.
- £90 million Housing Benefit overpayments written off.

**£2.10 billion Housing Benefit overpayments outstanding at January 2019 (the beginning of quarter 4 of 2018/19).**



At January 2019 (the beginning of quarter 4 2018/19) the total value of outstanding debt was around £2.1 billion, a decrease of £19 million (1%) on this point the previous year.

**At January 2019 (the beginning of quarter 4 of 2018/19) the average Housing Benefit overpayment outstanding per claimant in Great Britain was £546**



At January 2019 (beginning of Q4, 2018/19), the largest average amount of overpayment outstanding per claimant was in London (£985), while the lowest was in Wales (£284), (based on HB caseload figures, which include claimants without a HB overpayment, at the end of quarter 3 of 2018/19, as published in [Stat-Xplore](#)).

## At a glance

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Thoughts? We welcome feedback

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## What you need to know

This release contains statistics relating to amounts of incorrectly overpaid Housing Benefit (HB). Following the introduction of the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), which has now gone live in all 379 Local Authorities (LAs), **from quarter 1 2016/17 this publication no longer includes fraud data**. The publication has been renamed from 'Housing Benefit Recoveries and Fraud (HBRF) statistics' to 'Housing Benefit Debt Recoveries (HBDR) statistics' to reflect this change.

HBDR data is aggregate level data received on a quarterly basis from each LA, but published bi-annually each March and September. The March publication covers the first two quarters of the year (April to September). The publication in September covers finalised data for all four quarters of the year.

The amount of outstanding debt at the beginning of a quarter is a sum inherited from the amount of debt outstanding at the beginning of the preceding quarter and the debt recovery activities (as measured by the remaining three measures included in this publication) during the quarter. E.g. The amount of debt outstanding at the beginning of quarter 2 is the sum of the amount of debt outstanding at the beginning of quarter 1 and the amount of debt identified during quarter 1 less the amount of debt recovered and written off during quarter 1. In principle the amount of debt outstanding at the beginning of any given reporting quarter could be estimated from the released figures of the preceding quarter's publication. However LAs usually identify debt that relates to historic periods and if this historic debt identified relates to quarters for which data is already returned these new identified sums are applied to the outstanding amount of the next reporting quarter. These retrospective updates on the amount of outstanding debt lead to differences between the outstanding amount of debt estimated from the data based on the preceding quarter and that recorded in the current quarter.

Some LAs do not send completed data forms every quarter, or cannot supply data for all fields. This produces missing data in the returns which, in turn, affects the reported Great Britain totals. In previous publications of these statistics, statisticians have been filling the gap created by missing data though imputing or estimating what the missing value might have been. Our methodology for this can be found [here](#). However in recent years the number of non-returned LAs have reduced to the point that the effect on the GB totals is insignificant and therefore the imputation is no longer necessary. From September 2017 all published figures in this statistical summary are based on the actual returned data.

Tables containing the data that underlies the charts and figures featured in this statistical summary are also [published](#).

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, at June 2012, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

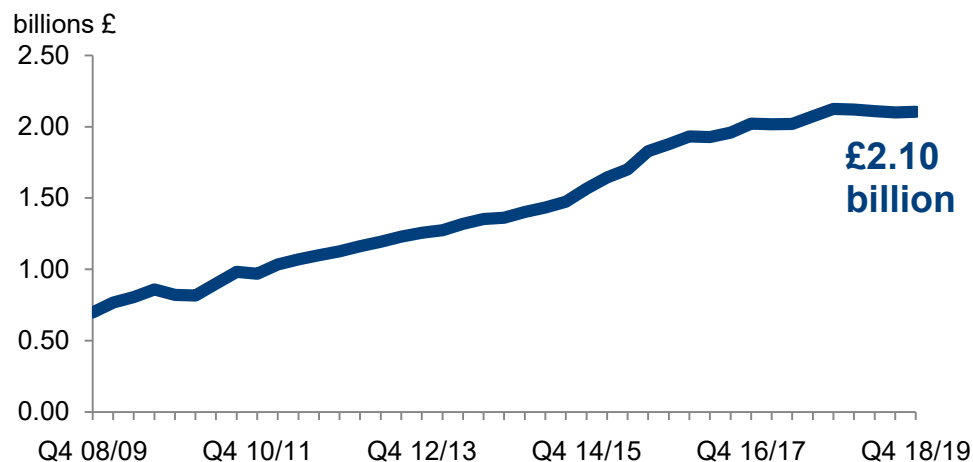
- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

**Note:** Percentage figures provided in this document are based on data rounded to the nearest thousand (please see [accompanying Excel data tables](#)). Recalculating the same percentage figures from data in this document might yield different results due to differences in rounding order.

# Housing Benefit Overpayments Outstanding at the Start of the Quarter

The total value of HB overpayments outstanding in Great Britain decreased for the first time during the financial year 2018/19

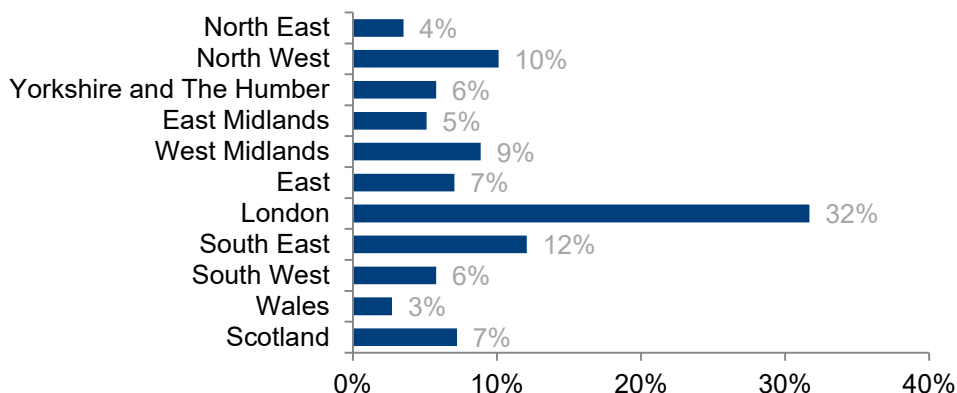


During 2018/19, for the first time the total value of outstanding overpayments followed a decreasing trend.

The total GB value of HB overpayments outstanding at the beginning of January 2019 (quarter 4 of 2018/19) was around £2.1 billion; a decrease of £19 million (1%) on this point the previous year.

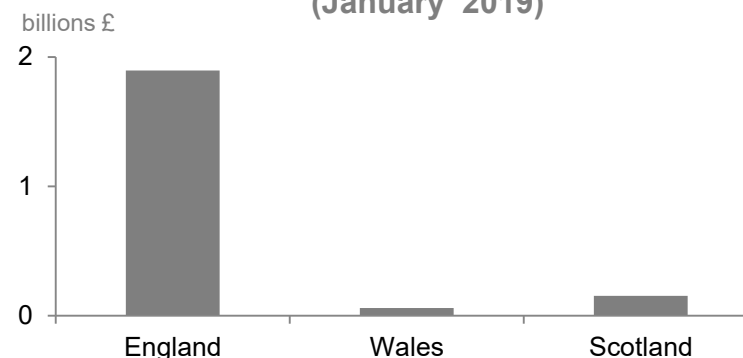
Please see [Additional Information](#)

At January 2019 London accounted for 32% of the national total amount of outstanding HB overpayment.



At the start of quarter 4 2018/19 the value of HB overpayment outstanding in London accounted for 32% of the total Great Britain figure, while value of HB overpayment outstanding Wales accounted for 3% of the national total.

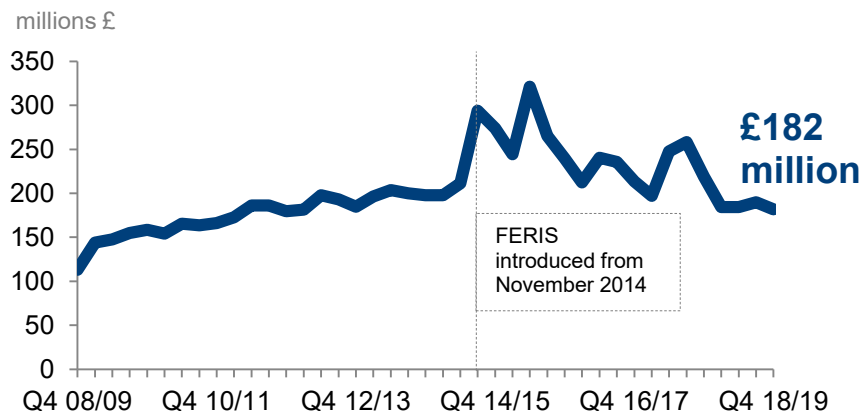
HB overpayments outstanding by country (January 2019)



At January 2019, the outstanding HB overpayment in England was £1.9 billion. This accounted for 90% of the total national figure of £2.1 billion.

# Housing Benefit Overpayments Identified During the Quarter

The total value of HB overpayments identified in GB continues to fluctuate



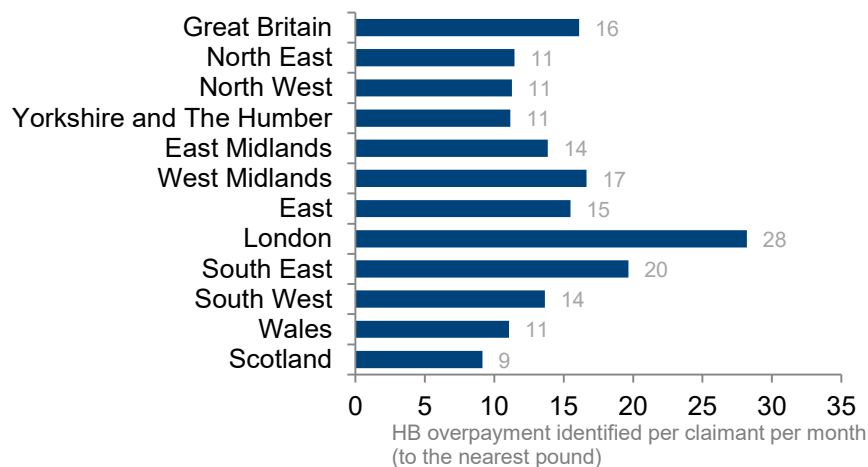
During 2018/19 the total value of HB overpayments identified was £740 million; a decrease of £183 million (20%) in comparison to those overpayments identified in 2017/18.

The total value of overpayments identified decreased in quarter 1 of 2018/19 from £219 million at March 2018 (quarter 4 of 2017/18) to £184 million at June 2018 and remained the same in quarter 2 of 2018/19. In quarter 1 of 2018/19, 67% of all Local Authorities recorded a drop in identified amounts from that recorded during quarter 4 of 2017/18 and only a half of these recovered the overpayments identified amounts in quarter 2 2018/19.

The total amount of HB overpayments identified in quarter 4 of 2018/19 was £182 million. This was a decrease of £35 million (16%) from the same quarter of the previous year, and the lowest amount identified in a quarter since quarter 1 of 2011/12.

There was an increasing trend on the amount of overpayments identified from 2008/09 to Q3 2015/16 where the amount identified in one quarter reached record high of £321 million. 2015/16 was an exceptional year, with the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) and Real Time Information (RTI) identifying historic overpayments of long duration through stock cleanse. Since then there has been an increase in the volatility of quarterly amounts of overpayments identified. This increase in volatility reflects pauses in RTI to allow LAs to manage the financial year end activities. Q3 2015/16 has been followed by a decreasing trend of quarterly identified amounts, with the amount identified in Q4 2018/19 being the lowest identified in a quarter for the last 6 years.

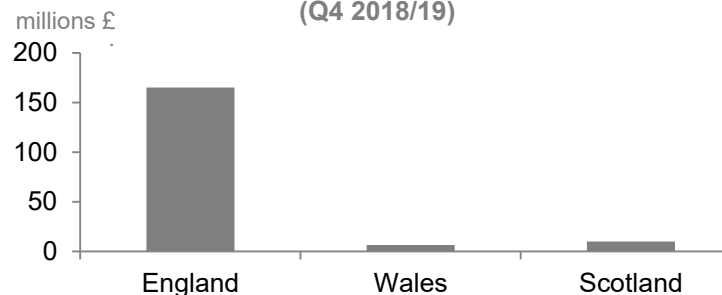
In quarter 4 of 2018/19 the average amount of identified HB overpayment per claimant per month in GB was £16



Please see [Additional Information](#)

During quarter 4, of 2018/19 London had the largest average amount of identified debt per claimant per month (£28), while Scotland had the lowest amount (£9), (based on HB caseload figures during this quarter, as published in [Stat-Xplore](#)).

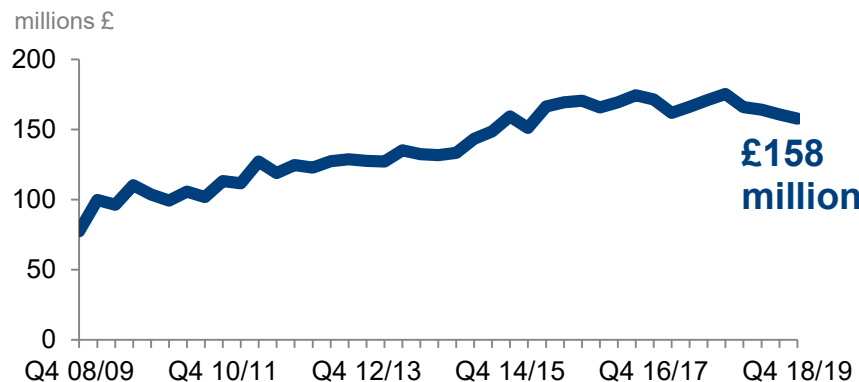
HB overpayments identified by country (Q4 2018/19)



Of the £182 million of HB overpayments identified in Great Britain during quarter 4 of 2018/19, £165 (91%) million were identified in England, £10 million (5%) in Scotland and £7 million (4%) in Wales.

# Housing Benefit Overpayments Recovered During the Quarter

There was a slow but continuous decrease on overpayments recovered in 2018/19



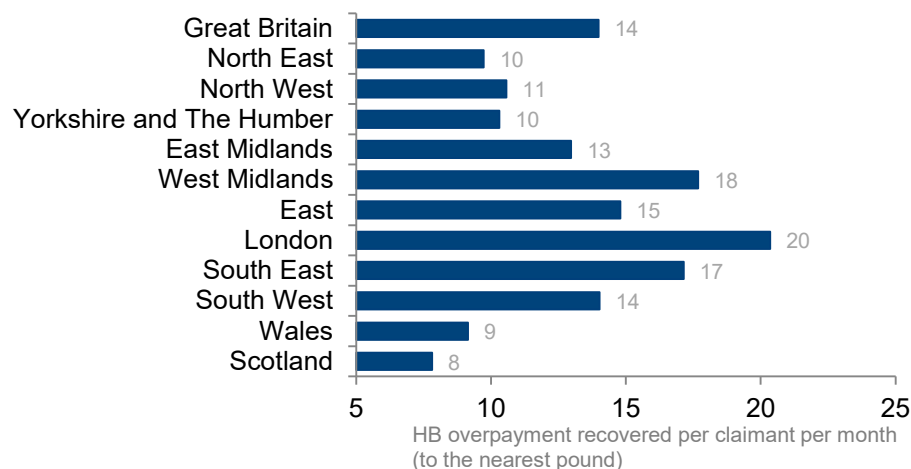
Historically, the total value of overpayments recovered has tended to vary seasonally between quarters, however overall it followed an upward trend, reaching a historic high of £175 million in quarter 4 2017/18. 2018/19 is the first financial year where the amount of overpayments recovered have seen a decreasing trend.

During 2018/19 the total GB value of HB overpayments recovered was £649 million, a decrease of £26 million (4%) in comparison to those overpayments recovered during 2017/18.

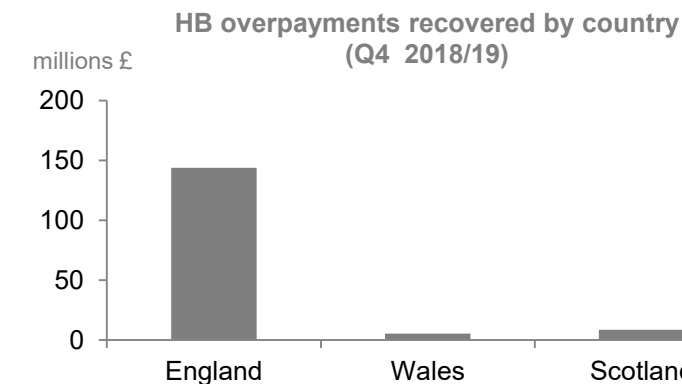
The total value of overpayments recovered decreased in quarter 1 of 2018/19 from £175 million at March 2018 (quarter 4 of 2017/18) to £166 million at June 2018, and it followed a quarter on quarter decrease for the rest of 2018/19.

The total value of overpayments recovered in quarter 4 of 2018/19 was 158 million. This was a decrease of £18 million (10%) from quarter 4 of 2017/18.

During quarter 4 of 2018/19 the average amount of recovered HB overpayment per claimant per month in Great Britain was £14



Please see [Additional Information](#)

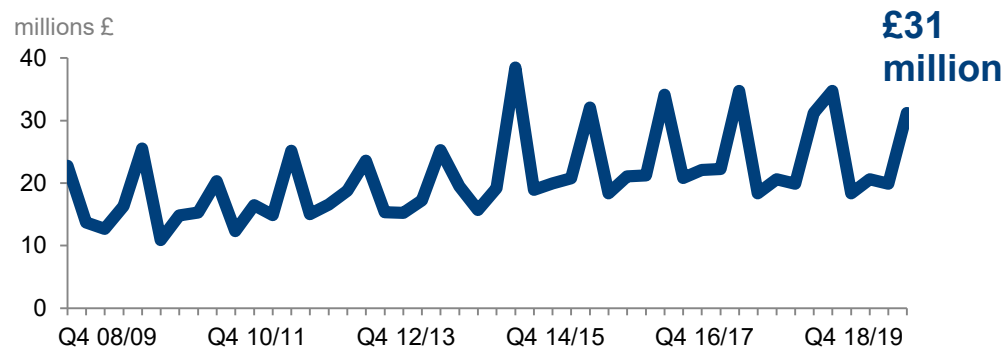


During quarter 4 of 2018/19, London had the largest average amount of recovered HB overpayment per claimant per month (£20), while Scotland had the lowest amount (£8), (based on HB caseload figures during this quarter, as published in [Stat-Xplore](#)).

In quarter 4 of 2018/19 out of the £158 million of HB overpayments recovered in Great Britain, £144 (91%) million were recovered in England, £9 million (6%) in Scotland and £5 million (3%) in Wales.

# HB Overpayments Written Off During the Quarter

The total value of HB overpayments written off in GB continues to fluctuate

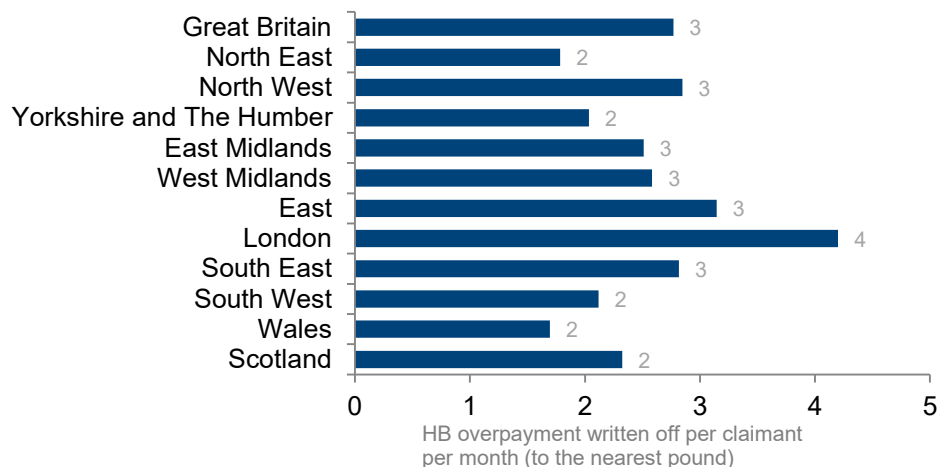


The total GB value of HB overpayments written off during 2018/19 was £90 million; a decrease of £9 million (10%) in comparison to those overpayments written off during 2017/18.

The amount of overpayments written off changes throughout the year. It is generally highest in quarter 4 (March) of each collection year followed by a sharp decrease during quarter 1 of the following year. In line with this there has been a decrease in the total amount of overpayments written off from £35 million at March 2018 (quarter 4 of 2017/18) to £18 million in June 2018 (quarter 1 of 2018/19).

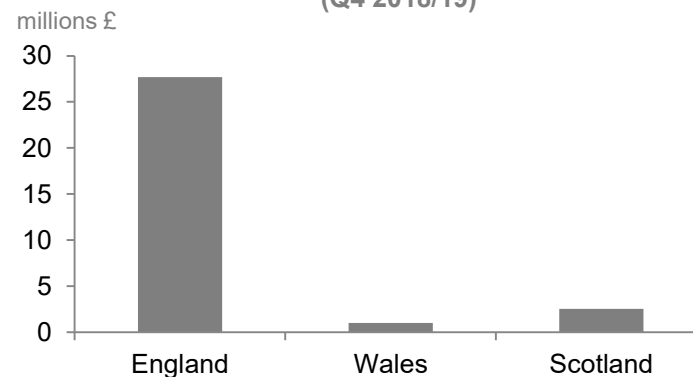
The total value of HB overpayments written off in quarter 4 of 2018/19 was £31 million. This was a decrease of £3 million (10%) from the total amount of HB overpayments written off in quarter 4 of 2017/18.

In quarter 4 of 2018/19 the average amount of HB overpayment written off per claimant per month in Great Britain was £3



Please see [Additional Information](#)

HB overpayments written off by country (Q4 2018/19)



During quarter 4 of 2018/19, London had the highest average amount of HB overpayment written off per claimant per month of £4, (based on HB caseload figures during this quarter, as published in [Stat-Xplore](#)).

In quarter 4 of 2018/19, of the £31 million of written off HB overpayments in Great Britain, £28 million (89%) were identified in England, £3 million (8%) in Scotland and £1 million (3%) in Wales.

# HBDR Data – Collection Processes and Accuracy

## Data Collection

The table below details the list of questions asked to LAs as part of the data collection process.

Field	Overpayment Questions
1	Total value of HB overpayments outstanding at the start of the quarter
2	Total value of HB overpayments identified during the quarter
3	Total value of HB overpayments recovered during the quarter
4	Total value of HB overpayments written off during the quarter

## Average Data Return Rates

Collection Period	Average LA Return Rate (across all quarters)
2008 – 2009	89.7%
2009 – 2010	99.2%
2010 – 2011	99.5%
2011 – 2012	99.6%
2012 – 2013	99.8%
2013 – 2014	99.7%
2014 – 2015	99.3%
2015 – 2016	99.9%
2016 – 2017	99.5%
2017 – 2018	100%
2018 – 2019	100%

Some LAs cannot complete certain questions. Hence, the question level completion rate has, in the past, often been lower than the values quoted here. Therefore we used to publish additional estimates, allowing for imputation (at a Great Britain level only) to account for LAs which could not provide data. These additional figures gave a sense of scale of this impact. However in recent years the number of non-returner LAs have reduced to the point that the effect on the GB totals is insignificant and therefore the imputation is no longer necessary. From September 2017 all published figures in this statistical summary are based on the actual returned data.

## Additional Information

HBDR is aggregate level data received from each LA, and as such, is subject to a significant degree of variation both in and between different LAs. From 2014 we have observed a significant amount of variation in the overpayment data. This could be due to a wide range of factors such as: variations and issues with different authorities' software suppliers; changes in LA return rates; additional side affects due to the phased implementation of Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), the implementation of the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) and Real Time Information (RTI) and factors unique to each LA (e.g. increases/decreases in resources, bulk clearing of historical overpayments).

## About these statistics

### Known Issues, Changes and Revisions

Our **Methodology** and **Background Information Note** provides further information on DWP HBDR statistics, including some of the processes involved in developing and releasing these statistics: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/housing-benefit-recoveries-and-fraud-data-methodology-and-definitions>

Following the introduction of a new Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), which has now gone live in all 379 areas, this publication (from quarter 1 of 2016/17) only includes information on Housing Benefit overpayments. The publication has been renamed to 'Housing Benefit Debt Recoveries statistics' to reflect this change.

### Other National and Official Statistics

Details of other National and Official Statistics produced by the Department for Work and Pensions can be found on the DWP website via the following link:

- A schedule of statistical releases over the next 12 months and a list of the most recent releases: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/about/statistics>
- Detailed background notes and methodology relating to this First Release can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/housing-benefit-recoveries-and-fraud-data-methodology-and-definitions>

### Feedback

Specific HBDR statistics feedback can be submitted via our [HBDR user questionnaire](#).

Completed questionnaires can be returned by e-mail to [stats-consultation@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:stats-consultation@dpw.gsi.gov.uk) or by post to the following address:

Client Statistics, Data and Analytics, Department for Work and Pensions, Room BP5201, Benton Park Road, Longbenton, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE, NE98 1YX

Users can also join the "Welfare and Benefit Statistics" community at: <http://www.statsusernet.org.uk> DWP announces items of interest to users via this forum, as well as replying to users' questions.

## About these statistics

### Supplementary Statistics

Tables containing the data that underlies the charts and figures featured in this statistical summary are [available](#). These include information by local authority on outstanding overpayments at the beginning of each quarter and identified, recovered and written-off overpayments at the end of each quarter.

### Uses and Users

HBDR is aggregate level data received on a quarterly basis from each LA. This data is used to produce established statistics on the amount of HB overpaid to claimants. The statistics also provide a means of comparing and contrasting information between LAs.

The data will also be used to feed into a range of briefings for Ministers and other senior officials and will be used to answer Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information requests. It will also be used for other policy functions including monitoring and informing changes to related policies.



## Publication frequency

### Dear users of the Housing Benefit Debt Recovery statistics

The statistics team in DWP are reviewing the frequency of their publications with a view to reduce the number of releases each year and direct efforts into development of the statistics and the expansion of the scope and content of the publications.

For this release the proposal is to reduce the current frequency of publishing every six months to an annual publication. The quarterly data would still be available but would only be released once a year.

As user of these statistics, it would be very helpful to understand from you:

- a) Whether you support the reduced frequency of release or reasons why this would impact on you as a user of the statistics. Please be specific in providing your reasons.
- b) What is the best month to publish. Please let us know if you use the published data as input into any other publication or a decision that happens at a particular point in time in the year.

Please email your feedback to [stats-consultation@dwp.gpn.gov.uk](mailto:stats-consultation@dwp.gpn.gov.uk), stating 'Publication Frequency' in your subject. The deadline for contributing to this consultation is 8<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

The statistics team really appreciate your input and your collaboration in this review.

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**DWP Press Office:** 0203 267 5144