Withdrawn

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Introduction

- DWP Fraud and Error (F&E) activities are driven by the findings from the biannual <u>DWP HB F&E Statistics</u>. The latest figures reveal £1.26 billion of Housing Benefit (HB) was overpaid for the year ending September 2015. These figures are compiled from HB Reviews (HBR) undertaken by the DWP Performance Measurement (PM) Team.
- 2. Annually, every local authority (LA) in England, Scotland and Wales is visited by PM. This could comprise of one or more monthly visits depending on the size of the LA. A sample of HB cases is selected for an accuracy check. The check identifies whether an HB award is correct or not. Errors are classified as official, customer or fraud. The check is completed by inspecting LA records and visiting HB customers.
- Collaborative working between the LA and PM is required to enable PM to carry out the review work and agree the outcomes. This partnership has proved to be very successful in ensuring the timely publication of the statistics for many years.
- 4. Following Performance Development Team's observations during LA site visits, this document has been developed to provide HBR good practice to further improve the process across all LAs. Many of these good practices are already undertaken by LAs and so this guidance is to encourage conformity across all LAs.
- 5. LAs using HBR good practice will continue to ensure the provision of timely and accurate HB information. An example will best explain the importance to both LAs and DWP in ensuring that the process is robust at a local level. If HBR discover an LA error of £100 a week on an HB award in an LA during an accuracy check, this is "grossed" up by DWP statisticians to give a national figure of £1.67 million. Therefore, a relatively small figure at LA level is significant nationally. LA compliance to the HBR error decision agreement process (see below) will ensure that the final figures are accurate.

Housing Benefit Review Good Practice

- 6. HB managers oversee the HBR, but usually delegate the day-to-day responsibility to a team leader/assessor (LA Error Control Officer (LA ECO). Good practice is to use staff familiar with the HBR process. The LA ECO should be given adequate time to devote to the HBR. There should also be absence cover by a HBR trained deputy LA ECO.
- 7. LA ECO telephone and email contact good practice is for LA ECO/deputy to provide alternative contact details as part of any answerphone messages and 'out of office' replies. It is important, wherever possible, to respond to telephone and email queries within 10 working days. Examples of urgent matters include completion of 48 hour checks on HB claims before a customer visit and abandoning and replacing HB cases from the HBR sample. Cover arrangements are similar for HBR teams.
- 8. PM email all communications to LAs during the HBR. The good practice is for LA ECOs to agree with PM which nominated email accounts will be used during the review. LA should monitor these email accounts for HBR communications daily, and treat them as a priority until all HB reviews are completed. The HBR is largely completed with the exception of a few cases on receipt of the HBR Findings Summary. This is issued about 5 months after the first LA contact to obtain prints. Please complete the Payment Fee form when the summary is received. If the HBR Findings Summary is not received, contact the HBR Single Point of Contact (SPOC).
- 9. LA HBR responsibilities and timescales are contained in the Process and Performance Standards document (see Appendix 1). It is important that the LA familiarise themselves with the contents of this document and the timescales contained therein. An initial meeting is held 6-8 weeks before the HBR and provides an opportunity to discuss the Process and Performance Standards document with PM. Good practice is for the HB manager, LA ECO and deputy to attend this meeting and be provided with a copy of the Process and Performance Standards document.
- 10. During the initial meeting, the LA should set out any local protocols and etiquettes that HBR staff need to adhere to while on site.

- 11. Some key actions from the Process and Performance Standards document require prompt action by the LA ECO and include:
 - on receipt of the HB case sample and checks, promptly complete checks, obtain payment system and Document Imaging Prints (DIP) and send *electronically* to the designated HBR email address. If the sample list not received on time, contact the HBR SPOC. Appendix 2 fully explains the electronic process
 - provide system prints for the correct award period, stipulated in the sample instruction letter
 - exceptionally, where there is an unavoidable reason why system/DIP prints cannot be provided electronically and by prior arrangement between PM/LA, arrangements will be made for LAs to provide them clerically. Hard copies should not be blurred and font size 10 or 12 point
 - if a clerical process LA to arrange payment and DIP system access in readiness for the start of the HBR. This can be a lengthy process, so prepare this as soon as you know the names of the HBR staff attending your LA. You will receive details of the HBR staff at the 6-8 week manager meeting. In some LAs, payment and DIP access is not possible and so LAs will provide all HBR prints
 - inform all HB staff of the HBR visit and the names of the HBR staff who
 will make home visits to customers. This is important to ensure
 customer facing/contact staff can confirm visiting officer identities, and
 reassure customers that a home visit is legitimate
 - PM may request a HB suspension, and by the time of the LA request, the customer has already had one calendar month to reply. The good practice is for LAs to agree to suspend HB immediately, rather than wait a further month
 - check and agree the HB error decisions in 10 working days from receipt of a decision (see Appendix 3). If you disagree with a decision, please do not hesitate to challenge. The integrity of the F&E figures depends on the LA role here. LAs act as a check on HBR results and may identify inaccuracies. Good practice is for LA ECOs to manage the whole process for error agreement and decision-making, not delegating to others

- Occasionally PM receive late contact from the LA after 10 days to disagree an error. The dispute is then 'out of time' and beyond action. Good practice is for LA ECOs to contact PM with an 'intention to dispute' within the 10 working days if they are not ready to provide their final comments within the 10 days deadline
- LAs should rigorously manage the error agreement process. Good practice is for LA ECO and HB manager to diary regular meetings throughout the review process to:
 - make an initial LA assessment of any errors
 - agree on errors to be challenged
 - discuss the outcome of any completed challenges
 - review errors on the HBR Findings Summary for lessons learned
- 12. If you would like more information or have suggestions for other HBR good practice, please contact hamish.j.robertson@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

APPENDIX 1: PROCESS AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The following table lists the process and standards against which both parties will be monitored:

No	Process	Standard
	PM Action (Admin)	
1	The PM Manager will contact the LA prior to commencement of the measurement review to discuss arrangements for the visit. The Manager will complete a LA profile Proforma (see Appendix 11B) and will provide an explanation of the background to the process, emphasising the unnotified visit requirement and the need to verify identity. The standards included in this document will be agreed.	6 – 8 weeks prior to commencement of the review the LA will be contacted. A meeting must be held between the PM Manager and both the LA (HB Administration and Fraud Managers). Only in exceptional circumstances can the PM Manager delegate this role. All should sign a copy of this document (PM Review Process Document) at this stage.
2	PM will contact the LA to provide: > the name(s) of the PM staff who will be conducting the HBR > a full list of cases to be reviewed	3 weeks prior to the commencement of the visit for all other cases
3	PM will provide a full statement of circumstances of the HBR, including: a change/no change statement a Decision Proforma a PM reassessment calculation (see Appendix 11c) for any errors identified 	Within 5 working days of receipt of necessary evidence/ supporting documentation from the claimant or any other interested parties, e.g. employer.
	LA Action (Admin)	
4	The LA will provide information for the completion of the LA Profile Proforma which will contain the following information: (see Appendix 11B)	Information to be provided at least 3 weeks prior to the commencement of the PM review visit to LA
5	LA ECO to complete the following checks: Verify that claim is live, Identify any previous fraud interest or current live fraud file, Check any overpayment history on the sample cases.	By the commencement of the review, i.e. on the first day of the PM visit. LA nominated contact should be from the HB administration section.
6	LA ECO to provide: ➤ Access to files ➤ Access to computer systems (including overview) ➤ Obtain screen prints where agreed - the following applies to benefit system and Data Imaging Prints: ➤ Obtain any clerical papers for the sample cases ➤ Provide workspace for PM Staff ➤ Provide Local Health & Safety instructions ➤ Provide Access to interviewing facilities on an ad hoc basis, and	At commencement of the review, i.e. on the first day of the PM visit. Provide access to private interview room if required

	Make LA staff aware of PM's presence (in case of contact from claimant to confirm identity of the PM visiting officer during notified and unnotified visits and for receipt of any verification sent in)	
7	LA to carry out reassessment of all the cases where the benefit assessment should change, using the information provided by PM, completing the relevant section on the Decision Proforma (DP) for each case. The DP will include: Agree/disagree changes Reasons for disagreement (where appropriate) Record the period of last HB payment made prior to reassessment	All change cases to be re-assessed and DP fully completed and returned to PM within 10 working days of receipt of information. A reminder will be issued after 5 working days which will also be copied to the Benefits and Revenues Manager.
	PM Action (Fraud Referrals and current LA Investigations)	
8	PM to refer all cases with suspicion of fraud to the appropriate organisation using form Appendix 11f or FRF (FES)	All referrals should go through the PM Team Manager. They should be of a high standard and should be sent within 5 days of the identification of the suspected fraud, following earlier discussion of the case.
9	Where LA have indicated a fraud interest, PM to check with LA Fraud/SFIS the stage of current fraud investigation, and for an agreement on whether it is safe to proceed.	At commencement of case preview
10	The PM Team Manager must carry out a thorough check of all non-residency outcomes on conclusion of the investigation. If there is evidence that the investigation was not sufficiently robust, then the LA Fraud Manager/SFIS Manager will be asked for comment and consideration of further inquiries/investigation until achievement of a satisfactory conclusion.	On conclusion of the LA Fraud/SFIS investigation of all non-residency outcomes.

	LA Action (Fraud Referrals and current LA Investigations)	
11	LA Fraud to investigate any cases where Housing Benefit is involved. Non-residency cases may be referred to the LA decision maker in the first instance where PM has not been able to contact the claimant. Where a suspicion of non- residency is identified the case will be referred to LA fraud to investigate. FES will investigate cases that LA fraud chooses not to investigate under the provisions of the Welfare Reform Act 2007. (NOT applicable when case transferred to SFIS).	LA Fraud should investigate all cases as a matter of priority; cases should be cleared within 13 weeks from date of referral. (NOT applicable when case transferred to SFIS).
12	LA Fraud section to inform PM Business Support Team (BST) if unable to carry out investigation	Using Part B of Appendix 11f, LA Fraud to advise BST within 10 working days if unable to investigate, providing reasons why (e.g. no fraud section in operation).
13	LA Fraud investigator to complete section C of the Appendix 11f	Section C (acknowledgement slip) of the form to be completed and returned to the BST within 3 working days of receipt.
14	If LA fraud is unable to provide a result due to the suspected non-residency or non-co-operation of the claimant, the case should be passed to the HB decision-maker to decide if benefit should be suspended.	To be referred and decided within 5 working days of referral.
	Performance Measurement Action	
	Performance Measurement to monitor success of the measurement process	PM will monitor a sample of High Suspicion referrals to both FES and LA Fraud through Data Quality Adjustment (DQA) of cases. In addition the questionnaires completed by PM will be returned to BST and provide details of any difficulties experienced.
16	Performance Measurement to provide funding to LAs according to sample size	On completion of the final visit – date to be notified by the PM Team Manager.

APPENDIX 2: Electronic Prints Transfer Process

Profile Meeting

PM Visiting Team Manager will go through the Electronic Process with LA colleagues at the initial Profiling Meeting.

At the meeting the Visiting Team Manager will explain:

- 1. That Performance Measurement (PM) has provided a digital solution that improves the process of print collection with LA data systems information being provided electronically. This has been fully tested and endorsed by several Local Authorities that agreed to take part in a pilot exercise. It also enabled PM to respond to concerns raised by LAs on the difficulties they face in securing accommodation, system and printer access for HB review staff and will help us to focus on delivering the best possible service in the most efficient way, making better use of digital services.
- 2. A comprehensive list of prints required from the LA data systems for each sampled case will be supplied. Annex 3 and 4 refers.
- 3. The electronic prints need to be in PDF or .doc format which are compatible with DWP systems.
- 4. Confirm that the LA have the technical knowledge to convert documents to PDF or.doc and suggest, for consistency, a good practice would be for the LA to prepare an aide memoire to share with all their staff involved in the electronic collation of prints process. The PM Manager or the Performance Measurement Single Point of Contact (SPOC) will help with any technical aspect of this process.
- 5. The LA will email to PM a single set of prints for one case. The LA should wait for confirmation that the single case transfer was successful before proceeding with the rest of the sampled cases. PM will email an acknowledgement to the LA within 2 working days.

The email address to be used for all prints will be: (delete as appropriate)

CSD South CT Group Mailbox <u>SOUTH.CTGROUPMAILBOX@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK</u>

CSD QUARRY HOUSE Midlands CT Group Mailbox
QUARRYHOUSE.MIDLANDSCTGROUPMAILBOX@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

CSD North CT Group Mailbox
NORTHCT.GROUPMAILBOX@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

The Performance Measurement PM SPOC for all liaisons throughout will be:

PM to Insert relevant contact name and email address prior to meeting with LA

The PM Checking Team Manager will be: PM to Insert relevant Manager's contact name and email address prior to meeting with LA

- 6. LAs have the flexibility to send prints relating to more than one case in the same email providing the overall file size or zipped file size does not exceed 10mb (DWP incoming mail file size limit) and that each print within has been identified with the review case number or customer's name.
- 7. LAs should only email prints or any other customer information using approved LA email secure systems (.gov.uk) and never from personal email accounts.
- 8. Throughout the process the PM Checking Team Manager will regularly contact the LA HB manager to monitor progress.
- 9. Provide the LA HB Manager with the LA process at annex 1 and time line at annex 2.

Process

1. PM Business Support Team issue the MIDAS list to LA Error Control Officer (ECO), receipting process followed.

LA ECO ascertains that claims are live, if any claims are closed/dormant/suspended the LA ECO informs PM by emailing a copy of the dormant payment screen to PM to Insert appropriate email address prior to meeting with LA

PM SPOC abandons and replaces the case and provides LA ECO with replacement case details.

To test the process the LA ECO will collate the system and DIP prints, as detailed in Annex 3 and Annex 4, for a single case and email them to <u>PM to Insert appropriate email address prior to meeting with LA</u> with the subject box of the email populated with the HB Reference number(s).

- 2. PM will provide confirmation that the email has been received and documents successfully opened within 2 working days.
- 3. If PM cannot open the prints then the PM SPOC will contact the LA ECO to try and resolve the issue.
- 4. If this fails the PM Checking Team Manager will liaise with the LA HB Team Manager to resolve the issue.
- 5. If the issue still cannot be resolved then PM will consider alternatives.
- 6. LA ECO will await confirmation from the PM SPOC that the test transfer was successful before proceeding with collating prints for the remaining cases.

If the test transfer is successful then the LA ECO collates all system /DIP prints as per annex 3 and annex 4 for each of the remaining cases and emails each set of prints to **PM to Insert appropriate email address prior to meeting with LA** with the subject box of the email populated with the HB Reference number(s). LAs have the flexibility to send prints relating to more than one case in the same email providing the overall file size or zipped file size does not exceed 10mb (DWP incoming mail file size limit) and that each print within has been identified with the review case number or customer's name.

- 7. If there are missing prints or additional prints are required PM SPOC provides the LA ECO details of which prints are required and requests they be emailed within 48 hours.
- 8. Throughout the process the PM Checking Team Manager will regularly contact the LA HB manager to monitor progress.
- 9. See Annex 2 for timeline.

Annex 1

LA ECO Desk Aide

- 1. On receipt of the email containing the case list from PM send acknowledgement to the sender of the email (who will be from our Business Support Team).
- 2. Ascertain claims are live, if any claims are closed/ dormant/suspended inform PM by emailing a copy of the dormant payment screen to PM using the generic email address provided at the profile meeting.
- 3. PM will abandon the dormant case and obtain a replacement case PM will provide you with the replacement case details if the replacement case falls within your LA area.
- 4. Test the electronic transfer process with one set of prints for one single case by electronically collating all the requested prints e.g. scan or obtain screenshots as detailed in Annex 3 and Annex 4. All documents need to be in PDF or.doc.
- 5. Attach the prints for the test case to an email and send to PM using the generic email address provided at the profile meeting with the subject box of the email populated with the HB reference number.
- 6. PM will provide confirmation that the email has been received and documents successfully opened within 2 working days.
- 7. If confirmation has not been received from PM within 2 working days contact the PM SPOC.
- 8. If PM cannot open the prints the PM SPOC will contact you to try and resolve the issue.
- 9. Await confirmation from the PM SPOC that the test transfer was successful before proceeding with collating prints for the remaining cases.
- 10. Once confirmation has been received that the test transfer was successful then follow the process in Para 4 for collation of prints for the remaining cases.
- 11. Email prints to the generic email address provided at the profile meeting with the subject box of the email populated with the HB Reference number(s).
- 12. All prints for all cases to be sent to PM by PM to insert relevant date prior to initial meeting with LA.
- 13. If additional or missing prints are required the PM SPOC will provide details of the specific prints required and request turnaround within 48 hours.

Annex 1 cont'd

Process for resizing the prints into an electronic document

Northgate

As long as the prints are in landscape and are printed directly from Northgate the prints will automatically re-size.

Alternatively the same instructions for Academy can be used

Academy and Civica

- 1. Open a Word Document and set page to landscape and set margins to 0.8mm
- 2. Open Academy on the screen that you want to copy.(must be live screen)
- 3. Press Alt and Print Screen
- 4. Go to Word Document and Paste.
- 5. Click on document and a border will appear
- 6. Click on small circle at the bottom right of the document and drag document towards the bottom right of the page.
- 7. Only put 1 screen on 1 page
- 8. Then save to relevant file or folder.

To resize click on document

Put cursor and hold on small circle in bottom right of document

Drag to enlarge.

Annex 2

Timeline

Insert dates

DateActionInsert dateMIDAS list sent to LA ECO.Insert datesTest single print transfer.Insert datesLA ECO collates all prints for all cases and emails to the Performance Measurement generic email address.Insert dateIf all prints are not received then PM SPOC will liaise with LA ECO.Insert datesPM complete preview of cases.

Throughout the process the PM Checking Team Manager will regularly contact the LA HB manager to monitor progress.

PM complete visits.

HB Screen Prints

ANNEX 3

Selected Week Insert date of selected week

1. Claimants address

- 2. Household composition (to include all members of household)
 - Dates of birth

For adults only

- Income. Where appropriate screen which shows the calculation of average earnings, breakdown of income used and or payslips used for employees and self-employed cases
- Capital
- Prints must show all income and capital for the selected week.

3. Rent details

- Landlord Details/Housing Association
- Rent Charged
- Services charges both eligible and non-eligible
- Number of bedrooms in property
- Number of bedrooms needed by household
- LHA rate
- SHD calculation, % used
- Number of weeks rent is charged and dates/number of rent free weeks
- Eligible Rent

4. Payment details

- Method of payment
- Period HB paid e.g. weekly
- HB payee
- Payment history print for last 3 months
- 1st date of continuous entitlement to support date on App 43. If not available note reason on App 43
- Details of the current overpayment deductions for the payment released covering the Selected week.

5. HB award calculation

- Applicable Amounts
- Disregards
- Disregard income
- Total Income used
- Amount of HB in payment at selected week. Details of the current amounts for payment released covering the Selected Week.

6. Miscellaneous

Copy of Benefit Cap Notification

- ATLAS Schedule to show when it was received and the actual ATLAS notification print.
- Notepad with Housing Benefit Review interested note or note on AP43 if flag system used
- Rent Officer determination

Where there has been a change in the HB Assessment between <u>Insert date of selected week</u> and the date the screen prints are taken please provide additional prints to show the change of circumstances as well as prints relating to the selected week.

HB Dip prints

ANNEX 4

Selected Week Insert date of selected week

- 1. Latest Claim form/ Review form.
- 2. **Supporting evidence for the Housing Benefit** in payment at Selected Week to include where appropriate
 - a. **Wage slips** used in the calculation of claimants/partner's income i.e. those used in any averaging of the wages.
 - b. Wage slips used to calculate Non Dependants income
 - c. Notification/Atlas for Tax Credits
 - d. Verification of rent.
 - HA and LA. Letter showing amount to include breakdown of all service charges or if paid by schedule a copy of the entry on the schedule. If not available note papers
 - Private Tenants. Copy of the tenancy and/or any letters re change in rent
 - Rent Officer's decision papers if appropriate.
 - e. Any CIS prints taken to verify Tax Credits and Benefits
 - f. Verification of Child Care Cost to show amount and provider. If cost is spread over term time and holidays provide an explanation of how this was worked out.
 - g. **Self-employed accounts** where appropriate provide an explanation of how expenses are proportioned between business and personal use
 - h. Occupational Pension/Annuities
 - i. Notification from Pension Service for AIF
 - i. Any **ID** sent in for the family unit
 - k. Bank Statement/Income Bonds/shares etc.
 - I. Students Grant/Bursary/Loan notification.
 - m. **Any other income** used the calculation of HB
 - n. ETD or ATLAS from DWP.
- If Housing Benefit has been reassessed after selected week provide the information that caused the reassessment along with live prints showing the reassessment.
- 4. Any **un-actioned post and ATLAS downloads/alerts** received prior to the date the payment covering the selected /week was released.
- 5. **DM decision** for extra bedroom in SHD cases.
- 6. **Real time information** (RTI feeds that support the currant award of benefit)

APPENDIX 3: Housing Benefit Review Decision Proforma

Claimant Name	
HB reference number	
FREDA number	

We have completed the review for this case and have found that the HB in payment is incorrect.

We have attached the Statement of Circumstances completed at the review for your information along with any supporting evidence and an assessment showing the effects of the incorrectness identified. Can you please check our findings and let me have your agreement or comments within 5 working days of receipt of this email?

The case will be subject to a number of further internal departmental checks which *may* result in discrepancies being found. If this occurs we will provide further confirmation.

Please remove HBR interest from your system notepad.

Thank you for your co-operation in ensuring the HBR runs smoothly and efficiently. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

Error no	Details of Error	OE/CE	Value of Error
		or CF	of Error
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

payment. However, it is import	es part of the review that do not aftent that the information you hold for your records to be updated ac	about a claimar	
Checking Officer		Date	
LA Completion:			
Housing Benefit Decision Ma	aker's Comments: re-assessment of benefit. * dings/re-assessment of bene	efit (If you do	not agree,

^{*} Delete as applicable

Have the above change(s) r	esulted in the benefit ceasing	? YES/NO	
f entitlement ceased, what date did it cease from?/			
Date Housing Benefit paid up to prior to reassessment			
Signed (LA Decision Maker)	Date		
FOR PM USE ONLY			
PM agreement with Decisi	on Maker's comment(s)		
Signed (PM)	Name	Date	
- , ,		Date	
- , ,		Date	
- , ,			
SECTION 5 –DISAGREEMI	≣NT		
SECTION 5 –DISAGREEMI	ENT PM AGA on form D3//.		
SECTION 5 – DISAGREEMI Date arbitration referred to F			
SECTION 5 – DISAGREEMI Date arbitration referred to F	PM AGA on form D3//.		
SECTION 5 –DISAGREEMI Date arbitration referred to F Arbitration outcome: PM de	PM AGA on form D3//.		

Email signature