

Housing Benefit Circular

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

HB A11/2016

ADJUDICATION AND OPERATIONS CIRCULAR

WHO SHOULD READ	All Housing Benefit Administration and Finance staff
ACTION	For information
SUBJECT	Payment Deduction Project interface: local authority user guidance. Updated September 2019

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>

- about the
 - **technical content of this circular**, contact Local Authority Support Team (LAST)
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Payment Deduction Project interface: local authority user guidance

Introduction

1. This user guidance was produced to ensure the PDP files created by LAs are successfully uploaded via the interface and validated by DWP DMS. This Guidance has now been revised to reflect the implementation of Transfer Your Files (TYF) to replace the Data Hub. This does not affect the content of the HB Guidance.
2. The Payment Deduction Project (PDP) interface between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and local authorities (LAs) is a technical solution for the recovery of Housing Benefit (HB) debt from Universal Credit and non-Universal Credit benefits. The interface went live in August 2016.

Issues identified following go live

3. Since go-live, issues are being identified with the data LAs are referring via Transfer Your Files. This is causing the referral, revision or recall files to fail validation and be rejected by DWP's Debt Management System (DMS).
4. At the point the referral, revision or recall file is uploaded via Transfer Your Files, the LA will not be aware of the file failure as this occurs when the file reaches the DWP DMS system.
5. Since the LA interface went live, to support implementation, these issues have been managed by the Local Authority Security and Support Team (LASST) and Debt Management (DM). This has been achieved by amending the .xml files where possible to avoid returning them to the LA. This will not be sustainable moving forward due to the volumes of LAs now 'on boarded'.
6. The PDP interface pulls data directly from the LAs HB systems. If the information is held within incorrect fields or the data is invalid, this will cause the whole file to fail when it reaches DWP DMS.
7. Analysis of file failures has determined several reasons for failure which occur due to data entries in the LA source system:
 - the forename and surname are recorded in the one field
 - the claimant and the partner name are contained within the same field
 - full stops, plus signs (+), ampersands (&), question marks (?) have been used in the name or address fields
 - the address field does not reflect normal format protocol e.g. 'address not known' or '??????????????'.

8. Circular [HB A6/2016](#) advises that LAs are required to check the Customer Information System (CIS) to ensure that a DWP benefit is in payment before making a referral. If the LA source system is not holding an address CIS should be used to update the relevant fields with this information.
9. Where a customer has an HB debt and is in receipt of HB, the debt should be deducted from this benefit award and should not be referred. Any cases that have been referred erroneously to DWP for recovery should be recalled and the deduction made from the HB award. This also applies when a customer's circumstances change resulting in a HB award.
10. Other non-quality referral issues identified:
 - the HB claimant is deceased and the referral has been made under an executor, next of kin or surviving partner.
 - the debt is inappropriately referred under the partner's name and their National Insurance number.

File failure

11. Xml files failing DWP DMS validation, for non-quality reasons detailed in this guide, will be returned to the LA for corrective action. If one non-quality referral is identified within the .xml file, the whole file containing multiple claimant referrals will fail. Subsequent errors within the file will not be identified until the file is re-submitted, which could result in the file being returned on multiple occasions. It is therefore within the LA's best interests to ensure the quality and accuracy of the data before making a referral.
12. Once a referral has been made, if the file fails validation within the DWP DMS system, the following steps should be taken:
 - LASST will contact the LA to inform them that the .xml file has failed
 - LA will retrieve the failed .xml file from their IT System
 - LA amends any incorrect records contained within the .xml file
 - LA uploads the corrected .xml file to Transfer Your Files
 - file goes back to DMS for validation.
13. During this period of time any revision or recall files submitted which contain records relating to the debts within the failed file will also fail validation. This will continue to be the case until the original referral file is corrected and validated by DMS. You will find a flowchart showing the file validation process at Annex 1.

14. In addition to non-quality issues .xml files will fail if they become corrupted, when this occurs the file will be displayed as successfully uploaded Transfer Your Files. However, DWP DM will be unable to open the file as an .xml file. Initial investigations suggest that such faults primarily occur when a user at the LA has attempted to manually alter the .xml file before uploading it onto Transfer Your Files. Where the .xml file is corrupted DM will not be able to indicate the reason for the corruption. When viewed with a browser, corrupted files fail to display as .xml with only the raw data visible. In all instances LASST will return the failed file to the LA, who will be responsible for raising an incident/support call with their LA IT supplier. Following corrective action by the LA IT supplier and/or the LA, these files will be required to be uploaded again on Transfer Your Files (no duplicate file will be generated at DWP as the original will not have been processed).
15. You will find more information on reducing file failures at Annex 2.

Recalls

16. After uploading a recall, the LA will receive a cessation file. This may not follow immediately as DWP DM may need to allow a period of time for any final deduction payments to be received on their system:
- Universal Credit can take up to 5 days
 - DWP non-Universal Credit benefits can take up to 14 days
17. This is normal practice and ensures that an accurate debt balance is returned to the LA.

Downloading files

18. Cessations and monthly schedules will be generated by DWP DMS in .xml format and placed in appropriate LA folder within Transfer Your Files. These are provided as .tar files. LAs must ensure these are downloaded from Transfer Your Files daily and processed. When LAs download the file, an exact replica of the file will be generated in Transfer Your Files with the suffix (Copy 1), this will stay in the folder for 24 hours from the time it was first downloaded. LAs should only download the copy file, if they experience problems downloading the original file.
19. For more information regarding accessing LA folders, uploading and downloading files within Transfer Your Files, please refer to the TYF User Guidance available on Glass Cubes

Payment schedules

20. The payment schedule is a record of the transactions received during a given period, for example 1 to 31 July 2016. If, during that period a payment is received and then reversed, the schedule will reflect a zero payment. The schedule is capturing payment activity within the reporting month, it is not indicating that debt recovery has not started or that debt recovery has stopped.

Example 1

If a payment of £10 was received by DWP DMS on 06 July 2016 and subsequently reversed on 08 July 2016, this is reflected as a net value of £0.00 in the July schedule which is received in August 2016.

21. This may occur because the benefit award is insufficient to make the deduction, which could be for a number of reasons including a sanction being imposed or the claim being closed.
22. Negative balances will occur on the payment schedule when DWP DMS 'claw back' monies that have been overpaid to the LA on customer accounts.

Example 2

If the debt balance is for £100 and DWP DM receive £120, the LA will still be paid the overpayment of £20.00 and the debt balance will become -£20.00. The customer will be refunded £20.00 and this will be recovered automatically from the LA the following month.

Reconciliation of balances

23. Some LAs have reported differences in the HB debt balance outstanding on the monthly payment schedules to that held within the LA systems. These discrepancies mainly occur with debts referred prior to the interface going live where the LA is also making recoveries via alternative methods and DWP are not aware.

Example 3

The claimant makes a direct payment to the LA who then fails to notify DWP of the revised balance.

24. To resolve this issue, LAs are required to recall the debt and on receipt of the cessation notification, create and submit a new referral. We are aware that LAs may be reluctant to follow this process due to the risk of the new referral falling further down the recovery priority order. However, analysis undertaken by DWP

DM team has shown that this is unlikely to occur. It should be noted that a request to revise a balance via the interface would only be appropriate if the balance is also being amended on the LA system.

25. Due to timing issues the balance outstanding figure held within LA systems may be different to the figure supplied within the payment schedule. This occurs when the LA has submitted a revision to the debt balance and it has not been actioned before the monthly schedule. LAs are advised to undertake a check to clarify this to avoid recalling the debt unnecessarily.

Contacts

26. LASST will deal with technical issues, non-receipt of files or problems with uploading or downloading files on Transfer Your Files.

- Email: lawelfare.lasupport@dwp.gov.uk
- Telephone: 01253 689422

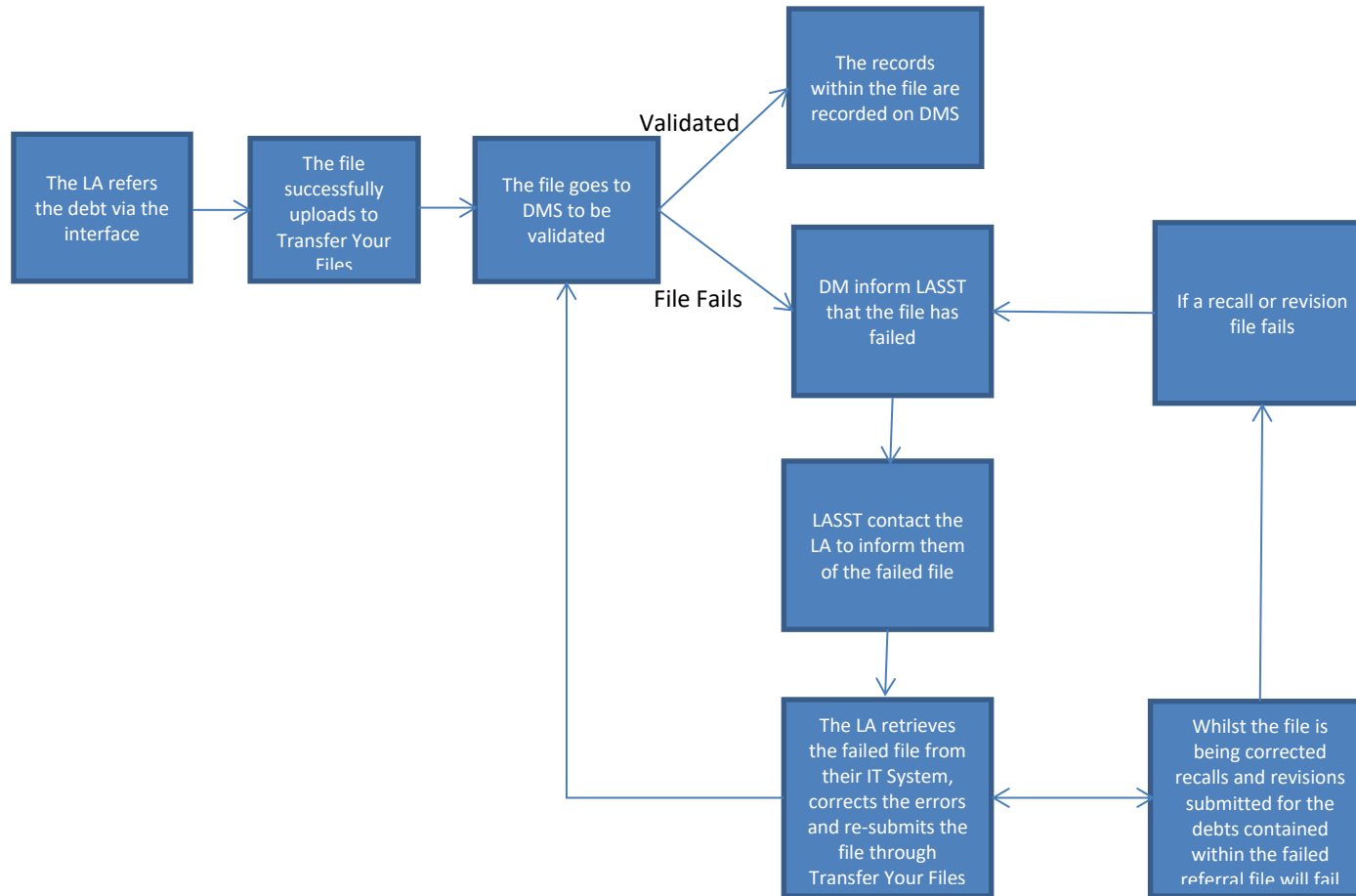
27. DM will deal with issues regarding recoveries, payments, balances, overpayment of debt balances, etc., in accordance with the Service Level Agreement. Queries can be raised using telephone number 0345 850 0293.

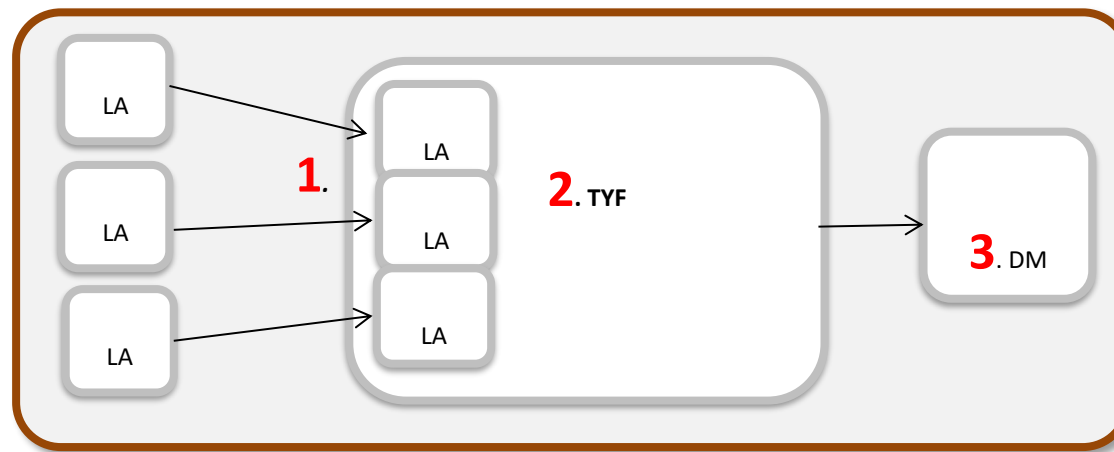
28. Debt Management Finance will deal with any schedule/invoice queries, changes to banking details or local office codes must be notified as soon as possible to ensure the accuracy of payment schedules. LAs should raise queries or notify any changes using the email address below:

- Email: debt.accountingandfinance@dwp.gov.uk

File validation process

Annex 1





Check points

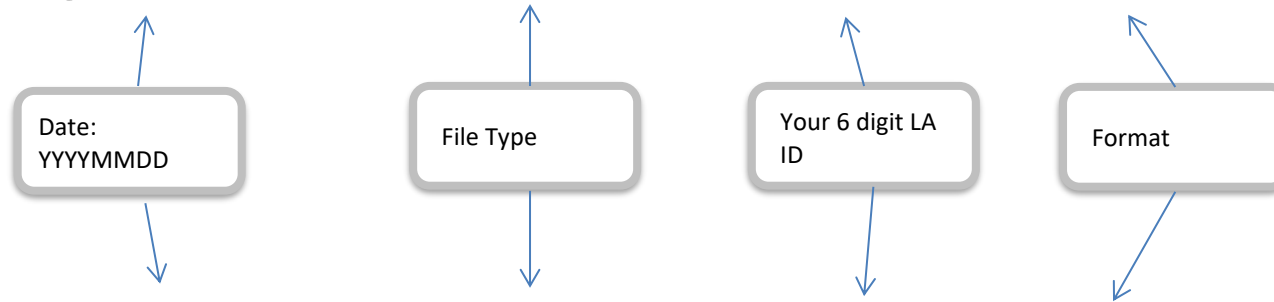
1. **LA to Transfer Your Files:** if LA files are uploaded on TYF successfully the LA is notified. However, the file Format and/or data may still fail validation.
2. **Transfer Your Files validation:** Transfer Your Files validates the format of the .tar and the .xml files inside it
 - if invalid it will trigger contact with the DWP LA Security and Support Team (LASST) who will then contact the LA to advise the need for correction
 - If valid, the .xml files are sent to Debt Manager Systems (DMS).
3. **DWP Debt Management (DM) Validation:** DM validate the.xml headers & data to ensure compliance with the schema
 - any invalid data in the file and currently the whole file is rejected; we are reviewing this to only reject invalid records in future rather than the whole file and will advise if this happens
 - DM will flag the failure, including the reason, to LASST who will contact the LA to correct their xml file
 - where the xml file is corrupted DM will not be able to indicate the reason for the corruption. When viewed with a browser, corrupted files fail to display as .xml with only the raw data visible.

LA Check Points

Below are the key points LAs need to check before submitting a file to reduce file errors/failures:

Correct file format:

E.g. 20160929-LAREF*-000000.xml



E.g. 20160929-PDPLA-000000.tar

All the .xml files should be packed in to a single .tar file with no subfolders and no compression.

* The .xml file type can also be an LA revision (LAREV) or an LA recall (LAREC)

Is the Data Valid?

Here is a list of common data errors currently being rejected which should be checked by the LA and corrected prior to sending:

- **a number of referrals have the title field missing completely**
e.g. <PersonNameTitle> </PersonNameTitle> - It doesn't need a title but the field still has to be in the file.
- **names and addresses should not end with a full stop**
e.g. <PersonGivenName>JAMIE.</PersonGivenName> - this is wrong.
- **personal details should not all be in one field** They **should be** in separate fields (Title, Given Name, Family Name)
e.g. <PersonFamilyName>Mr Joe Bloggs</PersonFamilyName> - this is wrong.
- **only valid addresses should be sent**, CIS should be checked if required
e.g. 3 FICTIONAL xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx No Trace LANE
- **deceased debts showing executors (EXORS) should not be sent.**

If a record is manually removed the 'Number of Records' in the header must also be changed.

Some Consequences of invalid data

- the whole .xml file is rejected and flagged to the LA via LASST for correction and re-submission
- if an LAREV or LAREC file is subsequently sent for National Insurance numbers that were not loaded because the referral file had previously been rejected, even if formatted correctly the debt record will not be found on DWP DMS
 - DM will have no record of that debt because due to rejection it was never loaded
 - to allow time to correct any invalid REF files, it would be prudent to wait at least two weeks before sending a revision or recall file.