

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Circular

Department for Work and Pensions

1st Floor, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA

HB/CTB A3/2009

ADJUDICATION AND OPERATIONS CIRCULAR

WHO SHOULD READ	All Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) staff
ACTION	For information and action if appropriate
SUBJECT	2008/09 HB/CTB Right Time Performance Indicator - Update for Local Authorities (LAs) on the changes relating to the release of data and detailing the steps some authorities may need to take to ensure their Single HB Extract (SHBE) data is fit for purpose

Guidance Manual

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

Queries

If you

- want **extra copies of this circular/copies of previous circulars**, they can be found on the website at www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars
- have any queries about the
 - **technical content of this circular**, contact the Performance Framework and Policy Team
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2008/09 HB/CTB Right Time Performance Indicator: Update for LAs and action if appropriate

Introduction

- 1 This circular gives revised information on the proposed release of right time performance data for 2008/09. It also sets out difficulties with Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) data identified to date and asks LAs to work with us to maximise the reliability and completeness of the scans as a step towards making performance data available on DWP's website and to ensure the data they are submitting to DWP is fit for purpose.

The Right Time Indicator (NI181 in England)

- 2 The right time indicator measures the time taken to process HB/CTB new claims and change events. Its purpose is to help deliver performance improvements in customer service.

Data collection

- 3 SHBE collection and loading processes are now working smoothly and the majority of LAs are providing us with extracts in line with the timetable outlined in HB/CTB Circular A9/2008. Since DWP began collecting data through SHBE extracts in July, the number of LAs returning extracts has increased each month and we are grateful for your on-going support. To date, around 380 LAs have returned at least three extracts.

Loading reports

- 4 We stated in *HB/CTB Circular A23/2008* that DWP's Information Directorate would be issuing a summary return each month to each LA whose extract had been returned and successfully loaded, advising them of the loading status. DWP will start issuing these reports to LAs in March 2009.

Validation of data and derivation

- 5 DWP has worked with software providers and a sample group of LAs to ensure that the derivation codes which generate right time performance statistics are working correctly and we are now confident that this has been achieved. Although the SHBE data and derivation process is generating accurate results for many LAs, we are aware of a number of problems that are affecting a significant number of LAs whilst some also have on-going difficulties related to source data. Key issues are
 - extracts providing overlapping data or missing data
 - records that are needed for change events ('T' records) are missing

continued

- data fields (like effective dates) with missing values
 - closed cases ('C' records) without accompanying change events ('T' records)
 - multiple closed cases ('C' records) with the same start or received dates
 - LAs stating that the extracts do not represent the state of their caseload, and
 - LAs awaiting updates/fixes to enable them to send extracts
- 6 Please see **Appendix A** for more information on these issues and advice on how to resolve them. Amongst other things, the exercise outlined in *paras 14–17* below will help us determine the extent to which these are software or data entry issues.

SHBE issues beyond the Right Time Indicator

- 7 The difficulties identified at paragraph 5 above primarily affect the calculation of the right time indicator but may also impact on other intended future uses of SHBE. To date activity has been concentrated on the two high level indicators (Right Time and Right Benefit) but there could be additional issues, not yet identified, with other SHBE data. We are aware of the need to review other elements of SHBE data, some of which may be used to produce National Statistics and additional management information.
- 8 LAs need to be aware that failure to send in complete data returns promptly could have a negative impact on any future funding distributions (please see *HB/CTB Circular S2/2009, para 6*).
- 9 LAs have expressed concerns that DWP will use extracted data that has been submitted but that they have told us is flawed and does not accurately represent their performance. To address this we confirm the statement in *HB/CTB Circular A10/2008 para 14* that “*it is not DWP’s intention to publish data that is unreliable or inaccurate*”.

Revised proposals for releasing data

- 10 *HB/CTB Circular A23/2008 para 15* advised that right time performance data would be published on DWP’s website. However, as a result of the validation work, LAs concerns and the assurances given around not releasing unreliable data, we will **not** publish right time performance data on DWP’s website until concerns have been resolved.
- 11 We appreciate that the delay in releasing the right time indicator performance data will be a disappointment, especially as this information is useful for benchmarking purposes. However, we believe it is in the interests of all who will want to use SHBE data that we maximise its value and ensure reliability and completeness before making it widely available. Consequently, we hope LAs will work with us and take part in the short term exercise on right time information set out below and in *Appendix B*.
- 12 DWP will discuss with the audit bodies and other stakeholders the implications of all this for the assurance and assessment work they undertake, particularly with regard to performance in 2008/09.

- 13 DWP is planning to undertake short and long term activities aimed at maximising the quality and reliability of all SHBE data.

Short term exercise to share Right Time data with LAs

- 14 We are arranging for LAs to receive their own right time performance data that we have derived from SHBE for October and November 2008. It will relate to their own individual performance and LAs will have to request this data so we ensure we send it to the appropriate person. Please see **Appendix B** for details of how to obtain this data and what actions to take following receipt.
- 15 We believe that providing performance information to LAs in this way will enable them to consider whether any of the known problems listed above at *para 5* and further detailed in *Appendix A* are affecting the results we have generated. This exercise may also identify other generic issues which we would want brought to our attention so that we can work with LAs and software providers to resolve them.
- 16 We do not envisage this process being ‘open ended’ and our intention is to maintain the process until DWP is satisfied that the derived right time indicator accurately reflects the LA’s performance. At this point, unless there are exceptional circumstances, there will be no further requirement for validation work to be carried out and we will be able to move to publication of the data.
- 17 The aim of this work is to enable us, in due course, to put right time performance data on DWP’s website – starting with the last quarter for 2008/09 and then considering the scope to add earlier data.

Option of reloading previously submitted data

- 18 The process of reloading previously submitted extracts can be resource intensive for both LAs and DWP. Our priority, in this short term exercise, is to ensure that **future** SHBE extracts are routinely generating accurate and reliable performance information. Therefore, we **cannot** accept or reload amended data for past SHBE extracts or make retrospective amendments to data. This policy was advised in *HB/CTB Circular A23/2008*. However, we will keep this policy under review in the light of what this exercise reveals.

Long term project

- 19 In line with the “COUNT” principle - collecting once and using numerous times, SHBE data is intended to serve a number of purposes beyond generating right time performance information. We have prioritised our activities around ensuring that the latter is working effectively, but are undertaking wider project work to ensure SHBE data is fit for the multiple purposes it serves. We will continue to work closely with software providers and a sample of LAs as we take this work forward, including replacing the HBMS extract used to generate fraud and error referrals.

Single HB Extract (SHBE) – Identified issues affecting calculation of right time performance

DWP's validation work and communications received from LAs and software providers have revealed a number of issues that impact on the accurate performance derivation for the indicator. These are outlined below.

- a) **Overlapping and missing data.** Some extracts received have contained overlapping and/or gaps in data which will impact on the derived performance. The possibility of incorporating a check for overlaps and gaps into the process after data has been loaded has been considered but is still some way off. Consequently, in the meantime, we would advise all LAs to ensure, as far as possible, that the data they submit is complete and without overlaps. The October/November 2008 performance report will give details of overlaps/missing data.
- b) **Problems with 'T' records (change events).** 'T' records are missing from some of the extracts. This will have an effect on the accuracy of change events performance. As we understand it, this is a system fault rather than a data entry fault and has already been communicated to some of the software providers. LAs may be unaware that 'T' records are missing from their extracts but where 'T' records are missing, this will be identified in the October/November 2008 performance report.
- c) **Data fields with missing values.** Some extracts received do not have a date in Field 253 – 'Date change of details are effective from'. This date is important where changes are reported in advance as time to process is calculated from the 'effective date' to the 'decision date'.
- d) **Closed cases ('C' records) without accompanying change events ('T' records).** When 'C' records appear on an extract, we expect to see corresponding 'T' records but this is not the case with all LAs. This will impact on the number of change events recorded for an LA.
- e) **Multiple closed cases ('C' records) with the same start dates or received dates.** This is a data entry problem permitted by certain software. DWP analysts are investigating whether they can eliminate most of the duplicate records, but as this may not be a long term solution, LAs are advised to seek a solution via their software providers.
- f) **Flawed Data.** A number of LAs have advised that they are aware their data is flawed. Prior to submitting data extracts to DWP by the transfer date, LAs may be able to rectify identified errors in their data *provided* the main LA system is also amended to reflect the changes made. As advised in HB/CTB Circular A23/2008 and paragraph 18 of this circular, DWP does not intend to accept resubmitted scans to correct earlier ones. This means the focus should be on making necessary changes to the LA system, e.g. correcting data held on it and/or applying outstanding fixes without delay, so that there is confidence that subsequent scans will be accurate and reliable.
- g) **LAs experiencing on-going software problems.** A small minority of LAs have been unable to return **any** extracts as they are still awaiting software programmes/updates/fixes. We liaise with software suppliers on these and other issues, but LAs may wish to pursue matters directly with their software supplier.

Release of Right Time performance data to individual LAs – LAs' role

- 1 For each LA that has provided relevant SHBE data scans, DWP is now able to provide each with its own October and November 2008 right time performance data as derived from the scans. LAs will only be sent this information if they request it and the arrangements for doing so are set out below.

How to receive your performance information from DWP

- 2 Please contact us by e-mail to request your right time performance data as derived from SHBE for October/November 2008 and/or any subsequent months for which we may run this exercise. This is to ensure we send the information to the correct person within your Authority. A request needs to be received by **16 March 2009**.
- 3 LAs in **Scotland and Wales**: contact alby.stone@dwp.gsi.gov.uk to request your right time performance data
- 4 For LAs in **England**, who you need to contact depends on your Government Office Region (GOR). Please contact:
 - alby.stone@dwp.gsi.gov.uk if your LA is in GOR:
 - East
 - West Midlands
 - philip.massey@dwp.gsi.gov.uk if your LA is in GOR:
 - East Midlands
 - North East
 - South East
 - South West
 - martin.lister@dwp.gsi.gov.uk if your LA is in GOR:
 - London
 - North West
 - Yorkshire and Humber

Checking the accuracy of the data

- 5 DWP have worked with software providers and a sample group of LAs to test the right time derivation codes and have found the result between the extracts supplied by LAs and LA software systems to be fairly consistent. However, if you are concerned about the accuracy of the performance information we send you, you will need to consider the issues arising from the validation work covered in *para 5* of the circular and *Appendix A*. This, together with information provided below, may help you determine the nature and extent of the discrepancies and enable you to work, where appropriate, with your software supplier to deliver solutions. Please also check that you have received and loaded the latest software patches available as this may automatically rectify some of the problems identified.

Data DWP will provide

- 6 For each month covered by the exercise DWP will provide details of
- Right Time indicator outcome for month covered
 - Total number of claim events processed
 - Total number of days to process claim events
 - Total number of new claims processed
 - Total number of days to process new claims
 - Average number of days to process new claims
 - Total number of changes events processed
 - Total number of days to process changes events
 - Average number of days to process changes events
 - Total number of claimants
 - Any periods of overlapping/missing data
 - Whether the extracts have included the relevant 'T' records to accurately record change events performance

Performance derivation

- 7 The right time performance data has been derived using the following fields from the SHBE

Linking Field 1	Record type
Linking Field 2	LA Code
Header Field 3	Extract date
Linking Field 4	Claimant's National Insurance Number
Field 35	Received date for HB claims
Field 36	Received date for CTB claims
Field 37	Decision date for HB claims
Field 38	Decision date for CTB claims
Field 39	Outcome of first decision on most recent HB claim
Field 40	Outcome of first decision on most recent CTB claim
Field 41	Date of start of HB entitlement
Field 221	Source of the most recent HB claim
Field 201	Date of start of CTB entitlement
Field 220	HB Treat as Made date
Field 229	CTB Treat as Made date
Field 230	Source of most recent CTB claim
Field 248	New weekly HB entitlement after the change
Field 249	New weekly CTB entitlement after the change
Field 250	Type of change, automated uprating or all other changes
Field 251	Data LA first notified of change in claim details
Field 253	Date change details are effective from
Field 254	How change identified
Field 255	Date HB supersession
Field 256	Date CTB supersession
Field 269	Date all information received from claimant for HB claim

Field 270	Date that all information was received from third parties (e.g. Rent Officers) to enable a decision on the most recent HB claim
Field 271	Date of receipt of CTB banding
Field 272	Date all information received from claimant for CTB claim
Field 273	Date that all information was received from third parties to enable a decision on the most recent CTB claim

Further information on derivation is contained in the document '*Deriving Performance in 2008/09*' issued to software providers in May 2008.

Letting DWP know the results of your checks

- 8 If you have concerns about the data we have provided, we would ask you to email IFDDMS.HBMSDIT@dwp.gsi.gov.uk within twenty working days of your receipt of the information. The email should contain
- sufficient information to identify your LA
 - details of the data which you consider to be incorrect
 - what you consider to be the correct data (if known) and the source of that data, and
 - information on how you (and your software provider) are intending to resolve any outstanding issues and the date by which it is considered that this will be completed
- 9 **Please note that if a LA does not respond within the twenty working day timescale, we will assume that they are content with the accuracy of their derived performance information DWP has provided.**
- 10 **LAs that are content with what we send need to do nothing.**

Accuracy of future SHBE data

- 11 Depending upon the issues raised by the October/November 2008 data exercise we may run similar exercises for subsequent months. In which case we will send the data to the same person that received the October/November 2008 data. The intention is not to make this open ended, but to carry out enough work to gain a clear picture of the issues and the steps needed to resolve them.