

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

General Information Bulletin

Department for Work and Pensions
 The Adelphi, 1 - 11 John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/>

HB/CTB G2/2006

15 February 2006

Contact	kath.murphy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk Wendy.Fisher@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Who should read	All Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) staff
Action	For information
Subject	Clarification of change in process for notifications and enquiries regarding previous sanctions and prosecutions Fully e-enabling HB and CTB claims Quarterly reporting of LA data-matches and intervention date and future monitoring arrangements Request for information from HB Data Subsidy Collection Project IT information flows for LAs, including urgent request for information Verification Framework Compliance Certificate Email address: Correction

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Clarification of change in process for notifications and enquiries regarding previous sanctions and prosecutions

Introduction

- 1 This section contains clarification of the changes introduced from 1 September 2005 to notifications and enquiries from Local Authorities (LAs) to Technical Support (TS) regarding previous administrative penalties, cautions and prosecutions held on the central databases. **Note:** Please bring this section to the attention of Fraud Managers, Fraud Staff and HB/CTB Managers.

Background

- 2 The process introduced in HB/CTB Bulletin G8/2005 has helped TS to inform LAs more promptly of previous history on a customer in order that correct action can be taken during a subsequent investigation. Prompt responses from TS to LAs enable cases to be progressed without delay and, where appropriate, enable LAs to claim due reward under the SAFE scheme.
- 3 Over 3200 notifications and enquiries per month are received from LAs by fax and mail. Difficulties arose in dealing with these as they were often handwritten and could be illegible. A lot of time was spent in establishing correct details by telephone or by returning the form to the originating LA.
- 4 Many enquiries for previous sanctions and prosecutions, approximately 80 per day, required us to handwrite envelopes for the replies.
- 5 These two factors were slowing down the time taken to reply to LA enquiries and therefore impacting on the progress of LA cases.
- 6 A meeting was held on 27 April 2005 with representatives from PSU (forerunner to TS), JWU and HBSD to discuss improvements in the process.

The process change

- 7 Following on from that meeting it was agreed that improvements could be made by implementing the following proposals
 - all notifications, including WIB4a (prosecution outcome) and enquiries from LAs should be typed thereby improving legibility, this will reduce the number of queries and returns made to LAs
 - all postal enquiries from LAs should be accompanied by a return envelope

The changes were also presented to, and endorsed by, the Fraud Operations Group at a meeting on 2 June 2005.

- 8 Many LAs have implemented these revised procedures but a number of issues have been raised by LAs. The purpose of this bulletin is to clarify the procedures that are in place which should go some way to resolving the issues that have been identified.

Clarification of the process

- 9 LAs should continue to type all notifications and enquiries. A return envelope should be attached to each postal enquiry. Alternatively, LAs can send a supply of envelopes to TS, who will contact the individual LA when the supply is running out.
- 10 Enquiries by fax should only be made in **urgent** cases. It is not necessarily accepted that every enquiry for previous sanctions is urgent just because it is a possible prosecution case.
- 11 TS will reply by fax unless there is previous customer history when a postal reply will be sent, together with the relevant printout of the administrative penalty or caution.
- 12 TS are unable to acknowledge individual notifications and enquiries from LAs due to the volumes involved and are unable to enter into separate arrangements with individual LAs.
- 13 Whilst we do appreciate that these arrangements may not be the preferred method of communicating with us, we do attempt to make the process as straightforward as possible so that we can deliver a consistently good level of service to all LAs.

Next steps

- 14 It is our intention to replace these procedures with an electronic solution; we will keep you informed of our plans as they develop.

Queries

- 15 If you have any queries regarding this subject, please contact
Joy Steer
Technical Support,
5th Floor West, Trevelyan Square
Leeds
LS1 6EB
Tel: 0113 232 7369
Email: Joy.Steer@Jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Fully e-enabling HB and CTB claims

- 16 We've always sought to keep our approach to the method of claiming HB and CTB up to date with developments in technology and in line with similar practices in the public and private sectors.
- 17 Given the major innovations around electronic claiming, signatures and alternative means of identity validation which have become available in recent years, the time now seems right to look seriously at fully e-enabling HB and CTB claims.
- 18 So what do we mean by 'fully e-enabling'?

- 19 Well, many authorities have offered claimants a partial electronic claims process for some years – for example by offering on-line or tele-claims. However, such claiming methods have always ultimately needed to be underpinned and validated by a hand-written signature on a printed form. We now want to consider giving authorities the option of removing this validation requirement, thereby fully e-enabling the claim.
- 20 We are looking at two options
- removing the need for a signature on a claim, and/ or
 - enabling authorities to accept a signature (and the rest of the claim) in electronic rather than hand-written form
- 21 Currently regulations require that claims be made in writing but there is no specific requirement for a signature, though our guidance has always advised that a hand written one is needed as part of the declaration. A case can already be made that ‘in writing’ includes electronically generated claims, but now may be the time to put the issue beyond doubt.
- 22 And, if we remove the need to claim in writing, it makes sense to do the same for changes of circumstance.
- 23 However, authorities who want to continue to require hand-written claims, signatures and change of circumstances notifications will be able to do so. We are not at this stage advocating the acceptance of electronic *evidence* in support of claims.

Fraud and error

- 24 Clearly the main potential impact of our proposals could be on fraud and error. The Department and authorities will need to work together to devise ways of ensuring there is no increase in fraudulent claims as a result of fully e-enabling claims. We will be looking with interest at the experience of the Pension Service, which has recently removed the need for signatures on some of its claims while building in alternative safeguards. We will also be looking at the experience of HM Revenue and Customs’ system for taking Tax Credits claims.

HB/ CTB claims made via DWP

- 25 Around two-thirds of HB/CTB claims are made via the Department, most via Jobcentre Plus’s Customer Management System, and a significant minority through The Pension Service. If we proceed to full e-enablement, this would also cover HB/CTB claims made via the Department.

We need LA input now!

- 26 We're aiming to reach some firm conclusions on the way forward within the next few months. To ensure that we give LAs a set of choices that best suit your needs we'd like to hear from you, on an informal basis, about
- Whether you favour the full e-enabling of claims, including electronic signatures
 - Whether you favour removing the need for a signature
 - Steps you've already taken on the road to full e-enablement, including alternative approaches to identity validation, etc.
- 27 We already know of some developments through bids to the Performance Standards Fund and individual dealings with a few authorities, but all submissions are welcome.
- 28 Please send your submissions to: e-enablement@dwp.gsi.gov.uk to reach us no later than 31 March 2006.

Quarterly reporting of LA data-matches and intervention data and future monitoring arrangements

- 29 Since the first quarter of 2004/05 we have been publishing fraud and error data on our website www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/hb_ctb/performance/performance.asp
- 30 Data currently published includes information on the number of fraud referrals, investigations and sanctions, and the number of fraud investigators employed on security work. It gives you comparative information in terms of caseload, regional and national totals. Feedback from the LA community through the Omnibus Survey has been very positive. We now propose to extend the published data to include data-matches and interventions.

Additional data to be published

- 31 We are not proposing to extend the range of data that local authorities are required to collect and provide, and we do not expect that these proposals will require any new resource commitment or procedural changes by you. This is information that we already capture.
- 32 The additional data published will be
- annual interventions target
 - number of interventions where review action has commenced since April 2005
 - percentage of annual intervention target achieved
 - data-matches received since April 2005
 - data-matches outstanding over two calendar months
 - percentage of data-matches resolved within two months

- 33 Interventions and data matches are currently scored as Performance Measures as they are an integral part of security work. In particular, these reviews are key to achieving the PSA target for reducing fraud and error in HB and CTB. It makes sense, therefore, that performance on review work is captured and published on the DWP website along with the counter fraud data.

Provision of data by LAs

- 34 It is important that LAs continue to submit data following the changes in the subsidy scheme. 33 LAs failed to provide data on the numbers of referrals, investigations and investigators for the first quarter 2005/06, despite sending in data on sanctions performance.

Future monitoring arrangements

- 35 With the changes in the way the Department pays subsidy for security work in 2006/07, it is imperative that this area continues to be adequately resourced and managed. The Department has a target to reduce loss in HB **and** fraud and error results in benefit subsidy loss for LAs – so we have a dual responsibility to continue to tackle this problem. We are keen to use our monitoring arrangements to help LAs improve their performance in this area. We will therefore be writing to some LAs soon to begin discussions about security performance where our data suggests there may be a problem, or where we have not received the required data returns.

Queries

- 36 If you have any questions please contact Neil Hodgson at
Email: neil.hodgson@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Request for information from HB Data Subsidy Collection Project

- 37 The HBDSC project team has previously issued communications about the role of the Project via HB/CTB General Bulletins and Housing Benefit Direct articles.
- 38 We now require some information from LAs to aid the smooth transition of receiving HB subsidy claim forms by floppy disc to receiving them and returning them via e-mail. (Apologies to those of you who have already provided the project team with some of this information. At the last LA Practitioners Operational Group forum it was agreed that in future we would make further requests for information using General Information Bulletins or HB direct.)
- 39 Could the HB officer responsible for completing these returns please provide us with the following information, either by telephone or email, using the contact details set out below:
- 1 What is your full name, direct dial telephone number and the name of the LA you work for?
 - 2 What is your email address?
 - 3 Who is your dedicated IT rep? (Please provide their name, telephone contact details and email contact details.)

- 4 State whether the PC you use to complete the HB subsidy claim form, which will also be used to receive and accept emails, has 'Adobe Acrobat Reader'. If so, please state what version of 'Adobe Acrobat Reader' you hold.
- 5 Who is the 'Responsible Finance Officer' who authorises the HB subsidy claim forms before returning them to DWP? (Please provide their name, telephone and email contact details.)
- 6 Do you use, or do you have a need for, any assisted accessibility tools, eg JAWS? Please provide details.
- 40 Please send your e-mail responses to Bryan Fuce, either by email or telephone
Email: Bryan.Fuce@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Tel: 01253 333965

Queries

- 41 If you have any queries or need to discuss your answers with us first, please contact:

Name	Telephone	Email
David Morris	01253 338412	David.Morris@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Sue Braithwaite	01253 333221	Susan.Braithwaite@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Julie Williams	01253 333965	Julie.Williams3@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

IT information flows for LAs, including urgent request for information

Update

- 42 *HB/CTB Bulletin U11/2005* gave background information on the project to replace the existing RATs infrastructure. The 15 pilot sites have now completed an exercise to provide the project with data to assess the effectiveness of the new system. Early feedback from the pilot sites is that the replacement system is a great improvement on RATs.
- 43 The replacement system uses the Customer Information Service (CIS) currently being rolled out in DWP which provides additional data that is not available on the RATs as well as enhanced search facilities. There will also be an upgrade to the service in February which will provide a breakdown of the Assessed Income Figure and the facility for authorities to update the HB/CTB interest.

Connectivity

- 44 A detailed connectivity/IT section will be included in next month's HB/CTB General Bulletin.

Roll out schedule

- 45 To aid the development of the roll-out schedule, *HB/CTB Bulletin U11/2005* requested information from all LAs which included asking about the number of users of the new system. This is of particular importance as, although an LA can have an unlimited number of staff who can access the new system, there is a limited number of users we can roll-out each month. This will be 3,000 per month between May and the end of October 2006. We are completing the roll-out schedule which should be issued in mid February. **Note:** Once this roll-out schedule has been issued it will not be possible to alter it.
- 46 A number of LAs have not responded to our request for information in *HB/CTB Bulletins U11/2005* and *U1/2006*. Those who have not responded are listed on our website at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/rat/>
- 47 Unfortunately this means that we cannot now allocate these LAs an early roll-out date. Once we receive the IP address, requested in the above bulletins, we will allocate a go live date towards the end of the roll-out schedule. **Please be aware that RATs will be removed from LAs before the end of 2006.** Each authority will be allocated an average of 40 users; this is based on the returns we have received to date. LAs requiring more than the average number of users will have to wait until January 2007 at the earliest before additional access can be given.

Urgent request for information

- 48 We need to know if you contract out your HB/CTB services to another company. If you do contract out these services, please let us know, **by 22 February 2006**
- 1 the name of your authority
 - 2 name of the service contractor (eg Capita)
 - 3 address of service contractor
 - 4 contact name
 - 5 contact telephone number
 - 6 email address

Please return information to Olapeju Akanwo at
Olapeju.Akanwo@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Items to consider

- 49 To aid the implementation of the new system there are a number of steps that you will need to take. You will receive more detailed instructions and supporting material before you go live.
- a Each LA will be issued with a copy of the **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)**; this document sets out the security requirements and responsibilities for staff using the new system. This document must be signed and returned to the DWP before access to the system can be authorised.
 - b The MOU also includes a **confidentiality agreement** which must be signed by all users of the new system. Only those users who sign the confidentiality agreement will receive access to new system.

- c Everyone using the new system must be registered on the **Government Gateway**, according to their role. Instructions on how to do this will be included in the training material. Users will not be able to access the new system if they are not registered on the Government Gateway.
- d We anticipate that the **training** for each member of staff should take no more than half a day. The training will consist of a self study course with the assistance of a facilitator.

Timetable

- 50 We plan to issue the training and guidance material 12 weeks before LAs go live on the new system. However, for those LAs being rolled out in May or June, that period will be reduced to around eight weeks. The training material will include a roll-out guide to the actions that need to be undertaken in the period leading up to the go live date.

Workshops

- 51 We are planning to hold a series of optional monthly workshops between March and September. These will give an overview of the training and guidance material and allow LAs to meet members of the project team. Once we have firmed up the dates and locations we will send out invitations.

Remote Access Terminals

- 52 We are in the process of developing a plan to remove the RATs from their current locations. Options being considered are
- removing the RATs eight weeks after your site has gone live to allow for a 'settling in' period
 - not removing the RATs until full national roll-out has been completed
- 53 Further updates will be issued as the project is rolled out.

How to contact us

- 54 Our contact details are
Wayne Norfolk, Tel: 0113 251 9012 E-mail: Wayne.Norfolk@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Group e-mails: It-flows-DWP@exmar01.dss.gsi.gov.uk
Our website address: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/rat/>

Verification Framework Compliance Certificate

- 55 The Verification Framework (VF) end of year compliance certificate for 2005/2006 has recently been reviewed. The certificate asks you to confirm that VF standards have been applied to each module with which you are compliant, and that targets for interventions and data-matches have been achieved. It also seeks confirmation of the number of reviews and visits initiated during the year.

- 56 The certificate indicates that aspects of your performance will be reviewed and assessed using data you have provided to HBMS and the Information Centre. These aspects are Data Incidents, NINO accuracy, loadable data to HBMS and the return of the HBSD/IAD scan to the Information Centre.
- 57 The certificate will be available on the website during the week of 20 February 2006 and can be downloaded. If any LA does **not** have access to the internet please email SAFE-VF@dwp.gsi.gov.uk to request a certificate. A copy of the certificate can be accessed by clicking on the icon.



Compliance
Certificate.doc

- 58 The completed end of year compliance certificate should be returned to SAFE-VF Team, Local Authority Performance Division HBSD by 30 April 2006.

Queries

- 59 Should you need to make any further enquiries please contact the VF team on SAFE-VF@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Email address: Correction

- 60 In *HB/CTB Circular A2/2006*, the email address for David Scholefield was incorrect. Please instead send queries on the Appeals aspects of that circular to ACI-Office-Support-Leeds@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Current HB/CTB Circulars

- 61 Following the issue of HB/CTB Guidance Manual, Amendment 9, the current 'A' circulars are listed in the table below.

Number	Subject
A27(Revised)/2003	Employment Retention and Advancement Scheme
A30/2003	Return to Work Credit
A9/2004	Disregard of Lone Parent Work Search Premium and Lone Parent In Work Credit Current HB/CTB A Circulars list
A13/2004	Uprating 2004 – FAQs The Pension Service Partnership Fund
A33/2004	Take-up of Council Tax Benefit: DWP activities to raise awareness of Council Tax Benefit
A3/2005	Change to HBMS Data Specification
A4/2005	Take-up of CTB: scan identifying customers receiving Pension Credit when no evidence of live HB/CTB claim
A6/2005	2005 HB/CTB Performance Standards

Number	Subject
A10/2005	1 2005 HB/CTB Performance Standards - clarifications 2 Issue of the 2005 HB/CTB MIS guide
A11/2005	2005 HB/CTB Performance Standards self-assessment
A14/2005	HB/CTB Performance Standards Fund
A15/2005	Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations Amdt to A13/2005
A17/2005	Work Search Premium for Working Tax Credit Partners Submission of self-assessments against the 2005 HB/CTB Performance Standards Amendments to the 2005 HB/CTB Performance Standards
A18/2005	HB/CTB (Miscellaneous) Regs (No 3) Regs 2005
A19/2005	Deferral of State Pension - the treatment of lump sum payments in HB/CTB
A20/2005	The Social Security (Care Homes and Independent Hospitals) Regulations 2005, Statutory Instrument Number 2005/2687
A21/2005	The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No.4) Regulations 2005 Current HB/CTB circulars list
A22/2005	ETD & appointee action
A23/2005	1 HB/CTB (Miscellaneous Amendments ((No. 5) Regulations 2005 (SI 2005/3294)) 2 Payments from the Financial Assistance Scheme: the effects on HB/CTB 3 London Bombings Relief Charitable Fund
A24/2005	Uprating 2006
A25/2005	CH/3801/2004 and staying cases Amendment to HB/CTB Circular A24/2005 Uprating
A1/2006	Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) Data Take on and Processing Schedule (DTOPS) 28 Amendment to HB/CTB Circular A24/2005 Uprating

62 You may destroy all other HB/CTB A circulars, but we recommend you keep at least one copy of each for reference purposes.

What's new on the web

63 The following items can be found on the website link shown

Document Type	Subject	Link
HB/CTB Circular A1/2006	Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) Data Take on and Processing Schedule (DTOPS) 28	http://www.dwp.gov.uk/hbctb/circulars/2006/A1-2006.pdf
HB/CTB Circular A2/2006	Further guidance about HB/CTB suspension, termination and date of claim	http://www.dwp.gov.uk/hbctb/circulars/2006/A2-2006.pdf
HB/CTB Circular S1/2006	DWP strategy for allocating the remaining Performance Standards Fund	http://www.dwp.gov.uk/hbctb/circulars/2006/S1-2006.pdf
HB/CTB Bulletin U1/2006	IT Information Flows for Local Authorities (ITILFA) Project	http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/news/newsletter/bulletins/2006/Bulletin_U1-2006-9_January.pdf
HB/CTB Bulletin U2/2006	Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for people receiving Pension Credit	http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/news/newsletter/bulletins/2006/bulletin-u2-260106.pdf
HB/CTB Bulletin G1/2006	Verification within The Pension Service Performance Standards Fund Customer Management System (CMS) Benefit Processing Replacement/Working Age Transformation and Change Programme – Tactical e-Services, Contact Management and FRAIMS	http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/news/newsletter/bulletins/2006/G1-2006.pdf

HB/CTB Circulars issued this month

- 64 The following HB/CTB Circulars have been issued this month
- Circular A2/2006
 - Circular A1/2006
 - Circular S1/2006

Other publications issued this month

- 65 The following publications have also been issued this month
- HB Direct Issue 50
 - Bulletin U3/2006
 - Bulletin U2/2006
 - Bulletin U1/2006
 - HB/CTB General Guidance Manual, Amdt 9

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