

# Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

## General Information Bulletin

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<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/>

**HB/CTB G2/2007**

**15 February 2007**

<b>Contact</b>	Queries about the <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>technical content of this bulletin</b>, contact the person named at the end of each section</li><li>• <b>distribution of this bulletin</b>, contact Corporate Document Services Ltd Orderline<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Tel: 0113 399 4040</li><li>- Fax: 0113 399 4205</li><li>- Email: <a href="mailto:orderline@cds.co.uk">orderline@cds.co.uk</a></li></ul></li><li>• <b>bulletin in general</b>, contact Kath Murphy<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <a href="mailto:Kath.Murphy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk">Kath.Murphy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk</a></li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Who should read</b>	All Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) staff
<b>Action</b>	For information

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# Getting access to Tax Credit information

## Introduction

- 1 LAs have been experiencing problems getting information from Tax Credit offices in order to assist their investigations. This is particularly affecting the HBMS living together rule (HB/CTTC003).
- 2 The Tax Credit Act is quite specific as to the nature of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) data that can be provided to LAs and to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). In order to facilitate requests for information on living together cases from DWP, HMRC have drawn up a set of criteria required.
- 3 HMRC would like similar requests from LAs to follow the same procedure.

## Request Criteria

- 4 The instructions issued to HMRC staff dealing with DWP/LA enquiries are as follows.

## Requests for information regarding third parties

- 5 In some cases DWP/LA may request information concerning a third party, for example, a spouse or person living with claimant. Before making such a request, DWP/LA must establish firm evidence of a connection between the parties that will affect the benefit claim under enquiry. In all cases where DWP/LA makes a request for third party information, the Fraud Officer must have completed a Request for Information (Form RFI) stencil, which will confirm that there is firm evidence showing a connection between the parties.
- 6 The 'Reason for Request' must include sufficient information to demonstrate evidence of a connection between parties.

## Action to be taken on receipt of stencil

- 7 On receipt of a request for information stencil HMRC Liaison Officer must check that
  - 'RFI fully completed' box has been ticked
  - a full explanation of reason for the request is given
  - the request is signed by an IGO from OIU if DWP request or fraud investigator
  - countersigned by his/her manager if an LA request
- 8 If the reason given requires clarification, a request can be made to IGO/investigator for further information. Once satisfied with the request, only the information shown above may be provided to DWP/LA.

## Queries

- 9 Any questions about this request should be made to [James.Ablewhite@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:James.Ablewhite@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Pension Credit – verification of capital

- 10 The Pension Service have recently completed a pilot in which they examined the risk of removing the requirement for customers to provide certain paper-based evidence to support their claims. The accuracy of the information given by the customer at the first point of contact was assessed by comparing it with supporting documents and through data-matching.
- 11 The pilot identified three types of capital as low risk
- cash
  - premium bonds
  - capital bonds
- As a result, The Pension Service will no longer require customers to provide separate documentation to verify these items. Instead, the customer declaration will be accepted as verification. There will be no change to the information given to LAs on Pension Credit ETDs.
- 12 LAs should be aware that no separate evidence of **cash, premium bonds or capital bonds** has been obtained by The Pension Service to support the customer declaration. Therefore, where a pensioner **does not** qualify for Pension Credit and their HB/CTB claim is forwarded to the LA with details of their income and capital, LAs may choose to
- accept the customer declaration to The Pension Service as evidence, or
  - verify these items themselves
- 13 Similarly, as these have been identified as low risk, LAs may now decide not to ask for separate evidence of cash, premium bonds and capital bonds when pensioners make a HB/CTB claim direct to the LA.

### Further information

- 14 For further information on this new procedure, LAs should contact their local Pension Centre through the normal liaison channels.

## PM10 – frequently asked questions

- 15 We have updated our website with answers to your most frequently-asked questions about the new Performance Measure 10 – number of reductions in benefit entitlement. If you have any queries, please look for the answer on <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/faq/sec-perf-measures.asp>

# Liaison arrangements on benefit issues between Jobcentre Plus and LAs: Supporting guidance

## Background

- 16 *HB/CTB Bulletin G12/2006* included an article about the new arrangements agreed between Jobcentre Plus and LAs to support effective liaison on administration and fraud issues.
- 17 These new arrangements, which will be introduced from April 2007, will centre on Jobcentre Plus/LA Joint Boards, primarily at Jobcentre Plus District level, with the District Manager and an LA Housing Benefit Manager as co chairs.

## Supporting guidance for District External Relations Managers in Jobcentre Plus

- 18 To support the implementation of these new arrangements the Governmental Partnerships Team in Jobcentre Plus has now issued some initial guidance, aimed at District External Relations Managers in Jobcentre Plus.
- 19 The guidance provides information that will help District ERMs undertake their new role and responsibilities in managing local liaison on benefit issues between Jobcentre Plus and LAs. It includes details on winding up the existing Joint Regional and Operational Boards, putting in place a network of contacts within Jobcentre Plus and LAs, setting up the new joint boards and, sets out an escalation route for the resolution of issues within Jobcentre Plus.
- 20 A copy of the guidance is issued with this Bulletin as an attachment file, ERM Guidelines.doc.
- 21 Over the coming weeks, District ERMs in Jobcentre Plus will contact LA colleagues to discuss and agree the new liaison arrangements to be put in place.

## Next steps

- 22 The Government Partnerships Team in Jobcentre Plus is continuing to develop this guidance and plan to issue a more detailed version at the end of March 2007. The focus of this will be on arrangements for sharing information and good practice and using available management information to support joint working and performance improvement. We will also be sharing that guidance when it is available.

## Further information

- 23 If you have any queries about this article please contact the Jobcentre Plus Governmental Partnerships Team
- [chris.bullen@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:chris.bullen@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk)
  - [lan.gibbins@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:lan.gibbins@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk)

# National Fraud Initiative 2006/07

## Introduction

- 24 The National Fraud Initiative (NFI) is a two-yearly bulk data-matching exercise performed by the Audit Commission on behalf of LAs and other bodies that they audit. This year the service will be provided as a web-based product that has been operational since the end of January 2007.
- 25 The NFI exercise is particularly important both in terms of its access to new data and in its ability to combat specific forms of fraud and error. Therefore in consultation with your representatives, including both FOG and POG, we have agreed the following guidance, for authorities in England and Wales, on how certain matches will be dealt with by The Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus.
- 26 This allows you to focus on standard HB/CTB matches and especially those matches that count towards your intervention target.

## Guidance on the 2006/07 exercise

- 27 The Audit Commission has been provided with your HB/CTB data using the HBMS download for October 2006.
- 28 We have liaised with colleagues in both The Pension Service and Jobcentre Plus to ensure the best possible use of resources in investigating those HB/CTB NFI matches where Income Support (IS), Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Guaranteed Pension Credit (GPC) or Savings Pension Credit (SPC) is in payment.
- 29 Just as in the last exercise The Pension Service has agreed to take all those HB/CTB matches where GPC or SPC is in payment. They will then use internal data to identify those matches that need further investigation and inform the Audit Commission of their results.
- 30 We have also reached agreement with Jobcentre Plus to receive all HB/CTB matches where IS or JSA (income-based only) are in payment and use internal data to sift out those matches where income, earnings or student status are already known. Once this match has been completed Jobcentre Plus will send those matches remaining either for investigation or for Customer Compliance action.
- 31 You will be informed of those HB matches that Jobcentre Plus retain and any matches referred to the Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) will be offered to you for joint working purposes. Local Jobcentre Plus offices are not able to take NFI matches that have not been internally matched due to the sheer numbers involved.
- 32 We are asking you to concentrate **only** on those NFI matches where there is no IS, JSA (income-based), GPC or SPC in payment. You will however be able to see these cases on the web-based application if you need to confirm any details.
- 33 These arrangements will be closely monitored and a full review will take place at the end of the exercise with your representatives on both FOG and POG.

## Data matches that count towards your 2006/7 reviews target

- 34 Certain NFI data matches will count towards your 2006/07 interventions target. To assist with these particular matches we have provided additional data to ensure they are of the highest standards.
- 35 They can be treated as interventions and will therefore assist you in meeting your target under Performance Measure 10. The resolving of these matches is the same as defined within the *HB/CTB Security Guidance* manual and the outcomes will be monitored by the Audit Commission and DWP.
- 36 To choose these particular matches you need to select them on the web-based application by following the NFI Guidelines on 'Selecting intervention matches'. This facility will only be available until the end of February, after which it will be disabled. Therefore it is important that they are selected before the end of February.

## Audit Scotland

- 37 The NFI 2007 exercise being run in Scotland is subject to further consultation.

## Questions

- 38 Any questions about the DWP dimension of this exercise should be addressed to [Graham.Dove@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Graham.Dove@dwp.gsi.gov.uk).
- 39 Any questions about the NFI itself should be addressed to the Audit Commission in the normal way.

## Current HB/CTB Circulars

- 40 Following the issue of HB/CTB Guidance Manual, Amendment 10, 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
A10/2005	2005 HB/CTB Performance Standards - clarifications
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
A2/2006	Further guidance about HB/CTB suspension, termination and date of claim
A4/2006	HB/CTB (General) Amendments Regulations 2005 SI 2005/2904

Number	Subject
A10/2006	HB Regs 2006 – Scotland
A11/2006	HB Regs 2006 – England & Wales
A13/2006	Overpayments Guidance: Underlying entitlement
A14/2006	Changes to the HBMS data extract
A15/2006	Student support uprating 2006/2007
A16/2006	The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 4) Regulations 2006 People from abroad – humanitarian protection
A17/2006 A17/2006 (Revised)	Targeting working age cases to reduce fraud and error in HB/CTB  Reissued as A17/2006 (Revised)
A18/2006	New options for making claims, amendments and change of circumstances notifications by telephone or electronically
A19/2006	2007 Uprating
A20/2006	Changes to Security Performance Measures
A1/2007	Valuation of National Savings Certificates  Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) Data Take on and Processing Schedule (DTOPS) 29

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

## Local Housing Allowance – communications products

- 42 The DWP Communications Operations Group is currently putting together a communications strategy for local housing allowance rollout.
- 43 They would like a named contact point within each LA to liaise with when the communications products are ready for release.
- 44 Could all authorities please send contact details to Tracey.Jones2@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

## ISCS Uprating error – information on CIS

- 45 An error has been detected on IS cases where the customer's 60th birthday falls during the uprating period (16 Dec 06 – 9 Apr 07). This may result in incorrect information appearing on the Customer Information System (CIS), as follows. If an award of Pension Credit is shown
- which starts before the customer's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, there is an error
  - but no Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD) has been received there may be an error especially if the 'details' show the award was created by 'uprating'
- 46 LAs are advised to check all such cases with their local Jobcentre Plus/The Pension Service contacts and notify LAST of any errors on a LAST5.
- 47 If an award of PC is shown and an ETD has been received there may be an error, but the information contained in the ETD should be correct.
- 48 An urgent fix is being developed but this will not correct cases already notified to CIS, for which a data cleanse will be required. As yet we do not know when the data cleanse will be run but we will keep LAs informed.
- 49 Any queries should be addressed to Ian Golds at IAN.GOLDS@DWP.GSI.GOV

## What's new on the web

- 50 The following items can be found on the website link shown

Document Type	Subject	Link
HB/CTB Bulletin G1/2007	<p>Changes to the 2007-08 HBSD/IAD Scan Guidance and Specification</p> <p>Local authority claim processing address</p> <p>Amendment to HB/CTB Circular A19/2006</p> <p>HB/CTB Guidance Manual Amendment 10</p> <p>New Jobcentre Plus processes (Standard Operating Model version2)</p> <p>Commissioners' cases</p>	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/news/newsletter/bulletins/2007/g1-2007.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/news/newsletter/bulletins/2007/g1-2007.pdf</a>
HB/CTB Bulletin S1/2007	<p>Non-Housing Revenue Account rent rebate subsidy thresholds and caps for 2007/08 – and early notification of possible changes for future years</p>	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/hbctb/circulars/2007/s1-2007.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/hbctb/circulars/2007/s1-2007.pdf</a>

## **HB/CTB Circulars issued this month**

- 51      The following HB/CTB Circular has been issued this month
- Circular S1/2007

## **Other publications issued this month**

- 52      The following publication has also been issued this month
- HB Direct Issue 62