

Shared Services



Service Level Agreement

between

**Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Shared
Services (SHSVCS) - Debt Management (DM)**

and

Local Authorities (LA)

2009/12

**This Service Level Agreement has been ratified by Carol Sheridan, Head of Debt
Management and the Practitioners Operational Group**

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

CRC	Client Referral Centre
CC	Contact Centre
DM	Debt Management
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
FCG	Finance Control Group
HB	Housing Benefit
LA	Local Authority
MP	Member of Parliament
OP	Overpayment
POG	Practitioners Operational Group
S of S	Secretary of State
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SHSVCS	Shared Services

Contents

Introduction

DM/LA Service and Performance Requirements	Appendix 1
Monitoring Guidance	Appendix 2
Nominated Officers	Appendix 3
Reviews and Disagreements	Appendix 4
National Sign-Off Sheet	Appendix 5
HB National Referral form	Appendix 6
Local Authority Change of circumstances notification	Appendix 7
Definition of Debt Manager Notifications to LAs	Appendix 8

Copy of the current National Framework Agreement For Service Level Agreements

Introduction

1. This document introduces the Service Level Agreement between the Local Authorities and DWP Shared Services. Debt Management for the recovery of Housing Benefit overpayments. It contains the requirements to set up and the principles of the Service Level Agreements between SHSVCS Debt Management and their Local Authority counterparts and is endorsed by Practitioners Operational Group.
2. The appendices relate solely to the specific, model, minimum service standards expected of DM and LA and should be read in context with the DWP National Framework Agreement.

Service and Performance Requirements for Debt Management and the Local Authorities

The following table lists the services and performance requirements against which standards will be measured and reports made.

No	REQUIREMENT	MINIMUM STANDARD	BY WHOM	METHOD OF CONTROL
1	DM and LAs to provide a mechanism for local contact to deal with enquiries between LAs and DM for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual cases with CCs to include enquiries relating to Debtor accounts and repayment to LA • CRC Wales for Non- compliance of Service Level Agreement. 	The agreed structure for communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular telephone contact via CCs (LAs and CCs to provide contact details) • Nominated Officers for formal escalation (CRC, CCs and LAs to provide contact details) 	CRC, CC, LA Manager and staff	Shared Issues log for non-compliance of SLA. (Appendix 3)
2	Referrals to be made on the National Standard OP Referral form. Copy attached at Appendix 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referrals only to be sent to CRC Wales (Porth) • All post to be sent to CCs • When connected to Government Connect, LA's will be able to e-mail referrals and post to CRC or CCs respectively 	LA's to use the National Referral form when requesting DM to recover HB debt LAs to check CIS if debtor is at address stated and in receipt of a prescribed benefit prior to issue A "Performance Requirement" for LAs to complete the National Referral forms to the standard of 90% quality referrals	CRC, CC, LA Managers and staff	Quality referral log. (Appendix 2)

No	REQUIREMENT	MINIMUM STANDARD	BY WHOM	METHOD OF CONTROL
3	Respond to initial requests from LA made on the National Referral form to recover HB debt	Notify LA that recovery is not appropriate or not possible or recovery will commence from a given date and at a given rate within 20 working days of original request	CRC/CC	Analysis of Debt Management Statistical Data (Appendix 2)
4	Standardise deduction rates and application of Income and Expenditure decisions	DM will decide all rates of recovery for HB debts in accordance with S of S standards DM to process and decide all Income and Expenditure applications for debts being recovered by DM on behalf of LA. Requests received by the LA to be forwarded to DM	CC	Appropriate Management Control by CCs
5	LA to notify CC of all changes of circumstances relating to a HB debt, which is being recovered by DM	National proforma to be sent to CC within 5 working days of the overpayment team being notified of the change of circumstance (appendix 7) DM to appropriately action change of circumstances notification within '2 week Head of Work' target.	CC/LA	DM Business Reports for CCs. Appropriate Management Control by LAs (Appendix 2)
6	To comply with the Welfare Reform Bill, DM to be informed when there is a HB overpayment linked to a DWP benefit overpayment	Where linked cases are identified and notified Debt Management will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process Sanction cases within 10 days • Non-Sanction cases within 30 days • Notify the LA of the outcome decision or write off, together with supporting documentation, at the same time as the decision is issued to the customer by post • In all other cases notify LA of outcome decision (including write offs) with supporting evidence within 5 days of the date of decision by post 	CRC/LA	Analysis of Debt Management Statistical data (Appendix 2)

No	REQUIREMENT	MINIMUM STANDARD	BY WHOM	METHOD OF CONTROL
7	Notify LA when recovery complete or recovery ceases for a specified reason	By using automated Debt Manager notifications (Appendix 8), DM to inform LA within 10 working days of identification when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full recovery has been achieved • Recovery ceases for a specified reason 	CC	Analysis of Debt Management statistical data (Appendix 2)
8	Make repayments to the LA's of money recovered on their behalf	DM to repay any debt recovered on behalf of LAs at monthly intervals one month in arrears. Payments to be accompanied with a schedule itemising amounts appropriate to individual debtors	CC/FCG	Appropriate Management control by CC/FCG (Appendix 2)
9	CC to forward customer complaints and MP enquiries relating to HB Debt to LA. LA can request a sequence of events from CC to complete LA response.	CC to forward customer complaint to LA within 7 working days. CC to respond to LA request for sequence of events within 7 working days	CC/LA	Appropriate Management Control by CC/LA (Appendix 2)

Monitoring Guidance for the Debt Management and Local Authorities Service Level Agreement

In setting up the SLA the aim should be to adhere, where at all possible, to the service provisions specified in the SLA as set down in the regulations. Where there is any deviation from that standard, discussion should take place at POG to put in place a target and timescale acceptable to both DM and LA. Details of any such agreement should be included within the end of year statement of performance. The guidance should therefore be used to inform discussions between DM and LA with a view to putting in place monitoring arrangements which are acceptable to both sides and which satisfy current legislation.

Service Provisions within the SLA are the minimum requirements needed to support the SLA 2009/10. Any local deviation from the minimum standards can only be in excess of those given and must be documented and agreed by both DM and the LA.

Service Provision Target/Standards and Data Stream

REQUIREMENT	No	TARGET/STANDARD	DATA STREAM	AVAILABILITY
LA Performance requirement for Quality of referral.	2	90% Quality Referral	Monthly HB statistical data	Immediately
Input referral to Debt Manager	3	CRC – within 10 working days	DM Business Reports	Immediately
Final outcome of referral to notify case put into recovery or returned to LA	3	CC - within 10 working days	DM Business Reports	Immediately
LA to notify CC of change of circumstances	5	LA - within 5 working days of the HB overpayment team being notified of change.	Management Control by LAs.	Immediately
CC to process change	5	CC – within ‘2 week Head of Work target’.	DM Business Reports	Immediately

REQUIREMENT	No	TARGET/STANDARD	DATA STREAM	AVAILABILITY
Linked HB Fraud Sanction cases	6	CRC will process cases within 10 working days and notify LAs of the outcome decision immediately	Debt Management Statistical Data	Immediately
Linked HB Fraud Non-sanction cases	6	CRC will process cases within 30 working days and notify LAs of the outcome decision immediately	Debt Management Statistical Data	Immediately
Linked all "Other" HB cases	6	CRC will process cases and notify LA of outcome decision within 5 days of date of decision	Debt Management Statistical Data	Immediately
Recovery complete or deductions cease	7	CC - within 10 working days of identification	Debt Management Statistical Data	Immediately
Payment to LA	8	DM Finance division. Periodicity - one month Due date - one month in arrears	Appropriate Management Control by FCG	Immediately
HB customer Complaints/MP enquiries	9	CC to forward HB customer complaint to LA - within 7 working days	Appropriate Management Control by CC	Immediately
CC to provide LA with a sequence of events in respect of a HB customer complaint/MP enquiry involving DM	9	CC to supply information - within 7 working days	Appropriate Management Control by CC/LA	Immediately
To provide statistical data to LAs	App 2	DM - Month in arrears - by end of 4 th week of each month	Debt Management Statistical Data	Immediately

Nominated Officers Supporting the Debt Management and Local Authorities Service Level Agreement

Each party to the SLA will provide nominated contact points within their organisation. The role of the officer will be to:

- Deal with queries effectively
- Resolve problems by contact with opposite number in LA or DM.
- Provide up to date lists of telephone numbers and contact points
- Gather information and statistics to monitor SLA performance.

3.1 CRC Wales Porth – will deal with queries relating to non-compliance of the Service Level Agreement.

Nominated Officer	Duties.	Contact details
Chris Jones	DM HB Referral Manager	T/N 01443 688623 E-mail: Christine.M.Jones@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Meryl Morris	SLA Liaison Officer	T/N 01443 688962 E-mail: Meryl.Morris@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

3.2 CCs – will deal with queries for individual cases, to include enquiries relating to Debtor accounts; repayment to LA and sequence of events for LA for HB Customer Complaints/MP enquiry involving DM.

Nominated Officer	Duties	Contact details.
Contact Centre Agents	Individual Case enquiries	T/N 0845 8500293
Pam Thompson	Complaints for individual cases	T/N 01274 302503 E- mail PAMELA.J.THOMPSON@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

3.3 The escalation route for Local Authorities to Debt Management will be:

ISSUE	RESPONSIBILITY
Unsatisfactory response by Contact Agents	CC Nominated Officer
Delays in payment to LAs	CC Nominated Officer
Customer Complaints sequence of events	CC Nominated Officer
Unsatisfactory compliance with the Service Level Agreement	CRC Nominated Officers

Local Authority Nominated Officers

Details to be provided by LAs held by CRC and CCs and update by LAs as and when appropriate.

Reviews and Disagreements Relating to the Debt Management and Local Authority Service Level Agreement

Reviews

The Service Level Agreement will apply from April 2009 to March 2012. This will provide DM and LAs with greater consistency when monitoring and ensuring sign-off of the SLA. Monitoring of the performance of the SLA will be required throughout the each year with a potential review 6 months following issue of this SLA. Any subsequent review will be directed by POG if and when required. Any amended agreement will need to be approved by the Practitioners Operational Group.

Disagreements

It is important that disagreements are resolved at the ***lowest practicable level***, i.e. Contact Agent. It is expected that most issues, which arise, will be resolved through informal discussions with colleagues. Where it does not prove possible to resolve an issue through these means, it should be referred to the CRC or CC nominated liaison officers as defined in appendix 3 who may need to escalate to national level to ensure consistency of approach (DM and LA).

**Service Level Agreement between Debt Management and Local Authority
Housing Benefit 2009/12**

Signed on behalf of CRC Wales

..... (Name of signatory)

..... (Signature)

..... (Job Title)

Signed on behalf of the Local Authority Housing Benefit

..... (Name of Local Authority)

..... (Name of signatory)

..... (Signature)

..... (Job Title)

Service Level Agreement Local Authority Nominated Officer

..... (Name)

..... (Telephone Number)

..... (Email address)

Date

Appendix 6

Department for Work and Pensions Shared Services, Debt Management (P) HBEN PO Box 171 Mitcheldean Gloucester GL17 OXG	Adran Gwaith a Phensiynau Gwasanaethau a Rennir, Rheoli Dyled (P) HBEN PO Box 171 Mitcheldean Gloucester GL17 OXG
--	--

LA address: <i>Address 1</i>	Date:
<i>Address 2</i>	
<i>Address 3</i>	
<i>Address 4</i>	
POST CODE	Tel:

APPLICATION FOR RECOVERY OF HOUSING BENEFIT

I am referring this over payment to you in accordance with Housing Benefit Regulation 102 for recovery from Social Security Benefits Subject to the provisions of the Housing Benefit Regulation 105.

CIS Checked On:
Customer's name: <i>Name</i>
Customer's current address: <i>Address 1</i>
<i>Address 2</i>
<i>Address 3</i>
<i>Address 4</i>
POST CODE
N.I. Number: <i>NiNo</i>
Date of birth:
LA reference number: <i>LA reference</i>
LA code: <i>LA code</i>

An overpayment of Housing Benefit has occurred as a result of failure to disclose or misrepresent a material fact.

Overpayment classification:	Error: <input type="checkbox"/>	Fraud: <input type="checkbox"/>
Reason for overpayment: <i>Please select from list</i>		
If other, input reason here:		

Periods of overpayment	From:	To:
Amount already recovered by LA:	£0.00	
Outstanding balance:	£0.00	

Your name

Local Authority

Change of Circumstances Notification

From: (LA)

To: Debt Management
Contact Centre

.....
.....
.....
.....

.....
.....
.....
.....

Customer Name:

NI Number: (NiNo)

LA Reference Number:

The following change of circumstances has occurred:

- Customer repaid in full
- Customer now in receipt of Housing Benefit
- LA have made own arrangements for repayment
- Customer has appealed / disputed OP decision
- Other

Name:

Signature:

DEFINITION OF DEBT MANAGER NOTIFICATIONS TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The following notifications are automatically issued by the Debt Manager Computer System to inform Local Authorities of the progression and outcome of the Housing Benefit Overpayment Referral.

HBPIF	Paid in full notification to LA
HBREC	Recovery start letter to LA
LAHSAG	Recovery reduced hardship notification to LA
LARET	Overpayment return letter to LA
LARETM	Missing data return letter

**NATIONAL FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT
FOR SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS**

BETWEEN

**THE DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS' SERVICE DELIVERY
BUSINESSES**

AND

LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING BENEFIT/COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT SERVICES

2006/2007

National Framework Agreement (Background)

1. This National Framework Agreement recognises that there will be a requirement for a number of the businesses that collectively form The DWP to enter into Service Level Agreements (SLAs) that describe the day to day working practices and standards between those businesses and LAs.
2. This Framework document lays down the overarching common principles that should be embraced in each of the individual SLAs. This will help to create a greater focus on working together to understand any issues that may arise, and promoting liaison as the means of resolving them, rather than merely laying down standards that are required to be met.
3. DWP SLAs that are covered by these overarching principles are:
 - The Pension Service (TPS)
 - Jobcentre Plus (JCP)
 - Disability Carers Service (DCS)
 - The Appeals Service (until transfer to DCA)
 - Financial Services Division – Debt Management (DM)
 - Rent Service (DWP Agency from 01/04/2004)

This document has been endorsed by the Local Authority Associations (LGA, WLGA, ALG, and COSLA)

Local Authorities

4. The LA have a key role in supporting government objectives in relation to placing people in work and removing people from poverty through delivery of Housing and Council Tax Benefit (CTB). Housing Benefit (HB) is an important part of welfare provision designed to enable people on lower incomes access to a decent home. It also plays a key part in enabling people to make the transition from welfare into work.

Department for Work and Pensions

5. DWP is committed to eradicating poverty for children, combating pensioner poverty and sustaining a higher proportion of people in work than ever before, whilst providing security for those who can't work. DWP has been created specifically to improve and tailor services to customers.

The Pension Service

6. The aim of The Pension Service is to combat poverty and promote security and independence for today's and future pensioners. In addition, The Pension Service will develop and implement local services through a local service plan that will be co-terminus with LA boundaries. These plans will involve a range of partners including LAs.

Jobcentre Plus

7. The aim of Jobcentre Plus is to help more people into work, help employers fill their vacancies, and to provide people of working age with the help and support to which they are entitled. An important feature of the organisation will be the alignment of Jobcentre Plus and LA boundaries. This development should bring benefits for DWP, LAs and our common customers.

Disability and Carers Service

8. Disability and Carers Service (DCS) exists to support disabled people and their carers, whether or not they are able to work, by providing an efficient and customer-focused delivery of Disability and Carer Benefits, payable to just under 4.5 million customers.

The Appeals Service

9. The Appeals Service hears appeals on decisions on Social Security benefits, Child Support, Vaccine Damage, Tax Credit, HB, CTB and Compensation Recovery questions throughout Great Britain and on decisions under the Road Traffic Act in England and Wales.

Financial Services Division – DM

10. DM is the organisation responsible for delivering debt management and recovery service for the DWP; this responsibility includes, in certain circumstances, the recovery of HB/CTB overpayment on behalf of LAs. DM has overall responsibility to support the DWP in the reduction in losses from fraud and error in programme spends, by the efficient and effective collection of debt. Service delivery requirements and standards are in the attached appendices.

The Rent Service

11. The Rent Service (TRS) is an executive agency of the DWP. We aim to be England's leading provider of impartial, professional rental valuation services that are fair to our customers and other stakeholders. TRS makes fair rent evaluations for regulated and secure tenancies, and determines whether HB

customers (and prospective customers) are being asked to pay more rent than their landlords might reasonably expect in open market conditions.

The Purpose of SLAs

12. The SLAs described in this document are intended to improve quality of services and secure application of minimum standards by the parties to the agreements. The SLAs also encourage closer working through dialogue and liaison and the development of a better understanding of our procedures in order to provide the best possible customer experience. Whilst individual SLAs will set out the minimum standards but both parties are encouraged to build on the SLAs to reflect local needs.

Reviews and Disagreements

13. All SLAs must contain arrangements for monitoring performance throughout the year plus arrangements for a full joint review of progress at the end of the business year. SLAs should run from April to March. It is important that a process for resolving disagreements at the lowest practicable level is described in all SLAs.

Monitoring Arrangements

14. Monitoring of the arrangements set out in the SLA in relation to performance against minimum standards and day to day liaison arrangements is essential. It is important that where minimum standards are not being achieved that this is not used as a reason to refuse to sign the SLA. The SLA should be used as a vehicle to promote dialogue to achieve the minimum standards or to agree the actions required to reach the standards as soon as possible. Liaison arrangements are the key feature of all SLAs and these arrangements should be regularly monitored to ensure that in ever changing circumstances they meet the needs of all parties.

Nominated Officers

15. Each party to an SLA should appoint a nominated officer to whom day-to-day problems can be addressed. This officer can also be the conduit for ensuring that any disagreements are handled at the most appropriate level. The appointed officer should also take responsibility for ensuring that full contact details are provided where issues need to be escalated. This will allow day to day business between the parties to be expedited in the most efficient manner.

Cross Referral to other SLAs

16. All parties need to note that where it is necessary to cross refer to arrangements specified in another organisation's SLA it is not acceptable to say "See SLA". The actual process to be conveyed must be detailed in each SLA.

Principles of Sign-Up

17. All parties should do everything in their power to establish the necessary dialogue and create the correct circumstances that will lead to sign-up of the SLAs. This must involve discussion regarding day-to-day liaison, minimum standards, monitoring and disagreement procedures.

Future Arrangements

18. As individual DWP Businesses evolve and closer working arrangements between DWP Businesses and LA become better established, individual SLAs and this framework document will need to change. It is important that the Businesses recognise that changes to individual model SLAs or this document require clearance through the Practitioners Operational Group (POG).