

# Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

## General Information Bulletin

Department for Work and Pensions, First Floor, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London, SW1H 9NA  
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/>

**HB/CTB G22/2008**

**21 November 2008**

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<b>Who should read</b>	All Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) staff
<b>Action</b>	For information

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# Alignment of capital verification for HB and CTB claims at £6,000

## Introduction

- 1 The current practice for local authorities (LAs) is to verify all capital declared, however small, in standard cases (non-passported). However, Jobcentre Plus verifies amounts over £5,500 whilst The Pension, Disability and Carers Service verify amounts over £6,000. Anomalies like this are confusing to both staff and customers.
- 2 In *HB/CTB Bulletin G12/2006*, we announced the 'harmonization of verification of capital pilot', run jointly between The Pensions Service and the Housing Benefit Strategy Division (HBSD). The results of this project, in which some 40 LAs participated, were outlined in a supplement to the May 2007 edition of *HB Direct*.
- 3 The results of the project were encouraging. DWP analysis suggests that the savings in administration by LAs not verifying capital below £6k far outweigh the small risk of fraud and error entering at the gateway.
- 4 This article sets out the DWP's revised guidance concerning verification of capital for all standard claims to HB/CTB and applies where a claimant has declared capital of £6,000 or below. For all non-standard claims (passported), you must accept the information provided by the Jobcentre Plus or The Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS).
- 5 This revised guidance has been discussed with your Local Authority Associations (LAAs) representatives.

## Implementation

- 6 On receipt of this bulletin, LAs can choose **not to verify declared capital of £6,000 or under for all standard claims including capital declared during the intervention process** with immediate effect or as soon as practicable to suit their individual circumstances.
- 7 In all cases of doubt LAs can still ask for verification of capital even though an amount declared is either Nil or below £6,000. This may also apply where no bank details have been declared but it is obvious there is capital. The HB/CTB Guidance Manual is currently being updated and DWP's verification policy is being incorporated into it.
- 8 LAs will continue to have the discretion to decide how to go about implementing this change, though in cases where you have already asked for documentary evidence of capital, you are likely to want to continue to progress the case till a decision on benefit entitlement is reached.

- 9 In implementing this change you may also wish to consider
- any impact on your current new claims procedures
  - any revision to your communications with customers, eg claim forms, leaflets, public notices
  - any information you provide to customers on your websites, and
  - what assurance strategies you could introduce to ensure that the revised procedures are working, eg sample check of cases
- 10 Monthly data-matches and targeted data scans will continue to have the potential to identify any discrepancies in declared capital.
- 11 The Audit Bodies have been made aware of this change in DWP's advice.

## Queries

- 12 Please direct any enquiries to  
[Adelphi.Fraud-Error-Policy@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Adelphi.Fraud-Error-Policy@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

## Housing Divisions within DWP have moved

- 13 This item first featured in *HB Direct Issue 83*, but is being repeated for information.
- 14 In the past the Housing Divisions were based at The Adelphi building in London, we have now moved to newly refurbished accommodation so that we can be located within the same building as our Ministerial team.
- 15 This means that whilst our email addresses will remain unchanged, our postal address and telephone numbers have changed. We have already embarked on an exercise to update all of the telephone numbers in the contacts list that is found in the HB area of the DWP website.
- 16 In the meantime the new postal address is
- First Floor  
Caxton House  
Tothill Street  
London  
SW1H 9NA
- 17 If you require further information please contact  
[Kath.Murphy@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Kath.Murphy@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

## NI 14 Reducing Avoidable Contact: the proportion of customer contact that is avoidable from the customers perspective – Applies in England

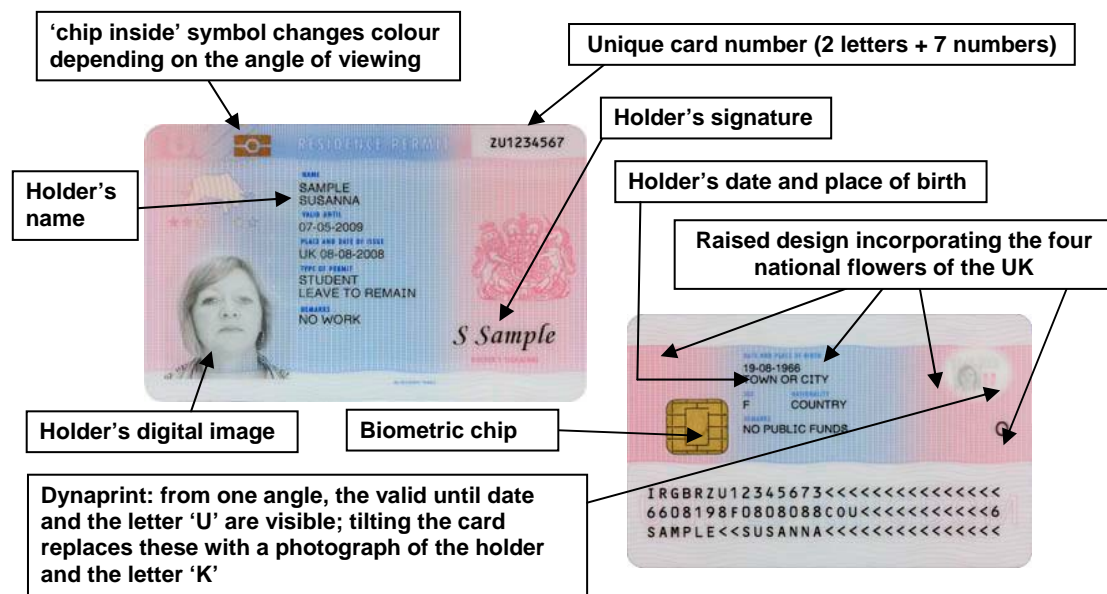
- 18 In England the suite of indicators includes one on reducing avoidable contact which extends to HB/CTB.
- 19 The purpose of the indicator which was set by the Cabinet Office is to reduce 'avoidable contact' between the community and LAs and is assessed from the customer's perspective rather than from the standards set by the authority for the authority. It aims to ensure that LA services are designed to meet the needs of service users.
- 20 **English** LAs will be required to report NI 14 data for the first time in April 2009 and are therefore expected to collect data from October 2008 so that they are in a position to report their performance in April 2009. The mechanisms for data collection can be based on existing Customer Relationship Management systems or using a simple paper proforma.
- 21 The Cabinet Office and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) have pointed out that this indicator should be used as a tool to identify local service delivery problems rather than as a national indicator. IDeA have developed a 'Community of Practice' where practitioners involved in implementing NI14 can ask questions and share their experiences - [www.communities.idea.gov.uk/welcome.do](http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk/welcome.do).
- 22 Communities and Local Government, the Cabinet Office and IDeA have jointly produced guidance to NI 14. The guidance is based on work in a number of pilot authorities.  
<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=8507853>
- 23 LAs wishing to know more about this indicator and arrangements for reporting should refer to the guidance and/or the Community of Practice.
- 24 Further clarification on this can be obtained from [Bob.kamall@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Bob.kamall@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk)

## National Identity Scheme - ID Cards for foreign nationals

- 25 Earlier articles in *HB/CTB Bulletin G19/2008* and *HB Direct Issue 82* informed you that from 25 November 2008 the UK Border Agency (UKBA) will issue compulsory identity cards to foreign nationals who apply for further leave to remain in the United Kingdom within certain categories, ie students and marriages/civil partnerships.
- 26 All HB/CTB staff should now make themselves familiar with the card - see diagram on page 5.

- 27 Although it is not intended to be the only source of ID, the card can be presented as a primary form of ID to prove the holder's identity, nationality, right to public funds, right to work and in connection with claims for Social Security benefits, including HB/CTB.
- 28 The ID card can also be referred to as a 'Residence Permit'
- 29 Customer facing staff particularly need to be able to recognise the card and check its validity, and be familiar with its security features. Please also refer to UKBA web page for more general guidance - (<http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/employersandsponsors/preventingillegalworking/idcardguide>)
- 30 HB/CTB guidance will be updated to reflect these changes.
- 31 Managers should also familiarise themselves with the card and its security features and ensure that all customer facing staff are made aware of the security features of the card.

## Security features



- 32 For more information about the ID Cards, though not for verification issues, please contact [PHILLIP.DE-SOUZA@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK](mailto:PHILLIP.DE-SOUZA@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK), or you can visit <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/managingborders/idcardsforforeignnationals/>

## **Consultation on amendments to the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) Order 1997 and the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) (Scotland) Order 1997**

- 33 As you will know the House of Lords delivered a judgment in the case of *Heffernan v The Rent Service* on 30 July 2008. The judgment fundamentally changes the way that localities are determined by rent officers. The House of Lords decision required that a locality should comprise the least number of neighbourhoods that could satisfy the provisions of the Rent Officers Order.
- 34 We are taking steps to amend the definitions of both localities and Broad Rental Market Areas (BRMA) in the Rent Officers Order to address any ambiguity that may have arisen following the House of Lords Judgment. We intend to make amendments to the Order that stabilise the current position rather than to effect any policy change.
- 35 The proposed amendments are
- a new and largely unified definition of BRMA that will apply in respect of both Local Housing Allowance (LHA) and Local Reference Rent (LRR) cases
  - the amended definitions of the areas will be generally similar except that the LRR definition is centred on the tenant and the LHA one is generic
  - the definition will allow areas to be drawn relatively broadly, and
  - to remove the requirement that an area should be made up of two or more neighbourhoods or district areas of residential accommodation
- 36 The proposed amendment to the Order went out for consultation on 18 November 2008 to key stakeholders. The deadline for comments on the draft Order is by 28 November 2008. We will update you on the progress of these amendments as soon as possible

### **Queries**

- 37 If you have any queries about this article, please contact [Olapeju.Akanwo@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Olapeju.Akanwo@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Statutory Instruments

- 38 The following Statutory Instrument (SI) has now been laid
- 2008 No. 2824, The Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (Amendment) (No.2) Regulations 2008, coming into force from 27 November 2008
- 39 Copies of SIs can now be downloaded from DWP's own website <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/advisers/docs/lawvols/bluevol/> and the website of the Office of Publication Information <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/stat.htm>

## What's new on the web

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

Document Type	Subject	Link
HB/CTB Circular A17/2008	Housing Benefit Data Service (HBDS) Timetable and revised process for transfer of the Housing benefit Recoveries and Fraud Return (HBRF) for 2008/09	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/A17-2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/A17-2008.pdf</a>
HB/CTB Circular A18/2008	Guidance on the content of The Employment and Support Allowance (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2008 - SI 2008/2428	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/A18-2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/A18-2008.pdf</a>
HB/CTB Circular A19/2008	Better off in Work Credit pilot	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/A19-2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/A19-2008.pdf</a>
HB/CTB Circular A20/2008	Change to method of claiming HB/CTB for people applying for Pension Credit over the phone	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/A20-2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/A20-2008.pdf</a>
HB/CTB Circular A21/2008	New appeals system	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/a21-2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/a21-2008.pdf</a>
HB/CTB Circular A22/2008	Guidance to Local Authorities on dealing with claims from those living in supported accommodation	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/a22-2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/circulars/2008/a22-2008.pdf</a>

Document Type	Subject	Link
HB/CTB Bulletin G20/2008	<p>Changes to the TAS1 Procedures - further advice</p> <p>Statutory Instruments</p> <p>Change to method of claiming HB/CTB for people applying for Pension Credit over the telephone</p>	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/bulletins/2008/G20-2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/bulletins/2008/G20-2008.pdf</a>
HB/CTB Bulletin G21/2008	<p>Single HB Extract (SHBE) and Housing Benefit Recoveries and Fraud (HBRF) Return</p> <p>The e-Transfer Project - Pilot exercise for the electronic transfer of the</p> <p>Local Authority Input Document (LAID)</p> <p>Customer Management System (CMS) Release 9</p> <p>New address for the Housing Divisions within DWP</p> <p>Government Connect, the GCSx Code of Connection – LAAs and</p> <p>POG Questions and Answers</p> <p>Commissioners' cases</p> <p>Statutory Instruments</p>	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/bulletins/2008/g21-2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/bulletins/2008/g21-2008.pdf</a>
HB Direct issue 83 October 2008	Newsletter	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/hb-direct-newsletter/2008/issue83-nov08.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/hb-direct-newsletter/2008/issue83-nov08.pdf</a>
Moredirect magazine October 2008	Magazine	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/hb-direct-newsletter/2008/moredirectOct08.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/hb-direct-newsletter/2008/moredirectOct08.pdf</a>

<b>Document Type</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Link</b>
Government Connect – the GCSx Code of Connection	Guidance	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/claims-processing/information-flow/whats-new/">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/claims-processing/information-flow/whats-new/</a>
HB Recoveries and Fraud (HBRF) guidance	Guidance	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/performance-value-for-money/returning-data.asp">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/performance-value-for-money/returning-data.asp</a>

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

41 The following HB/CTB Circulars have been issued this month

HB/CTB Circular A18/2008

HB/CTB Circular A19/2008

HB/CTB Circular A20/2008

HB/CTB Circular A21/2008

HB/CTB Circular A22/2008

HB/CTB Circular S5/2008

HB/CTB Circular F4/2008

## **Other publications issued this month**

42 The following publication has been issued this month

HB Direct Issue 83 November 2008