

## Editorial

As you can imagine, it is an exceptionally busy time in the world of Housing Benefit (HB) (when is it not, I hear you say!). You will all be aware of the lively debates, both in the Press and in Parliament, about the changes to HB announced in the Emergency Budget. There is also a Work and Pensions Select Committee hearing into the Budget changes and our Minister, Lord Freud, will be giving evidence this week. Meanwhile, as we report inside, we are preparing to lay regulations covering the first set of changes – the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) measures. In the coming months, we will want to continue and enhance our work with you to manage the transition.

You will have seen that the Government announced further welfare reform measures in the Spending Review, part of the much wider set of measures to address the budget deficit. The main change to HB is that, from April 2012, the LHA shared room rate (and single room rent in the old scheme), which apply to most single people aged under 25, will be extended to people aged 35 and under. Current exemptions, for example for those in receipt of severe disability premium and living in certain types of supported accommodation, will continue to apply. There are also changes to tax credits and Pension Credit that we will need to look at closely, to make sure we work out the implications for HB.

In the Spending Review, the Chancellor has confirmed that we will be taking forward work to introduce a Universal Credit over the next two Parliaments. This will combine all out-of-work income-related benefits (including HB) with tax credits to form one integrated source of help for all households that qualify. It will sharpen work incentives, remove complexity and reduce fraud and error. Although the plan is to start taking new claims to Universal Credit in 2013, there will be a lengthy transition period for existing cases. At the same time, the Chancellor announced proposals to reduce Council Tax Benefit (CTB) expenditure by 10% from 2013-2014 and localise to local authorities (LAs) (including devolution to Scotland and Wales). This means that CTB will not form part of Universal Credit but from April 2013 will be replaced by local schemes designed and administered by LAs, possibly within certain parameters. This should enable each LA to devise a scheme that best suits the needs of its local council tax payers, while managing spending within lower limits. As you can see, these are very major changes, with big implications for the work you do. Although they will not be coming in for some time, we will be working closely with you and your associations from now on as we develop these reforms.

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# The Automated Transfers to Local Authority Systems (ATLAS) Project

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has now agreed the IT solution which will supply and transfer the agreed data sets to LAs. Information will be sourced from DWP's Customer Information System (CIS) and sent securely to the appropriate LA's Data Transfer Appliance (DTA).

The ATLAS Project will be delivered in two phases. Phase 1, to be delivered in April 2011, will provide changes to HM Revenues & Customs (HMRC) tax credits and State Pension as a minimum. Phase 2, to be delivered in October 2011, will provide changes on all other benefits captured on CIS.

To conduct end to end testing we plan to introduce ATLAS to early adopter authorities for a period of three months. Evaluation will be carried out to ensure the system is fit for purpose before we roll out to the remaining LAs.

We have received indicative costs from the LA IT Suppliers to implement the required changes. In response to a Ministerial request to reduce all IT costs the project is liaising with suppliers to identify any cost reduction measures. The project will notify LAs of the available funding once we have received full cost estimates from DWP and LA IT suppliers.

The  **ATLAS** page on the DWP website is updated regularly. If you have any queries, please contact us on

 **Email: [QH.HBInfoFlowsProgramme@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK](mailto:QH.HBInfoFlowsProgramme@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK)**

# 2011 Budget measures

As you are aware, the Social Security Advisory Committee undertook a public consultation into the HB changes that will come into force in 2011. The Committee have now provided their report to the Department and we are considering their findings. We are still aiming to lay regulations to support the changes this month.

As we wrote in last month's edition, we are developing a range of communication products that we hope will help you in implementing these changes. Following discussion at the Practitioners Operational Group (POG), we are now finalising these products to ensure they will be available when regulations are laid.

If you have any enquires regarding this please contact

 **Email: [Olapeju.Akanwo@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Olapeju.Akanwo@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)**





# Housing Benefit subsidy for people in temporary accommodation

As most of you will know, we introduced a new Housing Benefit subsidy scheme for people in temporary accommodation, in April.

Following a recent consultation, Ministers have agreed to extend this subsidy scheme, from 1 April 2011, to include cases in other types of leased accommodation, such as housing association leasing schemes and accommodation that is leased for more than ten years, in Scotland and Wales.

The subsidy rates for 2011/12 will not be affected by the wider changes to LHA. They will also be fixed for two years, until the end of March 2013, to give you and other providers of temporary accommodation more certainty around funding.

The full details showing the scope and conditions of the new scheme are set out in the Explanatory Memorandum, which accompanies the legislation that was laid in Parliament on 18 October  [legislation.gov.uk](http://legislation.gov.uk)

An equality impact assessment is available on the  [DWP website](http://DWP website)

If you have any queries please contact

 Email: [joseph.stacey@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:joseph.stacey@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## New Fraud and Error Strategy

You might have seen the recent media coverage about the new Fraud and Error Strategy which was published on Monday 18th October. It can be found on the DWP's website at

 <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/tackling-fraud-and-error.pdf>

Next week, FESD will be sending a HB Direct Special to LAs only which will say more about the strategy and answer some of the burning questions that you have been asking.



# IRRV Annual Conference 28 – 30 September 2010

Did you or one of your colleagues attend the recent IRRV Annual Conference in Harrogate? If you did, we are keen to receive feedback from you.

From our stand we distributed many copies of our Information Brochure, how informative did you find the brochure?

For instance

- Did it provide useful information on current policies and projects?
- Do you have any suggestions which would enhance the usefulness of the brochure?
- Have you passed it round to colleagues who did not attend the conference?

If you spoke to any of the people who were representing DWP at the conference did you find them helpful?

We would welcome any feedback which can be sent to


 **Email: [mont.goldman@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:mont.goldman@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)**

# Employee Authentication Service (EAS) Project E-mail plea

The EAS Project is using GCSX and GSX Mailboxes to write to individuals at your authority involved in the EAS project. We will write to the Agents' GCSX or GSX Mailbox to invite them to their training event. One Agent has missed their training so far because they didn't know their IT department had set one up for them! If you are the designated Agent or Sponsor in your authority, please remember to regularly check your GCSX or GSX mailbox for correspondence from the project team.

Thank you.

Please remember to check the website

 **[www.dwp.gov.uk/eas](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/eas)** for regular updates,  
and the email hotline

 **Email: [eas.info@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:eas.info@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)** for queries.



# EAS CIS implementation project update

The national roll-out of EAS has started with the first Tranche of local authority agents (LA Agents) receiving their training invitations.

Tranche 1 LAs have now received the following documentation to ensure successful implementation of the EAS

- Business Implementation Guide
- Technical Implementation Guide
- Sponsor Pack + End User Tracker to be completed with the details of your authority's End Users

Tranche 1 LAs have received their dates to complete the following activities

- Operational Readiness Review (ORR) - a functional test conducted by your nominated technical contact to confirm that all the peripherals and software are installed and configured correctly
- Register, Enrol & Authorise (REA 1) – confirmation that the Agent can successfully register and enrol one CIS user, the DWP National Registration Authority (NRA) can authorise this user, and the CIS user can successfully log onto CIS
- REA2 – processing all remaining CIS users

And finally we have dispatched two packages containing the following for the installation of the EAS peripheral equipment to Tranche 1 LAs

## Package 1



Web camera  
Signature pad  
Smart Card reader  
Powered USB hub

## Package 2

Tokens  
Authentic web pack software installation CD

Your continuing help and support is appreciated and we thank you for the Base Information that you have already provided to enable us to communicate with the relevant personnel in your authority.

If you require further information or have any other questions, please contact us at

 **Email:** [eas.info@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:eas.info@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) or go to our website  [www.dwp.gov.uk/eas](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/eas)



# Overpayments exceed £1 million

This joint project between Stoke City Council and North Staffs DWP has been running since May 2008. Living Together (LT) fraud was the most prevalent fraud in Stoke-on-Trent so resources were targeted into looking at the problem, with the LA dedicating an investigator and support staff solely for this purpose.

All LT referrals were examined using a 'selection criteria' to ensure the investigation of high risk cases so as to make best use of resources.

Results to date

- 32 Prosecutions (8 receiving prison sentences, 3 suspended)  
16 of which have been LA led Prosecutions
- 26 Authorised for prosecution awaiting trial (12 LA and 14 DWP)
- 12 Formal Cautions
- 2 Administrative Penalties

Total Fraudulent Overpayments - £1,137,428.00

Every effort has been made to publicise the investigations, the majority have received local press coverage. Local radio has broadcast a report on Living Together fraud, which involved a reporter spending a day with the LA investigator.

The above results show what can be achieved by applying thorough evidence gathering techniques along with a strong commitment to joint working investigations.

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