

Housing Benefit Direct.....

September 2009

Issue 93

Editorial

I hope you are enjoying the rest of the Summer and that you have managed to get a break. It will soon be the start of the conference season again (IRRV rather than TUC!) and I will be in Scotland this week to speak at the annual Scottish IRRV conference. I have been

asked to talk, together with Ian Alcorn from West Lothian council, on the theme of 'Change is constant – benefits and welfare agenda', and I will try to set out some of the some of the drivers for change (population changes, social developments, for example) that make changes inevitable, even before you add in change initiated by political imperative or policy evaluation. In the course of doing a bit of research on this, I came across this quote by Winston Churchill: 'To improve is to change. To be perfect is to change often.' I think he must have been addressing a conference of benefit staff!



Change can of course be driven by factors such as security. As you know, we have been laying great emphasis on this recently. And I must congratulate and thank those (by far the majority) of you who have put so much effort into getting your authorities (in England and Wales) to meet the requirements of the GCSx Code of Connection. This has greatly assisted our e-transfer project, and we are now rapidly reaching the point where we will be switching on your 'servers' (Data Transfer Appliances) to enable you to receive e-LAIDs and e-LACIs from DWP. Can I take this opportunity to remind you, however, that one of the biggest business drivers of GCSx was to enable us to provide a more secure method of access to CIS than the internet. Therefore, from 1st October 2009, we plan to start the process of removing internet access to CIS. We will be working closely with Government Connect to ensure this change has minimal impact on business, but I do urge any of you who have not yet satisfied Government Connect that you comply with the Code of Connection to work as closely as possible with their team to meet the 30th September deadline.

As we have said, our new Ministers, Yvette Cooper (Secretary of State), and Helen Goodman, are looking closely at the Housing Benefit policy agenda. We are still committed to consult on further reform but of necessity this is going to be a bit later than we first envisaged. We will keep you fully informed of any more developments.

Finally, I am pleased that we have started to publish statistics on caseload again and these are now available for the period November 2008 to May 2009. As we make progress with the new arrangements we will be publishing caseload figures monthly from November this year.

Paul Howarth, Head of Housing Benefit Strategy Division
Email: Paul.Howarth@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

E Transfer Update

Government Connect are currently installing a Data Transfer Appliance (DTA) in every LA that delivers HB, to enable the receipt of the electronic LA Input Documents (LAIDs) from Jobcentre Plus and the LA Claim Information (LACI) from the Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS). The ESA LACI will also be available via the DTA later in the year.

Only one DTA will be provided per LA (including Unitary authorities) and it will be installed in the LA's corporate data centre (usually at the same location as the council's GCSX installation). However, each LA can nominate up to five users to access the DTA and distribute the attached files to appropriate parts of the organisation.

If an LA needs to pass this data to a third party (for example if all or part of the Benefits Service is outsourced), it should do so using appropriate secure means in accordance with both the DWP MOU and the Code of Connection.

Further information can be found on the Government Connect Website <http://www.govconnect.gov.uk/filetransfer/>

The LA Briefing Pack contains information on the e-transfer process and includes the action each LA needs to take when the DTA has been installed. The Briefing Pack is available on the DWP Website

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/claims-processing/hb-information-flows-programme/e-transfer-update/>

DWP Department for
Work and Pensions

CIS/EAS Implementation Project Update

Welcome to the first of our monthly updates on how the Customer Information System (CIS)/Employee Authentication System (EAS) implementation project is progressing. This project looks to ensure all access to CIS is through a secure 2-factor authentication route by the end of next year and to establish CIS onto the EAS. The rollout of EAS tokens and access to all local authority CIS users will take place over the next twelve months. This column will aim to provide regular updates to keep you informed.



Last month we started the ball rolling by sending letters to all Section 151 Officers and the Revenues & Benefits Managers informing them about the project and what they need to do. Copies of the letters are available on our website (details below) to give you some of the background to the project. Equally you may want to talk to your IT counterparts about finding out more about EAS and the benefits it could bring to your authority. The Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) EAS Project team, would be happy to speak to them about any queries they might have and have organised a number of events about EAS via SOCITM (the Society of Information Technology Management).

September will be a busy month for us as we are presenting on the CIS/EAS implementation project at two conferences. The first will be at the HB Info Conference on 14 September and then at the IRRV conference 29 September - 1 October. We will be located at stand no 14 and will be holding a workshop on the 30 September at the IRRV conference so if you are attending why not come and see us.

And don't forget, if you have any queries you can find out more information at our webpage

www.dwp.gov.uk/eas or by emailing the project team at EAS.INFO@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK

Real time 'in-claim' verification pilot

Earlier this year, in consultation with DWP, Sungard Public Sector piloted the application of their data analysis and risk modelling in relation to both the administration of new claims and for 'in claim' activity.

The evaluation of the 'in claim' elements of the pilot ('Intercept Risk' product) which includes interventions and targeted scans is now available. The DWP has been fully involved in the quality assurance of data and monitoring of pilot outcomes.

The Intercept product was piloted in Glasgow City Council. The pilot's aims were to:

- Compare the usability between the DWP High Risk Review file delivered on a monthly basis and the Sungard's real time risk score made available at an assessor's desk-top.
- Trial the use of weekly SHBE (Single Housing Benefit Extract) for improved targeting.
- Measure the efficiencies of using Sungard's risk analysis and risk modelling.

Main Conclusions from the pilot were:

- Process efficiencies as the LA is able to apply its own business rules in the selection of cases for intervention.
- Enables targeting of claims at greatest risk of having a change in circumstances and production of effective 'duty to notify' campaigns.
- High Intervention Success Rates - out of 1390 interventions completed, 78% of risk based target claims identified change.

Want to know more on how and what the pilot tested?

Full report available on www.sungardps.com/aspiren

For further information please contact james.rawlins@sungardps.com

SHBE (Single HB Extract) - Have your say!

Information Delivery has been working closely with LAs and software companies to remove the requirement to submit two separate data extracts to DWP each month. The switch-over from Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) to Single HB Extract (SHBE) for HBMS data matching is now well underway. Rigorous data quality checks have been taking place and 238 LAs have now had their HBMS extract 'switched-off' and we are using their SHBE for HBMS data matching.

We have been closely monitoring the change-over to ensure that there has been no deterioration in service and we would welcome your comments and experiences following the switch from HBMS to SHBE. We intend to issue a questionnaire to a sample of LAs in September but we would also like to invite comments from all LAs relating to this process change.

Please send your comments to IFDDMS.HBMSDIT@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

IRRV annual conference - We'll be there!!

DWP staff from Housing Benefit Strategy (HBSD), LA Performance (LAPD), and Fraud and Error Strategy Divisions (FESD) will be attending the IRRV Annual Conference and Exhibition at the Bournemouth International Centre from 29th September to 1st October.

HBSD and Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) HB Liaison can be found on stand 14. In addition to our Information Brochure which summarises the key activities currently underway within our policy areas, we will have representatives from the In and Out of Work project, the CIS Employee Authentication Service (EAS) Implementation project and Housing Benefit Data Matching Service.

The HB Fraud and Error Policy team, now part of FESD, and the Performance Development Team can be found at Stand 50. Both teams continue to support you in your efforts to drive down fraud and error.

Colleagues from Staff and Systems, and Customers and Information teams will be able to tell you about the benefits of HB fraud and error integration into FESD, as well as discuss some of the projects and products we have in place to support you.

Also joining us will be colleagues from DWP Communications. They will be bringing you up to date with the 'Targeting Benefit Thieves' campaign and will be letting you know how you are supporting the campaign and how you can get involved.

Further information is available from Mont.Goldman@dwp.gsi.gov.uk



More online services for DWP customers

DWP customers can already go online and use the Benefits Adviser service on the Directgov website to find out which benefits they may be entitled to.

Later this month we will enhance this service to enable customers to obtain an estimate of the amount of benefit they may be awarded.

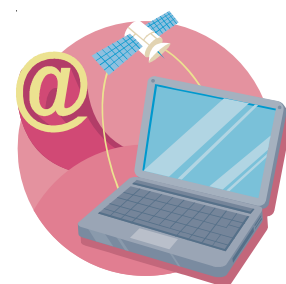
In addition there is a 'what if' facility where customers can input potential changes in their circumstances to see how this affects their benefits. For example, they will see if they would be financially better off in work.

Three of the eleven benefits and credits covered by this enhancement are HB, CTB and Second Adult Rebate. The service will make it clear that any financial information given is an estimate only.

The enhanced Benefits Adviser service comes just a few weeks after the launch of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) Online – an online service that allows contributions-based JSA customers to fill in and submit their claim on the Directgov website.

It's all part of the way in which DWP is improving the access customers have to its services. These online facilities provide an extra option in how to contact the Department, something a growing number of our customers have told us they want. DWP will be delivering more online services during 2010.

Further information is available from Rebecca.Hill@dwp.gsi.gov.uk



Secondment opportunity

Overpayments Policy Team

Do you have substantial experience of HB/CTB Overpayments and strong written communication skills, which can be utilized to review and update the Overpayments Guide, ensuring it is 'user friendly' and practical?

We are looking for someone from an LA to join the team for six months, starting in mid October 2009. During this time you will be seconded to the DWP and based at Quarry House in Leeds.

The work

- Working with the small Overpayments Policy team in Leeds, carrying out a full review of the present Overpayments Guide.
- Identify and incorporate changes to regulations and policy since the guide was updated in 2007.
- Develop and write comprehensive HB/CTB Overpayments guidance.
- Using experience gained in the field, devise and formulate examples that will make the guidance clear and logical.

The person

- We are looking for someone who is highly motivated, with a strong background in HB/CTB Overpayments.
- Someone who can take a leading role in a small team to push forward the amendments to the Overpayments Guide.
- Someone who has the ability to bring together information and guidance from a wide range of sources to develop detailed guidance that will be used by LAs on a daily basis.
- Someone with strong communication skills with the capability of producing effective written material.

As part of our role we need to increase support to LAs by updating the guidance on HB/CTB overpayments issues and giving clear explanations of DWP policy in these areas. We aim to take advantage of your experience of the recovery processes and also draw on your knowledge of LAs' interpretation of existing Overpayments guidance.

If you are interested in a career development opportunity helping to raise the general understanding of HB and CTB overpayments, and are preferably at S01/S02 level, please send your CV by email to Jane Autherson (email address below), no later than **18th September 2009**. I am afraid we are unable to pay for any costs incurred in getting to Quarry House on a daily basis.

For further information please contact **Jane Autherson** on ☎ **0113 232 7755** or email ✉ **Jane.Autherson@dwp.gsi.gov.uk**

