

## Editorial

It was good to see many of you again at the IRRV Conference in Bournemouth yesterday. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to stay more than one day this time, though a quite a few of us from DWP were there to speak to people who visited our stand.

In my speech, I covered a good many of the changes ahead, both definite and possible, and funding issues - where the message is that some further help to deal with the impact of the downturn is likely in the short-term, but a further efficiency challenge is almost certain for April 2011 and beyond.

We also had a discussion about the future, including the current debates about local and central delivery and the need to articulate what might be the optimum solution. This debate will clearly be very important over the coming months.

It was heartening to speak to the short-list nominees for Benefits Team of the Year award; all were focusing on the customer, and were implementing real-time processing of some sort. Some of the improvements in the overall service provided to customers were truly amazing. I think the customers were amazed too! It is a pity only one team can win (at the time of writing I do not know the result) as they all seemed worthy winners to me!

I am particularly pleased to see an article this month from Birmingham City Council about take-up. We are very keen to learn about what works best in this area so if you want to add to this do feel free to write in. More next time.

You will notice that we've slightly changed the format of Housing Benefit Direct this month and it is now fully electronic. If you have any comments on this please send them to Kath Murphy at [CaxtonHouse.LAFeedback@dwpgsi.gov.uk](mailto:CaxtonHouse.LAFeedback@dwpgsi.gov.uk)

Finally, some of you may already be aware that Jim Boyd from Pensions, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) retired recently. Jim was the main focal point for PDCS liaison with local authorities and worked immensely hard with us in many ways. We wish him well for the future. And we're very pleased that Caroline Woodhead has taken over his post.

 Email: [Paul.Howarth@dwpgsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.Howarth@dwpgsi.gov.uk)



# Free geodemographic tool for local authorities

Geodemographics is widely defined as the 'analysis of people and where they live'. As a system geodemographic tools have long been used by major retailers to understand their customers in order to target their products/resources and marketing/publicity strategies, etc.

Output Area Classification (OAC) has been developed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and is being promoted by Local Futures and their Collective Insights partnership as a common language for understanding citizens, customers and communities. It is the only geodemographic tool accredited as a national statistic.

Local authorities are increasingly recognising the need to be citizen focused in the delivery of your services. Some of you are already using commercial neighbourhood classifications to target various campaigns and improve the delivery of your services. OAC is a free alternative for you to use.

It can be used to analyse the characteristics of local customers and communities. It can help you understand the diversity of local neighbourhoods and inform priority areas for targeted interventions (such as take-up campaigns) and/or resources.

For more information about OAC and support offered go to



# CIS Prompts to LAs Project

Tax Credit (TC) information has been available on the Customer Information System (CIS) for some time but LAs do not receive any notification from DWP of changes to and new awards of TC which can lead to overpayments. The CIS Prompts to LAs project, part of the HB Information Flows Programme, is seeking to address this.

The project is working with CIS to deliver electronic prompts to LAs when changes that are not covered by the current ETD service occur. This will include changes to and new awards of TC and some further DWP benefits. The current Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD) process will not be affected by this.

Implementation of the CIS Prompts is planned for April 2010. Information will be provided as the project progresses via future editions of HB Direct and HB/CTB General Information Bulletins.

In the meantime if you want more information please contact Simon Wainwright or Jo Wood via

 **Email: [qh.hbinfoflowsprogramme@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:qh.hbinfoflowsprogramme@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)**



# Employment and Support Allowance CAM System

The full version of this item was published in Bulletin HB/CTB G16/2009 but this extract is being repeated in HB Direct to ensure that all LAs are aware of this change.

The Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Customer Account Management (CAM) system has been operational since 27/10/08. To date customers wishing to make a joint HB/CTB claim alongside their ESA claim have had a clerical HCTB1 issued to them for completion which they should return direct to LAs.

From 26/10/09 the process for customers wishing to claim HB/CTB alongside a new or repeat ESA claim will be to complete a full gather of HB/CTB information on the CAM system. At the point that the gather for ESA is complete (or after one calendar month if the customer has not provided all the ESA required information) the claim information will be forwarded to the appropriate LA on a Local Authority Claim Information (LACI) document.

During the summer of 2009 we undertook a series of seminars to highlight this change, full guidance is available on the LA Resource website at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/claims-processing/closer-working-with-dwp/employment-and-support-allowance/#esa>

If you have any questions arising from this change please contact us on

 Email: [hbsdmp.wweg@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:hbsdmp.wweg@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

# Amendment to the Rent Officers Order

From 12th October 2009 we are making a minor amendment to The Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) Order 1997 and the Rent Officers (Housing Benefit Functions) (Scotland) Order 1997 ('The Order').

This amendment to Schedule 3B of the Order inserts a provision which enables rent officers to include rents from other comparable Broad Rental Market Areas when compiling a list of rents for each category of dwelling to determine Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates.

This 'extrapolation' provision is used when the rent officer is not satisfied in any month that their list of rents contains a sufficient number of dwellings to enable them to determine a representative LHA rate.

A similar provision which had similar effect was inadvertently removed when we made changes to the Order which came into effect on 5 January 2009. As the amendment restores the original policy intention we have not consulted on this change. This is a technical amendment and we do not anticipate any impact on your business.

The Order can be found in the Office of Public Sector Information.

 [follow this link](#)

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# Local Authority Omnibus Survey, Reports for wave 18

The summary and final reports for Wave 18 of the LA Omnibus Survey are now available to download from the website.

As in previous waves the final report will be published electronically as separate sections, each available as a \*.pdf file for download from the website via the following URL [http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/report\\_abstracts/rr\\_abstracts/rra\\_590.asp](http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/report_abstracts/rr_abstracts/rra_590.asp)

The contents for wave 18 are

Title and contents

Section A: Information

Section B: Efficiency work programme

Section C: Corporate Contact Centres

Section D: Local Housing Allowance

Section E: National Indicators

Section F: Right Benefit Toolkit

Section G: Voice Risk Analysis

Section H: Working Age Customers

Section I: Appendices

The wave 18 summary report is also available using the following URL address <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/summ2009-2010/590summ.pdf>

Further information is available from

 Email: [Figen.deviren@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Figen.deviren@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

# *moredirect* – ideas and suggestions welcome

The latest edition of *moredirect* has just been published and should be available on the HB area of the DWP website very soon.

So what better time to ask if you have any ideas or suggestions for topics that you would like to see featured in the next issue of the magazine due out in Spring 2010? This is your magazine after all.

Do you have any comments or views about the layout and format of *moredirect*?

Please send your contributions as soon as possible to [Central-Services-Team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Central-Services-Team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

Alternatively, you can call me, Robert Sneddon, on [0207 712 2568](tel:02077122568) to discuss potential articles.

I look forward to hearing from you.



# Birmingham Revenues and Benefits Take Up

Birmingham City Council has supported benefit take up activities for some considerable time through a dedicated team located within our Benefits Service. The Council's commitment to take up recognises not only the importance to the individuals who benefit but also to local communities in terms of income generation and support for jobs. There are also the financial benefits through council tax and rental income.

The Team proactively seeks ways of identifying potential claimants through a wide range of measures including extensive use of benefit and other Council data and extensive partnership working with a range of agencies including health officials, housing associations and other parts of the City Council such as Adults and Communities.

We also respond to individual requests from either members of the public directly or from referrals via our Neighbourhood Offices.

While there is a natural emphasis on Council benefits the Team provides a holistic service across all benefits with an emphasis on good targeting and assisted claims to maximise effectiveness.

Last year the Team helped local people to claim over £8.5 million in additional benefit, approximately £12 for each £1 we invest in providing the service.

We have recently commenced a carer's premium take up campaign. Using information from our HB system, we identified claimants who were in receipt of attendance allowance, where there was a second person in the household but carer's premium was not in payment.

This campaign resulted in assisting in excess of 250 people to claim £600,000 worth of benefits. We have now extended the campaign to look at DLA claims on the same basis.

With the forthcoming disregard of child benefit from November 2010, we are looking at how we can get the message to people who, prior to this change, may not have been eligible to receive HB/CTB.

We will be contacting all claimants with children, who have previously applied or received benefit for part of this year drawing attention to the changes and inviting fresh claims and/or a request for a benefit calculation.

We have also worked with colleagues from Education to utilise the extensive schools and children's centres information network to promote and publicise the changes.

If you would like to find out more about our take up work or you have any best practice from your own activities you can share with us, please contact

 Email: [Patrick.nolan@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Patrick.nolan@birmingham.gov.uk)

