

Editorial

As you read this, you will be beginning to implement two important changes to the structure of Housing Benefit: disregarding Child Benefit and increasing the lower capital limit for pensioners. Both will have a significant impact on poverty. At this time, it's worth thinking about the fundamental purpose of Housing Benefit. It is really about giving people opportunity – to live in a decent home, to participate more fully in society and to escape poverty. So in my book, measures such as disregarding Child Benefit are the most significant of all because they are about outcomes and not (just) processes.

Also today (Monday 2nd November), those of us working here in Caxton House are going to hear at first hand how these outcomes are being achieved in Birmingham. We've invited Chris Gibbs, who heads revenues and benefits at Birmingham, to speak to us all at a lunchtime seminar. I understand it is already standing room only, which is really good. I'm delighted that there is so much interest here in how Housing Benefit is working in practice. We need to keep constantly up to date about operational issues and concerns. It is not always possible to come out to visit you as much as we would like and this is another way for many of us here to learn more about how things are going.

The deadline for completing your connection to GCSX (Government Connect) has now passed. As I understand it, all authorities have successfully completed the process for becoming Code of Connection compliant. This represents a very considerable achievement, and well done to you all. But, one week before the deadline, there was evidence that some LAs were continuing to use the old internet route to connect to CIS rather than their shiny new GCSX connection! Perhaps old habits die hard! I therefore want to remind you that DWP will be removing the internet connection in the near future, indeed we carried out a test disconnection for three hours on 28th October. I'm pleased to say that this gave rise to (mercifully!) fewer incidents than expected. We are also aware of some remaining loose ends concerning some of the third party contractors some of you use in the administration of benefits, we are monitoring the position here particularly closely.

Inevitably, the helpdesk we have set up are getting quite a high number of calls at the moment as LAs take their final steps onto the new infrastructure. The team are bearing up well under the strain and are processing enquiries as quickly as they can but sometimes finding the answer to a question isn't entirely straightforward so do please bear with them.

 Email: Paul.Howarth@dwp.gsi.gov.uk



Child Benefit is disregarded in HB and CTB

From today, Child Benefit will no longer be deducted from HB and CTB payments, boosting the incomes of many of the lowest paid families, including many of those parents with children living in poverty. It is estimated that in excess of 200,000 working families will be an average of £20 a week better off.

This is good news for many current recipients who will receive more benefit with which to pay rent and council tax. And many other low income families will become newly entitled to HB and CTB as a result of the change.

These benefits can be claimed by customers who are in paid employment, so this change is an added financial incentive for unemployed parents to go back to work.

Your authorities will need to reassess the cases of those customers who are likely to be affected by the disregard, and new claims to benefit will need to be made by those who become newly entitled.

A new campaign explaining the benefits of working is soon to be launched by DWP in cooperation with local partners. More details will follow in the coming weeks.

For more information contact

 Email: nelly.lawrie@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Updating the costs of administering HB and CTB

The Department is undertaking research to update its understanding of the costs to you of administering HB and CTB. Since we last carried out this type of research, in 2004, there have been a number of changes to HB and CTB. We expect that this, combined with the changing economic climate means that there will have been changes to how you deliver the benefits service, and how much it costs.

We have commissioned Risk Solutions, an independent research company, to conduct this research. The work will involve a combination of case studies (carried out by Risk Solutions) and a breadth survey (carried out by GfK NOP).

Over the next few weeks, we will be inviting a selection of LAs from across England, Scotland and Wales to reflect the range of challenges facing benefits services. This will help to ensure that the final cost estimates are robust, and that the Department gains an improved understanding of what drives costs.

The research team will make every effort to reduce the burden on LAs during the case study visits, and participation, analysis and data will be anonymised before publication.

Further information is available from

 Email: figen.deviren@dwp.gsi.gov.uk



'And they thought they'd never be caught'

A new phase of our Targeting Benefit Thieves campaign launches on 2 November: 'and they thought they'd never be caught'.

New adverts are based on customer insight, which shows that people don't believe they will be caught committing benefit fraud. The campaign helps to dispel this myth by using powerful statistics which highlight how many thieves we jointly caught last year.

National TV ads carry a message 'it's not if we catch you, it's when'. The ad uses common scenarios to demonstrate fraud. It then cleverly turns benefit thieves' complacency against them by showing the number of fraudsters we caught, and the harsh consequences they face.

Extra campaign activity will run in forty LA areas. Media includes two new radio ads, outdoor posters and online ads. To deepen the message and underpin the advertising, this will be complemented by PR.

All LAs are welcome to link in to the campaign by making use of the new online toolkit at www.dwp.gov.uk/benefit-thieves/local-authorities launching on 2 November and includes copies of the campaign materials. A slide presentation and poster templates are available to download and customise with your own contact details.

For more details contact Joanna Hennessy

Tel: 0113 232 4783

 Email: Joanna.Hennessy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

In and Out Of Work Process

Closer working between Jobcentre Plus, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and LAs, has joined up the services available to certain customers who are moving into and out of employment by providing a single point of contact to claim their benefits and credits. Over 200 of your LAs have adopted In and Out Of Work and are now enjoying the benefits it brings.

Jobcentre Plus collects the information, then shares it quickly and more securely with LAs thanks to the new IT systems that have been developed. Feedback from staff is positive, with a reduction in double handling of information and improved processing times for HB and CTB.

The new processes are also proving very popular with customers. A recent survey revealed that people had seen an improvement in the customer service they received, and increased confidence to take up employment in the future (particularly short-term) thanks to their benefits being turned 'on and off' much more quickly.

Rollout will continue over the coming months and is still on track to be completed across Great Britain by early 2010.

If you would like further information, please see the In and Out Of Work pages on the DWP website, or contact the project at

 Email: IOW@JOBCENTREPLUS.GSI.GOV.UK



Joint Working goes from strength to strength in Stoke-on-Trent

The continued commitment to work on a joint basis and combine resources between the Stoke City Council's Benefit Investigation Team and the DWP Fraud Investigation Service is producing significant results.

Since April 2009 there have been 57 joint sanctions with 31 of these being successful prosecutions. The prosecutions were conducted by both the Council's legal team and the DWP Solicitors Branch. These figures show that an impressive 54% of all joint sanctions have resulted in prosecution with many of these receiving press and even TV coverage, for maximum deterrent effect.

In total, 65% of all sanctions and fraudulent overpayments highlighted are as a result of joint working.

This high standard is achieved by regular meetings between the teams and a committed effort to ensure that all suitable referrals are offered for investigation by both parties.

Living Together Project

A joint project to put extra commitment into investigating living together (L/T) fraud is also proving to be successful, resulting in eight L/T prosecutions (two of which received custodial sentences) and six other sanctions to date. There are a further 16 L/T prosecutions awaiting trial.

The total overpayment figure from the project so far, stands at £413,666.

The project has received local press and radio coverage and there has also been some work with ITV which is soon to be broadcast.

All of this has been achieved with no extra resource to either team.

Martin Nicholls
Benefit Investigations Manager
Stoke on Trent City Council

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EAS CIS Implementation Project Update

Welcome to this, our third update on the EAS CIS Implementation Project. It has been another busy few weeks for the project with a number of major events occurring

- 1 Piloting the system: We are currently in the middle of the pilot of the new access system to CIS. We will be doing two more pilots before the full implementation. Some of you have kindly volunteered for these pilots but we are looking for more volunteers for both. Terms of Reference can be found on the website www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/eas-tor-pilot.pdf
- 2 The IRRV Conference: We presented to the IRRV conference in Bournemouth and have included many of the questions asked in the FAQs. The presentation can be found here <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/irrv-presentation-sep09.pdf>
- 3 LA Agents and Sponsors: Over 80% of your LAs have responded with their LA agent and sponsor name but the project needs 100% returns before we can proceed to the next stage. So if you are an R&B manager and have not responded please email the helpdesk. You will find the initial letter from Paul Howarth at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/rev-ben-eascis-letter-aug09.pdf>

Do get in touch with us if you have any further queries or questions and check out the website for the latest news and information at www.dwp.gov.uk/eas

The EAS CIS Implementation Project

 Email: eas.info@dwp.gsi.gov.uk



Secondment opportunities - Housing Benefit Strategy Division

There are a number of opportunities within the Housing Benefit Strategy Division for people from LAs to join us for six months, starting in January 2010. There will be opportunities for secondments to the DWP based at Caxton House in central London, Quarry House in central Leeds or Peel Park in Blackpool.

The work

The secondments bring with them the opportunity to work on a number of important issues relating to HB and CTB, for example

- raising awareness of Housing Benefit as an in-work benefit
- pushing forward proposals to rename Council Tax Benefit
- delivering any changes to policy that may be announced following the Pre Budget Report and/or the HB Review
- helping deliver the Employee Authentication Service to all LAs by October 2010
- helping deliver projects that form part of the Information Flows Programme (covering the electronic exchange of data between DWP and LAs)
- working with the small Overpayments Policy team based in Leeds, to assist in a full review of the Overpayments Guide and considering options for further policy development

The people

We are looking for

- people who are highly motivated, with a strong background in HB/CTB. Experience of HB/CTB

overpayments, while not essential, would be desirable for one of the roles

- people with strong team working skills who would be able to assist DWP colleagues in pushing forward a range of issues relating to the future of HB/CTB
- people who have 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
- people with strong communication skills with the capability of producing effective written material
- people with project management skills
- people with knowledge of the existing data flows between DWP and LAs (things like LAIDs, LACIs and ETDs)

If you are interested, we aim to take advantage of your experience of working with HB/CTB and to also draw on your knowledge of LAs' interpretation of existing guidance and procedures, including those relating to overpayments.

If you are interested in a career development opportunity, and are at S01/S02/PO1/PO2 level, please send your CV by email to Gary Rodgers (email address below), no later than 20 November 2009. We are not normally able to pay for any costs incurred in getting to our sites (Caxton House, Quarry House, Peel Park) on a daily basis but may be able to make an exception for the right candidates.

For further information please contact Gary Rodgers on 0207 449 5343

 Email: Gary.Rodgers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk



NB. Whilst we are happy to include this article we cannot endorse the product.

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For further information please contact Simon Lawrence, Learning & Development manager

 **Email: LandD@croydon.gov.uk**

Tel: 0208 8726 6000 ext 62850

