

## Editorial

As I'm sure most of you know by now, the public consultation on Housing Benefit reform is well underway and we have received over 50 responses already. This is in addition to the debate which is currently taking place on the IRRV, Chartered Institute of Housing and hbinfo message boards, which I think shows the depth of interest that our reform proposals has stirred. Many of the responses have focused on the ways in which Housing Benefit can do more to help people get back into work as well as to improve the quality and energy efficiency of private rented sector homes. But the consultation closes on 22nd February so get your responses in! It was good to see some of you at the consultation events that CIPFA organised. I was at the London event and I came with Helen Goodman, our Minister, to the one in Birmingham. There were very lively debates at both. We will also be coming along to the IRRV Benefits conference in Southport so do drop by and talk to us about Housing Benefit reform (as well as everything else!). Helen will also be speaking at the IRRV conference (on the Thursday).

I know that, increasingly, many of you receive requests for HB/CTB data from other parts of your authority connected to the delivery of a range of services, e.g. Free School Meals, Education Maintenance Allowances. Often, for legal reasons, there are limitations on the data that can be shared, even though greater access may improve customer service. We are currently reviewing data-sharing policy to see whether there are areas where more flexibility would be helpful to customers, local authorities and government.

So I am pleased to see (in the last General Information Bulletin) that authorities in England and Wales have been making good use of the Free School Meal Eligibility Checking Service (FSM ECS), also known as the hub. This user-friendly example of data-sharing facilitates lawful sharing of information between three different government departments, allowing you to easily check FSM eligibility at one source. Many of you have provided positive feedback about the service helping them to speed up their FSM application process. Some of you have even integrated the service with your own IT systems to provide a complete online FSM application service. If you need more information or wish to register for use, please

contact  [ges@hertscc.gov.uk](mailto:ges@hertscc.gov.uk)

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## Help to remind benefit thieves about the risk of being caught

Following a successful launch last year, the Targeting Benefit Thieves campaign *And they thought they'd never be caught* will run again throughout February and March. The campaign continues to dispel the myth that people can get away with fraud and uses powerful statistics to show just how many thieves we caught.

National TV ads will go live from 1 February for six weeks. Outdoor advertising in our 40 target LA areas will include posters at bus stops, shopping centres, phone kiosks and on bus sides. This will be supported by online advertising and PR activity.

During this phase we will also run communications aimed at people who go abroad and claim UK benefits they are not entitled to. Activity will include 'abroad fraud' banner ads on travel related websites and email host sites such as Hotmail and Yahoo!.

You are welcome to link in to the campaign by making use of the online toolkit. As well as the campaign ads and customisable poster templates, it has been enhanced to include copies of example press materials. You may find these useful to reference or customise with your own local information and data, when developing communications to publicise successful court cases for example. The toolkit is available at

 [www.dwp.gov.uk/benefit-thieves/local-authorities](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/benefit-thieves/local-authorities)

For more information please contact Joanna Hennessy

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## HB/CTB Overpayments Guide

The HB/CTB Overpayments Guide is currently being re-written as it was last updated in 2007 and there have been numerous changes since then.

The amendments will be produced by Jane Autherson, who is responsible for this area of policy, assisted by myself, Ben Travers. I have been seconded from Calderdale Council specifically for this task.

Last time the guide was re-written we asked you for contributions in the form of suggestions, comments, good practice, letters and leaflets. We received an excellent response and are keen to encourage it again. We would especially like any ideas you have on how we could make the guide more user-friendly and informative.

We have written to your LA Associations seeking volunteers to quality assure (QA) the amendments we are going to make. If you would like to be included in this, please contact us by 5 February 2010. The first amended chapter will be sent out for QA week commencing 8 February 2010.

If you have any suggestions for the guide, or any queries, we would be happy to hear from you. We hope to publish the updated Guide in early June, so it would help if you could get back to us by the end of March.

My email address is  [ben.travers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ben.travers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)



# IRRV Benefits/Benefits Fraud Conference – We'll be there!!

DWP will once again be attending the IRRV Benefits/Benefit Fraud Conference and Exhibition at the Southport Convention Centre from 9 to 11 February 2010. Staff from HB Strategy Division (HBSD), LA Performance, and Fraud and Error Strategy Divisions (FESD) will be there.

HBSD, Pension Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) HB Liaison and Information Directorate staff can be found on stands 7 and 8. In addition to our Information Brochure which summarises the key activities currently underway within our policy areas, we will have copies of the HB Consultation document. Throughout the week, we will have representation from the Consultation team and HB Data Matching Service. On Tuesday, a representative from the CIS Prompts project will be on the stand, and the Employee Authentication Service will be represented all week.

At stand 9 you will find staff from FESD who will bring you up to date on some of the initiatives you are interested in such as One Strike, VRA, and the Right Benefit Toolkit. The Performance Development Team (PDT) who provide a FREE consultancy service will be there too. Both teams continue to support you in your efforts to drive down fraud and error.

In particular, colleagues will also be available throughout the event to let you know more about our plans for national roll-out of Credit Reference Agency data-matches in April. We strongly encourage all fraud managers and other interested parties to collect an 'Information Pack' detailing what you need to do to prepare – training for some of you will commence in March.

Also joining us will be staff from DWP Communications. They will be bringing you up to date with the *And they thought they'd never be caught* campaign and will be letting you know how you are supporting the campaign and how you can get involved.





# EAS CIS Implementation Project Update

Welcome to our February update on the EAS CIS Implementation Project. For those attending the IRRV conference in Southport this month we will be on stand 8 so do come over and talk to us.

Key items for this update are

- **Revenue & Benefits Managers, Agents & Sponsors:** We have recently sent you a letter discussing next steps, some of the technical requirements of the project and the need to ensure you have a GCSX email address for secure emails. We will also be in touch soon to get details of the GCSX email addresses of your key people for wider DWP use. The letter can be found in the 'What's New' section of the EAS website  [www.dwp.gov.uk/eas](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/eas)
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Updated:** We have updated the implementation FAQs to reflect the greater detail we now hold thanks to the pilots. This is particularly useful around the technical elements of the roll-out. You will find this in the 'What's new' section of the EAS website  [www.dwp.gov.uk/eas](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/eas)
- **Piloting the system:** Thanks to everyone who has responded to our request for authorities to pilot the system. We are currently conducting the small implementation pilot but are looking for volunteers for the large implementation pilot. Training for the Large Implementation Pilot will be held in London but any LA is welcome to join  [www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/eas-tor-pilot.pdf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/eas-tor-pilot.pdf)
- **Local Registration Authorities:** we are in the process of supporting DCSF in contacting all LAs that have indicated they wished to access EAS via a local RA rather than the National RA. If taking the local RA option remember you will need to have business plans, funding and project team in place by end March to fit with the implementation timeline.

Please write to us at  [eas.info@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:eas.info@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) 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](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/eas).

*The EAS CIS Implementation Project Team*

