

## Editorial

Hello everyone

Paul Howarth, who normally writes these editorials, is just catching up in the office after a week at the frontline. He spent the week at Brighton local authority, Brighton Jobcentre and the Jobcentre Plus Benefit Delivery Centre at Worthing. So it will be interesting to know how it went. This gives me an opportunity to introduce myself - to those I haven't met already - as the Head of our Local Authority Performance Division, here in DWP. My main jobs are to support and incentivise local authorities' administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefit (HCTB), measure and monitor performance across the system, and decide what subsidy should be paid. I'm keen to hear your views about these things, particularly what you're doing well that others can learn from, what needs improving and, given the pressure across public finances, where we can save money with the least pain.

This month's edition of Housing Benefit Direct highlights some welcome progress. For example, implementation of the In and Out of Work initiative is almost complete. All of you are now receiving HCTB claim information electronically, which speeds up the administering of claims and reduces the risk of them getting lost. And we are now using the Single Housing Benefit Extract for data matching, which reduces work for you. If there's any aspect of our work that you'd like to know more about, please let us know and we can include it in a future newsletter.

I'll stop now, so you can dive into this newsletter and so I can start planning my week at the frontline, which I very much hope will be in a Local Authority.

Best wishes

James Price

Head of Local Authority Performance Division, DWP

Tel: 020 7449 5377. Mobile: 07867 907629.



## E Transfer Update – The completion of National Rollout of phases 1 - 3

We are pleased to announce that phases 1 to 3 of the e-Transfer Project have been successfully rolled out. All Local Authorities (LAs) in the United Kingdom are now receiving HB and CTB claim information electronically. This means claim information is received quicker, which improves customer service by helping to reduce end to end processing times. By using a more secure method of transit, risks to forms getting lost are also removed.

LA Input Documents (LAIDs) and LA Claim Information documents (LACIs) are sent from Jobcentre Plus and Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) in Portable Document Format (PDF). They can either be printed off at the LA or uploaded into document management systems.

The next and final stage of the project will consider providing the electronic LAIDs and LACIs to LAs in Extensible Mark Up Language (XML). If implemented, this will allow LAs to download files directly into their HB/CTB processing systems.

Work is underway to progress phase 4 and we will inform you of developments in due course. It is planned to pilot XML in August 2010 with a view to going live in October 2010.

Further information about e-Transfer, along with current guidance and Frequently Asked Questions can be found on

 [the DWP Website](#)

## Pensions Reform - how the increase in women's State Pension age will affect other benefits

This is to remind you that from 6 April 2010, the State Pension age for women born after 5 April 1950 will start to gradually increase from 60 to 65, so that by 2020 it will be the same as for men. This will mean an increase to

- the earliest age that people can get Pension Credit, and Housing and Council Tax Benefits (HB/CTB) for 'pensioners'
- the maximum age up to which people can get 'working age' HB/CTB
- the earliest age that people can get Winter Fuel Payments
- the maximum age up to which
  - women can get 'working age' benefits, such as Income Support (IS) and Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
  - men can get IS

In addition, the earliest age for receiving disability premiums, some earnings disregards and the disregard of the value of second homes will rise.

Full details of the impact on Housing and Council Tax Benefits are in HB/CTB Circular A16/2009.

For further information visit  [Directgov](#) or contact Nicky Gilmore on 01253 688580.



# Decommissioning of the HBMS extract completed!

We are pleased to announce that the final HB Matching Service (HBMS) extracts were decommissioned at the beginning of February 2010 and we are now using the Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) for all LAs for HBMS data matching purposes.

This marks a significant step forward in making maximum use of available data sources and reduce the burden of data provision on LAs.

The decommissioning of HBMS extracts commenced in March 2009 with the parallel running of both the original HBMS extract and the SHBE, allowing us to ensure that 'like for like' results were being achieved before any HBMS extracts were decommissioned. By the summer, 238 LAs were no longer required to provide a HBMS extract to DWP. We worked closely with LAs and software suppliers to overcome the technical issues that were preventing further decommissioning and in September 2009, phase 2 of the decommissioning schedule commenced.

A comprehensive data validation process has been established to continuously improve data quality within SHBE extracts and to ensure accurate results are achieved from data matching. We continue to analyse each SHBE extract and provide reports to individual LAs when data incidents are identified. Assistance is available to encourage the prompt resolution of any data issues. We are also able to identify where a data incident results from a generic software issue. In these scenarios, we work closely with software providers to ensure a timely fix is implemented.

In September 2009, we undertook an evaluation exercise to gauge LAs' experience of the decommissioning process. A representative sample of 40 LAs were selected and individually contacted. We were pleased to receive an overwhelmingly positive response with 96% of LAs agreeing that the decommissioning of the HBMS extract was 'a step in the right direction towards reducing the burden of data provision on LAs'.

Nine out of ten LAs also confirmed that their results from data matching had 'been maintained' or 'improved' since SHBE implementation and 100% found the data quality reports and advice offered by HBMS useful.

Many thanks to all LAs and software suppliers for your patience and support in achieving this success!

For further details regarding use of the SHBE in HBMS data matching, contact the HBMS Data Integrity Team



 Email: [IFDDMS.HBMSDIT@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:IFDDMS.HBMSDIT@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)



# EAS CIS Implementation Project Update

Welcome to our March update on the EAS CIS Employee Authentication Service Customer Information System Implementation Project.

Key items for this update are

- Pilot success: Newham Revenue & Benefits have registered and enrolled their first CIS users onto Employee Authentication Service (EAS) and are using it on a day-to-day basis, so many congratulations to them. We'll be using the learning from their experience to support and inform the wider roll-out.
- Local Registration Authorities (RAs) (responsibility for registering end-users onto the system, getting them set up and confirming their identity): The Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) EAS project has finalised the list of LAs that will be building local RAs over the next few months. All other LAs will need to access EAS via the DWP national RA. We will be contacting all LAs that opted for the local RA but are not on the DCSF build list to discuss how they will come onto the DWP National RA.
- Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Updated: We have updated the implementation FAQs, this is particularly useful around the technical elements of the pilot and use of the webcam so that photos of individuals can be taken as part of the registration process. You will find this in the 'What's new' section of the  [EAS website](#).
- Piloting the system: Thanks to everyone who has responded so far. We are currently conducting a small implementation pilot but are looking for volunteers for the large implementation pilot, training will be held in London but any LA is welcome to join go to  [www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/eas-tor-pilot.pdf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/eas-tor-pilot.pdf).

Please write to us at  [Email: 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).



# Update on In and Out of Work

Over the last eighteen months we have reported on the implementation of the In and Out of Work (IOW) process across LAs in Great Britain. IOW joins up the services of Jobcentre Plus, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and LAs by providing support through a single point of contact for certain customers as they move into and out of employment.

Rollout is almost complete, and a recent programme of research has revealed just how popular IOW is proving to be with staff and customers alike.

The majority of customers surveyed agreed that IOW provided them with a much better service compared to previous claims. Also, because benefits can be turned on and off much more quickly under IOW, there has been a huge boost in confidence amongst customers to take up short term employment.

Staff are positive too, a high percentage of those surveyed could see the benefits of IOW and how it enables them to provide a better customer service:

*'The whole process is much quicker for customers and saves on duplication as they don't have to provide information to different organisations', one member of staff commented.*

Leigh Lewis, DWP's Permanent Secretary, summed up the project's achievements:

*'In and Out of Work proves, quite simply, what joined up government can achieve. Jobcentre Plus, HMRC and local authorities have worked closely to introduce new, ground breaking processes that are already making a real difference to the lives of our customers. Credit goes to the hard work and cooperation of staff from all three organisations for making the project a success'.*

For further information please contact  [Email: Alison.Jessop@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Alison.Jessop@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)



## Update - LA claim information (LACI) for ESA

At the January LA User Group, attended by approximately twenty five of you, issues were raised regarding the quality and quantity of the information received on the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Local Authority Claim Information (LACI) document. We have passed this information on to Jobcentre Plus.

In response Jobcentre Plus has circulated a note to all Contact Centre and Benefit Delivery Centre staff highlighting the 'Top 5' LACI issues. This note emphasises the importance of the HB/CTB information gather from both the customer and LA perspective.

Jobcentre Plus has asked for assurance that this has been cascaded to all appropriate staff. They are also going to investigate the quality of calls. This is something they do as part of their quality assurance; however the HB/CTB data gather issues are to be highlighted, so these can be checked specifically.

In addition there are several requirements that are to be implemented in ESA Release 10.1 on 31 May 2010, which will also improve the quality and quantity of the HB/CTB data gather for ESA claims. Details of these changes will be issued to LAs prior to implementation.

If you have any questions or want any further information please contact Jackie Daly

 Email: [HBSDMP.WWEG@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK](mailto:HBSDMP.WWEG@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK)

## Council Tax Benefit awareness campaign

At this time of year, we know that many LAs will be issuing Council Tax bills, and we want to remind you about the flyers and posters available to promote Council Tax Benefit (CTB). You can customise these with your own logo and they are a simple way to tell customers that they may be missing out on reduced bills.

You can find the flyers and posters at  [www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/counciltax/](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/counciltax/)

If you would like any further information, please email Josie Granter in DWP Communications,

 Email: [josie.granter@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:josie.granter@dwp.gsi.gov.uk).



# CIS prompts to LAs update

In October we told you about the CIS prompts to LAs project, which is scheduled for implementation week commencing 5 April 2010.

The project is working with CIS to deliver electronic prompts to LAs when changes that are not covered by the current Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD) occur. This will include new awards of and changes to Tax Credits and certain other DWP benefits. The current ETD process will not be affected by this and will continue as it is now.

The CIS Prompt will be a notification which will 'prompt' the LA User to view the customer records on CIS. The project have ensured that over 6 million customer interests taken from the latest SHBE returns will be loaded on to CIS, enabling LAs to maximise the benefits of the system from implementation, rather than building up the interests over time.

LAs will be able to view the electronic prompts for their customers 24 hours after the change occurs on CIS. The LA will be able to set new prompts, as well as amending and ending any HB/CTB interest, ensuring the LAs are aware of the most up to date and accurate customer information possible.

We will be issuing the guidance material in March 2010 to the LA Benefit and Revenue Managers. If you believe the current contact details need updating, please notify the project on the e-mail address shown below.

Information will be provided via future editions of HB Direct and the HB/CTB General Information Bulletins. In the meantime if you would like any more information please contact Glen Skinner or Simon Wainwright via:

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

