

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

Urgent Bulletin

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<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/>

HB/CTB U3/2007

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Who should read	All Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) staff
Action	Urgent – to note and action
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Temporary suspension of data flows between DWP and local authorities

From: Paul Howarth, DWP, Head of Housing Benefit Strategy Division

- 1 I am writing to you urgently about data flows between DWP and local authorities (LAs).
- 2 Although we have no reason to believe that there is cause for concern about DWP data transfers, in light of yesterday's announcement by the Chancellor about HMRC, DWP have initiated a review of current processes as part of good practice. As part of this review, DWP have decided to temporarily suspend all data flows between DWP and local authorities.
- 3 During this period, LAs should not transfer the Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) nor the Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) scan. However, these data should continue to be extracted as normal without being dispatched. At the end of this period, the data will be collected and processed as normal.
- 4 For data flows from DWP, LAs should not expect to receive fraud and error referral data, risk score review lists or scan data during this period. Again, we will dispatch this information once this temporary suspension period has concluded.
- 5 I appreciate you will be concerned that this temporary suspension of data-matches may interrupt your regular flow of work in addressing fraud error, and that this could make it more difficult to meet your targets, particularly PM10.
- 6 First, can I assure you that we will be doing all we can to ensure that we can resume the data-matching service as soon as possible, so hopefully any impact will be minimal. Second, we will take this into consideration in our forthcoming review of the 2007/8 targets, which have already promised to undertake as part of our normal business. We will send another bulletin out as soon as possible and meanwhile I would be grateful if you could hold off making further enquiries until we can provide you with more information.
- 7 In the meantime you might also be interested to read the following note sent to all DWP staff:

In the light of yesterday's news about data lost by HMRC, you will not be surprised that we are undertaking a review of our own procedures.

We have no reason to believe that any DWP security processes have not been followed, but as good practice we believe we should take stock.

While we do so, we are introducing a brief, temporary suspension of any movement of data by disc, tape or memory stick through the courier or postal system. This will allow us to check compliance with our processes and policies. This applies to any customer, or staff data.

We will tell you when this temporary suspension is lifted. Until then, data of this kind should not be sent physically through the courier or postal system without the explicit, written consent of Mike Truran, CIT Service Delivery Director. In the first instance any questions on this can be directed to your line manager who will speak directly to your business continuity manager.

Paul Howarth, DWP, Head of Housing Benefit Strategy Division