

# Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit

## General Information Bulletin

Department for Work and Pensions, The Adelphi, 1 - 11 John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT  
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/>

**HB/CTB G16/2008**

**29 August 2008**

<b>Contact</b>	Queries about the <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>technical content of this bulletin</b>, contact details are given at the end of each article</li><li>• <b>distribution of this bulletin</b>, contact Corporate Document Services Ltd Orderline<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Email: <a href="mailto:orderline@cds.co.uk">orderline@cds.co.uk</a></li></ul></li><li>• <b>bulletin in general</b>, contact Kath Murphy<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Email: <a href="mailto:Kath.Murphy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk">Kath.Murphy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk</a></li></ul></li></ul>
<b>Who should read</b>	All Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) staff
<b>Action</b>	For information

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## New Unitary Authorities

- 1 This list of new Unitary Authorities was first published *HB/CTB Bulletin G15/2008* on 7 August. Unfortunately some authorities were placed within the incorrect new council area within Cheshire. Please find set out below a corrected table – for convenience the corrections are underlined.

New Council	Existing Councils
Bedford Borough	Bedfordshire County Council and Bedford Borough Council
Central Bedfordshire	Bedfordshire County Council, Mid-Bedfordshire DC and South Bedfordshire DC
Cheshire East	<u>Part of</u> Cheshire County Council, Crewe and Nantwich <u>BC</u> , Macclesfield BC, <u>Congleton BC</u>
Cheshire West & Chester	Part of Cheshire County Council, Chester City <u>Council</u> , Ellesmere Port and Neston <u>BC</u> <u>Vale Royal BC</u>
Cornwall	Cornwall County Council, Caradon, DC Carrick DC, Kerrier DC, North Cornwall DC, Penwith DC, Restormel DC
County Durham	Durham County Council, Chester-le-Street DC, Derwentside DC, Durham City Council, Easington DC Sedgefield BC, Teesdale DC, Wear Valley DC
Northumberland	Northumberland County Council, Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed BC, Blyth Valley BC, Castle Morpeth BC, Tynedale DC, Wansbeck DC
Shropshire	Shropshire County Council, Bridgnorth DC, North Shropshire DC, Oswestry BC, Shrewsbury and Atcham BC, South Shropshire DC
Wiltshire	Wiltshire County Council, Kennet DC, North Wiltshire DC, Salisbury DC, West Wiltshire DC

## Further information

- 2 Further information is available from [barrie.fox@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:barrie.fox@dwp.gsi.gov.uk).

## Performance and Good Practice Guide update

- 3 In April 2008 we launched the new web-based Performance and Good Practice Guide (PGPG) (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/performance-guide/>). This guide provides guidance on the new HB/CTB performance framework, the two new HB/CTB performance indicators and good practice to help LAs to improve the delivery of HB and CTB.
- 4 We intend to update the PGPG regularly with additional good practice and you'll now find the first of these updates in Part 2, in the section titled *Right Benefit, how to maximise performance against the indicator*.
- 5 We've also updated the link for the Administrative, Security and Fraud Partnership Agreement, in the section titled *Carrying out counter fraud activities to identify customers who set out to defraud the system*.
- 6 You will also find a new link to an *Updates* page in the left hand margin on the PGPG part of the website so you can immediately see at a glance what changes/additions have been made to the guide. We'll let you know as soon as this is available.

## Printing the PGPG

- 7 We have removed the pdf versions of the guide and simplified the way you can print from the web. If you just want to print
  - a particular section of the guide, open the part you want and print. The guide will print as a text version without the left hand and top navigation.
  - the complete guide, select '**Printer friendly version**' from the left hand navigation and then print. The complete guide will print as a text version without the left hand and top navigation.

## Sharing good practice

- 8 As always we are keen to hear of any contributions from LAs who have identified good practice and want to share it more widely. If you have any good practice to share or have any queries on any of the above please contact us at [Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Using Customer Information System (CIS) to set the Y/N indicator

- 9 For some time now, we have been automatically correcting claims for Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Pension Credit when we identify that the customer's HB/CTB interest is not registered by the Y indicator. As you know, when the indicator is not set, you will not receive ETD notifications about the passporting claim.
- 10 Whilst these monthly data fixes have been successful in reducing the number of claims with no indicator set, there are still around 24,000 claims every month that we have to correct.
- 11 LA staff with access to the CIS should be aware that they can update the indicator if it is missing or incorrectly set. It is important that you have this check built into your procedures whenever you use CIS to verify entitlement to a passporting benefit. This will become even more important in the future when other benefits come within the remit of ETDs.
- 12 CIS training and guidance for LAs can be found on the DWP website at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/claims-processing/information-flow/cis/training.asp> where *Deskaid DA05 "Registering and Maintaining Interests"* gives details of how to update the Y/N indicator.

## Queries

- 13 If you have any queries, please us contact by email [Fraud-Error-Policy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Fraud-Error-Policy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – your questions answered

- 14 In *HB/CTB Bulletin G14/2008* we advised you that an ESA Frequently Asked Question site had been put on to the DWP website.
- 15 So that you have details of other questions that been asked we have now added a new page "ESA – your questions answered".
- 16 This new page contains more details than the FAQ. It is arranged with subject headings and links to *HB/CTB Circular A11/2008* and will be updated regularly. We have included a date so that you will know when questions have been added.
- 17 The ESA FAQ has not been removed but has been amended.

- 18 Both sites can be accessed via  
[www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/claims-processing/working-with-dwp/esa.asp](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/claims-processing/working-with-dwp/esa.asp)

## Queries

- 19 If you have any queries, please contact by email  
[Christine.Watkins@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Christine.Watkins@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## LA CIS Guide abolition of the 1% Management Test Check

- 19 The HB Information Flows Programme has decided with **immediate** effect to withdraw the requirement on LAs to carry out the random 1% test check of accesses made to CIS by its users. Full details can be found in *paragraph 5.4* of the [LA CIS Guide](#)
- 20 **Note:** this does **not** replace the requirement to carry out **system generated management checks**, which remains unchanged.
- 21 A recent audit review by the Department's Risk Assurance Division (RAD) on CIS end-user access controls reported that the clerical method of selecting accesses from a list provided by the user for a random management check had no deterrent value. RAD also concluded that the additional level of security that would be provided if this check was automated would be negligible, and not commensurate with the costs involved.
- 22 DWP requires Managers in LAs to have an explicit responsibility relating to the security of personal customer information on CIS. Managers must be aware of risks and make all reasonable attempts to prevent exploitation of CIS data and ensure users with access are:
- aware of security requirements which affect them
  - complying with mandatory controls and procedures
  - aware of the reporting procedures for security incidents
  - encouraged to report any suspicions or concerns to the appropriate officer.
- 23 Users in LAs should be made aware the Department's LA Support Team (LAST) proactively carries out unseen inspection of accesses to CIS. Each specific user's access can be identified and is recorded on an audit trail.
- 24 Where there is cause for concern and a potential security incident is identified, LAST will contact individual LAs to ensure a thorough investigation is carried out. LAST will provide the necessary level of support and guidance to LAs carrying out investigations and will supply full audit trails in respect of any accesses as required.

## Further information

- 25 If you have any queries about this subject, please contact [malcolm.mattack@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:malcolm.mattack@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Centralisation of FIS Decision Making Process

- 26 A national working group was set up in Summer 2007 to examine the feasibility of establishing a discrete decision-making function to deal specifically with Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) referrals. It was envisaged that this initiative would reduce the competing priorities for Specialist Decision Makers (SDM) within Benefit Delivery Centres (BDC) and thereby result in a quicker end-to-end process time, as well as concentrating expertise in a small number of locations and improving the consistency of the decisions made.
- 27 A pilot was run for several months at Merthyr BDC from October 2007 to test the processes operated by a centralised SDM section, and the associated overpayment work. A refined process was devised whereby FIS investigators made referrals on a revised REF2 template. This encouraged focussed submissions to SDMs, providing only the evidence required to make the decision and facilitated improved clearance times. As a result of the success of this initiative, the centralisation of FIS Decision Making work is now being rolled out nationally, and will be based at two locations at Merthyr Tydfil and Stirling, broadly covering the south and north of the country respectively.
- 28 The broad rollout schedule has been agreed and the order that Areas will migrate into the appropriate centralised unit is as follows

### **Merthyr Tydfil BDC**

Wales – already migrated  
South East  
East of England  
West Midlands  
South West  
London

### **Sterling BDC**

Scotland  
North West  
Yorkshire & The Humber  
North East  
East Midlands

- 29 The next Areas to migrate will be the East of England and Yorkshire & The Humber. Dates have yet to be confirmed for rollout, as both Merthyr Tydfil and Stirling Decision Making Units (DMU) are currently undertaking a Capacity Planning exercise to compare anticipated volumes received with the actual figures, and to provide assurance that the DMUs are correctly resourced with trained staff to handle the work.
- 30 A few weeks before go-live date for each Area, DWP will run upskilling events for FIS staff and a representative number of LA staff. For those unable to attend, we will furnish a copy of the presentation slides and speaker notes. The local FIS Area Fraud Investigator will notify LAs of migration dates once confirmed.
- 31 As is current practice in most Areas, FIS will continue to refer files to Decision Makers in joint working cases. Following migration date, and in any cases where a LA investigate cases alone, LAs will refer files to Decision Makers at Merthyr or Stirling but only for those cases where a sanction is probable. In cases where a sanction is not appropriate, LAs should continue to refer files to their local BDC for action. Full details of the process are enclosed in the attachment sent with this bulletin: *Appendix A Process for LAs to make referrals*.

## Further advice or information

- 32 If you need any further advice or information please contact [Brian.Evans1@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Brian.Evans1@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk)

## Principal reasons for collection of Single HB Extract data

### Introduction

- 33 This article
- addresses the issue raised in a recent meeting between DWP and IT suppliers on the principal intended use of the information collected as part of the Single HB Extract
  - is intended for information only and LAs do not need to take any action
  - is sent with three attachments
    - **Appendix B1:** Brief descriptions of the principal reasons for collection
    - **Appendix B2:** Table of principal reason and field identifiers
    - **Appendix B3:** Table of field identifiers and descriptors

## Information collected on the principal reasons for collection of Single HB Extract

- 34 The Single HB Extract is a direct extract of each LAs computer system which is sent to the DWP on a monthly basis. This data return is provided at a claimant level and contains a wealth of information on various aspects of the Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) claim, including, for example, details of live claims, changes of circumstances and appeals. The data on the Single HB Extract will be primarily used to monitor LA performance, provide information on fraud and error referrals and inform future policy decisions on HB and CTB.
- 35 At a recent meeting between DWP and IT suppliers it was requested that the Department provide more details on the principal use of each of the different data items (fields) on the extract so that it was clear why this information was being requested from LAs; this circular responds to that request. We have identified twelve principal uses of the extract and matched each data item into at least one of these uses (some items appear for more than one use).
- 36 Many of the pieces of information are primarily collected for a specific purpose; others are used for a range of activities. For example, the claimant's gross income from employment is used for processing claims details and data-matching.
- 37 For completeness, a list of fields no longer in use is included in Appendix A. These fields were previously used for various activities, but are no longer collected, e.g. changes in the information requirement leading to the redundancy of the field. These fields were identified as no longer in use in the April 2008 Single HB Extract specification which was provided to IT suppliers and LAs on 1 October 2007.
- 38 While this document is intended to describe the principal reason(s) for collection, it should not be considered an exhaustive list. Given the wealth of information on the Single HB Extract, much of which has not been available at claimant level before, it is possible that some of the data items may be used for purposes not listed here in the future. However, if there are any significant changes to the uses of the data on the Single HB Extract we would inform LAs and update this document as appropriate.
- 39 The information collected may be used for any of the Department's purposes. We may get information from others to check the information and to improve our services. We may give information to other organisations as the law allows, for example to safeguard against crime. To find out more about how we use information, visit our website [www.dwp.gov.uk/privacy.asp](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/privacy.asp)

## Queries

- 40 For queries or comments on this article, please contact
- up to 31 August [Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)
  - from 1 September: [Enquirieshrad@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Enquirieshrad@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Important information for all LA Overpayment Recovery Teams

- 41 DWP Debt Management would like to make LA HB Overpayment Recovery colleagues aware that they have been experiencing some technical difficulties with their system notifications.
- 42 Unfortunately a small number of notifications which advise the LA that recovery has broken down or that Debt Management has been unable to commence recovery, have not been generated.
- 43 As a result some LAs may find discrepancies when reconciling the latest payment schedule with their overpayment recovery records. The debt recovery process has been unaffected and the schedules will reflect **actual** debt recovered from the customer via the legacy benefit systems.
- 44 Debt Management would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused. They would like to take this opportunity to assure LAs that steps have now been put in place to address this issue and future notifications will not be affected. In addition Debt Management is undertaking an exercise to identify those cases affected to resolve on an individual basis with LAs impacted.
- 45 Debt Management has set up a Helpline for LA colleagues to ring should they have any questions relating to this issue and how it may impact individual cases. The number for this Helpline was communicated by letter to LAs w/c 18 August 2008.

## Queries

- 46 For any queries relating to this item please contact **either** your local Debt Centre or the Helpline, details of which have been sent via a separate communication directly to LAs.

## Value for Money exercise

- 47 DWP are undertaking a Value for Money exercise in relation to some of the fraud related items of expenditure. We would therefore like your views on the use of the Royal Mail 'do not re-direct' scheme.

- 48 We currently pay Royal Mail centrally for a 'do not re-direct' service. This contract has been in existence for many years and the world has moved on considerably since it was introduced. Anecdotal evidence suggests that envelopes are only rarely returned to the issuing office. However there is also a view that the very visible envelopes used, do still provide a deterrent to the change of address type of fraud and also play a part in reducing error. We are keen to know
- how many LAs use 'do not re-direct' envelopes
  - what you use them for (what sorts of correspondence)
  - (roughly) how often envelopes are returned, and
  - whether you think just using the envelopes on their own would serve as a useful deterrent

## Please send us your views

- 49 We realise that there is a degree of subjectivity involved in answering some of these questions but your views would be appreciated.
- 50 It would be helpful if you could reply so that we can discuss this at the next Security Operational Group meeting on 18 September.
- 51 Please send your views or comments to us, by email [Fraud-Error-Policy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Fraud-Error-Policy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Pension Credit

### AIP Reviews

- 52 LAs will be aware that The Pension Service faces the prospect of handling 1.7 million AIP reviews between now and 2010. These reviews will be handled by a number of different processes that will kick in from September 2008
- Full Case Review
  - Rapid Review Process
- 53 Full details of these processes, the criteria to be used and details of how to find out about Pension Service work scheduling will be provided in the next bulletin.

### Queries

- 54 If you have any queries, please contact by email [James.Boyd@thepensionservice.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:James.Boyd@thepensionservice.gsi.gov.uk)

## What's new on the web

55 The following items can be found on the website link shown

Document Type	Subject	Link
HB/CTB Bulletin G14/2008	Employment Support Allowance – Frequently Asked Questions Statutory Instruments	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/bulletins/2008/G14-2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/bulletins/2008/G14-2008.pdf</a>
HB/CTB Bulletin G15/2008	New unitary authorities Statutory Instruments	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/bulletins/2008/G15-2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/bulletins/2008/G15-2008.pdf</a>
HB/CTB Bulletin U1/2008	House of Lords' Heffernan Judgment	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/bulletins/2008/HBCTBBulletinU1-2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/bulletins/2008/HBCTBBulletinU1-2008.pdf</a>
ESA Operational Guide – Interim process	Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) - Operational Guide for Local Authorities Interim Process (October 2008)	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/claims-processing/operational-manuals/esaoperationalguideancev1.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/claims-processing/operational-manuals/esaoperationalguideancev1.pdf</a>
HB Direct Issue 80 August 2008	Newsletter	<a href="http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/hb-direct-newsletter/2008/issue80august2008.pdf">http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/user-communications/hb-direct-newsletter/2008/issue80august2008.pdf</a>

## HB/CTB Circulars issued this month

56 The following HB/CTB Circulars have been issued this month

HB/CTB Circular F1/2008

HB/CTB Circular F2/2008

HB/CTB Circular F3/2008