

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 G1/2008

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Who should read	All Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) staff
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Locality review in London

From Paul Howarth, Head of Housing Benefit Strategy Division.

- 1 I am writing to you urgently about the review of localities recently undertaken by The Rent Service (TRS) in England.
- 2 As you will be aware, TRS has implemented revised localities (BRMAs in the case of Local Housing Allowance Pathfinder and Second Wave Group authorities) throughout most of England. In London, these localities were due to have been implemented from 1 January 2008. As a result of a temporary injunction obtained in the High Court, the implementation of these revised localities has now been suspended **in the London area only. This does not affect the localities outside of London which have been agreed and have already been implemented.**
- 3 Whilst the majority of London local authorities (LAs) were content with the proposals, Westminster City Council has applied for, and been granted, a temporary injunction preventing the implementation of the revised localities until 21 January 2008 when a judicial review of the Rent Service's actions in relation to the review of localities as it affects Westminster City Council will take place. This means that there will be a delay in the implementation of the revised localities and BRMAs in the London area.
- 4 The injunction means that the new localities in the London area, due to come in to force on 1 January, will not now be implemented. London LAs should continue to use the older local reference rents based on localities determined before the latest Rent Service review.
- 5 LAs in and around London, who are affected by this suspension, have already been contacted by The Rent Service.
- 6 We will keep you informed of developments as soon as possible. If you have any concerns about this issue please contact your local Rent Service office. Alternatively, you can contact us at the following address: lhaadviceline@dwp.qsi.gov.uk

The Pension Service liaison

Introduction

- 7 For some time now The Pension Service (TPS) have been experiencing increased number of calls from LA staff asking for the release of customer information, both from Housing Benefit (HB)/Council Tax Benefit (CTB) staff and other LA areas such as Social Workers and Care Workers.
- 8 Such information can only be supplied when customer consent has been granted or when a legal gateway allows for the transfer of such information, such as that which exists to HB/CTB staff and certain other areas of the authorities.
- 9 The increased number of requests has caused confusion on when information can be provided and sometimes delayed the supply of information in cases where it should be provided.

Revised process

- 10 To address this issue TPS has reviewed current procedures to identify how to provide TPS staff with a clear indication of when they can share information with an LA and when further information is needed before any sharing can take place.
- 11 Since the introduction of the Customer Information System (CIS), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have held details of LA staff working in HB/CTB who require access to DWP data and it is intended to use this list to identify LA staff with a legitimate reason to gain information direct from TPS.
- 12 It is also intended to provide TPS staff with details of other LA staff working within joint teams who can also access DWP data direct in performing their DWP functions within those teams.
- 13 When TPS receive a call from an LA they will first check if the person calling is registered on this list. If so, TPS staff will ask our normal customer identity questions for the customer to whom the call relates and where successfully provided will go on to answer the query.
- 14 These details relate to the usual customer information, such as name, address and date of birth, etc which would normally be available to HB/CTB staff.
- 15 When an LA caller is not on this list, TPS staff will require confirmation that consent exists for the sharing to take place or in the few cases where a gateway does exist, the Local Education Authority (LEA) or Supporting People teams, confirmation that they work in those areas.
- 16 The process becomes operational from 28 January 2008.

Action for LAs

- 17 You must make sure your staff's CIS registration remains up to date. Pension Centre Liaison Officers will be making arrangements with you via The Pension Service Communications to keep the database updated for all LA joint team members.

Contact details

- 18 If you have any queries/issues in relation to this, contact hb-ctb-liaison@thepensionservice.gsi.gov.uk