

Housing Benefit Direct.....

For staff involved in the delivery of HB/CTB in Local Authorities
April 2008

Issue 76

Editorial

Paul is making the most of the Easter bank holidays and has taken a few days off work so I have taken on the task of writing this month's editorial. When Paul wrote last month he mentioned the one month count-down to the national roll-out of the Local Housing Allowance and by the time you receive this edition of **HB Direct** the 7 April milestone will be very close indeed. I know you have all been fully engaged in preparation for the implementation and I am sure all this hard work will now pay off as the new scheme is rolled-out. Our support will continue as the roll-out progresses so if you have any queries please contact us, details are in the LHA article below.



The 1st of April sees the launch of a new performance framework for HB and CTB in line with a wider drive to reduce the number of performance indicators local authorities face. This is to ensure that customers receive the right benefit at the right time and the new performance framework will be in place by the time the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's responsibilities in respect of HB and CTB are transferred to the Audit Commission in England, Audit Scotland and the Wales Audit Office. These and other changes will be discussed in more detail in the next edition of **moredirect**, to be published on the 15th April.

This edition of **HB Direct** provides an update on work related to the Employment and Support Allowance which will be introduced from October 2008 and which will have a significant impact on HB/CTB. The article sets out the work that has been going on to ensure local authorities are prepared for the resulting changes. Other articles provide an update on the Tribunals Service's new centre in the Midlands, pensions reform, the Knowledge Network website and the new Partnership Agreement between Jobcentre Plus and local authorities.

Finally, on data transfer we are making good progress with the project to roll-out encryption software to all local authorities that will enable the resumption of data transfers to and from the Department. We are on schedule to have all installations (excepting a few LAs that have experienced technical difficulties) including Northern Ireland completed by early April 2008. Our IT supplier is expecting to re-start live data transfers on Friday 28 March. Results data (where available) will be transferred first.

Ilona Blue, Head of Local Authority Performance Division
Email: ilona.blue@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Local Housing Allowance

I am sure you will, by now, all be more than ready for the introduction of the Local Housing Allowance on 7 April.

Many thanks to those of you who have completed our Business Assurance questionnaire. We have received an excellent response rate at 90% of all authorities, and the amount of preparation work underway is very encouraging for an extremely successful national implementation of LHA.



We realise that you may have further questions as more customers make new claims or move address and we will be continuing our support for some time yet. This will include updating our FAQs and responding to queries via our advice line LHAadviceline@dwp.gsi.gov.uk. We will also continue with our LHA communications for at least the next couple of months both here in **HB Direct** and in **HB/CTB General Information Bulletins** – if there are any specific areas you feel would be useful then please let us know and we will do our best to publish further advice.

Partnership Agreement for Benefit Administration, Security and Fraud between Jobcentre Plus and Local Authorities



This is to let you know that Jobcentre Plus and LAs have jointly agreed a new, three year, Partnership Agreement which sets out the principles for effective partnership working between the two organisations at a local level.

The key aim of the Agreement, which is to be published on 7 April in *HB/CTB Bulletin G7/2008*, is to provide a framework that supports effective joint working in respect of Benefit Administration, Security and Fraud. This replaces the previous separate agreements for joint working in Benefit Administration and Fraud.

We are confident that the agreement will make a real contribution to ensuring that both organisations continue to work effectively together and deliver a quality service to our shared customers so please make sure that you look out for the next bulletin.

Queries

If you have any queries about this article please contact the **Jobcentre Plus Governmental Business Partnerships Team**

Contacts: ian.gibbins@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk or chris.bullen@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

HB and CTB Appeals: Change of Processing Centre in the Midlands Area

In *HB/CTB Bulletin G6/2008* we told you about some organisational changes that are taking place within the Tribunals Service. We are including a shortened version of the item here but suggest you read *G6/2008* for full details of the action that you need to take.

In October 2008 the Tribunals Service will open a multi-jurisdictional Administrative Support Centre (ASC) for the Midlands area. It will be located near to Birmingham city centre. In preparation for this, some of the appeal work currently processed at Nottingham SSCSA Tribunals Service will, from 1 April 2008, be processed by Birmingham SSCSA Tribunals Service.

You are only affected by this change if:

- you normally send Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit appeals to Nottingham SSCSA Tribunals Service (Pearson Building) **and**
- those appeals are normally heard at any of these eight venues
 - **Nottingham, Derby, Chesterfield, Northampton, Lincoln, Leicester, Boston and Kettering**

If the above does not apply to you then please continue to send your appeals to the Tribunals Service office that you normally do.

If you are affected, then from and including 28 March 2008 please send all new Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit appeals to Birmingham SSCSA Tribunals Service at

 SSCSA Tribunals Service
Midlands Area
3rd Floor
Auchinleck House
Broad Street
Birmingham
B15 1DL



If you have any further queries please refer to the advice contained within *G6/2008* first before contacting **Rob Day**, Birmingham Tribunals Service District Manager on ☎ **0121 634 7248**.

Pensions Reform

In the December edition of *HB Direct* we provided information about the key changes to State Pensions (SP) being brought in from 6 April 2010. In this edition we provide some information about the activities being undertaken by the Pensions Reform Delivery Programme (PRDP), to raise awareness of these changes.



Advertorials

A series of Advertorials will appear in a range of consumer magazines. The first article appeared in *Bella* magazine on the 3 March 2008. These articles are targeted at women and carers and are designed to help raise awareness of the impact of Pensions Reform and the rise in State Pension age.

Postal Preference Survey Mailing

In March a letter and a copy of the leaflet 'State Pensions Your Guide' was sent to around 62,000 people who had expressed an interest in receiving information about Pensions. The letter gives an overview of the key elements of Pensions Reform, information about payment of voluntary National Insurance contributions and a reminder about the Pension Tracing Service.

Targeted Leaflet Drop

In January, 60,000 copies of leaflet 'State Pensions Your Guide' were placed in GP surgeries. This process will be repeated again in April 2008 with a different leaflet, 'Pensions for Women'.

SP Equalisation Mail Out

We will be sending a mailshot to 1.7m women who are affected by the gradual increase in women's State Pension age (SPa) ie women born between 6 April 1950 and 5 April 1955. The phased mailshot will advise each woman of her exact SPa date and run from early 2009 until 2012. We'll provide more information about the mailshot in subsequent editions of *HB Direct*.

More information

For more information about Pensions Reform contact **Jenny Vernon** - Pension Reform Delivery Programme on 0114 294 3246 or visit The Pension Service Intranet site <http://www.thepensionsservice.gov.uk/>

An update on the Knowledge Network website

In the March issue of *HB Direct* we told you that we were hoping to shortly re-instate the Knowledge Network website. It was our intention that this website would provide access to a small selection of information, including statistical forms, which would primarily enable you to submit stats 121, 122 and 124 returns for 2007/08. Unfortunately, we are still having difficulties with re-instating the actual Knowledge Network website and it is unlikely that this will be up and running in the immediate future.

Therefore as an interim measure and to ensure you have access to the statistical forms and guidance you require we have been able to make some information available on the Housing Benefit pages of the DWP website. You should be able to find the statistical forms, including an electronic form that you should use to submit quarter 4 Stats 124 information, at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/statistical/> by Friday, 4 April 2008.

Please accept our apologies for the continued delay in restoring the Knowledge Network website. We are still working on restoring a full website in the future and will provide you with more information on this when appropriate.

If you have any queries please contact

Jan Ripley
Housing Benefit Database and Matching Service
DWP

Email: Jan.Ripley@dwp.gsi.gov.uk



Employment and Support Allowance

This is a further update on our plans for the introduction of the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), information is also available in more **direct** (October 2007), *HB/CTB Bulletin G3/2008* and details about implementation funding in *HB/CTB Circular S2/2008*. We have also been working closely with your Local Authority Associations and Jobcentre Plus to identify all the effects on HB/CTB policy, legislation and operations.

This new benefit will be introduced on October 2008 and will apply to new customers only subject to a 2 year linking rule. It will have a significant impact on HB/CTB as it will be replacing Incapacity Benefit (IB), Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), and Income Support (IS) paid on the grounds of incapacity.

ESA claims will be taken over the phone by Jobcentre Plus Contact Centres using a new Customer Account Management system (CAM) rather than the existing Jobcentre Plus Customer Management System (CMS).

We are currently looking at how information and evidence gathered for HB/CTB claims will be handled by Jobcentre Plus. We want to keep processes as simple as possible both for you to administer and for customers to understand. As an interim measure when ESA is introduced, customers who want to claim HB/CTB will be sent a clerical claim form (HB/CTB1). This form will be sent with a covering letter to explain that, once completed, the form, along with all related evidence must be returned to the relevant local authority.

We will also be issuing you with Electronic Transfer of Data (ETDs) containing the outcome of ESA (Income Related) claims. From Spring 2009 ETD notifications for ESA(Contribution based) claims will also be produced although a manual notification system will operate initially.

Current plans are for the roll out of the full process from the end of 2009. This will involve a Local Authority Information Document (LACI) being produced following completion of the data gather and being sent to you by Jobcentre Plus. We will ensure that the standard of information included in this document will be of the same standard as the current Local Authority Input Document.

We will continue to work closely with Jobcentre Plus to make sure that the roll out of this process using the CAM system maintains the current levels of good service for both yourselves and customers. Jobcentre Plus staff involved in the process will receive training on gathering evidence and information in support of claims for HB/CTB.

Further advice

We will be sending out regular updates over the coming months to help you prepare for this change but in the meantime if you require further advice please contact HBSD on ☎ HBSDMP.WWEG@dwpgsi.gov.uk

Transfer of data between local authorities and DWP

I am writing to give you an update of our plans for the resumption of data transfer between DWP and local authorities.

On 25 February your Chief Executive received a letter from the Permanent Secretary advising (him) of the steps the Department is taking to implement a secure solution, using an approved data encryption product, which will allow us to resume data transfers.

Rollout of that software, and associated products, to LAs has now commenced and is expected to be completed by early April 2008. The DWP Data Encryption Project will be contacting your nominated contact/s to facilitate the installation and activation of this software, and initiate your demonstration data transfer.

Following the successful transmission and acceptance of your test data our service provider, EDS, will contact your authority with specific details of how the transfer of your data will be resumed. You will be told what to send and when. They will also provide you with a specific email address that you should use for this purpose. This email address is part of the secure transfer process therefore **please do not return data to any other address**.

Initially we will be concentrating on restoring HBMS data – first results data then your current monthly extracts. Historical data that you may have extracted since the suspension of data flows in November should continue to be kept in secure storage – we will contact you with our plans for this at a later date.

Later we will resume the collection of the HBSDIAD Scan/Single HB Extract. We will write to you separately about this.

The resumption of data transfers between us is a planned, staged process so **please await the specific communications before returning any data to us**.

If you have any queries resulting from this article please direct them in the first instance to Jan Ripley

Email: ☎ jan.ripley@dwpgsi.gov.uk, telephone: ☎ 0773 331 5370.