

Housing Benefit Direct.....

September 2008

Issue 81

Editorial

As Paul is taking a well-deserved summer break, I have the privilege of writing this month's editorial. Not that it feels much like summer: apart from the weather, it's been as busy in the Adelphi as at any time of the year.



We are finally beginning to recover from the data embargo. Thank you for your patience and for all your efforts in ensuring that we are once again able to compile performance information. Together we are getting there as you can see on the new-look HB website at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/index.asp>

There is plenty going on in fraud and error. Besides the pilots of Voice Risk Analysis and work with the Credit Reference Agency, DWP are about to launch a new campaign against benefit fraud – please see inside for further details. Over the coming months we shall be working closely with you to keep up the progress in making sure that the right benefit is paid to the right people.

Angie Cannizzaro in my division is leading the internal review of Housing Benefit with HM Treasury. This is a huge piece of work, announced by the Chancellor in his spring Budget and due to report by the end of the year. The focus is on ensuring that Housing Benefit delivers the best value for money and helps encourage people into work. On the latter point, over the coming months we shall be launching an awareness and understanding campaign – emphasising, for instance, that Housing Benefit can be paid to people who are in work as well as those out of work.

We have just published some interesting research by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University which looks at the links between social housing and worklessness. For further details, have a look at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/report_abstracts/rr_abstracts/rra_521.asp

Finally, as we move into the autumn we shall see the launch of the Employment and Support Allowance on 27 October (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/esa/>) and continuing consultation on welfare reform following the publication of “*No One Written Off*” in July (<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/welfarereform/noonewrittenoff/>). And we are working very closely with colleagues in CLG as they prepare for a Housing Green Paper around the end of the year.

Busy times ahead for us all! I hope you enjoy what is left of the summer and come back refreshed from your holidays.

Andrew Parfitt: Head of Housing Research and Analysis Division
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2007/08 HBMS referrals

We are working with the Housing Benefit Data Matching Service (HBDMS) to improve the outcomes from data matching. On 17 July HBDMS issued a flyer notifying LAs that, following the ending of the data embargo, they could resume sending in the HBMS Electronic Results Spreadsheet. We would like to thank those LAs who have subsequently returned their results.

The latest performance figures for Quarters 1-3 of 2007/08 show that 193,000 data matches were issued with 15,000 (8%) not being returned to HBMS. The figures also show that only 158 of the 408 LAs have returned all their data matches.

Data matches are a good source for finding fraudulent or erroneous claims; this is borne out by the fact that

- 80% of LAs have positive results in 20% or more of their matches and
- 12% have 40% or more matches that are positive

We are therefore asking you, if you have not already done so, to return your outstanding results to HBMS as soon as possible. We also ask you to continue to action your future data matches without delay. Details of how to send in your results are in the HBDMS July flyer.

For further information and advice please contact
jane.perfect@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

DWP Department for
Work and Pensions

ESA Operational Guidance



Operational guidance is now available for Local Authority staff in readiness for the implementation of *Employment and Support Allowance Release 1* on 27 October 2008.

The **ESA Operational Guide – interim process** can be found under 'ESA Guidance' using the following link

www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/claims-processing/working-with-dwp/esa.asp

The guidance includes information on

- The interim process for customers claiming HB/CTB and ESA, including the customer journey
- Voice recording retrieval - (*further detail to be added*)
- ESA (C) ETD arrangements - (*further detail to be added*)
- Implementation
- Liaison arrangements with Jobcentre Plus
- Example customer notifications

For more information contact either

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Remote Access Terminals

Back in 2005, when the Remote Access Terminals (RATs) service was replaced by providing you with access to the Customer Information System (CIS), we also promised to provide HMRC Tax Credit details electronically. After successfully overcoming a number of hurdles along the way we delivered Tax Credit data onto CIS on 9 July 2008.

You now only have to look in one place for confirmation of a customer's DWP benefit information and Tax Credit awards, enabling more efficient processing of HB and CTB.

We are now looking at the options for producing a prompt indicating new claims and changes of circumstances of Tax Credit awards. This is being progressed alongside review of the existing Electronic Transfer of Data notification service. Further information will be available as work progresses via the DWP website (www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit) and this publication.

In the meantime, any questions regarding information on CIS should be raised with the LA Support Team as per the normal route.

Email: LA-ST@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

September launch for new Benefit Fraud campaign

The latest version of DWP's campaign to target benefit thieves launches on **23 September** and will focus on 40 LA areas.

The new campaign aims to build on the success of the '*No Ifs, No Buts*' campaign, which scored highly with the public in terms of fraud awareness. This time we're putting more emphasis on the risk of being caught by demonstrating the various methods of detection, and providing the facts to prove it.

The three-phased roll out will run as follows

- 23 September, the campaign begins in 30 LA areas supported by local press and radio advertising, PR and outdoor posters
- 3 November, the campaign goes nationwide with national TV, press and PR activity
- Early 2009, 10 more LA areas will join the campaign

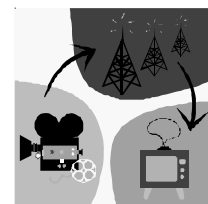
The areas selected (full list available via www.dwp.gov.uk/benefit-thieves/local-authorities) have been chosen for their high working age claimant numbers to give maximum impact to the campaign. The additional 10 local areas joining the campaign in 2009 will be used as a control group to measure its effectiveness.

LAs play a valuable part in the fight against benefit fraud and we want you to link into the campaign whether you are one of the selected areas or not. To help, we are providing poster templates which you can customise with your own details. These will be available to download at www.dwp.gov.uk/benefit-thieves/local-authorities after **22 September**.

For more details contact Tony Oakland-Smith at

Email: tony.oakland-smith@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

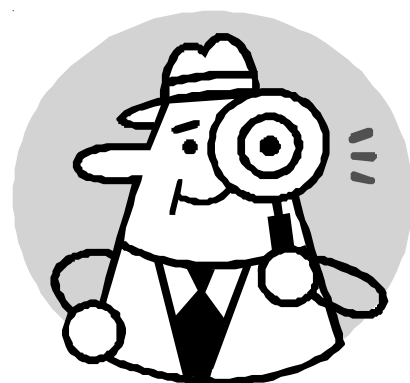
Tel: 0113 23 24479.



Learning from pilot benefit inspections and CPA 2008

The Audit Commission have produced a *learning from pilot benefit inspections* web tool, sharing findings from pilot inspections of benefit services at nine councils across England. Participating councils were

- Blaby
- Bradford
- Chester-Le-Street
- Derby
- Merton
- Newham
- Slough
- Tower Hamlets
- Wokingham



The inspections tested and informed the Commission's approach to inspecting benefit services, following transfer of responsibility from the BFI on 1 April 2008.

Each council volunteered for the pilot inspections which identified a variety of approaches to delivering benefit services. Future inspections will take place where authorities are, or show a risk of underperforming.

The web tool focuses on key issues for benefit services. Many examples of notable practice were highlighted. The aim is to help stimulate improvement in other councils. It does not cover all aspects of benefits work but highlights some of the most interesting approaches from the pilot inspections. Findings are presented under the following headings:

- Benefit take-up
- Working with customers
- Knowing your community
- Overpayments
- Preventing fraud
- Claims processing
- Performance management
- Investing in staff, and
- Value for money

The web tool will be available online from 1 October 2008 at <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/benefits>

The Audit Commission has published its approach to CPA 2008 (including benefits) for single tier councils. Online guidance for can be found at <http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/cpa/stcc/stccframework.asp>

Housing Benefit Fraud Video

The fraud awareness video has been produced by Manchester City Council with funding from the DWP and is available free to all LAs. It can be used to raise awareness of both staff and the general public, and is available on DVD, CD and includes versions that can be streamed on the Internet version.

The DVD version contains a single run and looped version suitable for use in public areas, whilst the CD contains a single run version and a number of resources and downloads which you can use. The web enabled versions (three output options) can be uploaded onto your Intranet &/or Internet sites. There are three posters using characters from the video, which you are free to use. They are available as PDF images or print quality posters, which you can customise or just add your own logo (in the bottom left hand corner). Additionally it contains a 'screensaver' and PC 'wallpaper' which staff could put on their PC.



To obtain your **free** copies (or to request additional free copies) please send your authority contact details and full delivery address to stop.benefit.fraud@manchester.gov.uk

IRRV annual conference

We are pleased to announce we will be attending the IRRV annual conference and exhibition at Manchester Central from 30 September – 3 October 2008. We can be found on **stands 6 and 40/41**.

To support DWP's key strategic aim to share a secure electronic information flow with LAs, colleagues from **Government Connect** can be found on **stand 15**.

The **DWP/Pension Service stand 40/41** will be managed by a team of staff who will be happy to answer any queries you may have. In particular this stand will feature representatives from the In and Out of Work project.

Stand 6 will be shared by the **DWP Performance Development Team** and the **Fraud and Error Policy Team**. The Fraud and Error Policy Team will be focussing on 'Right Benefit'.

If you are attending the conference please come and see us on all three stands. We look forward to seeing you there.

Contacts stand 40/41: **Mont Goldman/Fiona Mcleish**

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✉ Fiona.Mcleish1@thepensionservice.gsi.gov.uk

Contacts stand 15: **Steve Brown (Government Connect)**

✉ Steve.brown1@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Contacts stand 6: **Fiona Campbell/Colin Tomassi**

✉ Fiona.c.campbell@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

✉ colin.tomassi@dwp.gsi.gov.uk



2008 Performance Framework and Single HB Extract - LA Query Handling Procedures

We have been reviewing our current process for handling queries from LAs and software providers.

From **Monday 1 September 2008**, we will be restoring the Housing Data Matching Services and Housing Research and Analysis Division generic email addresses.

Below are the key areas covered by the specific inboxes

- Use MISqueries.HBDataService@dwp.gsi.gov.uk for queries relating to:
 - the process of recording and transmitting data to DWP including the Housing Benefit Recoveries and Fraud (HBRF) return
 - loading reports, and
 - the HBMS Extract and data matching
- Contact hbsdiad-scan@dwp.gsi.gov.uk for queries relating to
 - the **numerical** content and format of fields on the Single HB Extract, and
 - caseload data
- The Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk is the contact point for
 - clarification on **data** requirements for the Single HB Extract
 - issues arising from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) and Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA)
 - new claims or change events processing guidance
 - the Performance and Good Practice Guide, and
 - performance information published on HoBOD
- Contact Enquirieshrad@dwp.gsi.gov.uk for queries around
 - the clarification of data requirements for the HBRF return
 - the derivation of the performance indicators and Key Management Information (KMI)
 - software problems/issues
 - the Single HB Extract main specification and guidance, and
 - technical issues around the information that should be recorded in different fields on the scan.

We hope that these changes will provide a more streamlined service.

Need an answer? Post your questions and suggestions to HB-Policy-FAQ@dwp.gsi.gov.uk