

Housing Benefit Direct.....

October 2008

Issue 82

Editorial

Paul Howarth and several of his senior colleagues are away, giving me a rare opportunity to step forward and offer a few words of introduction to this month's issue of HB Direct. I'm delighted to step into the breach.



I'm going to take the opportunity to offer a few impressions following my return to the HB fold in April, having last worked in this area in 1999.

But first, I'm going to share the content of a note I found during a thorough (and [very!] long overdue) clear out of accumulated papers prior to my move here. It's from my boss when I left Housing Benefit for the first time (in 1992!) 'David' he said in a parting message to me 'no one ever escapes from Housing Benefit permanently' – prophetic words indeed!

So how do things look after nine years away? Some of the issues look (depressingly?) familiar. Why is that, whatever policy changes are made, rent levels (and therefore HB expenditure) always rise faster than expected? This was a burning issue throughout my previous stints on HB and, frankly, it hasn't gone away.

On, hopefully, a more positive note I'd like to make two observations

- I've been very impressed by the positive and constructive dialogue that the Department is able to have with the Local Authority Associations even when the issues under discussion are difficult
- The sheer volume of work that goes on around here is phenomenal, I've already been involved in a review of the subsidy regime for customers in temporary accommodation and a review of mortgage interest support, and witnessed at close quarters the work that has gone into issues like the change to the backdating rules and the ongoing review of HB for working age customers – and that really is only the tip of the iceberg and
- I've been immensely impressed by the quality of service provided to customers at the LAs I've had the chance to visit, the commitment to customer service and the dedication of the people I've met has made a very big impression already

That was three wasn't it? Oh well, as someone once said, 'no one expects the Spanish Inquisition'. I hope you enjoy this month's issue.

David Gleave: Deputy Head HB Strategy Division

Email: David.Gleave@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

HB/CTB Performance Indicators - Frequently Asked Questions update

Following the introduction of the new HB/CTB performance indicators (right benefit and right time) in April 2008, we have revised and updated the existing frequently asked questions (FAQs). The changes can be found on the HB/CTB section of the DWP Resource Centre website using the following link

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/performance-value-for-money/faq.asp>

If you have any comments or suggestions concerning the FAQs or have another performance indicator related query please write to us using the following email address Performance-Framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Changes for lone parents from November 2008



This is to let you know that in the next General Information Bulletin G19/2008, we will be providing a detailed article on the changes that are being introduced from November 2008 for lone parents who receive Income Support.

In short, anyone claiming Income Support as a lone parent who has a child aged 12 or over will have to look for paid work and make a claim for another benefit. There are a few exceptions to this rule, full details of which will be provided in G19/2008.

Throughout October and November Jobcentre Plus will be contacting all lone parents affected by this change which may generate some enquiries for local authorities. The article in the bulletin will also explain that there should be no break in their HB/CTB if they move to Jobseekers Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance.

If, after reading the bulletin, you need any further advice or information then please contact

✉ Mark.Flounders@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk



New location for local authority briefing pack

Business Delivery Events during May/June 2008 organised by The Pension Service, focussed on changes to HB/CTB telephone claims taken alongside Pension Credit applications. The Pensioner HB/CTB Claims project distributed hard copies of the local authority briefing pack at these events. Following the events an electronic copy of the local authority briefing pack (New HB/CTB claims process from October 2008) was made available on the HB part of the **existing** DWP website.

Since 8 August 2008 the briefing pack has been migrated to the **new** DWP website and can now be found at

📄 <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/claims-processing/working-with-dwp/pensions.asp>

Questions raised at the Business Delivery Events are included in Annex E of the electronic briefing pack and will be updated on a monthly basis.

For more information please contact

✉ HB/CTB.NEWPROCESSQUERIES@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK



Moredirect – ideas and suggestions welcome



The latest edition of *moredirect* has just been published and should be available on the HB area of the DWP website very soon. So we thought that this would be a good opportunity to ask you if you have ideas or suggestions for topics that you would like to see featured in the next issue of the magazine due out next Spring, this is your magazine after all. What do you think of the magazine? Do you have any comments about the layout and format of *moredirect*. We would welcome your views. Please send your contributions as soon as possible to Central-Services-Team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Alternatively, you can call me, Robert Sneddon, on 0207 712 2568 to discuss potential articles. I look forward to hearing from you.



Employment and Support Allowance – Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD)

You will already be aware that Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) contribution based ETDs will not be available until April 2009. Unfortunately, from ESA Go-live, ETDs relating to ESA for income related (IR) cases will not clearly distinguish themselves from JSA income based ETDs therefore an interim solution is required until this can be fixed on 8 December 2008. Details of this six week interim solution are detailed in the **ESA Operational Guide – interim process** which can be found at

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/housingbenefit/claims-processing/operational-manuals/esaoperationalguidancev2-0-2.pdf>

For more information contact
Simon Wainwright

simon.wainwright@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

0113 232 4438



Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – further guidance

The Employment and Support Allowance (Consequential Provisions) Regulations 2008 (The ESA(CP) Regulations) contained amendments to the HB/CTB regulations to take account of the introduction of ESA on 27 October 2008. Circular A11/2008 contained the guidance on the effects of the introduction of ESA on HB/CTB.

We have identified areas where the ESA(CP) regulations could be interpreted in a way that would not deliver the policy intention. The areas are

- when a component should be awarded
- the component to be awarded and
- to whom the easement in respect of the Enhanced Disability Premium should apply

The Employment and Support Allowance (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2008, SI 2008/2428 amend the ESA(CP) Regulations, to ensure they deliver the policy intentions listed above.

Guidance on these issues and other amendments in SI 2008/2428 will be issued shortly.

For further advice or information please contact Christine.Watkins@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

NB: Whilst we are happy to include this advert we cannot endorse this product.

Benefit take-up campaigns – training course

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit take-up has a strong emphasis in the new benefit service inspection KLOES announced in March 2008.

To reach level 3 – ‘good’ – on service accessibility, benefit authorities need to demonstrate ‘take-up campaigns are effective, targeted and tailored to the profile of local communities. Extra money has been brought in to the local economy as a result.’

Child Poverty Action Group offer a one-day training course ‘Benefit take-up campaigns’ designed to help you design a take-up campaign strategy. The next London date is Tuesday 18 November, or the course can be provided ‘in-house’ to meet the needs of your authority. The trainer is Celia Minoughan, an experienced local authority benefit take-up campaign manager.

For full details visit Child Poverty Action Group’s website

<http://www.childpoverty.org.uk/training/CPAGcourses.htm#takeup>

or contact Sarah Kerridge

✉ skerridge@cpag.org.uk

☎ 020 7812 5217.



Your views, comments and suggestions for *HB Direct*

The purpose of *HB Direct* is to tell you about future developments within HB and we would welcome your views on the format and content of the newsletter.



You may have comments or suggestions for future editions – or you may even have a question you want to ask us!

Please send your ideas or questions to Kath Murphy at

✉ Kath.Murphy@dpw.gsi.gov.uk

How can I get *HB Direct* sent to me?

If you would like to receive *HB Direct* by email, usually on the 1st of each month (or nearest working day), then please send your name and the name of your LA or organisation to

✉ orderline@cds.co.uk.

They will add you to their e-mailing list. You will need Adobe Acrobat to enable you to open the pdf file. This can be downloaded free of charge from the website

<http://www.adobe.co.uk/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>

