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Guidance

LA Welfare Direct 9/2023

Updated 8 September 2023

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Contact

If you have queries about the:

- technical content of this bulletin then contact details are given at the end of each article
- general content and distribution of this bulletin, contact: lawelfare.correspondence@dwp.gov.uk

Who should read

All Housing Benefit staff

Action

For information

Editorial

I've been responsible for the oversight of Housing Benefit (HB) in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for just over ten years. Reading the updates in this edition of the LAWD has caused me to reflect on how much has changed since 2013, for example, the significantly improved performance on debt collection. I'd like to think that at least some of this is down to the work we have done to establish the HB Debt Service, the support we have offered to individual local authorities (LAs) and the work to reconcile debts being referred for collection from DWP administered benefits. If you get an opportunity, please come along to one of the debt workshops referred to within this bulletin.

We've also ramped up our endeavours on fraud and error. We started off with the Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (more commonly known by its acronym FERIS) which, thanks to you, we got off the ground in a matter of months. We now have the HB Award Accuracy Initiative and seen performance on this improve steadily since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic; the return on investment being £4 for every £1 of programme spend.

Ten years ago, we were maybe expecting there to be fewer HB claims than there are now. I guess if benefit simplification was easy we'd have done it many years ago. However, Move to Universal Credit is building momentum and you can see below the new areas which are coming on stream for Tax Credit only customers and with limited scale tests for other benefit combinations.

My memories on Facebook tell me that I was in Crieff this time ten years ago – my first time presenting at an IRRV conference. This week I am looking forward to meeting LA colleagues in Glasgow and, of course, next month in Telford. If you are there, please come and say hello and feel free to ask any questions.

I do hope you've managed to take a good break from work this summer and been lucky with the weather if you have.

Clare Elliott

Head of the Local Authority Partnership, Engagement and Delivery division

Low value Housing Benefit debt recovered by DWP's Debt Management

1. Debt Management has recently identified approximately 400 Housing Benefit (HB) debts, with balances of £1.00 or less, which their system will not collect as a deduction from the Department for Work and Pensions's (DWP's) benefits. This is a DWP system set parameter to fall in line with DWP's Abandonment Policy for other types of low value debt.

2. However, the department's debt recovery system does not automatically abandon the HB debt as it would for a DWP administered benefit as it does not own the HB debt. Therefore, any HB debts £1.00 or less loop around the debt recovery system with no action.

3. Debt Management asked the Local Authority Partnership, Engagement and Delivery (LA-PED) division to seek views from the Practitioners' Operational Group (POG) as to whether:

- they would be content to give DWP the authority to abandon HB debts of £1.00 or less, or alternatively
- Debt Management could return the low value balance to the local authority (LA) for the LA to take their own action under their write-off policy.

4. POG consensus was that any HB debt that is £1.00 or less is returned to LAs from Debt Management. This is so LAs can account for any amounts of debts not collected and take appropriate action (for example, writing off the debt).

5. Any HB debts authorities write-off will need to be accounted for in their debt stats they report to the department on a quarterly basis. Without the return of the debt, they would not have the information to do so.

Timing and future action

6. Debt Management is hoping to start returning debts currently held with a balance of £1.00 or under within the next few months.

7. LAs must not re refer these debts or any further debts with a balance of £1.00 or under to Debt Management going forward.

8. If you have any questions regarding the content of this article, email:
lawelfare.pdt@dwp.gov.uk

Update: Transformation of the SHBE returns using a real time Application Programme Interface

9. As you know, DWP is working with LA IT software suppliers to transform the current four-weekly SHBE (Single Housing Benefit Extract) to automatically provide the HB data from LA systems to DWP in real-time. This will increase the frequency in which the data will be sent to the department and reduce the burden on LA administrative teams by removing the manual extraction, data checking, saving, and exporting of the extract to DWP.

SHBE Application Programme Interface pilot

10. Since the last update in [LAWD7/2023 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-72023#shbe-application-programme-interface-pilot\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-72023#shbe-application-programme-interface-pilot), we are pleased to confirm that the early adopter pilot of the SHBE Application Programme Interface (API) final solution has started; with the first live HB data arriving in DWP mid-July.

11. The feedback gathered so far has allowed:

- IT software suppliers to ensure the solution is working as expected and make changes/improvements where necessary
- DWP to ensure the solution collecting HB data is working as expected and can handle the quantity of data incoming from LAs
- DWP to understand the impact that moving to SHBE API has on LAs.

12. The data and feedback collected is also enabling DWP to improve the implementation products and confirm live support measures ahead of national rollout to ensure LAs are supported by DWP and their IT software suppliers.

SHBE API knowledge share for LAs

13. In readiness for national rollout, LAs need to be aware of the following:

- **Connectivity**

- SHBE API uses the same certificate and IP address as existing DWP data-shares (for example – Customer Information System (CIS) Interest Automation)

14. Early adopter LAs found the initial set up of SHBE API simple, using DWP's live pilot guidance and IT software supplier own solution guidance.

- **18-month historic data bulk upload**

- all LAs will complete an 18-month historic data bulk upload of all live HB cases, providing DWP with a baseline record.

15. Do note: Early adopter LAs have recently completed their 18-month historic data bulk uploads and have advised that all LAs take early action to resolve outstanding Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) referrals for DWP's CIS mismatches of a surname, National Insurance number, or date of birth ahead of national rollout.

16. LAs who have undertaken this activity have benefitted from this when completing their 18-month historic data bulk upload. Whereas LAs who did not, resulted in additional work for them to catch up on historical inaccuracies.

- **Real-time error handling**

- SHBE API will validate claimant data against CIS to ensure the data arriving is accurate.
- if a mismatch occurs, DWP will return the record to your LA advising why it hasn't been accepted. From then, your LA will need to investigate, amend, and resubmit the correct data to DWP.
- where CIS is wrong, LAs will have to send a CIS500 request to DWP and resubmit the record once CIS has been amended.

17. The feedback received during weekly pilot reviews with early adopter LAs has assured DWP that the live HB data is arriving in DWP as expected and that the introduction of additional data-quality validations and real-time error handling has benefitted early adopter LAs involved; additionally improving the quality of data arriving in DWP.

National rollout next steps

18. National rollout of SHBE API remains on track for autumn 2023 and will still take place using a staggered approach to accommodate LA IT software supplier's release schedules.

19. DWP will be issuing implementation guidance (which is being prepared in collaboration with early adopter LAs and IT software suppliers) and a frequently asked questions guide in readiness for national rollout.

20. Whilst the implementation guidance will provide detailed information to aid LAs' understanding of SHBE API, DWP will work with your IT software supplier to provide

calls/overviews to build LA confidence in the process DWP and software your IT software supplier are providing.

21. In the build-up to national rollout your LA Revenues and Benefits teams will need to:

- ensure that your CIS Interest Automation solution is working. If not, raise an incident with LA Security and Support Team helpdesk as soon as possible
- review outstanding HBMS referrals to ensure your HB claimant data is as up to date as possible
- ensure you are using the CIS500 version v27.0 form to request amendments to CIS – the form and guidance is available on Glasscubes
- install your IT software supplier's most recent release into live in readiness. If hosted, you'll need to request that your IT software supplier updates your IT when required.
- work closely with your internal IT team to ensure they have the capacity to make the necessary system changes in autumn 2023.

22. To reassure LAs, DWP has agreed that following implementation of the final solution, there will be a period of dual running to ensure the accuracy of data and address any issues which impact LA's performance measurement figures before moving across to solely using SHBE API data.

23. If you need any further information, email:

lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk

New email solution for Disability Living Allowance Working Age form DBD68LA (for unitary authorities and county councils)

24. DWP currently issues form DBD68LA by email to LAs to establish care home admission dates and funding information for those in receipt of Attendance Allowance. DWP is extending this service to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) Working Age queries.

25. The email solution will be available from 11 September 2023 and should be **used by all unitary authorities and county councils**.

26. DWP DLA Working Age colleagues will issue the form DBD68LA to LAs by email from: internalenquiries.disabilitylivingallowance@dwp.gov.uk and replies from LAs should be returned to the same address.

27. The same DBD68LA form is used for both DLA Working Age and Attendance Allowance. To help identify if the DWP enquiry is for a DLA or Attendance Allowance LAs can use the customer's date of birth:

- if the date of birth is on or after 8 April 1948 this is a DLA customer.
- if the date of birth is prior to 8 April 1948 this is an Attendance Allowance customer.

28. If LAs have any queries about the content of this article, email:
lawelfare.laliaisonteam@dwp.gov.uk

Reminder: Home Office schemes to relocate and resettle individuals from Afghanistan

29. The Home Office has started issuing visas to Afghan citizens who fled to a third country in connection with the collapse of the Afghan government in 2021. Visas are being issued under the Afghanistan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) or the Afghan Citizens' Resettlement Scheme (ACRS). We expect arrivals in the UK to be staggered as individuals are being strongly encouraged to find suitable accommodation before travelling.

30. This is a reminder of the habitual residency test exemptions which continue to apply to those with 'indefinite leave to enter' under the ACRS and ARAP routes.

31. Regulations are in place to ensure that these persons have access to income-based, disability and carer benefits quickly after they arrive in the UK. These individuals are exempt from the habitual residency test but will still need to satisfy other benefit entitlement conditions. Please refer to circular [HB A9/2021](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-adjudication-circulars-2021/a92021-the-social-security-habitual-residence-and-past-presence-amendment-regulations-2021) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-adjudication-circulars-2021/a92021-the-social-security-habitual-residence-and-past-presence-amendment-regulations-2021>) for more detailed information including access to HB.

New Performance Measurement work programme

32. DWPs Performance Measurement is responsible for measuring and reporting on the accuracy of DWP benefit payments; including benefits administered by LAs.

33. We do this by randomly sampling a set of cases from the live load of the benefit. For HB this is done on a monthly basis with most LAs only coming up in one monthly sample, although some larger LAs appear in more than one.

Performance Measurement samples for the next work programme

34. Performance Measurement samples are manageable versions of a larger group from the HB live-load population. To ensure that the sampling provides information on

different sub-groups, the sampling design is changed to drop elements from the current sample and replace them with a fresh sample. This approach ensures that we refresh information on the overall population gradually over time.

35. Performance Measurement will start our next work programme in November 2023 and:

- the sample will be targeted to select Working Age passported cases only.
- LAs will receive this sample six to eight weeks ahead of the review for profile meetings and for LA system prints to be provided to Performance Measurement.

36. The sample size will remain the same as used for the publication in May 2024 and we will aim to complete 3,000 reviews over a 12-month work programme.

37. The sample will be targeted to include:

- Universal Credit (UC) passported cases
- Employment and Support Allowance cases without Child Tax Credits

38. The data from these reviews will be included in the May 2025 national statistics.

39. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the continued support that you provide to Performance Measurement that enables us to complete our reviews.

40. You can find our HB work programme for November 2023 to October 2024 attached as a separate **Appendix A** alongside this bulletin.

Future work programme planning for November 2024 to October 2025

41. Following feedback from LAs, we will be exploring the option of developing a rotating work programme for the Performance Management reviews. This will stop the current position of the same LAs being reviewed in the same quarter each year.

42. We will engage with LA-PED and LAs in the development of proposals to make changes to the yearly work programme. This will include attending the next Practitioner's Operational Group meeting on the 19 October 2023 to take questions from LAs on changes to the sample and future work programme changes.

43. Once development is finalised and the actual rotation changes are known we will issue further communications and guidance so LAs are informed of what to expect.

44. We hope LAs will be pleased by this news and look forward to updating you with the development details.

45. In the meantime, if you have any questions regarding this article do contact:
Michelle.Heath@dwp.gov.uk

HB overpayment/debt workshops for LAs

46. This article is to provide you with advance notice that LA-PED is planning a series of HB overpayment/debt workshops for LAs that will run from October 2023 through January 2024.

47. The majority of the workshops will be held face to face. However, there will also be a limited number of virtual one's taking place. The workshops will be open to all LAs and places will be limited to two representatives per LA.

48. The workshops are primarily aimed at HB recovery leaders and the objectives of are to:

- raise the profile of HB debt recovery within LAs
- ensure the understanding of debts recovered through DWP benefits is embedded
- obtain any good practice to refresh the Overpayments Good Practice Guide
- share any ideas from attendees relating to dealing with recovery in the current social economic climate and in the future
- further understand any qualitative information not reflected in the HB debt statistics.

49. The exact location of each face-to-face workshop has yet to be finalised, However, in order to give LAs some advance notice, we propose to hold them in the following regions (Note, these may be subject to change):

- Scotland – Glasgow, Tuesday 10, October 2023
- South West – Plymouth, Wednesday, 25 October 2023
- East Midlands – Sheffield, Wednesday, 1 November 2023
- Central – Nuneaton, Wednesday, 8 November 2023
- North West – Manchester, Tuesday, 21 November and Friday, 24 November 2023
- Wales – Treforest, Wednesday, 29 November 2023
- East – Bury St Edmonds, Tuesday, 12 December 2023
- North East – Longbenton, Thursday, 11 January 2024
- London – Central London, Thursday, 18 January 2024
- Scotland – Falkirk, Tuesday 23 January 2024.

50. We will be issuing a further communication very soon to confirm venues, timings and details of how to reserve a place.

HB Award Accuracy Initiative performance information provided by LAs

51. LAs will be aware DWP derives performance information from the SHBE returns, which captures claim level activity. In turn, this information is used to monitor performance. The Performance Development Team's (PDT's) collaborative work with LAs has provided some insight into the performance information used to monitor Housing Benefit Award Accuracy (HBAA) Initiative performance, in particular:

- the setting of the 'intervention' type when commencing a Full Case Review (FCR) or undertaking a HBMS referral including Self Employment Reviews (SERs) – this informs progress against the intervention volumes LAs are funded to undertake
- correct attribution of the source of any change made to the HB award – this informs the financial value of savings directly attributed to the intervention.

Setting intervention type

52. Following the decommissioning of the clerical HBMS returns in the financial year ending March 2023, it is necessary for LAs to set up an intervention for each HBMS/SER referral on their LA IT system, to ensure it is captured for reporting purposes. The HBMS file (ending .001) must therefore be uploaded on to an LAs IT system to ensure all outcomes are fully reported to DWP.

53. The two key SHBE fields that inform the coding of the DWP reports are:

- SHBE Field 173 – Reason for Fraud and Error Detection Activity
- SHBE Field 254 – If no annual uprating, how was the change identified

54. To ensure HBAA Initiative activities are accurately captured all HB assessors must set the intervention types to either:

- High Risk score case referral from HBMS – Code 1 for FCRs
- HBMS Data Match Referral – Code 2 for HBMS/SER Referrals

Identifying cases for FCRs (within allowed flexibility)

55. Where LAs are identifying cases for FCRs within the flexibility allowed by DWP, they should set up and record cases in accordance with the processes outlined in the article.

Changes to HB award

56. Any subsequent changes to the HB award associated with the respective intervention types should be correctly attributed against either:

- Code 20 for HBMS
- Code 21 for FCR

57. Do note: the descriptors on front-end LA IT systems may differ slightly depending on an LA's IT software supplier. If LAs are unsure which intervention type/change code to select, they should refer to their LA's IT software supplier area within Glasscubes.

58. PDT will continue to monitor the proportion of interventions and change source recorded against expected codes and, by exception, engage with LAs where there is significant variation, for example overuse of code 99 for intervention type or for HB change source.

59. The aim is to get things right 'first time' so if any LA would like to discuss this further or seek additional support from PDT, do contact:

lawelfare.pdtprm@dwp.gov.uk

Latest update: Move to UC

60. September 2023's expansion of Move to UC activity to move claimants on legacy benefits to UC will see work commencing in:

- Cumbria and Lancashire
- Essex
- Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, and the Isle of Wight
- Southwest Wales
- East Scotland
- Lincolnshire Nottinghamshire & Rutland.

61. Whilst October will see work commencing in:

- South-east Wales
- Central Scotland.

62. We are continuing with our small-scale discovery phase for Tax Credit couples; learning and adapting to ensure couples can make a claim to UC effectively before we increase numbers later this year.

63. From September we are also starting a separate small-scale discovery phase with other legacy benefit combinations to support our preparation to move households on different combinations of legacy benefits at scale in the financial year ending March 2025.

64. Furthermore, building on the positive reception of January's publication [Learning from the Discovery Phase](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/completing-the-move-to-universal-credit-learning-from-the-discovery-phase) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/completing-the-move-to-universal-credit-learning-from-the-discovery-phase>) which outlined our learnings from the 'Earliest Testable Service' cohort (the first 500 Migration Notices issued in Bolton and Medway), we have been working with Ministers to publish [Completing the Move to Universal Credit: learning from initial Tax Credit migrations](#)

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/completing-the-move-to-universal-credit-learning-from-initial-tax-credit-migrations/completing-the-move-to-universal-credit-learning-from-initial-tax-credit-migrations>) and [Move to Universal Credit statistics, July 2022 to May 2023](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/move-to-universal-credit-statistics-july-2022-to-may-2023) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/move-to-universal-credit-statistics-july-2022-to-may-2023>)

HB decisions by the Upper Tribunal

65. Decision Making and Appeals (DMA) Leeds is not aware of any HB cases that have been decided by the Upper Tribunal (UT) since the last edition of the LAWD bulletin.

66. A selection of [decisions of the UT](https://www.gov.uk/administrative-appeals-tribunal-decisions) (<https://www.gov.uk/administrative-appeals-tribunal-decisions>) are published on their website. Do be aware that there is an undefined time lapse between decisions being issued and their appearance on the website.

67. If you have any queries about cases before the UT Judges or courts, please contact us by email at: quarryhouse.dmaleedscustomersupportservices@dwp.gov.uk

New Legislation

68. The following Statutory Instrument (SI) has been laid:

- 2023 No. 894 Social Security (Infected Blood Capital Disregard) (Amendment) Regulations 2023, made on 9 August 2023.

69. Copies of SIs can now be downloaded from [legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/) (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>)

What's new on our HB pages on www.gov.uk

70. The following items can be found on the website link shown:

Document Type	Subject	Link
LAWD8/2023 bulletin	Editorial. Local Council Tax – Reduction interest setting on Searchlight – Additional method for communicating with Employee Authentication Service	LAWD8/2023 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-82023)

Document Type	Subject	Link
	<p>users – Updated versions of the Verify Earnings and Pensions guidance and frequently asked questions – Updated version of the Housing Benefit Accuracy Award Initiative FAQs – VEP service to provide more than 12 months’ worth of data – Invitation to the next Data sharing and IT consultation and engagement forum – Publication of HB speed of processing statistics for January to March 2023 – Practitioners’ Operational Group and LA Welfare Steering Group – New Conversational Platform on UC telephony – Latest update: Move to UC – Impact of digitalisation on DWP services – HB Decisions with the Upper Tribunal – New Legislation – What’s new on our HB pages on www.gov.uk</p>	

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