

[Department
for Work &
Pensions](#)

Guidance

LA Welfare Direct 1/2024

Published 19 January 2024

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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

Happy New Year to you all! A late main edition this month due to the holidays.

I hope you managed to have a nice break over the festive period; it now seems a long time ago as things ramp up for a busy year ahead.

Before Christmas we issued the funding schedule out to you all detailing the majority of your indicative allocations across all the funding elements (Housing Benefit Award Accuracy (HBAA) is always later due to the dependency on management information that comes in around February). A great deal of effort goes into this and I hope you continue to find this product helpful for your planning. You will see that for the financial year ending March 2025, it includes details of the Move to Universal Credit (UC) managed migration New Burdens funding.

In terms of planning, we also understand that we need to provide you with more details around the managed migration plan which gets underway in April this year.

Hopefully, you have read the letter from Neil Couling we sent to your single inboxes on 4 December 2023. This set out the high-level plans for migration and also stated that we would be writing to you this year with more detail on the national roll out plan and the volumes of Housing Benefit (HB) claimants involved and what this means for individual local authority caseloads so you can understand how and when the work is moving. We hope to have this with you in the next month.

We will also be producing detailed guidance for you on the HB to UC customer journey and before the end of March 2024 plan to hold an all LA conference call. This call aims to walk through the plan and guidance in readiness for scaling in April 2024. I will be chairing this call and want to ensure you have as much clarity as possible on how things will work. More details will follow soon.

In the meantime, I hope you are keeping well and I look forward to speaking to many of you soon.

Darren Baker
Head of Fraud, Error & Debt, Change Communications and Engagement.

LA progress with the Desk Based Review for correct supported accommodation and temporary accommodation markers

1. You will be aware that in March 2023, we funded local authorities (LAs) £5 million nationally to conduct a Desk Based Review of their whole Housing Benefit (HB) caseload. This was to ensure that all HB cases had the correct Supported Accommodation (SA), Temporary Accommodation (TA) or neither marker recorded against them. In return for this funding, we asked all LAs to complete this activity by the end of March 2024.

2. We are now just three months away from that deadline. Since late November 2023, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has contacted a small number of LAs where Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) management information (MI) was indicating a significant lack of progress. However, during January, February and March 2024, DWP will be ramping up this contact with LAs, based upon what the MI is telling us about progress.

3. In addition, we will be sending out case lists to LAs where there is clear inaccuracy with what has been recorded. These lists will be nearly identical to the case lists we sent out on 31 July 2023, for example where:

- new Working Age cases had not been marked as SA or TA
- new Working Age cases had been marked as both SA and TA, when only one should be recorded
- supported accommodation cases did not have an SA type recorded

4. To minimise the case volumes in these lists, we ask that all LAs continue to self-monitor to ensure that all new HB cases are correctly marked.

Ministerial reporting

5. You will be aware that the provision of accurate supported accommodation and temporary accommodation MI remains a key priority for government ministers.

6. DWP is also required to report to ministers on actions being taken across all LAs, towards meeting and providing 100% assurance on the robustness of the information recorded and reported.

7. If you have any questions, please contact lawelfare.datamatching@dwp.gov.uk

Transformation of the SHBE returns using a real time Application Programme Interface: Further update and urgent reminder for those LAs due to go live

SHBE Application Programme Interface pilot

8. Since the last update in December's [LAWD12/2023](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-122023#update-transformation-of-the-shbe-returns-using-a-real-time-application-programme-interface) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-122023#update-transformation-of-the-shbe-returns-using-a-real-time-application-programme-interface>) bulletin, the national rollout of the SHBE Application Programme Interface (API) is continuing.

9. There are now approximately 140 LAs sending HB data to the DWP in real time. Whilst there were some minor initial teething issues experienced by a small number of LAs with connectivity, overall we have received positive feedback from LAs on implementing the solution.

Urgent reminder for LAs to action

10. As a reminder, unless there are exceptional circumstances, we are aiming for all LAs to go live by early February 2024. For LAs due to go live in the coming weeks, LA Revenues and Benefits teams must:

- review and complete the activities advised in [LAWD9/2023](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-92023#update-transformation-of-the-shbe-returns-using-a-real-time-application-programme-interface) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-92023#update-transformation-of-the-shbe-returns-using-a-real-time-application-programme-interface>) (paragraph 21)
- ensure your latest software release is tested and installed into 'live' ready for your onboarding tranche (Important note: the software release required for SHBE API is detailed in the DWP national rollout guidance. This is available under each IT software supplier's area on Glasscubes)
- utilise any products or tools made available by your LA IT software supplier.

11. LAs that were meant to go live but have not been able to, should contact the Local Authority Data Sharing team at lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk to arrange a new go live date as soon as possible.

12. All LAs are reminded that they are required to provide Gnu Privacy Guard (GPG) keys in readiness for the SHBE API enhanced security changes that will be included in your LA's winter software releases. LAs can find GPG key guidance on Glasscubes in their IT specific workspace.

13. Thank you to those LAs who have already provided DWP with their GPG keys.

Pilot LAs

14. We would also like to take this opportunity to say thank-you to those LAs that provided help and assistance during the pilot phase of the project. The constructive feedback received from these LAs has greatly assisted DWP, enabling a smoother rollout across all LAs.

15. The pilot LAs were:

- Durham
- South Cambridge
- East Suffolk
- Adur and Worthing
- Chorley
- Gateshead
- Cambridge City
- Newham
- Ashford
- Fife
- Clackmannanshire

16. If you need any further information, email lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk

Verify Earnings and Pensions Funding for the financial year ending March 2025

17. On 19 December 2023, LAs were issued with their funding schedule for the financial year ending (FYE) March 2025. The schedule included details of the funding allocations for the Verify Earnings and Pensions (VEP) scheme. You will have noticed that this funding has reduced significantly from FYE March 2024. This has been proportionately reduced due to the volume of Working Age HB claims (these generate VEP Alerts) that are due to migrate to UC in the first part of the FYE 2025.

18. Over the coming weeks, we will be providing you with the launch material for VEP (which will outline our expectations around LA performance of the scheme) along with guidance and Working Age HB plans for UC migration. This will be followed up by an all LA conference call (details to follow nearer the time). In the meantime, current LA performance nationally is excellent and we would urge you to continue with these efforts into the new financial year.

19. We want to assure you that DWP still views VEP as a vital tool in keeping claims correct and will remain so throughout the FYE March 2025.

Local Housing Allowance: Indicative rates for the financial year ending March 2025

20. As advised in the [LAWD12/2023 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-122023#the-chancellors-autumn-statement-2023\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-122023#the-chancellors-autumn-statement-2023), the Chancellor announced in the Autumn Statement that the government will raise Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates in Great Britain to the 30th percentile of local market rates in April 2024. On 9 January 2024, the [indicative LHA rates for the financial year ending March 2025 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-housing-allowance-indicative-rates-for-2024-to-2025/indicative-local-housing-allowance-rates-for-2024-to-2025\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/local-housing-allowance-indicative-rates-for-2024-to-2025/indicative-local-housing-allowance-rates-for-2024-to-2025) were published. The rates are for Great Britain only.

21. The confirmed LHA rates will be released in accordance with legislation on 31 January 2024.

Invitation to the next Data Sharing and IT consultation and engagement forum

22. The next forum will be held on Tuesday 13 February 2024 from 11am to 12 noon.

Joining instructions

23. The joining instructions are:

- follow this link to join the [MS Teams live event, \(https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_NWZjMTYxODEtNTQ1Mi00ZWRkLWE2NDQtMzY4ZjQ1Njc4N2Yw%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%2296f1f6e9-1057-4117-ac28-80cdf86f8c3%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2297368585-be27-4f80-a168-b7792680f27c%22%7d\)](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_NWZjMTYxODEtNTQ1Mi00ZWRkLWE2NDQtMzY4ZjQ1Njc4N2Yw%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%2296f1f6e9-1057-4117-ac28-80cdf86f8c3%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%2297368585-be27-4f80-a168-b7792680f27c%22%7d) or call in (audio only) by dialing 0203 787 4277 and, when prompted for the Phone Conference ID, enter 124 162 916#
- note: It is more difficult to ask questions through dial-in so, if you anticipate having questions, we recommend joining through MS Teams where possible
- aim to join the event two or three minutes before the start time, as we intend to start promptly

- speakers will be muted by default, but instructions will be given during the event if you want to ask a question

Forum agenda

- A 15-minute introduction from DWP, covering projects recently delivered, projects currently in delivery, insight into future planned projects, as well as the most recent common issues that have been reported to us
- 30 to 45 minutes of questions from LAs on the call about the projects and matters covered in the introduction and any other IT and data sharing questions and issues LAs may have
- If time allows, 15 minutes focused on suggestions from LAs about future data sharing, data matching or automation projects that DWP could consider funding and delivering

24. The call will be recorded and published on Glasscubes.

25. The forum is open to all LAs and it would be beneficial for every LA to have at least one representative dial into the forum to help maximise feedback. Each LA representative should:

- seek input and feedback from as many colleagues as possible prior to dialling in, for example, questions they might want to have answered.
- have knowledge, at least at a high level, about data sharing, data matching and current IT topic areas
- feedback to their colleagues about how the conference call went, including the answers to the questions we asked

26. We look forward to your participation on the call. However, if you have any questions in the meantime, please contact paul.selby@dwp.gov.uk

Practitioners' Operational Group and LA Welfare Steering Group

27. The last Practitioner's Operational Group (POG) meeting took place on 14 December 2023. Agenda items included the LA Welfare issues Highlight Report, LA funding, Move to UC, Cost of Living, updates on the VEP and HBAA schemes

for the FYE March 2025 and an HB Fraud Investigations and Joint Working Group update.

28. Both groups' meetings are held bi-monthly (and alternately), so the next LA Welfare Steering Group meeting is scheduled to take place on 18 January 2024.

29. If you have any questions regarding topics raised at these consultation groups, you can email lawelfare.correspondence@dwp.gov.uk

HB decisions by the Upper Tribunal

30. DMA (Decision Making and Appeals) Leeds is not aware of any HB cases that have been decided by the Upper Tribunal (UT) since the last edition of the LA Welfare Direct bulletin, LAWD12/2023 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-122023>).

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

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

HB cases awaiting decision by the Upper Tribunal

33. DMA Leeds have not been made aware of any new HB/CTB cases that are awaiting decision by the UT.

34. 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

35. The following Statutory Instruments (SIs) have been laid:

- 2023 No.1280 The Tribunal Procedure (Amendment No.2) Rules 2023, made on 4 December 2023
- 2023 No. 1310 The Occupational Pension Scheme (Amendment) (Equal Treatment) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2023, made on 6 December 2023
- 2023 No.1309 The Pensions Act 2004 (Amendment) (Pension Protection Fund Compensation) Regulations 2023, made on 6 December 2023
- 2023 No.1312 The Pensions (Pension Protection Fund Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2023, made on 7 December 2023
- 2023 No.1352 The Social Security Additional Payments (Third Qualifying Day) Regulations 2023, made on 11 December 2023

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

What's new on our HB pages on [www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-benefit-information-guidance-and-good-practice-for-local-authority-staff) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-benefit-information-guidance-and-good-practice-for-local-authority-staff>)

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

Document Type	Subject	Link
Bulletin	1. Editorial 2. Refresh of Housing benefit 3. Assurance Process Module X for the financial year ending March 2023 4. Reminder: Procurement of reporting accountants for the FYE March 2025 HBAP 5. The importance of LAs keeping up to date with	LAWD12/2023 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-122023)

Document Type	Subject	Link
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IT software supplier releases **6**. Update: Transformation of the SHBE returns using a real time Application Programme Interface **7**. Update: National Fraud Initiative supplementary matches for student loans **8**. The Chancellor's Autumn Statement 2023 **9**. HB overpayment/debt workshops for LAs: Remaining availability **10**. Secondment opportunity in LA-PED division's new Management Information Insight Team **11**. Secondment opportunity in LA-PED division's new Memorandum of Understanding Compliance team **12**. LA access issues to Glasscubes' notifications and services **13**. Latest update: Move to UC **14**. Practitioners' Operational Group and LA Welfare Steering Group **15**. HB Decisions by the Upper Tribunal **16**. New Legislation **17**. What's new on our HB pages on www.gov.uk

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