

Guidance

# LA Welfare Direct 3/2024

Updated 11 March 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](mailto:lawelfare.correspondence@dwp.gov.uk)

# Who should read

All Housing Benefit staff

# Action

For information

# Editorial

Welcome everyone to March's edition of the LA Welfare Direct. I appreciate this is a really busy time of year and, indeed, there is certainly a lot going on with the Move to Universal Credit (UC) and the Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) Application Programme Interface to name just two.

In December 2023, we issued the indicative funding allocations to you all. We plan to issue your final allocations in the next week detailing all the Housing Benefit (HB) funding streams including the HB Award Accuracy (HBAA) Initiative.

This month we also provided the details of our planned All LA Verify Earnings and Pensions and HBAA Initiatives conference call in preparation of their April 2024 launch. And, amongst other articles, you'll also find updates on the Move to UC and the Care Home Information Service and an invitation to a Glasscubes tutorial that we hope local authorities will find useful.

Finally, I have my fingers crossed that the weather starts to improve as we move into spring and we all get to enjoy a well-deserved rest with the Easter bank holidays that are coming up at the end of March.

Take care.

**Tracy Williams**

Head of Local Authority Funding, Analysis & Business Support

Local Authority Partnership, Engagement and Delivery

## **Important reminder: SHBE Application Programme Interface**

1. As reminded in January's [LAWD1/2024](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2024/la-welfare-direct-12024#transformation-of-theshbereturns-using-a-real-time-application-programme-interface-further-update-and-urgent-reminder-for-those-las-due-to-go-live) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2024/la-welfare-direct-12024#transformation-of-theshbereturns-using-a-real-time-application-programme-interface-further-update-and-urgent-reminder-for-those-las-due-to-go-live>), all local authorities (LAs) should now be using the SHBE (Single Housing Benefit Extract) Application Programme Interface (API) to send Housing Benefit (HB) data to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
2. Therefore, LAs who are not using SHBE API and have not arranged a later start date by exception, must contact the LA Data Sharing team at [lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk) immediately.

### **LA provision of GPG key to DWP**

3. As part of the rollout to SHBE API, all LAs must also provide a GPG (Gnu Privacy Guard) key to DWP. If you have not done this already, you must follow the guidance available on your IT software supplier specific workspace on Glasscubes and send one immediately to [lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk)
4. The new token functionality will be rolled out to all LAs in March 2024. We will provide further communication by Glasscubes advising when LAs will receive their returned keys along with guidance.

5. If you encounter any difficulty in generating the key, contact the email address given above.

6. We would like to take this opportunity to thank those LAs who have already provided DWP with their GPG key.

## Frequently asked questions

7. DWP continuously monitors your questions and feedback and uses this to improve the frequently asked questions (FAQ) on SHBE API

8. The updated FAQs is now available on your IT software supplier specific workspace on Glasscubes.

9. Thank you to those LAs that provided feedback.

10. If you need any further information, email [lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk)

## Further update: Care Home Information Service

11. DWP is working to deliver an automated data sharing solution, for Care Home admissions and discharge notifications, between LAs and DWP. The aim is to ensure all admissions and discharges are notified promptly, to minimise the risks of overpayments and underpayments at a moment of significant stress for individuals and their families.

12. Since our last update in [LAWD7/2023](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-72023#update-care-homes-information-service>), we have been working closely with the LA early adopters and Adult Social Care (ASC) IT software suppliers to develop and refine the Care Home Information Service (CHIS) solution.

13. As a reminder, the CHIS project is part of the first stage of a suite of initiatives to improve ASC data sharing from LAs to DWP with a future goal of two-way data sharing.

## Latest position

14. Two LAs are now successfully live data sharing. We are also working with additional LAs (from the remaining ASC IT software suppliers) to bring them onboard. This will ensure all ASC IT solutions are being tested.

## National rollout

15. National rollout will commence with a small number of LAs in June to July 2024, with a view to increasing numbers in a phased approach across each supplier base between September 2024 to the end of March 2025.

## Next steps

16. In the coming months DWP will:

- onboard county councils to the DWP API gateway
- share rollout guidance with all LAs
- hold all LA calls, in partnership with your individual ASC IT software supplier, to give an overview of the CHIS API solution.

17. Future updates will be shared through LAWD bulletins and Glasscubes.

18. We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank our early adopters LAs, whose ongoing support has been invaluable to the project.

19. If you would like any further information, please contact [lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk)

## Update: New War Pension rates

20. A small number of LAs have recently contacted DWP to ask when the details of the new War Pension rates will be published. Unfortunately, the department is unable to do so until the Ministry of Defence issues a Ministerial Statement to Parliament.

21. We apologise for the delay and any inconvenience this is causing LAs. An HB adjudication circular will be issued with the new rates as soon as we have confirmation that the Ministerial Statement has been issued.

## **Latest update: Public Services Network**

22. LAs will be aware that two of DWP's IT applications (Searchlight and Verify Earnings and Pensions (VEP)) are still accessed through the Public Service Network (PSN).

23. To assist LAs removing their reliance on PSN, as previously communicated, DWP Digital colleagues are currently developing the solutions to migrate these two services off PSN.

24. The design of the proposed solution took longer than anticipated due to the complexity of the work involved. Progress has now been made on the design of the internet facing solution and it is likely that it will rely upon MTLS (Mutual Transport Layer Security) authentication.

25. We will be providing regular communications over the coming months to keep LAs updated on progress and to help with their planning.

26. If you have any questions, please email [lawelfare.lasecurity@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.lasecurity@dwp.gov.uk)

## **Update: The Cabinet Office LA Council Tax debt recovery pilot**

27. The Local Authority Partnership, Engagement and Delivery (LA-PED) division published an article in [LAWDLite10/2023](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-lite-102023#the-cabinet-office-pilots) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-lite-102023#the-cabinet-office-pilots>) regarding the Council Tax debt recovery pilot. The Cabinet Office and LA-PED continue to work on the proposed national rollout of a data sharing process to support Council Tax debt recovery.

### **Next steps**

28. The Cabinet Office is working to standardise documentation that will be required from each individual LA to use this data sharing process. It is envisaged that this documentation will be sent out within the next three months. DWP and the Cabinet Office are also working alongside HM Revenue and Customs to progress the process.

29. This process may take longer than expected and we are grateful for your understanding.

## **Universal Credit All LA conference call on 15 March 2024**

30. As detailed in the Preparations for Move to Universal Credit (Managed Migration) letter sent to Revenues and Benefits managers on 20 February 2024, this is to remind LAs that the Universal Credit (UC) All LA conference call will take place on Friday 15 March 2024 from 11am until 12.30pm.

### **Joining instructions**

31. The joining instructions are:

- The MS Teams link to this meeting has been shared in the version of the LAWD3/2024 that was sent directly to each LA's single inbox. (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.

32. To prevent any capacity issues, we ask that no more than two representatives from an LA join the call.

33. If you have questions that you would like addressing on the call, please email them to [lawelfare.laliaisonteam@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.laliaisonteam@dwp.gov.uk) in advance if possible.

# All LA VEP and HB Award Accuracy Initiatives conference call on 21 March 2024

34. As detailed in the VEP and HB Award Accuracy (HBAA) Initiatives launch letters for financial year ending March 2025 (sent to Chief Finance Officers and Revenues and Benefits managers on 21 February 2024, this is to remind LAs that the All LA VEP and HBAA Initiatives conference call will take place on Thursday 21 March 2023 from 2pm until 3:30pm.

35. During the call we will look to prepare LAs for the relaunch of the Initiatives from April 2024 and provide an overview of the expectations as well as an opportunity for questions. Therefore, all LAs are encouraged to attend.

## Joining instructions

36. The joining instructions are:

- The MS Teams link to this meeting has been shared in the version of the LAWD3/2024 that was sent directly to each LA's single inbox. (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.

37. To prevent any capacity issues, we would ask that no more than two representatives from an LA join the call.

38. If you have any queries regarding the Initiatives, or wish to discuss the exceptional reasons why your LA may not be able to participate in the initiatives, you can email [lawelfare.frauderrordebt@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.frauderrordebt@dwp.gov.uk)

## Invitation to a Glasscubes tutorial on 26 March 2024

39. In response to the yearly Customer feedback survey on data sharing and data security, the Local Authority Support Team is holding a Glasscubes tutorial on Tuesday 26 March 2024 from 2pm until 3pm.

## **Joining instructions**

40. The joining instructions are:

- The MS Teams link to this meeting has been shared in the version of the LAWD3/2024 that was sent directly to each LA's single inbox. (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.

## **Tutorial agenda**

41. The agenda for the tutorial is:

- navigation
- using the search feature
- setting notifications
- top tips
- question and answers.

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

43. The tutorial is open to all LA colleagues who have access to Glasscubes and would benefit from an opportunity to ask questions.

44. We look forward to your participation on the call. However, in the meantime, if you have any questions please contact [lawelfare.lasupport@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.lasupport@dwp.gov.uk)

# Latest update: Move to UC

45. Move to UC activity for those claiming Tax Credits only continues to press ahead and we are on track to fulfil our aim of inviting over 500,000 households to claim UC by the end of the financial year ending (FYE) March 2024. Move to UC activity is also now operating in all Jobcentre Plus districts throughout Great Britain (GB); a month earlier than originally planned.

46. As outlined in a recent [Written Statement \(https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-01-25/hcws213\)](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-01-25/hcws213) from the Minister for Employment, preparations for migrating wider groups of legacy benefit claimants from April 2024 are well underway.

47. Excluding Employment and Support Allowance only and Employment and Support Allowance with HB, we plan to have completed the remaining moves for those in Working Age benefit households sequentially (starting with Income Support claimants and those claiming Tax Credits with HB from April, HB only claimants from June, Employment Support Allowance with Child Tax Credits from July and Jobseekers Allowance in September) by the end of FYE March 2025.

48. As Move to UC activity is now operating in all Jobcentre Plus Districts throughout GB, Migration Notices will be issued to the benefit combinations outlined above by benefit type and not by geographical location.

## UC sanctions regime

49. The [LAWD12/2023 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-122023\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-122023) outlined various DWP measures delivered in the Chancellor's [Autumn Statement \(https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6568909c5936bb00133167cc/E02982473\\_Autumn\\_Statement\\_Nov\\_23\\_Accessible\\_Final.pdf\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6568909c5936bb00133167cc/E02982473_Autumn_Statement_Nov_23_Accessible_Final.pdf) on 22 November 2023. The statement included the UC sanctions regime.

50. As requested by the DWP/LA Practitioners' Operational Group, you will find to follow some clarification regarding the UC sanctions regime:

51. A sanction is a reduction of benefit, not a suspension, and this remains unchanged. The Autumn Statement 2023 measures do not change the way sanctions are administered, including the way 'good reason' is applied.

52. The new claim closure measure for disengaged claimants and end of scheme review will only impact claimants that receive the UC Standard Allowance only

(where they have remained disengaged for a continuous period of six months or more, following an open-ended sanction).

53. Claimants usually lose 100% of their UC Standard Allowance when a sanction is applied.

54. Do note: Where entitlement to passported benefits is based on receipt of a monetary award of UC, sanctioned claimants in receipt of the UC Standard Allowance only will lose their entitlement at the point of sanction.

55. This measure will not be applied to UC claimants who receive additional amounts for childcare, housing, or a disability, nor will it be applied where the claimant has a new, or pre-existing vulnerability, which impacts on their ability to look for, or to take up work.

56. If you have any questions about the content of this article, please email [lawelfare.laliasonteam@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.laliasonteam@dwp.gov.uk)

## Publication of the Discretionary Housing Payment reports

57. DWP is pleased to announce the publication of two comprehensive research reports on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) on 29 February 2024.

58. We would like to thank the LAs involved for their collaboration on the first of these reports, the [Local Authority Insight Survey Wave 36](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-insight-survey-wave-36-discretionary-housing-payments) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-insight-survey-wave-36-discretionary-housing-payments>). This research was commissioned to enhance our understanding of LAs' management and use of DHPs in England and Wales. The findings from this report have played a crucial role in informing policy development contributing to our evaluation of the wider impact of DHPs within HB and UC.

59. The second report, [The Early Evaluation of Discretionary Housing Payments](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-evaluation-of-discretionary-housing-payments) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-evaluation-of-discretionary-housing-payments>), was commissioned to help us better understand recipients' experiences of claiming DHPs and the impacts this support had on their lives.

60. We continue to value the on-going support and collaboration with LAs. Your support and advice is central in building our evidence base on the use and impact of DHPs for households to inform future policy making.

# **Secondment opportunities in LA-PED division's Performance Development Team**

61. Working with LAs, as one of our major stakeholders in Welfare Reform, continues to feature heavily and for this reason we value the expertise and knowledge that those administering HB within LAs can bring.

62. LA-PED division has had a very successful programme of bringing HB experts from LAs in to work alongside data sharing, subsidy, change and performance teams on secondment. We are now looking for LA secondees to join our Performance Development Team (PDT).

63. PDT comprises of business consultants and Performance Relationship Managers (PRMs), who have many years of experience and expertise of working with central and local government to deliver sustainable improvements in performance.

64. The consultancy and PRM roles offer a wide variety of working experiences, which complement each other and come together when supporting HB performance. We work collaboratively with LAs to help them evaluate their processes, identify efficiencies and improve service delivery. Continuous improvement is central to the work we deliver and our aim is to transfer our skills and knowledge to our clients.

## **Desirable skills**

- strong stakeholder engagement and management - ability to build and maintain effective working relationships with LAs and other stakeholders.
- good drafting and communication skills
- competent excel skills – enjoys working with and analysing management information
- managing competing priorities.

65. Through our long history of secondees joining our team we have gained a deeper understanding of what life is like within an HB service. This has helped us shape how we deliver our performance management offer and best support all 350 LAs. In turn, LA secondees have seen their own knowledge of the HB landscape widen.

66. We do not want to stop there. We understand the fast-paced, ever-changing environment you come from and we want to continue this exciting learning journey

together. These opportunities are ideally suited to those with a good understanding of HB procedures and who want to gain an insight into central government whilst learning new skills in a busy and supportive workplace.

## **Further information**

67. Secondment posts would be offered for either 12 months or 24 months dependant on the role offered. Both the consultancy and PRM roles require some travel and overnight stays, this is more frequent for the consultancy role. The posts would usually be full time and based across the country. To give you an idea, we have hub locations in the following places:

- Blackpool
- Glasgow
- Leeds
- London
- Manchester
- Newcastle upon Tyne
- Sheffield

68. Moves at public expense would not be considered.

69. As a guide the:

- PRM role is the Higher Executive Officer grade in the civil service with a broad salary range of £35,000 to £41,000
- consultancy role is the Senior Executive Officer grade in the civil service with a broad salary range of £41,000 to £48,000

70. If you are keen to register your interest, check with your LA you can be released and then send your CV to [laped.businesssupportteam@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:laped.businesssupportteam@dwp.gov.uk) by Tuesday 30 April 2024.

## **Practitioners' Operational Group and LA Welfare Steering Group**

71. The last Practitioners' Operational Group (POG) meeting took place on 15 February 2024. Agenda items included the LA Welfare issues Highlight Report, LA funding, Move to UC, Cost of Living and an update on the HB Fraud Investigations and Joint Working Group.

72. Both groups' meetings are held bi-monthly (and alternately), so the next LA Welfare Steering Group meeting is scheduled to take place on 21 March 2024.

73. If you have any questions regarding topics raised at these consultation groups, you can email [lawelfare.correspondence@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.correspondence@dwp.gov.uk)

## **HB decisions by the Upper Tribunal**

74. 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.

75. 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.

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

## **HB cases awaiting decision by the Upper Tribunal**

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

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

## **New Legislation**

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

- 2024 No. 101 The Pension Protection Fund and Occupational Pension Schemes (Levy Ceiling) Order 2024, made on 30 January 2024
- 2024 No. 121 The Statutory Paternity Pay (Amendment) Regulations 2024, made on 1 February 2024
- 2024 No. 159 The Universal Credit (Work-Related Requirements) In Work Pilot Scheme (Extension) Order 2024, made on 15 February 2024
- 2024 No. 176 The Tax Credits (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2024, made on 20 February 2024
- 2024 No. 249 The Social Security (Contributions) (Limits and Thresholds, National Insurance Funds Payments and Extension of Veterans Relief) Regulations 2024, made on 29 February 2024
- 2024 No. 247 The Tax Credits, Child Benefit and Guardians Allowance Up-rating Regulations 2024, made on 29 February 2024

80. 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>)**

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

<b>Document Type</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Link</b>
Bulletin	<b>1</b> Editorial <b>2</b> New Housing Benefit Matching Service Rule HBCB001 to replace HB501 <b>3</b> Annual uprating:	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2024/la-welfare-direct-22024">LAWD2/2024</a> ( <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2024/la-welfare-direct-22024">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2024/la-welfare-direct-22024</a> )

Document Type	Subject	Link
	<p>Polygamous marriage cases</p> <p><b>4</b> Deadline for the submission of HB Subsidy final tested claims and assurance process reports or audit certificates</p> <p><b>5</b> Closing of the Payment Deduction Programme full reconciliation exercise Debt Management inboxes</p> <p><b>6</b> Additional HB overpayment or debt workshop for LAs</p> <p><b>7</b> Enhancing the Universal Credit data available to LAs</p> <p><b>8</b> Publication of HB speed of processing statistics for July 2023 to September 2023</p> <p><b>9</b> Practitioners' Operational Group and LA Welfare Steering Group</p> <p><b>10</b> Latest update: Move to UC</p> <p><b>11</b> HB</p>	

Document Type	Subject	Link
	Decisions by the Upper Tribunal <b>12</b> New Legislation <b>13</b> What's new on our HB pages on <a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a>	
Adjudication circular	Victims of forced marriage and victims of transnational marriage abandonment	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-adjudication-circulars-2024/a22024-victims-of-forced-marriage-and-victims-of-transnational-marriage-abandonment"> <u>A2/2024</u>            (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-adjudication-circulars-2024/a22024-victims-of-forced-marriage-and-victims-of-transnational-marriage-abandonment)         </a>

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