

# Housing Benefit Direct.....

For staff involved in the delivery of HB/CTB in Local Authorities  
May 2007

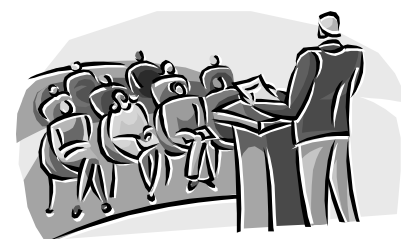
Issue 65

## Editorial

In one of those unusual but happy coincidences, I am writing this editorial just after spending a very interesting day at the Local Authority Investigation Officers Group (LAIOG) annual conference, and in this issue of HB Direct we have a special fraud and error supplement. As many of you will know, LAIOG exists to promote continuous improvement in both the performance and the professional development of investigators. It does this by encouraging best practice in local authority investigation services and enhancing training opportunities. It was certainly a lively and informative day, with a strong DWP presence, I'm pleased to say - for example John Southworth from HBMS spoke about the latest developments in data-matching and Chris Bull gave the BFI perspective on both past achievements and future prospects.



I was very pleased to be invited to open the first full day of the conference together with the chairman, David Clarke. I tried to set out some thoughts on our strategic approach to counter-fraud work. It went something like this: I want to see us move towards identifying the level of fraud in a given locality, and not just Housing Benefit but all benefits. This is not something we currently have the ability to do, but we may be able to get closer to it. We could then set a joint target to reduce that level by a certain percentage. I do not want to be prescriptive about how this is done - other than following the usual legal requirements. But I do want us to provide appropriate support, including the right tools



and the right infrastructure to facilitate the best possible results. And in doing so, I'm very keen that we get the views of the experts, and consult fully with the local authority associations - on what is required. And we would expect that Jobcentre Plus, The Pension Service and local authority fraud staff would work together in the most effective and efficient manner.

Of course, it will not be possible to meet these aspirations overnight. But it is clearly important to have a clear view of where you want to be in future, when developing policies now. Work we have done to reform subsidy and move towards less prescriptive measurement (PM10 is about outputs rather than inputs) fits this agenda in my view. And we have set out in our fraud and error action plan ways in which we will do more both to promote local autonomy and to provide more effective data and IT. A good example is the trial of voice risk analysis in Harrow.

In particular, we now have the opportunity to make best use of all our collective resources, now that we are legislating to reverse the restrictions placed upon us by the Howell opinion. In my view this must be the right way forward but we must also be sure that we make the best of it. There is quite a bit of detailed work yet to be done on the regulations (some of the devil will undoubtedly be in the detail) and on preparing operationally. So although the Welfare Reform Bill is likely to receive Royal Assent before too long, that is only the start.

I do hope that everyone will find something interesting and valuable in this month's fraud and error supplement. Of course, there are some specialist tasks involved in counter-fraud work, but fundamentally it is a matter for all of us. We all should be vigilant, aware and informed!

Paul Howarth, Head of Housing Benefit Strategy Division  
Email: [Paul.Howarth@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Paul.Howarth@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Jobcentre Plus to push HB and CTB as in-work benefits

DWP has launched a campaign to promote HB and CTB to people who are currently out of work. Ministers are keen to promote both benefits as 'in-work' benefits for people of working age who are currently out of work. Many Jobcentre Plus customers wrongly assume that if they begin work they will automatically be ineligible for HB or CTB and this lack of understanding can act as a barrier to employment.

Jobcentre Plus staff are shortly to be issued with desk aids and guidance on how much HB and/or CTB a customer will be able to claim and further communications work with both customers and staff will be undertaken over the coming months.

For further information about this campaign please contact **Laura Graham**, DWP Marketing Communications  
Tel: ☎ 0113 232 4479

## PinS and PM10 Workshops

**THANK YOU**

A big thanks to all of you who attended the recent workshops in London, Manchester and Edinburgh. We received lots of helpful comments and ideas which our colleagues in Learning and Development are now evaluating.

We will provide full feedback in the next few months and will let you know when the new training packages and information on achieving PM10 are available.

For more information please contact  
☎ [James.Ablewhite@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:James.Ablewhite@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

## LHA Implementation Team

There have been some changes to the membership of the LHA Implementation Team. Up-to-date contact details are:

Adrian Pateman  
☎ [Adrian.Pateman@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Adrian.Pateman@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

Kish Nathwani  
☎ [Kish.Nathwani@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Kish.Nathwani@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

Lynda East  
☎ [Lynda.J.East@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Lynda.J.East@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

You can also contact the team by emailing  
☎ [LHAadvice@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:LHAadvice@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)



## Further improvements in HB & CTB processing times

On 15 March 2007 we published performance statistics for the third quarter of 2006/07. The figures show there continues to be improvements in your performance over recent quarters. In particular, in quarter 3 of 2006/07 59% of you were bettering the 30 days required for an 'excellent' score for processing new claims.

The latest key outcomes are:

### New claims

- 241 (59%) of you exceeded the 30-day requirement to score excellent, compared with 176 (43%) of you in the same quarter of 2005/06
- The average number of days to process new claims improved from 34 days in the third quarter of 2005/06 to 31 days in the third quarter of 2006/07

### Change of circumstances

- 107 (26%) of you exceeded the 9-day requirement to score excellent for processing changes of circumstances in the third quarter of 2006/07, compared with 99 (24%) in the same quarter of 2005/06
- The average number of days to process changes of circumstances in the third quarter of 2006/07 was 16 days, which is the same as in the third quarter of 2005/06

The statistics can be found on the Department's Information and Analysis website at ☎ [http://www.dpw.gov.uk/asd/asd1/hb\\_ctb/performance.asp](http://www.dpw.gov.uk/asd/asd1/hb_ctb/performance.asp)

## More HBMS products on the way to help you achieve your PM10 targets

### Proposed National Last Recorded Review Date scan

HBMS plan to issue a new scan to you with their normal data matching scan next month. The new scan will include all standard, working age cases with a claim start date over two years ago, but no Last Recorded Review Date (LRRD). This will help you identify potentially risky cases that have not had a full review, and to tidy up any data issues with the LRRD.

### Standard working age cases with no change to earnings in the last 12 months

HBMS plan to issue a further scan to you identifying cases where the claimant and/or partner has declared earnings but has not reported any increase in the last 12 months. The last such scan was issued in November 2006; HBMS plan to issue this on a quarterly basis. Failure to declare an increase in earnings is one of the major causes of loss in HB.

For more information on both these scans please contact:  
☎ [chris.j.fuller@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:chris.j.fuller@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

# The Lyons Inquiry and Council Tax Benefit

The long-awaited final report of the Lyons Inquiry into Local Government has finally been published. The Inquiry was led by Sir Michael Lyons and was set up in 2004, following the Balance of Funding review, to look at the case for making changes to the system of local government funding, particularly council tax reform.

After several extensions of its remit, the Inquiry published its findings on Budget day 2007. The chapter on local taxation concludes that the current system - a property tax with a related benefit to alleviate the burden for poorer households - does not need reforming. However, it stresses the important role of council tax benefit (CTB) in improving the perceived 'fairness' of council tax, and the need to ensure that those who are entitled to help get it.

We have all been working hard to improve CTB take-up, particularly for pensioners who have the lowest take-up rates. Many of you do excellent work in this field. The report is very supportive of our partnership working with The Pension Service, and encourages us to continue and expand this work, particularly around more proactive delivery of CTB. Additionally, Sir Michael recommends increasing the upper capital limit in CTB for pensioners to £50,000, and renaming CTB as a 'rebate'.

We are very pleased that the report supports our joint efforts to increase take-up and are continuing to work with you and The Pension Service to make CTB more accessible. We will consider the possibility of increasing the capital limit in light of other issues including simplicity, practicality and affordability, and will look at opportunities for 'rebranding' CTB in the context of wider improvements.

Our current work to improve access to CTB (and HB) will make changes to allow people applying for Pension Credit over the phone to make a claim for CTB/HB at the same time, without the need for a separate signed claim form to be submitted to you. We plan to implement these improvements during 2008 and you will hear more about them through the usual channels.



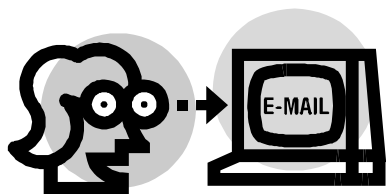
The full report is available on the internet at <http://www.lyonsinquiry.org/>

If you have any queries please contact [christie.dennehy@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:christie.dennehy@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

## Moredirect - let us know what you think

We published the latest edition of Moredirect at the end of March 2007, so we thought that this would be a good opportunity to ask you what you thought of the changes that we had made to the design of the magazine. If you have any comments about the layout and format of moredirect or if you have ideas for topics that you would like to see featured then we would be really pleased to hear from you.

Please send your comments and suggestions to us at [adephi.central-services-team@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:adephi.central-services-team@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)



## Urgent action needed

In *HB/CTB Bulletin G5/2007* that was issued last week, there were a few items that we needed you to consider or action urgently.



The particular items that you need to look at are

- **para 1** - HB/CTB Guidance Manual Amendment 11
- **para 3** - Security of HBSD/IAD Scan data
- **para 41** - Plea from HMRC
- **para 42** - Classification of overpayments caused by a 'delay in processing'
- **para 52** - Overpayment recovery when bankruptcy has been discharged

## Local Authority Omnibus Survey - final report for wave-13

The final report for wave-13 of the LA Omnibus Survey will be available for download from the DWP website on Thursday, 10 May. The URL address for the publication will be <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2007-2008/rrep414.pdf>

The survey sections for wave-13 were:

**Section A** Information

**Section B** Business Processes Re-engineering

**Section C** Local Housing Allowance

**Section D** DWP Housing Benefit Web Site

**Section E** Financial Inclusion Activity

**Section F** Better Off Calculation

**Section G** Decentralisation and Contact Information

If you require further information please contact

✉ [Richard.Zaluski-Zaluczowski@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Richard.Zaluski-Zaluczowski@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## The Performance Standards Fund: National Products

You should already be aware that the Performance Standards Fund closed at the end of March 2007. The PSF has awarded funds to the value of £184m since its inception in 2003. It is clear that the fund and the commitment from you to develop and implement new systems, training and new methods of working has contributed to the significant improvement in benefits administration in recent years.

In the next General Information Bulletin, to be issued in May, we will provide information on each of the national products, providing contact details to enable you to obtain further information about their effectiveness, ease of implementation and value for money.

Please contact ✉ [Maxine.Leyland@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Maxine.Leyland@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) for further information.

## 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@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Kath.Murphy@dwp.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](mailto: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

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