

LA Welfare Direct 8/2024

Introduction

Technical Information for Housing Benefit Staff

Contents of bulletin:

- Revised Memorandum of Understanding compliance pre-audit questionnaires
- Transfer Your File replacement: Call for LA testers
- Latest update: Additional Universal Credit information on Searchlight
- Latest update: UC – Local Council Tax Reduction data feed enhancements
- Update: Identifying Local Vulnerability data sharing working group
- Latest update: Move to UC
- Invitation to the next Data sharing IT consultation and engagement forum
- Publication of Housing Benefit speed of processing statistics for January 2024 to March 2024
- Practitioners' Operational Group and LA Welfare Steering Group
- HB decisions by the Upper Tribunal
- New Legislation
- What's new on our HB pages on www.gov.uk

Revised Memorandum of Understanding compliance pre-audit questionnaires

1. The local authority (LA) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) 'Compliance IT' and 'Benefit and Provision' pre-audit questionnaires have been revised to contain the most up to date MOU numbering references, to align with the references in the MOU issued July 2024. The revised pre-audit questionnaires with the updated MOU references was placed on Glasscubes on Friday 2 August 2024.

2. LAs who have already started to complete their pre-audit questionnaire returns, in preparation for their compliance audits, do not have to use the revised versions avoiding duplication of work.

Transfer Your File replacement: Call for LA testers

3. Transfer Your File (TYF) is a Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) solution that is used to securely share customer data between DWP and third parties, including LAs. DWP is updating the technology that supports the solution and creating a replacement to TYF, which is expected to launch in summer 2025.

4. DWP is looking for a small number of LAs to support the development and build of the replacement system. LAs who are interested would need to provide one or two named contacts who could conduct testing. Testing would be required intermittently as the solution progresses. Testers will be provided with access to the system to carry out usual activities, such as uploading and downloading test files. Periodically they will be asked to provide feedback on how easy the system is to use and areas of improvement. The testing period will start in September 2024.

5. If your LA would like to be involved please provide the contact details of the named person/s to lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk by Friday 23 August 2024.

Latest update: Additional Universal Credit information on Searchlight

6. As advised in LAWD6/2024, the Searchlight team had to prioritise other technical work and so our first release of additional Universal Credit (UC) information would be postponed from spring to summer 2024.

7. Unfortunately, the team has also experienced resourcing issues and is now aiming to make the changes between August 2024 and October 2024.

8. We have firm plans to further build on the amount of UC data available on Searchlight after the first iteration in the Autumn of 2024.

9. We will continue to provide updates on progress through the LAWD bulletin. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk

Latest update: UC – Local Council Tax Reduction data feed enhancements

10. As advised in LAWD6/2024, we are closer still to rolling out the spring 2024 UC - Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTR) data feed enhancements.

11. The term “spring release” refers to when it was released into DWP production environment. This sits behind a “toggle” that we can switch on for each LA when the LA and their IT software supplier is ready.

12. Six LAs are currently testing one major and one minor set of changes. The results are extremely positive and the first LA is aiming to go live with the spring 2024 and interim summer 2024 releases in the week commencing 12 August 2024.

13. The number of LAs and IT software suppliers working closely with us to test the releases is growing. At the same time, we are road testing our technical guidance (as are suppliers) to ensure the detailed guidance is clear, comprehensive and accurate. We think it's important to carefully and steadily increase the number and types of LAs testing against a variety of LCTR schemes in order to provide assurances to all LAs.

14. We would like to thank Wakefield Council for volunteering to go first with testing and for their feedback on our early guidance drafts.

15. We will continue to update on progress, including on completion of the late summer 2024 release in future LAWD articles. In the meantime, if you have any questions for the team, please contact lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk

Update: Identifying Local Vulnerability data sharing working group

16. In LAWD6/2024, we asked stakeholders to consider applying to join our Identifying Local Vulnerability (ILoV) data sharing working group. As a result, we now have 11 additional members, covering a wide range of cross-cutting areas such as:

financial hardship

homelessness

supporting citizens not in employment, education or training

supporting families

disabilities and health

supporting citizens who are economically inactive and employment schemes

data analysis and data science, including predictive analytics.

17. As well as learning about these areas and, in particular, the related data needs, the team will be consulting with the working group members on the design of the data sharing solution.

18. If you can provide expert knowledge on any of the above, with a real focus on identifying and/or working to support the most vulnerable people in your council area, please consider joining the ILoV data sharing working group by contacting lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk

Latest update: Move to UC

19. In line with Move to UC migration plans, the department started migrating households in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance receiving tax credits in July 2024.

20. Housing Benefit (HB) only households were brought into the journey from 17 July 2024. This was previously planned to commence in June 2024. However, timelines were extended to allow the relevant automated processes, required to progress these cases safely at scale, to be developed.

21. We have started issuing letters (referred to as the Tax Credit Closure Notice) to State Pension age tax credit claimants who have been identified to move to Pension Credit. State Pension age tax credit claimants in scope to move to UC will be issued a migration notice from September 2024.

22. The 'Third Party Guide - to support those households required to make a Move to Universal Credit' has been updated after feedback from stakeholders. Distribution of version 2.0 took place on 24 July 2024 to all LA's single inboxes. If you have not received a copy, please contact your local Partnership Manager.

Invitation to the next Data sharing IT consultation and engagement forum

23. The next forum will be held on Wednesday 4 September 2024 from 11am to 12 noon.

Joining instructions

24. The joining instructions are:

the MS Teams link to this meeting has been shared in the version of the LAWD8/2024 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

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 or 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

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

26. 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 of their 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

27. 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

Publication of Housing Benefit speed of processing statistics for January 2024 to March 2024

28. The department published Housing Benefit (HB) speed of processing statistics and associated data for quarter 4 (Q4) of financial year ending (FYE) March 2024 on Wednesday 31 July 2024.

Some key points

29. During Q4 of FYE March 2024, there were 100,000 new HB claims and 3.3 million changes of circumstances to existing HB claims processed in Great Britain.

30. For new HB claims, this is an increase of 5,100 (5%) since last quarter and an increase of 3,200 (3%) when compared to a year earlier.

31. For change of circumstances to existing HB claims, this is an increase of 2.3 million (241%) since last quarter and a decrease of 120,000 (4%) when compared to a year earlier.

New claims

The average time taken to process a new HB claim during the latest quarter was 19 calendar days. This is one day higher than last quarter and one day less as a year earlier.

Change of circumstances

The average number of days taken to process a change of circumstance to an existing HB claim during the latest quarter was three calendar days. This is five days lower than last quarter and the same as a year earlier.

Practitioners' Operational Group and LA Welfare Steering Group

32. The last Practitioners' Operational Group meeting took place on 25 July 2024. Agenda items included the LA Welfare issues Highlight Report, LA funding, Move to UC, DWP/LA MOU Compliance New Burdens, an update on the HB Fraud Investigations and Joint Working Group and the Cost of Living.

33. Both groups' meetings are held bi-monthly (and alternately), so the next LA Welfare Steering Group meeting is scheduled to take place on 8 August 2024.

34. 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

35. Decision Making and Appeals (DMA) Leeds are aware of the following HB case that has been decided by the Upper Tribunal (UT):

UA-2021-000630-HB [2024] UKUT 117 (AAC) – Ipswich Borough Council v The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

36. A selection of decisions of the UT 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.

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

New Legislation

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

2024 No. 822 The Social Security (Contributions) (Amendment No. 4) Regulations 2024, made on 25 July 2024

2024 No. 843 The Statutory Paternity Pay and Statutory Adoption Pay (Parental Orders and Prospective Adopters) (Amendment) Regulations 2024, made on 30 July 2024

39. Copies of SIs can now be downloaded from legislation.gov.uk

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

40. On LAWD7/2024 lite, you can find:

Secondment opportunities in Housing Policy Division

Housing Benefit Debt Recovery: Frequently asked questions

Housing Benefit subsidy guidance manual 2023 to 2024