

LA Welfare Direct 9/2024

Introduction

Who should read – HB Staff. Various technical changes.

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Update: Final rollout action to take for the Single Housing Benefit Extract Application Programme Interface

1. Thank you to those local authorities (LAs) who have provided the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) with their GNU Privacy Guard (GPG) key.
2. LAs that have received their returned key/credentials from DWP must now take the final rollout action to move over to the 'Version 2' Token URLs to ensure data is sent more securely.
3. LAs should use the following guidance available on their IT software supplier specific workspace on Glasscubes, in conjunction with the guidance provided by your IT software supplier, to support these actions:
LA guidance - generating a GPG key for DWP – v1.1
LA guidance - receiving your GPG encrypted file and next steps – v1.0
GPG key and next steps frequently asked questions v1.0
4. If you have any questions regarding GPG keys or your LA's next steps, please contact lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk

Further update: Care Home Information Service

5. Further to our last update in LAWD3/2024, we continue to work with early adopter LAs and their Adult Social Care (ASC) IT software suppliers on the Care Home Information Service (CHIS) early adopter trial. We are successfully sharing live data with two LAs and working with additional LAs, representing each ASC IT software supplier, to complete testing in the coming weeks. This is to assure confidence that all ASC IT systems are working as expected before we move to national rollout.
6. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our early adopter LAs for their valuable insight and feedback during the trial, which has helped identify several enhancements to the CHIS solution. We are working with your ASC IT software suppliers to design and implement these improvements.

National rollout and next steps

7. DWP is finalising national rollout plans to be agreed with ASC IT software suppliers.

8. To support LAs through national rollout, in due course, DWP will:

provide guidance with all LAs, specific to each LA's ASC IT software supplier

hold all LA calls, in partnership with each LA's ASC IT software supplier, to give an overview of the CHIS Application Programme Interface (API) solution and answer any LA questions

Actions for County Councils

9. Prior to CHIS national rollout, all County Councils need to complete some preparation activity to onboard to the DWP API gateway.

10. DWP has issued onboarding guidance to all County Councils and we kindly ask you to complete the API onboarding activities as a priority.

11. Thank you to the County Councils who have already completed this task. We will be in touch with next steps following receipt of all returns.

12. In addition to ongoing work in relation to CHIS, the new Going into a care home if you get benefits web page has recently gone live on www.gov.uk. This tells customers what information DWP needs to know and how to report a move into a care home.

13. We will continue to share further updates through the LAWD bulletin and Glasscubes. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk

Changes to the Housing Benefit Debt Service

14. The Housing Benefit Debt Service (HBDS) provides LAs with access to real time employment and income information to help with the recovery of Housing Benefit (HB) debt.

15. In accordance with UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), DWP and HM Revenue and Customs have completed a review of the data items currently returned to LAs through the HBDS process.

16. From 30 September 2024, DWP will no longer be returning duplicated data items identified through HBDS and LAs must access this information through Searchlight. The six duplicated data items which will no longer be returned through HBDS are:

Last payment amount

Taxable pay year to date (YTD)

Latest payment date

Employer ref

Employee works number

Director indicator

17. We have also taken this opportunity to remove any blank columns that cannot be edited on the HBDS template.

18. The above change was communicated by letter to LA single inboxes on 12 August 2024 and you should refer to the letter if you require any further information about this change.

19. If you have any further questions in relation to this article, email lawelfare.lasupport@dwp.gov.uk

Universal Credit claimants approaching State Pension age

20. LAs have identified and reported to Local Authority Partnership Engagement and Delivery (LA-PED) division a number of HB claims where Universal Credit (UC) is in payment despite the claimant reaching State Pension age (SPa).

21. This has occurred because the UC claim has not automatically closed when a claimant has reached SPa.

2. Although the onus is on the claimant to declare a change of circumstance when they reach SPa and contact UC to close their claim, from 21 August 2024 the UC Programme has introduced an automatic closure of the claim for those claimants that have reached SPa. The closure date will be the end of the Assessment Period (AP) in which they reach SPa.

23. In addition, to align with the letter from Retirement Services, which claimants receive four months before reaching SPa informing them that they can claim State Pension (and, if applicable, Pension Credit and HB), claimants will now receive an automated UC journal message at the end of the AP when they reach 65 years and eight months. The message will outline everything they need to know about approaching SPa and will include the date their UC claim will end.

24. Further work is also taking place to introduce a new alert three months before SPa to prompt the UC Pension Migration Team to make contact with the claimant if they have not yet claimed their State Pension.

25. If you have any questions regarding the content of this article, contact lawelfare.lalaisonteam@dwp.gov.uk

Cyber security

26. We know there is still work to do for many LAs to improve their cyber security and no organisation should consider themselves immune from attack.

27. The Information Commissioners Office (ICO) recently published a reprimand against Hackney Council following a cyber-attack and the council published a response.

28. We recommend all LAs take the time to read the reports linked, particularly the last section from the ICO report, which provides advice to all LAs and how to consider their own security.

Local Authority Partnership, Engagement and Delivery division communication products and accessibility

29. The LA-PED Communications Team has recently reviewed the way in which we present our products (such as this bulletin) to conform with accessibility standards.

This is in line with DWP policy to ensure a consistent approach for document accessibility for all colleagues, customers and partners and is a legal requirement. As a result, the products we send out will now look slightly different. The main changes you may notice (especially if using assistive technology) is the use of 'alt text' to describe images, increased line spacing and more descriptive hyperlinks.

30. Following feedback from LAs to the Customer survey on data sharing and data security, we will also be writing out directly to LAs in the near future to clarify the purpose and timings of all products too.

31. In the meantime, if you have any questions or further feedback, do contact us at lawelfare.correspondence@dwp.gov.uk.

HB Debt Recovery statistics for April 2023 to March 2024

32. The HB Debt Recovery (HBDR) statistics were published on 4 September 2024.

33. Here are the headline statistics:

LAs identified £445 million overpaid HB – £14 million more than during the financial year ending (FYE) 2023

LAs recovered £439 million overpaid HB – £32 million more than during the FYE 2023

LAs wrote off £68 million overpaid HB – £4 million less than during the FYE 2023

At the start of Q4 of the FYE 2024, there was £1.6 billion outstanding overpaid HB – £74 million less than at the start of quarter 4 of FYE 2023

34. As discussed at the national HB debt workshops that the Performance Development Team ran from November 2023 to February 2024, LAs may want to consider benchmarking their LA's performance against those of neighbouring or comparable LAs. Invariably the current economic climate and declining HB caseload will be impacting your HBDR figures and this is a way to consider if the impacts are similar.

Update: Move to Universal Credit

35. Throughout the Move to UC process, DWP has ensured the correct level of support is in place to safely move claimants over to UC. In some instances, DWP has either delayed the issue of a Migration Notice or cancelled the Migration Notice until any necessary support was in place.

36. DWP is now ready to notify (and in some cases re-notify) households receiving tax credits that need to safely move to Universal Credit before tax credits close in April 2025.

37. The latest release of the Move to UC statistics has been published on www.gov.uk. These statistics relate to the movement of households claiming tax credits and DWP benefits to UC for the period July 2022 to June 2024.

Secondment opportunities in LA-PED

38. 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 LA HB experts can bring to the team. These secondment opportunities provide those experts with an opportunity to gain an insight and experience of policy development and workings of central government.

39. LA-PED has had a programme of bringing HB experts from LAs in to work alongside data sharing, subsidy, change and performance teams on secondment. We are now looking to register your interest for further secondment opportunities over the coming months.

40. LA-PED comprises of approximately 150 staff. The division is responsible for overseeing the performance of LAs in their delivery of HB. It monitors a range of performance data including how quickly and accurately HB is paid and the prevention and detection of fraud and error. LA-PED offers support and challenge to those LAs not meeting performance expectations.

41. It supports a large programme of data sharing activity that is paramount in helping LAs pay the correct amount of HB and is heavily involved in managing change activity supporting the Welfare Reform agenda.

42. It's also responsible for paying HB Administration Subsidy, Discretionary Housing Payments, New Burdens and additional grant funding.

43. This is an exciting opportunity to play a leading role in maintaining and improving stakeholder relationships between DWP and LAs and in designing innovative opportunities for closer working during this busy and complex period of Welfare Reform.

Personal requirements

44. Candidates should possess the following:

good understanding of HB procedures and regulations

good drafting and communication skills

ability to build and maintain effective working relationships with LAs and other stakeholders

ability to work with people at different levels in the organisation and to work as part of a team to achieve results

ability to deliver work at pace and with successful, quantifiable outcomes Further information

45. Secondment posts would be offered for either 12 months or 24 months dependant on the role offered across the division. The posts would usually be full time and based across the country, although no moves at public expense would be considered. These opportunities will be determined by business need so your CV will be kept on file, and you will be contacted once a suitable opportunity arises.

46. If you are keen to register your interest and are at S01/S02/SO3 and Pay Band level 4 or equivalent, (roughly equates to civil service HEO/SEO/G7 grades) please:

check with your LA that you could be released, and then

send your CV by email to laped.businesssupportteam@dwp.gov.uk

HB Decisions by the Upper Tribunal

47. Decision Making and Appeals (DMA) Leeds is not aware of any cases that have been decided by the Upper Tribunal (UT).

48. 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.

49. 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 UT

50. DMA Leeds have not been made aware of any HB case that is awaiting decision by the Upper Tribunal.

New Legislation

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

2024 No. 869 The Social Fund Winter Fuel Payment Regulations 2024, made on 22 August 2024

2024 No. 872 The Infected Blood Compensation Scheme Regulations 2024, made on 22 August 2024

Provisions (Modification) Order 2018, made on 9 May 2018

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

What's new on our Housing Benefit information pages on www.gov.uk