

## LA Welfare Direct 10/2024

### Introduction

Who should read – HB Staff. Various technical changes.

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## **Reminder: The Department for Work and Pensions' approved route for local authorities to send their Memorandum of Understanding compliance pre-audit questionnaires and supporting evidence**

1. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) would like to remind local authorities (LAs) that we cannot access third party email links to obtain LAs' completed pre-audit questionnaires and supporting evidence. LAs can send their completed pre-audit questionnaires and evidence to support their Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) compliance audits through Transfer your File (TYF) as an alternative route to email, if your LA prefers to do so.
2. LAs can upload their questionnaires and supporting evidence to the 'Ad-Hoc out' folder in TYF by the date quoted in their MOU audit notification. When evidence is sent using TYF and LAs have uploaded their files to the folder, they will need to notify the Compliance Team at [lawelfare.lacompliance@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.lacompliance@dwp.gov.uk) to ensure that it is retrieved.
3. Please note: LAs who do not have an upcoming audit should not send any questionnaires or supporting evidence until requested to do so.
4. If you have any questions regarding this update, contact [lawelfare.lacompliance@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.lacompliance@dwp.gov.uk).

## **Reminder of timescales for IP address changes**

5. This is a reminder that LAs must give DWP at least 28 days' notice when they change their public facing IP (Internet Protocol) addresses. Failure to provide the adequate notice could result in loss of service to Searchlight, Verify Earnings and Pensions and the Application Programming Interfaces (APIs).
6. There have been recent examples where LAs have failed to give DWP sufficient notice, resulting in our IT teams completing emergency changes to ensure continued access to our services. DWP can no longer guarantee that service will not be disrupted if LAs do not provide 28 days' notice.
7. An LA's IP address must be fixed to that LA and should be registered to them with either the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority or Reseaux IP Europeans Network Co-ordination Centre. If this is not the case, the LA must have an agreement with their internet supplier that gives them exclusive use of the IP address and that it will be fixed.

8. LAs should contact the LA Security and Support Team at [lawelfare.lasupport@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.lasupport@dwp.gov.uk) for any questions relating to this article, or to make us aware of an upcoming change to IP addresses.

## **LA Housing Benefit subsidy workshops in early 2025**

9. During the first quarter of 2024 (January to March), the LA Funding Team, who sit within the Local Authority Partnership, Engagement and Delivery division, held a number of Housing Benefit (HB) subsidy workshops with those LA staff who are responsible for completing HB subsidy claim forms. The feedback from attendees was extremely positive.

10. To help improve authorities' customer journey, the LA Funding Team is proposing to hold a further series of HB subsidy workshops which will be scheduled throughout the first quarter of 2025. The LA Funding Team plan to deliver these interactive workshops through MS Teams.

11. As in previous years, we intend to hold separate workshops for LA staff who are new to the role and for those more experienced in completing subsidy claims.

### **New to subsidy workshops**

12. The workshops will provide a standard overview of HB subsidy methodology combined with details of any changes being introduced to the 2024 to 2025 HB Assurance Process and their impact. The main areas of focus, in respect of claim preparation and subsequent claim settlement, will include the following:

applicable timelines LAs need to adhere to each financial year

how estimates determine monthly subsidy payments

growth factors, exceptions and settlement of claims

a question and answer session

13. Anyone wishing to attend one of these workshops should email an expression of interest to [lawelfare.lapaymentsandsubsidy@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.lapaymentsandsubsidy@dwp.gov.uk) using 'New to HB subsidy workshops 2025' as the subject heading.

## **Workshops for LA staff experienced in subsidy**

14. The HB Assurance Team are currently engaged with key stakeholders to consider potential changes to the 2024 to 2025 HB Assurance Process. Therefore, the focus of this year's workshop will be directed towards:

details of any planned changes

timing of changes.

potential impacts of changes

changes to the reporting methods

15. If possible, within the time constraints, the HB Assurance Team will review some of the main areas of concern that have been raised throughout the assurance period and issues highlighted in last year's workshop evaluation returns.

16. Once the content of the workshop has been finalised, LA staff members expressing an interest in attending the experienced subsidy workshop will receive confirmation of the content and issues to be included.

17. Anyone wishing to attend the experienced workshops should email an expression of interest to [lawelfare.lapaymentsandsubsidy@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.lapaymentsandsubsidy@dwp.gov.uk) using 'Experienced in HB subsidy workshops 2025' as the subject heading.

18. Expressions of interest for both types of workshops should be submitted by 3 November 2024 at the latest.

19. Additionally, it would be helpful if interested attendees could indicate any subsidy issues or areas of learning they would like to discuss on the expression of interest response (for either workshop).

## **Discretionary Housing Payments mid-year estimate form for financial year ending March 2025 (England and Wales only)**

20. The Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) mid-year estimate form was issued directly to LA single inboxes on 2 October 2024.

21. The DHP mid-year estimate form will ask for:

the actual DHP expenditure paid by the LA between 1 April 2024 and 30 September 2024

the LA's estimated DHP expenditure for financial year ending March 2025 between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025

additional monitoring information to help monitor demand and trends.

22. The form will include a new request for monitoring information on ineligible applications and updated completion guidance on the information that is being requested.

23. LAs must return the completed DHP mid-year estimate to [dhp.returns@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:dhp.returns@dwp.gov.uk) by no later than 31 October 2024.

24. The monitoring information continues to improve DWP's understanding of how DHPs are being used to support people affected by Welfare Reforms.

25. If you have any questions, contact [dhp.returns@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:dhp.returns@dwp.gov.uk)

## **Latest update: Additional Universal Credit information on Searchlight**

26. As advised in LAWD8/2024, the Local Government Data Sharing Transformation Team were aiming to make the first set of changes to enhance Searchlight with additional Universal Credit (UC) information between August 2024 and October 2024. The additional resource needed to carry out this work has been delayed and will start from 7 October 2024.

27. We have agreed with UC and Searchlight teams to iteratively expand the existing API, between build start in October 2024 up to 31 March 2025.

28. By working in this agile way, we intend to deliver the highest value UC data items in priority order and in the shortest feasible time, whilst maintaining all necessary testing.

29. We continue to meet with the working group of LAs who have played a key role in co-designing and approving the first iteration of changes we are planning to deliver. The working group members have agreed to continue to co-design and approve further iterations. Thank you to those LAs for their continued support.

30. 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](mailto:lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk)

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

31. As advised in LAWD8/2024, 6 LAs were testing one major set of changes to the UC - Local Council Tax Reduction data feed. On 12 August 2024, Wakefield council, an NEC LA, went live with the changes and we received very positive feedback on the additional UC data fields available. To date, Wakefield have experienced no negative issues since going live.

32. Work continues, with five other NEC LAs still testing and five Civica LAs who have now begun testing. All LAs are compliant with the MOU and are up to date with

their work, so they can compare the two file types – existing and enhanced (version 2).

33. We will begin testing with a number of Capita LAs in October 2024.

34. We continue to grow the range and number of LAs using the enhanced version 2 files. Following a period of careful testing, we will look to release all version 2 files to each LA. LAs will be notified before the version 2 files are made available. In the meantime, we continue with our careful testing work with LAs and their suppliers.

35. We are also ready to release the final changes, known as the “late Summer release,” which will complete the original LA requirements. These changes will be integrated into the enhanced version 2 files.

36. We will continue to update on progress. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact [lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk)

## **Update: Identifying Local Vulnerability data sharing working group**

37. In LAWD8/2024, we asked LA stakeholders to consider applying to join our Identifying Local Vulnerability (ILoV) data sharing working group, particularly individuals with insight around:

data analysis

data science

use of predictive analytics.

38. We appreciate that this may involve reaching out to others in the organisation, which we would encourage people to do. This is a real opportunity for LAs to influence the solution that would best fit LA needs.

39. DWP also needs to hear from LA leaders on their priorities for addressing vulnerable groups and from people who can discuss the technical aspects of a solution.

40. We are holding a series of workshops, both face to face and virtual, in November 2024. These workshops are designed to close the remaining gaps in our Discovery work. After this, we will be setting out solution options (in Alpha), before designing and building the data sharing solution.

41. This is possibly the last chance to assemble an LA working group covering a wide range of specialist areas that can truly influence a design to match LA needs.

42. This offer is given to LAs only.

43. If you or your colleagues can provide expert knowledge on any of the above, please consider joining the ILoV data sharing working group by contacting [lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk)

## **Update: Move to UC**

44. In September 2024, we started issuing Migration Notices to households receiving Pension aged tax credits (including mixed aged couples), income-based Jobseekers Allowance and small numbers of income-based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) (including ESA with HB).

45. To ensure all tax credit households are provided with the time needed to claim UC, ahead of the closure of the tax credit service on 5 April 2025, the vast majority of tax credit claimants (tax credits only or those with other benefit combinations) who have not been sent a Migration Notice or have previously been cancelled or deferred from the journey will receive a Migration Notice before the end of October 2024. No further cancellation requests will be offered for tax credit claimants moving forward, however a claimant will be able to ask for an extension if they need more time.

46. Claimants should not apply for UC or Pension Credit (PC) before getting their notice. Those tax credit claimants who have received their notice and haven't yet applied for PC or UC will still be able to qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment. The Winter Fuel Payment is made automatically.

47. Read more information and details on the full eligibility for the Winter Fuel Payment – [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

## **Reminder: Correct use of the MGP1 LA form**

48. LAs are reminded that the only purpose of the MGP1 LA form is to respond to either an HB Stop Notice or an HB MIG Stop Notice and should only be used to notify UC that:

HB is not closing because the claimant is living in temporary or supported accommodation

there is an overlap of benefit which needs to be recovered from UC as unearned income

49. LAs must not use the MGP1 LA form to provide details of a claimant's change in circumstance or to confirm HB has closed where there is no overlap of benefit.



## **Actions for LAs**

50. LAs should select the appropriate reason for completing the MGP1 LA form from the email header menu.

51. There are two options which can be selected and it is important to select the correct option as this will pre-populate the subject header field of the return email:

overlapping Housing Benefit – HB closed official

temporary or supported exempt/specific – HB not closed – official

52. Once the template has been completed, LAs should select the box ‘click here to email form.’ This will ensure the correct email address is prepopulated.

53. Adhering to the above actions will ensure the MGP1 LA form is routed to the appropriate UC team and enable the correct action to be taken.

54. If you have any questions regarding the content of this article, contact [lawelfare.liaison@dwpgov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.liaison@dwpgov.uk)

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

55. The last LA Welfare Steering Group meeting took place on 19 September 2024. Agenda items included LA funding and HB Subsidy Data Collection, bringing the administration together for HB and PC, Move to UC and the Cost of Living.

56. Both groups’ meetings are held bi-monthly (and alternately), so the next Practitioners’ Operational Group meeting is scheduled to take place on 17 October 2024.

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

## **HB Decisions by the Upper Tribunal**

58. Decision Making and Appeals (DMA) Leeds have been made aware of the following HB/CTB cases that are awaiting decision by the Upper Tribunal (UT), since the last edition of the LAWD bulletin.

UA-2024-SCO-000026-HB – DWP joined as second Respondent to the appeal concerning entitlement to HB for an additional bedroom, as provided for by Regulations 13D(3)(za) and 2 of the 2006 Housing Benefit Regulations, and whether the same regulations are indirectly discriminatory due to a disability.

59. 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.



60. 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**

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

2024 No. 964 – The Social Security (Infected Blood Capital Disregard) (Amendment) Regulations 2024, made on 18 September 2024

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

What's new on our Housing Benefit information pages on [www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)

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

Document Type	Subject	Link
Guidance	Household Support Fund 6	HSF6