

Housing Benefit Direct issue 166 April 2016

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Editorial

Welcome to the April edition of HB Direct. There are no ‘April Fool’ jokes in here (as far as I know) so let’s get straight down to the serious business.

Clare Elliott is off for a few days so I’m guest editor this month. This gives me a chance to highlight a couple of areas that are of particular interest to me. If you’ve been involved in the process of getting connected to the new data hub then you’ll know that it has proved rather more tortuous than we expected it to be when we started out. Nevertheless I’m pleased to say that almost all local authorities (LAs) have now successfully ‘on boarded’ and should be able to access their Universal Credit data via this route. The intention is to send all our data via the hub in the not too distant future, so it is important that any LAs who haven’t yet completed the process get on board as soon as possible.

There are still some frustrating teething problems but we are very nearly there now and I’d like to thank everyone for their hard work and patience in getting us this far. The Data Transport Appliances that we have been using to transfer data will soon be a distant memory; consigned to the dustbin of history along with (for those of you with long memories) Remote Access Terminals (RATS).

We’ve recently been undertaking some additional work on compliance with the data sharing Memorandum of Understanding. Keeping customer data secure is such a critical area and will only become more so as the world becomes an increasingly digital one. Scarcely a day goes by without some breach of data security making it into the newspapers and no one wants to be in the papers for the wrong reason. Generally, since the disastrous leak of Child Benefit data in 2007, the public sector has had a pretty good record in this area and it’s in all our interests to keep it that way!

On a personal note, I’ll be retiring at the end of May. I’ve done three separate stints working on various aspects of Housing Benefit (and Community Charge Benefit, if anyone remembers that, and Council Tax Benefit). I’ve kept coming back for more because this is such an interesting area to work. I’ve loved working with LAs and the fact that each and every one is different. This brings its challenges but has been immensely rewarding too!

All the best to all of you.

David Gleave

[Distribution and newsletter enquiries](#)

SFIS Project - End of implementation

The roll out of the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) Project was successfully completed on 1 March 2016.

All 380 LAs, National Anti-Fraud Network and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) have gone live over a rolling programme which began in July 2014. 910 people have transferred into the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and over 16,500 fraud cases migrated.

As the Project transitions into 'business as usual' we have detailed the communication routes from 4 April 2016. The main emphasis is to resolve issues at a local level if possible, as detailed below:

Fraud and Error Service

If an LA has an enquiry relating to the Service Provision or Fraud Referral process, this should be raised with DWPs' local Fraud and Error Service (FES) team via their own LA Service Provision Single Point of Contact (SPoC). The escalation route, as detailed within the National Service Provision Framework, can be instigated if necessary.

Any queries or proposed changes from LAs that may have wider impacts on DWP or LAs can be referred on by FES to others in DWP and/or to the Practitioners' Operational Group, as appropriate.

Conversely, if FES has a query relating to the Service Provision or Fraud Referral processes, they will raise it with the local LA SPoC. Again, the escalation route can be instigated if necessary.

Knowledge Hub

The Knowledge Hub (KHub) has been one of the main communication tools between the SFIS Project and LAs. We will stop using the KHub in April and a message will advise on the new FES communication routes. The message will also advise where products previously available on the KHub can be found.

SFIS general enquiries email inbox

This was another communication route for people to raise queries with the SFIS project. This will close from 4 April 2016 and an automated response will advise on the new communication routes as detailed above.

Housing Benefit subsidy workshops – 2015/16

The workshops concluded in Cambridge on 16 March 2016. We held a total of 16 workshops with all regions of the country being covered at least once. Over 270 LA delegates attended, each workshop also had a representative from the external audit organisations.

We found the workshops extremely fruitful and enlightening with much discussion being generated. The variety of discussions and the focus on different subjects at different workshops was a constant source of surprise to the presenters. We thank all those who attended this very stimulating, productive series of workshops and the LAs which agreed to their representatives' attendance.

LA feedback has been very positive and unambiguous in recommending the value of further workshops. As a result, a further series of workshops will be held in 2016/17. A forthcoming edition of HB Direct will provide further details and request expressions of interest. It is highly likely that a number of workshops will be provided for those who are new, or relatively new, to subsidy.

If you have any suggestions for subjects/items to include in the workshops, please email michael.mina@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

The DWP Network on the Knowledge Hub

DWP now has a Network page on the KHub. This brings together all of the DWP groups on the Hub, such as, 'DLA is ending' and Universal Credit communications. It also provides information on the range of DWP's campaigns, including See Potential and Disability Confident.

You can find the Network page at khub.net/dwp

Memorandum of Understanding – Security compliance

Recently our Business Change and Support Team (BCSST) has carried out a security compliance exercise to confirm that the information transferred between HMRC, DWP and LAs is being managed in accordance with the requirements outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

A percentage of LAs were contacted and asked to re-affirm that appropriate arrangements were in place, that nothing had changed and the terms of the MoU were still being complied with.

Results have been positive and this exercise has proved a useful reminder that the MoU is a living document and should be subject to a regular review.

BCSST will continue to work with LAs to ensure compliance is understood and provide any help as required. During 2016/17 BCSST will undertake additional exercises including alternative approaches such as telephone calls and written questionnaires to demonstrate compliance.

Compliance with the MoU is a really important part of our arrangements for ensuring customer data is handled securely. There is no room for complacency but the results of the recent exercise are reassuring and we are grateful to LAs for their continuing efforts to ensure data is handled securely.

If you have any queries or would like to know more about security compliance please contact hbsdsecurity.team@dwp.gsi.gov.uk