

# Housing Benefit

## General Information Bulletin

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**HB G11/2017**

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<b>Contact</b>	Queries about the <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>technical content of this bulletin</b>, contact details are given at the end of each article</li><li>• distribution of this bulletin, contact <a href="mailto:housing.correspondenceandpqs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk">housing.correspondenceandpqs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk</a></li></ul>
<b>Who should read</b>	All Housing Benefit (HB) staff
<b>Action</b>	For information

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## Update: Verify Earnings and Pensions service

1. From 6 October 2017, the Wider Use of Real Time Information (WURTI) service was re-named Verify Earnings and Pensions (VEP) service.
2. VEP has rolled out successfully to 10,000 users in all 380 local authorities (LAs) and Housing Benefit (HB) assessors in all LAs can use the earnings and pensions information supplied by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) to verify new claim assessments, change of circumstances and reviews.
3. Going forward, an alerts service is being developed, that will use HMRC payment data to trigger an alert to LAs as and when there are certain changes to a customer's earnings and pensions information during the life of an HB claim.
4. There will be **two** alert categories:
  - "Start" alerts (this will alert you that a claimant or their partner has new employment earnings or non-state pensions)
  - "Fluctuating" alerts (this will alert you that a claimant or their partner's employment earnings or non-state pensions have changed).
5. We have been working closely with LA representatives since April 2017 to develop and redefine the rules for alerts. We are currently testing with 10 volunteer LAs to inform the design, such as:
  - alerts generated on a daily basis. There are large peaks and troughs of alerts reflecting when employees are paid/circumstances change, for example, at week end, month end and year end/start
  - alerts will be re-prioritised on a daily basis as new payments arrive
  - alerts will be accessed from within the VEP service. This will ensure outcomes can be tracked in real time and allow the WURTI Project to ensure that most effective alerts are given highest priority
  - LA staff will be able to select the next available alert from within an specific alerts task page
  - Summary Management Information of alerts available/actioned will be provided to managers within the service.
6. Next year we plan to start a controlled rollout of the alerts service during the first half of next year.
7. It is proposed that the alerts will replace the current referrals of Bulk Data Match and Optional Real Time Information.
8. More details regarding the alerts rollout approach and alerts functionality are to be confirmed and will be provided in the coming months.
9. If you have any questions contact [wideruseof.rtisupport@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:wideruseof.rtisupport@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## Update: National Fraud Initiative

10. The National Fraud Initiative (NFI) 2016/17 matches were released to LAs and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in January 2017. As you know these matches are delivered every two years and aim to identify fraud and error in HB only and related DWP benefits, using a range of data sources and have so far already identified almost 700 cases of HB overpayment involving student loans.
11. The matches relating to DWP administered benefits are released directly to DWP therefore significantly reducing the volume of matches for LAs to consider.
12. The HB data held by NFI was refreshed in October of this year. At this point Student Loan (SL) data was also refreshed which included information for the majority of students entering Higher Education in September 2017.
13. The matching of both HB and SL data will be turned around quickly, with additional HB only matches being released by NFI to LAs by mid December 2017.
14. To help support LAs in dealing with these matches, NFI have taken steps to reduce false positives and improve their filtering of cases. Therefore, it should make it easier to identify cases that are for compliance or investigation.
15. Once you receive these matches it is important that action is taken as quickly as possible to sift cases, especially for HB only to student loans; given that many students' courses are likely to end in June 2018.
16. In the unlikely event that you need to contact DWP for further information please follow your normal business as usual processes.

## Reminder: Payment Deduction Project

17. One key area of overpayment recovery was the introduction of the Payment Deduction Project (PDP). In advance of its rollout, we issued Circular [HB A6/2016](#) to notify LAs about the changes and to provide further advice.
18. We encourage all LA benefit administration and debt recovery teams to refresh their familiarity with the significant detail provided in that circular. The circular clearly sets out what an LA can expect when a debt is referred for recovery from:
  - legacy benefits (for example, Income Support/Jobseeker's Allowance/Employment and Support Allowance/Personal Independent Payment, etc.)
  - Universal Credit (UC) live service
  - UC full service

## Key points

19. Prior to referring a debt to Debt Management (DM), LAs must check the Customer Information System to ensure that an appropriate DWP benefit is in payment. LAs must also check their systems to ensure that DM are not already holding the debt as a result of an earlier clerical referral before it is referred via the PDP interface. DM does not have the functionality to check whether referrals made over the interface are duplicates of those already referred manually. If the LA refer a debt that is already held on the system both debts may be recovered resulting in customer complaints and the need for additional management of refunds.
20. The timescales and processes for legacy and UC debt referrals via PDP for LAs is as follows if:
  - recovery is possible immediately from a DWP benefit It may take up to 2 months for the monies to be sent to the LA
  - a legacy benefit is in payment and recovery of a higher priority debt is already in place. LAs should expect to have the debt returned immediately
  - UC is in payment and less than 5 debts in recovery. DM will hold the debt indefinitely until they are able to commence recovery against the HB debt. There will be no acknowledgement to LAs that this has happened
  - UC is in payment and more than 5 debts in recovery of a higher priority order. LAs should expect to have the debt returned to them
  - UC full service ceases. LAs can expect the debt to be returned following UC benefit cessation
  - UC live service ceases the debt will continue to be held by UC for up to 6 months after benefit cessation.

## Key points summarised

- LAs will not receive confirmation from DM that the HB debt has been received
- even if benefit is in payment, DM may not be able to make any recovery for the LA (for example, if there is not enough UC in payment or there are other debts with a higher priority)
- if an LA recalls a debt there is a holding period before DM returns the debt while they await for any unallocated monies to be transacted
- if a debtor wishes to make a payment to the LA, on a debt that has been referred to DM, the LA should refer the debtor to DM to make the payment and only accept the payment themselves in exceptional circumstances. This will prevent balance mismatches and over recovery.

## Update on Circular HB A6/2016

21. The circular talks about 'revising' debts via the interface. This process has changed for LAs that use **Capita and Civica**. Revisions uploaded via the interface for Capita and Civica sites are automatically treated as non-genuine and are not processed, **unless the LA emails** DM to state they are genuine and should be processed.
22. As advised in the circular, DM will deal with issues regarding recoveries, payments, balances, etc., in accordance with the Service Level Agreement. Queries can be raised using the telephone number 0345 850 0293. Technical issues relating to Data Hub connectivity or non-receipt of files should be escalated via email to [la-sst.hdd@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:la-sst.hdd@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## HB decisions by the Upper Tribunal

23. We are aware of the following HB cases that has been decided by the Upper Tribunal:
  - CH/3393/16: Decision set aside and remitted to LA to reconsider decision regarding HB in respect of the claimant alone as he was not subject to immigration control.
  - CH/3414/16: Removal of Spare Room Subsidy (RSRS). Claimant appeal dismissed. Nelson followed.
  - CH/5389/14: RSRS. Remit. Nelson followed.
24. Decisions of the Upper Tribunal are published on their website which can be found on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)
25. If you have any queries about cases before the Upper Tribunal Judges or courts, please contact us by: email at [fldmdma.customersupportservices@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:fldmdma.customersupportservices@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) or Fax on: 0113 2324841

## New Legislation

26. The following Statutory Instruments (SIs) have been laid:
  - 2017 No.901, The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (Consequential Amendments) Order 2017, came into force 3 November 2017
  - 2017 No.1015, The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments No. 4) Regulations 2017, came into force from 16 November 2017

- 2017 No.1020, The Jobseeker's Allowance (Schemes for Assisting Persons to Obtain Employment) (Amendment) Regulations 2017, coming into force 20 November 2017

27. The following Statutory Rule (SR) of Northern Ireland has been laid:

- 2017 No.216 (C.13), The Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 (Commencement No. 9 and Transitional and Transitory Provisions) Order 2017 came into force from 15 November 2017

28. Copies of SIs/SRs can now be downloaded from <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/>

### What's new on our HB pages on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

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

Document Type	Subject	Link
<b>HB Direct issue 179</b>	<p>Editorial</p> <p>Reminder: Discretionary Housing Payments mid-year monitoring returns 2017/18 from English and Welsh LAs</p> <p>Replacement of the Employee Authentication Service</p> <p>Reminder: Automated Transfers to Local Authority Systems Awareness Pack</p> <p>Universal Credit Live Manual Payments UC Live HB Stop Notice UC Full Service - Automation of LCTR notifications</p> <p>Housing Delivery Division's products to be published on GOV.UK in HTML format only</p> <p>LA Practitioner's Operational Group</p>	<p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hb-direct-newsletters-2017/hb-direct-issue-179--2">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hb-direct-newsletters-2017/hb-direct-issue-179--2</a></p>

	<p>Update from the Wider Use of Real Time Information Project</p> <p>Apollo Register</p> <p>The Performance Development Team's support with debt recovery</p> <p>Secondment Opportunities: DWP HDD</p>	
<b>HB G10/2017</b>	<p>Common input errors with Housing Benefit claims</p> <p>Update: Verify Earnings and Pensions service</p> <p>Delays in the return of RTI data</p> <p>Electronic Data Interchange for LAs</p> <p>HB Decisions by the Upper Tribunal</p> <p>New Legislation</p> <p>What's new on our HB pages on www.gov.uk</p>	<p><a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/653259/g10-2017.pdf">https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/653259/g10-2017.pdf</a></p>