

Guidance

LA Welfare Direct 5/2023

Updated 18 May 2023

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Contact

If you have queries about the:

- technical content of this bulletin then contact details are given at the end of each article
- general content and distribution of this bulletin, contact lawelfare.correspondence@dwp.gov.uk

Who should read

All Housing Benefit staff

Action

For information

Editorial

Welcome to May's bumper edition of the LA Welfare Bulletin. As we move well and truly into the new financial year, we continue to collaborate with each other to make improvements and updates to our work which, in turn, helps make all our jobs more effective and efficient. I'd like to thank you for that continued engagement and support; we know it's not easy and collaboration does take you away from delivering but I hope we all see the value in it.

Some of this thanks is highlighted in two of the articles following your engagement with us on the new Verify Earnings and Pension User Interface survey and the surveys for additional UC data items and Local Council Tax Reduction data feed (including an extension to the date for completing the surveys).

As always, there are other opportunities to help collaborate on key topics such as data sharing and the Care Home Information Service and you can find more details about getting involved in this bulletin.

As you know, this bulletin is our main way of communicating with Housing Benefit (HB) staff and, where possible, we try to include all:

- clarification of guidance and processes that impact on HB processing
- requests for collaborative help to improve HB delivery (working group invites, etc)
- important updates and sign posting to more detailed information on HB policy, delivery and wider Department for Work and Pensions benefits and Welfare Reform
- all LA call invites

- and much more

We use this vehicle in our strive to make it easier for LAs to find as much information as possible in one place and reduce communications traffic to you by avoiding ad-hoc emails where we can. We do appreciate how valuable your time is but we ask that you use some of that time to ensure you read this bulletin each month.

If you would like to provide any feedback on this bulletin or how we communicate with you more generally, do feel free to send an email to lawelfare.correspondence@dwp.gov.uk

Finally, I'm hoping that you can all get some well-deserved rest with the bank holidays that are coming up during May. I have my fingers crossed that as we continue into spring and head towards the summer months the weather starts to improve and we can all enjoy the longer days.

Beck Bryning

Head of Local Authority Grants, Local Authority Partnership, Engagement and Delivery division

New email solution for Attendance Allowance form DBD68LA (for Unitary authorities and County Councils)

1. As advised in [LAWD8/2022 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2022/la-welfare-direct-82022\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2022/la-welfare-direct-82022), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ran a test and learn pilot to explore the effectiveness of replacing the postal process with a new secure email solution as a way of corresponding with local authorities (LAs) to obtain information regarding care home admissions and funding information (using the existing Attendance Allowance form DBD68LA).
2. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with participating LAs reporting improved ease and speed of sending and receiving responses to these queries by email, particularly for staff working from home. It has also reduced the need for repeat requests to DWP as 48% of all enquiries were returned within 7 days.
3. As a result, the email solution was made available from 3 April 2023 and should be used by all LAs.
4. If your LA has not yet provided a secure (gov.uk network) email address in order to use the new email solution, then please do so by sending an email to lawelfare.liaisonteam@dwp.gov.uk by Friday 19 May 2023.
5. In the longer term, DWP is continuing to work with the LA Adult Social Care software suppliers to develop a more strategic solution for LAs to provide the care home data to DWP using automated technologies. This will help remove the

resource burden on LA staff further. More information about this will be shared with LAs on this over the coming months.

Changes to the Housing Benefit Matching Service Incapacity Benefit and Income Support change of address rules

6. The Local Authority Partnership, Engagement and Delivery (LA-PED) division is continually improving the suite of Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS) rules to provide quality referrals and to reduce nugatory referrals issued to LAs.

7. LA-PED has reviewed and made changes to the rules that identify HB claimants who are in receipt of certain DWP benefits and who have failed to notify the LA of a change of address:

- HBIB005 - identifies HB claimants in receipt of Retirement Pension, Invalidity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Sickness Benefit, Widows Benefit, Incapacity Benefit, Maternity Allowance or Bereavement Benefit
- HBIS005 identifies HB claimants in receipt of Income Support

8. LA-PED has worked closely with several LAs to identify issues and improvements to the rules. Investigations revealed that some referrals related to claimant addresses on DWP benefits systems that were either incorrect or not current. Amendments to the coding of the rules have been made and these referrals will now be excluded, resulting in the reduced number of nugatory referrals you will now receive.

9. The enhanced referrals have been available to LAs from week commencing 24 April 2023 and should now only include current addresses held on the DWP benefits systems.

10. The HBMS rules guidance (which is available on Glasscubes) will be updated to reflect the new changes for both rules.

11. LA-PED would like to take this opportunity to thank those LAs who participated in the consultation process.

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

Update: Transformation of the Single Housing Benefit Extract returns to DWP using a real time Application Programme Interface

13. LA-PED is currently working with your HB IT software suppliers to transform the current four-weekly Single Housing Benefit Extract, to automatically provide the HB data from LA systems to DWP in real-time. This will increase the frequency in which the data will be sent to DWP and reduce the burden on LA administrative teams by removing the manual extraction, data checking, saving and exporting of the extract to DWP.

Update

14. Since the last update in [LAWD2/2023](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-22023), (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-22023>) LA-PED has been working with LA IT software suppliers to test the solution with DWP.

15. We will soon be ready to start testing the solution with a small number of LAs as early adopters. To this end, LA-PED will shortly be contacting LAs (as recommended by their software supplier) to ask for their support. However, if your LA is interested in becoming an early adopter, you can register your interest with LA-PED directly by emailing lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk

16. Testing with the early adopters and their LA IT suppliers will take place over summer 2023, and the outcomes from this will inform the national rollout implementation approach that is planned for early Autumn 2023.

17. We will be providing updates on the progress of the early adopter testing over the coming months.

National rollout next steps

- LA Revenues and Benefits teams will need to work closely with their IT teams to ensure they have the capacity to make the necessary system changes in late Summer/Autumn 2023. LA-PED will be providing further information to support this planning in early summer once we see the initial outcomes from early adopter testing
- National rollout will take place using a staggered approach to accommodate the LA software supplier release schedules

18. Following implementation of the final solution, there will be a period of dual running to ensure the accuracy of data and address any issues which impact LA's performance measurement figures before switching off the existing solution.

Care Home Information Service: Request for additional LAs to join the early adopter trial

19. Since our last update in [LAWD2/23](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-22023) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-22023>), LA-PED has been working with a

small number of LAs testing the new automated solution as part of an early adopter trial.

20. DWP is now in a position to extend the early adopter trial period for a further three months and increase the number of LAs we are working with.

21. We are asking for additional LAs to join the early adopter trial. Therefore, if you can participate or would like any further information to help you decide, then please contact lawelfare.ladsdeliveryteam@dwp.gov.uk

Next steps

22. We will onboard any new LAs joining the trial by providing an introduction session and arranging for the necessary system access to participate.

23. Progress with the early adopter LAs will be monitored throughout the trial period via regular weekly checkpoints and the gathering of management information from Attendance Allowance agents. The outcomes will then be used to support and inform our future wider implementation approach.

Issues with the Local Council Tax Reduction additional deduction reasons data share

24. In April's [LAWD4/2023 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-42023\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-42023) bulletin, LA-PED told you about the addition of nine deduction reasons and amounts to be added to the Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTR) data share from Wednesday 5 April 2023.

25. Unfortunately, a key requirement was not picked up in testing and LA-PED was not aware that where a deduction is not one of the nine additional deduction reasons, no deductions data would be received via the LCTR data share file.

26. To urgently address this issue, the files were put back to how they were prior to 5 April. Therefore, files received by LAs from 13 April were 'back to normal'. Unfortunately, this means the files do not include the nine deduction descriptions.

27. We fully appreciate and apologise for the issues and inconvenience this has caused for LAs and are working as quickly as possible to deliver the enhanced solution. We will keep you informed of progress.

Revised Memorandum of Understanding between DWP and LAs

28. On 17 April 2023, LA-PED directly issued the revised Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DWP and LAs, along with a letter outlining the key changes to all LAs.

29. To ensure continued access to DWP, HM Revenue and Customs and Home Office derived data, each LA is required to fully review the MOU, sign and return the necessary declarations to lawelfare.lasecurity@dwp.gov.uk by the close of business on 12 June 2023.

30. Please note, we had to reissue the MOU and the letter on 25 April 2023. We apologise again for any inconvenience this may have caused.

31. If you need to contact us or have any queries about the content of this article you can email the address given above.

Invitation to a question and answer session on the MOU compliance requirements

32. On 17 April 2023, DWP sent a letter to LAs providing the high-level findings from the LA MOU Compliance Audit pilot. We also advised that, following this pilot, the audit is extending to all LAs and asked authorities to start impacting the audit pilot findings within their LA by completing and returning an audit template (Annex B of the letter) to lawelfare.lacompliance@dwp.gov.uk by 12 June 2023.

33. We've since had numerous questions from LAs surrounding this requirement. Therefore, we would like to invite LAs to an all LA call where they can ask questions. This call will be held on Thursday 11 May from 2.30pm to 3.30pm.

Joining instructions

34. The joining instructions are:

- The MS Teams link to this meeting has been shared in the version of the LAWD5/2023 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

35. The call is open to all LAs and would be beneficial for every LA to have at least one representative dial into the call to help us maximise feedback.

36. We look forward to your participation on the call. However, if you have any questions in the meantime, please contact lawelfare.lacompliance@dwp.gov.uk

Feedback from the new Verify Earnings and Pensions User Interface survey and

reminder about the closure of the old User Interface on 18 May 2023

37. Thank you to all Verify Earnings and Pensions (VEP) users who completed the new VEP User Interface (UI) survey. We had an excellent response rate and, as a result, received valuable information on the new UI, together with comments/suggestions we will take forward. Do note, the new VEP UI was implemented to meet accessibility standards so, whilst we have kept the old one open for ease of handover, do be reminded we will be closing the old VEP UI on 18 May 2023.

Findings from survey

38. Some high level findings from the survey:

- Over 97% of respondents are successfully using the new VEP UI
- A small number of respondents expressed difficulties in accessing and saving the new VEP UI. See more information under the heading Closure of the old VEP URL reminder further along in this bulletin
- Issues with users being timed out of VEP. We are making enquiries with our digital colleagues regarding this and will keep you informed of progress

Reminders:

39. To follow are some reminders on the use of VEP that LAs should find helpful:

- you can access VEP for any HB cases you are working on. In other words, you do not need to have received an alert
- you can change the payslips used to calculate a different average that is displayed when viewing the earnings from the VEP averaging tab. See paragraph 20 of the VEP guidance (Topics 1-4). (New updated VEP guidance was issued directly to Revenues and Benefits Managers on 4 April 2023 and can also be found on Glasscubes)
- there is a feedback facility on VEP. If you have any suggestions for improvements you can click on the feedback button (at the top of the screen) and the email suggestions will go directly to our digital colleagues
- anyone experiencing difficulties navigating through to VEP guidance and instructions on Glasscubes can email the LA Security and Support Team at lawelfare.lasupport@dwp.gov.uk for advice

40. We are working on updating the frequently asked questions on VEP and, once completed, will be placed on Glasscubes.

Closure of the old VEP UI reminder

41. The old VEP UI will be closed on 18 May 2023 and access to VEP will be via the new link only.

42. If you are having difficulties connecting to or saving the new UI link do refer to the latest instructions on Glasscubes. Should you continue to experience difficulties then you should send an email vep.implementation@dwp.gov.uk as a matter of urgency. We will then arrange a Microsoft Teams call with you to resolve your issues before the old UI closes.

Update: Collection of IP address data for HB claimants

43. The collection of IP addresses for online HB new claims and changes of circumstances on the SHBE has been in place since April 2020.

44. LA-PED's Data Strategy Team has been working with LA IT software suppliers and online claim providers to facilitate the capture of additional data relating to IP addresses. The additional data is the date, time and time zone of a new claim or a change of circumstances online transaction and is being collected for fraud and error purposes.

45. This additional data capture was implemented on 1 April 2023.

46. LA IT suppliers will be issuing release notes to inform LAs of any actions they need to take to ensure that the collection of this additional data is enabled. LAs should ensure that these instructions are followed and that they are upgraded to the latest version of the National Benefits Schema.

47. LA-PED is aware that not all LAs have the facility to capture IP address data.

48. If you have any questions regarding the content of this article you can contact lawelfare.datamatching@dwp.gov.uk

Extension to deadline for LA responses to the surveys for additional UC data items and LCTR data feed

49. The Local Government Data Sharing Transformation team (LGDST) has had an excellent response to the surveys we asked you to complete about the additional Universal Credit (UC) data items that you would like to be able to view on Searchlight and the UC LCTR data feed. The surveys were sent on 5 April 2023 to all LAs Revenues and Benefits Managers.

50. In respect of the Searchlight surveys, we received:

- 92 responses to our LCTR survey
- 92 responses to our HB survey

- 96 responses to our Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) survey
- 56 responses to our Local Welfare Provision (LWP) survey
- 44 responses to our Adult Social Care Financial Assessments (ASCFA) survey

51. Many thanks to those who took time to complete the survey(s). It provided us with some extremely valuable information that we were able to relay to UC and Searchlight colleagues on 18 April 2023.

52. The results have provided us with a clear indication of which data items are the most important to LAs. We still have some work to do to:

- ratify our conclusions with our working group
- fully understand exactly why LAs need each data item
- comprehensively understand the importance of the verification status to LAs
- verify that the data items available meet your requirements
- check that Searchlight can host the data and that it fits the Searchlight customer-centric model

53. We will keep you informed of progress but there is no guarantee that we will be able to deliver on all these data items due to technical design constraints.

54. In respect of the LCTR data feed survey, the 100 responses give us plenty of rich data to consider as we work with UC colleagues on our aim to deliver significant improvements to the types of UC data we share with you.

55. However, we would really appreciate more responses to the LCTR data feed survey and/or the five Searchlight surveys. To this end, we have extended the closing date to complete the surveys to 16 May 2023.

Volunteers needed to join the DWP/LA UC data sharing working group

56. We are looking for volunteers from differing sized LAs with different IT software suppliers, with diverse ways of working and from locations throughout the country to enhance our current UC data sharing working group.

57. We particularly need volunteers with a working knowledge of the:

- automation of the LCTR data feed
- use of Searchlight, particularly for ASCFA and the LWP (please forward on to anyone within your council this might be of interest to)

58. If this is something that you would be interested in and you know what it would take to help transform the way you work, contact lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk for more information.

Update: Move to UC

59. The Minister for Employment laid a [Written Ministerial Statement](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-03-28/hcws678) (<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-03-28/hcws678>) on 28 March 2023 outlining the expansion plans on Move to UC.

60. As outlined in our national communications, we begun to increase the number of Migration Notices issued to Tax Credit claimants from April 2023. To facilitate this activity, we are expanding into additional parts of the country and by September 2023, Move to UC activity will be taking place in all regions of Great Britain.

61. On 3 April 2023, we expanded into Avon, Somerset, and Gloucester and will be expanding into East London and Cheshire in May. Currently, work is progressing towards expansion of Move to UC activity into the Greater Manchester and North East Yorkshire and Humber areas for June.

Practitioners' Operational Group and LA Welfare Steering Group

62. The last Practitioners' Operational Group meeting took place on 20 April 2023. Agenda items included LA Welfare issues Highlight Report, Move to UC and the latest extension to the Household Support Fund.

63. Both groups' meetings are held bi-monthly (and alternately) so the next LA Welfare Steering Group meeting is scheduled to take place on 18 May 2023.

64. If you have any questions regarding topics raised at these consultation groups, you can email lawelfare.correspondence@dwp.gov.uk

Secondment opportunities LA-PED

65. 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 an opportunity to gain an insight and experience of policy development and workings of central government.

66. The LA-PED division 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.

67. LA-PED comprises of approximately 120 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.

68. 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.

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

70. 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

71. 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

72. 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.

73. If you are keen to register your interest and are at S01/S02/S03 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 with the Upper Tribunal

74. Decision Making and Appeals Leeds have not been made aware of any new HB/CTB decisions by the Upper Tribunal since April's edition of this bulletin.

75. A selection of decisions of the UT are [published \(https://www.gov.uk/administrative-appeals-tribunal-decisions\)](https://www.gov.uk/administrative-appeals-tribunal-decisions) on their website. Do be aware that there is an undefined time lapse between decisions being issued and their appearance on the website.

76. If you have any queries about cases before the UT Judges or courts, please contact us by email at

New Legislation

77. No further Statutory Instruments (SIs) have been laid since the last edition.

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

What's new on our HB pages on [www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-benefit-information-guidance-and-good-practice-for-local-authority-staff) (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-benefit-information-guidance-and-good-practice-for-local-authority-staff>)

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

Document Type	Subject	Link
LAWD4/2023	Editorial Reminder: Deadline for the submission of Housing Benefit pre-audit final claims and Discretionary Housing Payment claims Additional Universal Credit deductions reasons and amounts to be added to the Local Council Tax Reduction data share Supported housing research Frequently asked questions: Supported	LAWD4/2023 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-4202)

Document Type	Subject	Link
	<p>housing and temporary accommodation caseload review</p> <p>New online service for parents and carers to prove they are entitled to Child Benefit</p> <p>Further extension to the Household Support Fund</p> <p>UC expanded to more Tax Credit claimants</p> <p>DWP's continuation of Help to Claim support</p> <p>Practitioners' Operational Group and LA Welfare Steering Group</p> <p>Decisions with the Upper Tribunal</p> <p>New Legislation</p> <p>What's new on our HB pages on www.gov.uk</p>	
LAWDLite4/2023	<p>Urgent reminder: Immediate notification of procurement of audit firm for the financial year ending March 2024</p>	<p>LAWDLite4/2023 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-lite-42023) </p>

Document Type	Subject	Link
	Housing Benefit Assurance Process (England only) required Publication of refreshed HBAP modules for the FYE March 2023	
Circular HB A5/2023	Housing Benefit operational information, performance support and engagement for the financial year ending March 2024	Circular HB A5/2023 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-adjudication-circulars-2023/a52023-housing-benefit-operational-information-performance-support-and-engagement-for-the-financial-year-ending-march-2024)
Circular HB S5/2023	Additional New Burdens funding to meet the costs of delivering Welfare Reform changes in the financial year ending March 2024	Circular HB S5/2023 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-subsidy-circulars-2023/s52023-additional-new-burdens-funding-to-meet-the-costs-of-delivering-welfare-reform-changes-in-the-financial-year-ending-march-2024)
Circular HB S6/2023	Housing Benefit Award Accuracy Initiative funding for financial year ending March 2024 for local authorities participating from 3 April 2023	Circular HB S6/2023 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-subsidy-circulars-2023/s62023-housing-benefit-award-accuracy-initiative-funding-for-the-financial-year-ending-march-2024-for-local-authorities-participating-from-3-april-20)

Document Type	Subject	Link
Circular HB S7/2023	Funding for the Verify Earnings and Pension service for the financial year ending March 2024	Circular HB S7/2023 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-subsidy-circulars-2023/s72023-funding-for-the-verify-earnings-and-pension-service-for-the-financial-year-ending-march-2024)

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