

[Department  
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Guidance

# LA Welfare Direct 2/2024

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# Contact

If you have any queries around 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](mailto:lawelfare.correspondence@dwp.gov.uk)

# Who should read

All Housing Benefit staff

# Action

For information

# Editorial

Welcome everyone to the second LA Welfare Direct of 2024. As you'll be aware, this is a big year for local authorities (LAs) in terms of the Move to Universal Credit (UC) for all the remaining groups of claimants. But there are many other important changes too, not least the near completion of the project to replace the old Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) process with the new real time SHBE data share. Also, the ending of the 12 months we gave LAs to carry out a desk-based review of the whole Housing Benefit (HB) caseload to ensure supported accommodation and temporary accommodation markers are correctly set on all cases.

Consequently, the volume of communications from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) over the coming weeks and months is likely to be higher than usual.

One of the most important things that I've tried to inspire in my own area of DWP (data sharing and data security) is a real focus on listening to our LA customers and continuous improvement. And, from the qualitative feedback we've received over the last eight years, you've noticed the difference. However, we do appreciate there is more to be done.

To add to that feedback, I thought you might be interested in seeing some further quantitative feedback about our data shares, which comes from comparing the answers we received from LAs from our once-a-year survey which we started in winter 2021.

<b>Data Share</b>	<b>Satisfied or very satisfied 2022</b>	<b>Satisfied or very satisfied 2023</b>	<b>Change</b>
Automated Transfer to LA Systems	89%	88%	-1%
Verify earnings and pensions (VEP)	76%	87%	+11%
Searchlight	75%	85%	+10%
Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS)	62%	75%	+13%
Housing Benefit Debt Service	63%	74%	+11%
UC Local Council Tax Reduction (UC-LCTR)	65%	67%	+2%
Apollo	42%	55%	+13%
Housing Benefit Risk Model	34%	53%	+19%

These positive results generally reflect where we've made improvements, or where LAs know improvements are on the way soon. Given the further improvements we anticipate being able to deliver to VEP, Searchlight, HBMS, UC-LCTR and Apollo in the coming 12 months, hopefully satisfaction levels will increase further. None of this would be possible without LA feedback and support, sometimes during the ideas and/or trialling phases or sometimes just from filling in the customer survey on data sharing and data security. Please keep on providing us with that open, honest feedback. It really helps.

Anyhow, please read on. This month you'll find important articles about a number of matters. But of particular interest to many LAs will be the improvements that will soon be delivered in relation to UC data sharing. This relates both to the UC data on Searchlight and to the number of variables in the UC-LCTR data share. We know these improvements are some of the highest priorities that LAs have flagged to us over the years and have the potential to

significantly improve your ability to deliver welfare services to vulnerable citizens. Not long to wait now!

Paul Selby

LA-PED Deputy Divisional Manager

## **New Housing Benefit Matching Service Rule HBCB001 to replace HBHB501**

1. The Local Authority Partnership, Engagement and Delivery (LA-PED) division is continually reviewing and improving the suite of HBMS rules, to provide quality referrals and to reduce nugatory referrals issued to LAs.
2. LA-PED has worked closely with several LAs to identify issues and improvements to rule HBHB501, which identifies claims where a dependant aged 19 years or over is living in the household.
3. Investigations revealed that the quality of referrals would be enhanced by matching the dependant's details against HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Child Benefit (CHB) data. As HMRC CHB data is now available to the DWP, rule HBHB501 will be de-commissioned and replaced by a new rule HBCB001.
4. HBCB001 will exclude potential referrals where the claimant or partner receives CHB for the dependant. As these cases will now be excluded, HBCB001 will identify dependants aged 18 as well as those aged 19 years or over, whereby CHB is no longer in payment. By coding the rule this way there will be a reduction in nugatory referrals.
5. HBHB501 also excluded all potential referrals where the claimant or partner was receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
6. The new rule HBCB001 includes these referrals and indicates which components of DLA or PIP are in payment. This enables LAs to make the appropriate adjustments to the claim, depending on whether the care and living or mobility components of DLA or PIP are in payment.
7. The new referrals will be available to LAs from the week commencing 5 February 2024 and the HBMS rules guidance (available on Glasscubes) will be updated to reflect the new rule.
8. LA-PED would also like to take this opportunity to thank those LAs who participated in the consultation process.

9. If you have any questions regarding the content of this article, do contact [welfare.datamatching@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:welfare.datamatching@dwp.gov.uk)

## Annual uprating: Polygamous marriage cases

10. Since issuing the new style uprating circular HB [A8/2023](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-adjudication-circulars-2023/a82023-housing-benefit-uprating-for-the-financial-year-ending-march-2025>), a small number of LAs have asked for the new rate for an additional member in a working age polygamous marriage.

11. The table provided at paragraph 13 of the circular gives details of the rates which are increased by the annual uprating order. However, the table does not include a rate for the additional member in a polygamous marriage for the Working Age legacy benefits, including Housing Benefit (HB), because these rates are not included in the uprating order.

12. If you have any working age polygamous marriage cases, paragraph 1 (a) and (b) of [Regulation 23](#) (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2006/213/regulation/23>) of the Housing Benefit Regulations 2006 sets out how to calculate the rate for the additional member of a polygamous marriage. For your ease, the calculation is as follows:

- the amount for a single person over 25 is deducted from the amount for a couple where one is over 18 to obtain the amount for the additional member. So, the sum for the period beginning in April 2024 will be £142.25 (couple rate) minus £90.50 (single person over 25 rate) = £51.75

13. If you have any questions about this article, please contact us at [housing.policyenquiries@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:housing.policyenquiries@dwp.gov.uk)

## Deadline for the submission of HB subsidy final tested claims and assurance process reports or audit certificates

14. Final tested claims for HB subsidy and subsequent HB assurance process reports (in England) and audit certificates (in Scotland and Wales) are required in legislation to be submitted by the 30 November following the end of the

relevant financial year. DWP does not have any plans to change this statutory deadline.

15. However, for the financial years ending (FYE) March 2021, 2022 and 2023 an extension was granted to the statutory submission date for claims – see [LAWD3/2023 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-32023#extension-to-statutory-deadline-for-final-tested-claims-for-the-financial-year-ending-2023\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-32023#extension-to-statutory-deadline-for-final-tested-claims-for-the-financial-year-ending-2023) bulletin. As previously advised, DWP would not exercise its right to apply withholdings for claims due on 30 November 2023 and subsequently received by 31 January 2024. LAs will be given adequate advance notice prior to DWP introducing withholdings for any claims not submitted by the published deadlines.

16. DWP does not intend to extend the deadline for HB subsidy final tested claims for the FYE March 2023 beyond 31 January 2024, or grant formal extensions to this deadline.

## **Expected submission date as agreed with your auditor**

17. Where LAs were not able to meet the 31 January 2024 deadline they should have informed DWP of their expected submission date and agreed this date with their auditors prior to notifying DWP at [lawelfare.lapaymentsandsubsidy@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.lapaymentsandsubsidy@dwp.gov.uk)

## **Closing of the Payment Deduction Programme full reconciliation exercise Debt Management inboxes**

18. The Payment Deduction Programme (PDP) full reconciliation exercise has been completed. Therefore, the 'HB debt recovered by the Department for Work and Pensions' (previously known as the PDP) closed the Debt Management inboxes used during this exercise from 1 February 2024.

19. LAs should call the Debt Centre about queries regarding individual debts on 0800 916 0647.



# Additional HB overpayment or debt workshop for LAs

20. As previously advised in [LAWD9/2023](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-92023>) and [LAWD11/2023](#) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2023/la-welfare-direct-112023#housing-benefit-overpaymentdebt-workshops-for-las>), LA-PED division held a series of HB overpayment/debt workshops for LAs running from October 2023 through to January 2024.

## Additional workshop availability

21. Due to the demand of these workshops, we have added an additional venue and places are still available:

- London – Camden Council Offices, 21 February 2024

22. The workshops are aimed at HB recovery leaders and the objectives are to:

- raise the profile of HB debt recovery within LAs
- ensure the understanding of debts recovered through DWP benefits is embedded
- obtain any good practice to refresh the Overpayments Good Practice Guide
- share any ideas from attendees relating to dealing with recovery in the current social economic climate and in the future
- further understand any qualitative information not reflected in the HB debt statistics.

23. You can contact [caxtonhouse.lapedpdpsupport@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:caxtonhouse.lapedpdpsupport@dwp.gov.uk) to secure a place.

## Enhancing the Universal Credit data available to LAs

24. LA-PED division's Local Government Data Sharing Transformation (LGDST) team has been working closely with a working group of representative LAs to identify the extra information about UC claims that would help increase accuracy, reduce overpayments and enable greater automation. We confirmed

requirements and their priority through a detailed survey of all LAs in June 2022 and have scrutinised the responses to the LA customer survey on data sharing and data security.

25. LGDST has also been working with UC, LA IT software suppliers and DWP's Searchlight team to ensure that dozens of additional data items will be available through the UC Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTR) feed and Searchlight to support the administration of:

- LCTR
- HB
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Adult Social Care Financial Assessments
- Disabled Facilities Grants or Disabled Access Grants

## **UC-LCTR data share schema improvements**

26. The LGDST team aims to deliver some of the additional data items in spring 2024 by enhancing the data feed to:

- state the reason for any transitional protection
- report the full details of the household composition when a change in the composition has been reported. When the last dependant or non-dependant leaves the household, the file will contain the header but without any dependents or non-dependents beneath it
- include the monetary value of the minimum income floor if it has been applied
- include a full breakdown on the UC award - (to the extent that is possible)
- show the date the claimant moved into the property
- include more specific information about why the UC award was terminated
- the date that any change in employer occurred
- provide more information about joint tenants
- include the type and value for up to 31 deductions. (There will also be an 'other' category in instances where there are any other deduction types that are not enumerated but this is not expected to be needed in most cases.)
- include the receipt of up to 33 benefits for the claimant

27. Our development follows the Agile methodology, prioritising the items that LAs have told us add the most value. Some of them were much more complex to deliver than first thought and required extensive testing to ensure we had got it right.

28. That means, that whilst some items may not be delivered in the first spring 2024 tranche, we are still working on enhancing the data feed as follows for delivery by summer 2024:

- include the receipt of up to 33 benefits for dependants and non-dependants
- provide more information about carers
- provide more information about any limited capability to work.
- advise LAs about any deaths immediately, however files will continue to include the deceased during any UC run-on period
- provide details about any corporate or personal appointees, the system does not hold any details about someone having the power of attorney
- provide details of whether the claimant owns the property or owns a share of the property (shared ownership)
- show if the claimant is living with the landlord and whether they have any relationship
- provide more information when the two-child limit has been applied by clarifying:
  - the number of children on the account
  - the number of eligible children on the account along with their name and age
  - where there has been a change to the eligible child, the date of the change will be provided

29. Do note: The project has concentrated on adding additional data items to the data feed. Any outstanding bugs or enhancement requests outside the agreed scope will be looked at separately when resources and funding permit.

## **LA IT software suppliers**

30. We have also been keeping LA IT software suppliers updated and they have already been commissioned to make the necessary changes to their systems so that they can receive and accept the additional data items to the UC-LCTR feed. They are also looking at the potential for increased automation.

31. Although we have undertaken significant testing (including regression testing, where we check that things can be put back to the way they were before if necessary) we have developed a dual file approach. This means that, for a set period, two files will be issued; one with and one without amendments. This additional functionality gives us extra security should something go wrong and allows added flexibility if an IT software supplier or an LA is not quite ready to go.

## **Searchlight improvements**

32. Whilst most of our effort has been focused on improving the UC-LCTR data feed we haven't forgotten about our promise to update the UC data LAs can view on Searchlight. This work has been on a slower track because the Searchlight team has been focused on other high priority work and had to go through normal governance protocols.

33. However, the LGDST, Searchlight and UC teams are planning to make some improvements in Spring 2024 by adding some additional UC data items on Searchlight. Specifically, these are:

- the amount of any transitional protection
- the amount of any deductions by type
- if the claimant is in receipt of a Limited Capability for Work payment
- if the claimant is in receipt of a Limited Capability for Work – work related activity payment
- the amount of any benefit cap that has been applied
- the date the decision to terminate the UC payment was made
- the date the UC payments terminated
- the reason why UC was terminated
- the reason why UC was refused
- the amount of any UC Housing Element paid to the claimant
- when the two-child limit has been applied by clarifying:
  - the number of children on the account
  - the number of eligible children on the account along with their name and age
  - where there has been a change to the eligible child, the date of the change will be provided

34. We will continue to work on the delivery of further UC data items on Searchlight once these initial items have been added.

## **LA requirements that cannot be met**

35. There are some instances when we cannot provide the information requested by LAs because it is either not held on the UC system or it is aggregated on the UC system. The UC system holds an aggregated figure for unearned income, so it is not possible to provide separate amounts for income from sources, such as private pensions, rental income, student grants and spousal maintenance, etc.

36. A few other requirements cannot be met because they are not considered or requested from the claimant in the UC assessment. They are details about:

- any child maintenance received
- the number of hours worked
- any hospitalisation over 52 weeks
- whether someone is an apprentice or trainee
- if anyone in the assessment unit is pregnant
- the start and end date of any benefit cap (Note: details about the application of a benefit cap in any assessment period is already supplied)

## Summary

37. We have worked closely with our working group and the wider LA community, including considering LA responses to the LA customer survey on data sharing and data security and other feedback to identify and prioritise requirements.

38. We have held regular monthly meetings with the working group to inform progress and seek opinions and engage weekly with the UC team to track progress and agree next steps.

39. We have also engaged with the LA IT software suppliers to ensure that they are enhancing their systems to receive and display the additional data and, where applicable, automate the data.

40. We are working to deliver as much as we can in spring 2024, with work continuing on the remaining deliverables once the first batch of enhancements have been delivered.

## LA actions for consideration

41. In advance of the changes occurring, LAs may want to start to consider how the improved data shares could:

- be used to improve accuracy and reduce overpayments
- in light of the greater levels of data available, speed up processing by providing additional automation routine
- lead to changes in the way their LCTR scheme operates

42. We will continue to provide updates on progress but, in the meantime, the team can be contacted on [lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk](mailto:lawelfare.datasharingtransformation@dwp.gov.uk)

## Publication of HB speed of processing statistics for July 2023 to September 2023

43. DWP published the [HB speed of processing statistics](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/housing-benefit-statistics-on-speed-of-processing-for-2021-to-2022) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/housing-benefit-statistics-on-speed-of-processing-for-2021-to-2022>) and associated data for quarter two (Q2) of the FYE March 2024 on Wednesday 31 January 2024.

### Some key points

- During Q2 of FYE March 2024 there were 100,000 new HB claims and 1.1 million changes of circumstances to existing HB claims processed in Great Britain
- For new HB claims, this is an increase of 3,900 (4%) since last quarter and an increase of 9,000 (10%) when compared to a year earlier
- For change of circumstances to existing HB claims, this is a decrease of 290,000 (21%) since last quarter and a negligible decrease of 1,300 when compared to a year earlier

### New claims

- The average time taken to process a new HB claim during the latest quarter was 20 calendar days. This is two days lower than last quarter and one day less as a year earlier.

### Change of circumstances

- The average number of days taken to process a change of circumstance to an existing HB claim during the latest quarter was nine calendar days. This is one day higher than last quarter and the same as a year earlier.

# Practitioners' Operational Group and LA Welfare Steering Group

44. The last LA Welfare Steering Group meeting took place on 18 January 2024. Agenda items included the LA Welfare issues Highlight Report, LA funding, Move to UC and the Cost of Living.

45. Both groups' meetings are held bi-monthly (and alternately), so the next Practitioners' Operational Group meeting is scheduled to take place on 15 February 2024.

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

## Latest update: Move to UC

47. You may have seen the [Written Statement \(https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-01-25/hcws213\)](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2024-01-25/hcws213) from the Minister for Employment setting out our plans from April 2024.

48. The statement provides more detail of the legacy benefit combinations that we will move from April 2024 when we start with Income Support households (who may also be receiving HB and or Child Tax Credit) and households claiming Tax Credits with HB. Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) only and ESA with HB remain deferred until 2028.

49. This activity follows the small-scale discovery activity that began in September 2023 to support the migration of households from April 2024, and the learning from this discovery work is being used to inform and improve our approach. As before, we will only increase the scale of migration for these households when we are assured it is safe to do so.

50. We continue with the expansion for Move to UC Tax Credit migration. This has continued to progress well and remains on track to fulfil our aim to notify over 500,000 Tax Credit only households of the need to claim UC by the end of the financial year ending March 2024.

## HB decisions by the Upper Tribunal

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

LAWD bulletin.

52. [A selection of decisions of the UT \(https://www.gov.uk/administrative-appeals-tribunal-decisions\)](https://www.gov.uk/administrative-appeals-tribunal-decisions) 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.

53. 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)

## **HB cases awaiting decision by the Upper Tribunal**

54. DMA Leeds have not been made aware of any new HB or Council Tax Benefit cases that are awaiting decision by the UT.

55. 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**

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

- 2024 No. 29 The Council Tax Reduction Schemes (Prescribed Requirements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2024, made on 10 January 2024

57. Copies of SIs can now be downloaded from [legislation.gov.uk](http://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)**  
**[\(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-benefit-information-guidance-and-good-practice-for-local-authority-staff\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-benefit-information-guidance-and-good-practice-for-local-authority-staff)**



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

<b>Document Type</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Link</b>
Bulletin	Editorial. LA progress with the desk-based review for correct supported accommodation and temporary accommodation markers. Transformation of the SHBE returns using a real time application programme Interface: Further update and urgent reminder for those LAs due to go live. VEP funding for the financial year ending March 2025. Local Housing Allowance: Indicative rates for the financial year ending March 2025. Invitation to the next data sharing and IT consultation and engagement forum Practitioners' Operational Group and LA	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2024/la-welfare-direct-12024">LAWD1/2024 (<u>https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/la-welfare-direct-bulletins-2024/la-welfare-direct-12024</u>)</a>

Document Type	Subject	Link
	Welfare Steering Group. HB Decisions with the Upper Tribunal. What's new on our HB pages on <a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a>	
Adjudication circular	Changes to income and capital disregards in the Housing Benefit Regulations	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-adjudication-circulars-2024/a12024-changes-to-income-and-capital-disregards-in-the-housing-benefit-regulations">A1/2024 (https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-adjudication-circulars-2024/a12024-changes-to-income-and-capital-disregards-in-the-housing-benefit-regulations)</a>

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