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To: The Chief Executive
The Director of Finance
The Director of Housing
Metropolitan District Councils
Non-Metropolitan District Councils
London Borough Councils
Scottish Regional and Islands and District Councils
Common Council of the City of London
Council of the Isles of Scilly

HB/CTB(93)41

The General Manager
The Chief Finance Officer
Development Corporations and
Commission for the New Towns

The Secretary
Scottish Homes
Development Board for Rural Wales

5 November 1993

Dear Sir/Madam

- I. NEW BOOKLET: GUIDANCE ON THE DESIGN OF HB/CTB CLAIM FORMS
- II. BENEFITS AGENCY AND LOCAL AUTHORITY OPERATIONS BULLETINS
- III. NHB(IS) PRODUCTION RECORD

- I. NEW BOOKLET: GUIDANCE ON THE DESIGN OF HB/CTB CLAIM FORMS

Introduction

1. We will soon be sending a new booklet to each authority on how to develop claim forms for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (HB/CTB). Our aim is to help authorities design clear, user-friendly benefit claim forms.

2. Each local authority's claim forms will reflect differences in working methods, computer software and house-style. Forms range from four page computer mailers to 16 page forms with an all-encompassing approach (telling claimants about school meals, clothing vouchers and other welfare services). Many are available in languages other than English. A national model form is therefore inappropriate.

Why we produced the booklet

3. The booklet responds to authorities' requests for guidance. Authorities need to collect enough information to enable them to determine benefit correctly but some authorities have been criticised by the Office of the Data Protection Registrar (ODPR) for requiring too much information. The booklet has been written with the Data Protection Principles in mind and we have kept the ODPR in touch with our progress. We are expecting to receive further guidance on the wider Data Protection issues (including information to be asked on claim forms) from the ODPR early next year and will be discussing this with the Local Authority Associations when it is held.

4. In addition the Audit and Accounts Commissions recommended improvements to the clarity and layout of claim forms. The new booklet is intended to help authorities meet this aim also.

How the booklet was developed

5. We employed a team of specialist form designers. An independent market research company tested an earlier version with staff in a number of authorities and with claimants. We also produced the booklet in consultation with the Local Authority Associations and National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, and we improved and expanded the guidance as a result of their involvement.

When will we get the booklet and what do we do with it?

6. The booklet is now being printed. We hope that distribution will be completed by early December. It is designed to be a practical, flexible guide and authorities are free to adapt the content and presentation to meet local needs. Part 1 gives language and design guidance. Part 2 includes a checklist of all the information needed to claim HB/CTB, in a modular format. This is intended to help authorities to decide how much of the information they wish to include in their claim forms and to provide them with advice about colours, layout and style (including print styles) and the wording of questions.

Contact point

7. If you have any queries about the booklet please contact Nina Robinson on 071 962 8360

II. BENEFITS AGENCY AND LOCAL AUTHORITY OPERATIONS BULLETINS

1. The Benefits Agency (BA) has recently issued two Operations Bulletins on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit to its District Offices. Bulletin 2/93 provides BA offices with information on Housing Benefit and Crown Tenants - this corresponds to Item II of Circular HB/CTB (93)27.

2. Bulletin 3/93 provides information to Income Support staff on miscellaneous HB/CTB issues. In particular, LAs may wish to note paragraphs 6-9 which remind Adjudication Officers on the importance of prompt decisions in fraud related cases. Paragraph 10 concerns an improvement to IS termination notices which will now carry a reminder on the need for the customer to get in touch with the local council regarding HB/CTB. Finally, there is a reminder on the exchange of information where the authority has contracted out benefits administration.

3. Copies of both bulletins are attached, at Appendix A, for information.

Any enquiries should be addressed to Christopher Moore on 071 962 8293.

III. NHB(IS) PRODUCTION RECORD

1. From 1 November 1993, but with no retrospection, the Income Support Computer System will automatically maintain a record of the production of up to eight NHB(IS) notifications. This will enable the IS section to confirm whether information on a particular IS claim has or has not been sent to the local authority. The system will record the type of NHB(IS) notification but not contain details of what information the notification contained.

2. The Benefits Agency may use this record to remind authorities that the information being sought on a NHB5 has already been supplied. Because a high percentage of NHB5s received seek such information, the BA asks that authorities thoroughly check their own records and unlinked post before completing a NHB5.

3. The NHB(IS) record may also assist in the establishment of the date of claim when a claimant alleges that a NHB1 has been completed and sent to the Benefits Agency but there is no trace in the local authority.

4. A copy of the Benefits Agency's Circular IS(OS)27/93 is attached, at Appendix B, for information.

Any enquiries should be addressed to Christopher Moore on 071 962 8293.

Yours faithfully

Michael Lloyd

Michael Lloyd

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BA AND LA OPERATIONS BULLETIN

To be brought to the attention of all District Managers

Benefits Support Branch

Issue 2/93

Housing Benefit (HB) and Crown Tenants

- 1 There have been a number of cases where HB has been paid incorrectly to Crown tenants. Circular HB/CTB (93) 27 has been issued to Local Authorities (LAs) to:
 - remind them that HB is not payable for Crown tenancies
 - ask them to check existing claims to identify incorrect payments
- 2 When HB is withdrawn because the customer is a Crown Tenant, the Social Security Policy Group suggest that LAs:
 - advise the customer on the alternative forms of funding available; and
 - invite the customer to claim IS if appropriate.
- 3 If the person already receives IS, the LA have been advised to supply the Benefits Agency (BA) with a list of affected tenants. The list will give details of the customer's:
 - name
 - address
 - NINO
 - rent
 - last date of entitlement to HB
- 4 AOG 27803 - 27805 covers the circumstances when the rent of a Crown tenancy should be included as a housing cost in a customer's IS.

Contact:

If you have any queries on the content of this bulletin please contact:

BA Publishing
Trevelyan Square
Leeds

Distribution: District Managers
ADs

3 August 1993

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If you have any queries about the distribution of bulletins please contact:

BA PUBLISHING HELPLINE

0532 327104 or GTN 513 27104 or

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Series No	3/93	Date	Wednesday, October 27, 1993
Subjects	1 DUPLICATE NHB(IS) NOTIFICATIONS 2 DISPATCH OF NHB (IS) NOTIFICATIONS TO LA 3 FRAUD SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT (SLA) 4 INCOME SUPPORT TERMINATION & DISALLOWANCE NOTIFICATIONS 5 DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION 6 PRINTER FAILURES	Action	1 RETAIN 2 RETAIN 3 FOR INFORMATION 4 FOR 1 NOVEMBER 1993 5 RETAIN UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE 6 FOR INFORMATION
Contact	MARK ALLEN BENEFITS SUPPORT BRANCH (INCOME SUPPORT) ROOM 3 S 25 QUARRY HOUSE LEEDS TELEPHONE: (0532 3/24030 FAX: (0532 3/24970 GTN: 513		
To	District Managers ADs		

Duplicate NHB(IS) notifications

- 1 A problem has been discovered with the production of duplicate NHB(IS) notifications. There are two reasons for non-production of duplicates.
- 2 For these reasons, when requesting a duplicate NHB (IS)
 - visit the WHERE YOU LIVE screen to ensure that the indicators are set;
 - adjudicate on the claim; and
 - inhibit any inappropriate system notifications.
- 3 Only request a duplicate if an NHB (IS) would not otherwise be produce. Do not enter Y in the Issue NHB (IS) field merely as a precaution against non-productions of a NHB (IS). See Income Support Other Benefits Vol 2 Guide - Housing Benfit and Council tax Benefit. The ISGs will be in offices from 15 October 1993.
- 4 If more than one NHB (IS) is produced because of user error, destroy the duplicate or incorrect notification.

Dispatch of NHB (IS) notifications to LA's

- 5 Delays issuing NHB (IS) notifications to LA's have subsidy implications for the LA. Send NHB (IS) notifications to the LA as soon as possible after they have been printed. Take into account any local liaison Service Level Agreement (SLA).

Fraud Service Level Agreement (SLA)

- 6 E-Mail 20/93 advised offices that a Model National Fraud SLA exists between the Benefits agency (BA) and LAs. Adjudication Officers may be asked by LA fraud officers to make decisions based on information gathered by them.
- 7 The Adjudication Officer should inform the LA fraud officer immediately a decision is made. Delays making decisions, or informing the LA, can have implications on the subsidy that the LA can claim.
- 8 If a delay in making a decision does occur, the Adjudication Officer should:
- advise the LA as soon as possible; and
 - give reasons for the delay.
- 9 Staff are reminded the HB/CTB regulations allow the BA to provide the LA fraud officer with any information required for the investigation and prevention of fraud for:
- Housing Benefit; and/or
 - Council Tax Benefit

Income support termination and disallowance notifications

- 10 From 1/11/93 termination and disallowance notifications issued to customers will include the following additional paragraph about Housing Benefit and Council Tax:

Housing Benefit and Council tax Benefit

If you are not getting Income Support, you may still be able to get Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit. Get in touch with your local council as soon as possible. If you are already getting Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit you must let the council know that you are not entitled to Income Support.

Disclosure of information: Local authorities who have contracted out their benefits administration

- 11 A small number of LAs have contracted out their benefits administration to the private sector. At the moment, legislation does not allow direct correspondence between the BA and the contractor. This legislation is being reconsidered and direct correspondence may be possible in the future.
- 12 Until further notice, all queries referred to the BA should be from a LA employee. If written or oral contact is made by the contractor, advise them to refer the query to the LA. This also applies if a written request is accompanied by the customer's consent for disclosure of information.
- Note: It is a criminal offence to supply information for the assessment of a HB/CTB claims to someone other than the LA.**
- 13 Ensure that NHB1s, NHB(IS) notifications and replies to NHB5s are sent to a LA official and not to the contractor.

Printer failures

- 14 Most local Service Level Agreements between the BA and LAs contain a commitment by the BA to distribute NHB (IS) notifications within a specified time limit.
- 15 If NHB (IS) notifications are not produced because the batch print has failed, advise the LA that a delay will occur. Bearing in mind the time period for distribution specified in the SLA, you may wish to request that Helpdesk produce the print centrally, BSB (IS) are presently looking at this problem with ITSA, with a view to setting up a standard procedure when a print failure occurs.

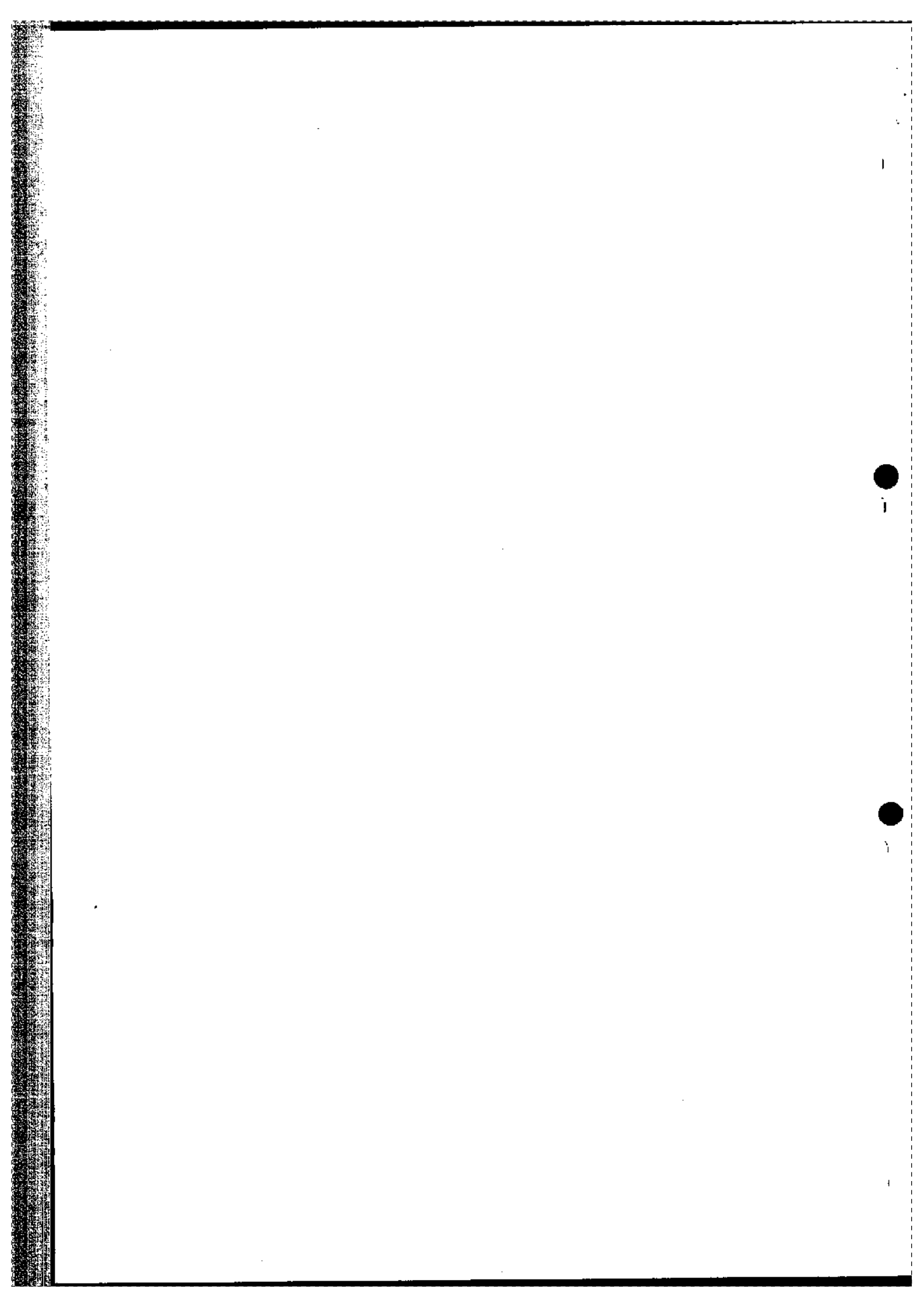
If you have any distribution queries regarding this and any other bulletin series, please contact

BA Publishing Helpline :

• 0532 327014 GTN 513 27104 •

• 0532 347381 •

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NHB(IS) production details

Background

- 1 Many enquires from the Local Authority (LA) arise from the apparent non-receipt of NHB(IS) notifications. This causes unnecessary work when information is duplicated which may already be:
 - in transit to the LA; or
 - within the LA awaiting action.
- 2 Presently, the Income Support Computer System (ISCS) does not record the production of NHB(IS) notifications.
- 3 From 1 November 1993, details of NHB(IS) notifications produced on a claim will display on:
 - a new screen the NHB(IS) PRODUCTION DETAILS screen IS510579, in the Enquiry/Notes dialogue IS510
 - the Full Record Print (FRP) RIS10211 and Data Protection Print (DPP) RIS10214
- 4 Only details of NHB(IS) notifications produced from 1 November 1993 display.

About this circular

- 5 This circular contains instructions on:
 - how to view details on the new screen
 - the new sections in the FRP and DPP

Who should read this circular

- 6 Bring this circular to the attention of all IS staff.

Action

- 7 Follow the instructions in this circular from 1 November 1993.

Annotation of Instructions

- 8 The Income Support Guides and updated System Reference Guide (SRG) will be issued in October 1993. The updated Printed Output Guide (POG) will be issued in November 1993. On receipt, note the number of this circular IS(OS) 27/93 against the:

- SRG, dialogue IS510
- POG, report numbers RIS10211 and RIS10214

Queries

- 9 If you have any queries about the contents of this circular contact Adviceline on 0800 456500.

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NHB(IS) production details

Introduction

- 10 The ISCS automatically produces NHB(IS) notifications when appropriate, but does not record the production of the form on the system.
- 11 From 1 November 1993, details of NHB(IS) notifications produced on a claim display on:
 - a new screen the NHB(IS) PRODUCTION DETAILS screen IS510579, in the Enquiry/Notes dialogue IS510
 - the Full Record Print (FRP) RIS10211 and Data Protection Print (DPP) RIS10214
- 12 Only details of NHB(IS) notifications produced from 1 November 1993 display.

Details displayed on the NHB(IS) PRODUCTION DETAILS screen

21 The screen displays details:

- of NHB(IS) notifications produced by the system
- in date order, with the most recent on the first line
- of each NHB(IS) notification, on a separate line

Two NHB(IS) notifications produced at the same time and for the same reason

22 When two NHB(IS) notifications are produced at the same time, for Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB), and for the same reason:

- (1) the details display on one line; and
- (2) HB/CT displays in the Type of form field.

Update of details during the claim

23 The screen is updated when an NHB(IS) notification is produced at the office. This is the working day following adjudication in dialogues IS090 and IS091.

24 The screen displays details to a maximum of eight lines. The earliest entry is deleted when:

- (1) the maximum is reached; and
- (2) a further NHB(IS) is produced.

Details displayed following the end of a claim

25 Following the end of a claim, dialogue IS510 displays details of the NHB(IS) forms until the claim is archived.

26 If a repeat claim is made prior to archiving, dialogue IS510 continues to display details of any NHB(IS) forms issued on the previous claim.

New screen message

27 When no notes are held in dialogue IS510 an error message currently prevents access to the dialogue.

28 From 1 November, this message is replaced with a new screen message:

C9523: Comment: No details for display

29 This message appears independantly on both screens in dialogue IS510 when there are no details to display.

Explanation of fields on the NHB(IS) PRODUCTION DETAILS screen

30

Field	Notes
Date issued	Displays the date the NHB(IS) is printed at the office
Type of form	Displays: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the HB, CT or HB/CT; and • NHB(IS) form heading: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IS Decision - Change of Circumstances - End of Entitlement - Start of HB/CT Interest - End of HB/CT Claim - Duplicate Form
LA Name/ Housing Exec	The LA name on the NHB(IS) form

Changes to the FRP RIS10211 and DPP RIS10214

31

The FRP and DPP display the details held on the NHB(IS) PRODUCTION DETAILS screen:

- at the end of the prints
- on a separate page

32

The FRP and DPP do not display notifications that are deleted from the screen because the maximum of 8 lines is reached.

FRP or DPP produced for an archived claim

33

When a FRP or DPP is produced for an archived claim, details display that were held in dialogue IS510 before archiving.

Liaison with the LA

- 34 Most Service Level Agreements (SLAs) between the Benefit Agency (BA) and LAs include a clause that LAs will not request information already supplied by the BA.
- 35 Offices may wish to use the details held in the NHB(IS) PRODUCTION DETAILS screen to ensure that this clause of the SLA is met eg, to ensure the LA do not unnecessarily request confirmation of IS entitlement as part of an annual review.

Loss of NHB1 or NHB1A

- 36 The production of NHB(IS) notifications suggests form NHB1 or NHB1A was received by the BA office.
- 37 If the NHB1 or NHB1A is lost or not received by the LA, they may be able to establish an HB/CTB date of claim by:
- using information about the type of notification produced; and
 - combining this with the date of receipt of the IS claim.

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