Editorial

I do hope you had a good break at Christmas and the New Year. The coming year will be an interesting and challenging time for all of us as we seek to implement the Government’s Housing Benefit reform programme and prepare the way for the more fundamental reforms, including Universal Credit.

There will be some changes to our structure here at DWP as we take forward this agenda with you (more about the changes next time). The focus of our work in the coming months will be implementation of the LHA reforms as well as the longer-term policy development work. You will see inside this edition that we are looking for secondees to help with this. In addition, please see article inside about implementation of the LHA changes. If you have any thoughts and ideas on this please let me know. And if you would like to help us by being part of a wider advisory group that we can turn to in order to ask questions and test ideas (by email), please also let me know. This would not of course supersede any of the usual consultation machinery. We hope to come out soon with more guidance on the new safeguard for paying Housing Benefit direct to the landlord, and we hope to say more shortly about the allocation of additional DHP money.

On Universal Credit, we had our first meeting of the local authority advisory group just before Christmas. We discussed a variety of key issues involved in the design and delivery of Universal Credit and the relationship between DWP and local authorities. It was agreed that the main areas for urgent consideration could be categorised under three broad headings: resources and staffing; the needs of customers; and design and delivery.

Briefly, on each point, we agreed that it would be particularly important to address a range of local authority staffing and resourcing issues over the period of transition to Universal Credit – especially given the need to manage the current programme of reform of Housing Benefit alongside the moves to Universal Credit.

On customers, as well as meeting the varied needs of Universal Credit customers, we also recognised that we had to meet the needs of pension age customers indirectly and directly affected by the reform plans, and understand the timing of changes that would affect them; customers with additional needs, including those without on-line access, would also be a priority.

Finally, it was recognised that we needed to resolve outstanding policy and design issues including greater clarity on the delivery model and the role that local authorities might play; we need to define what face to face customer contact would be like and who would deliver it; and we need to recognise that local authorities deliver many services that are linked very closely to the Housing Benefit service and so would be affected by Universal Credit.

The clear message is that we need your help in building the design of Universal Credit and, again, we are inviting you to join us on short secondments to help with the design work.

Email: Paul.Howarth@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
EAS CIS Implementation Project Update

The roll-out of the Employee Authentication Service (EAS) has managed to continue on schedule despite the snow. So far

- 352 agents from 220 authorities have received their training
- peripherals and tokens have been dispatched to all authorities in Tranche 3. Any authority who has not received the hardware should contact the project team

Those of you who were not able to attend training events due to the recent adverse weather conditions will be contacted in due course to rearrange your training and implementation schedule.

Important notes

- In the event that a user does not have acceptable photo identification (ID) (e.g. driving licence, passport) other ID may be accepted alongside recommended non-photo ID. Agents need to refer to the guidance that will be issued in due course or contact the National Registration Authority (NRA) manager for further information
- LA Agents - there have been several cases of agents not completing the registration and enrolment correctly. When this happens the NRA will not be able to authorise a user’s token which will slow down implementation. It is important that agents attend their designated training event and follow the step-by-step guides when registering and enrolling their users

If you require further information or have any other questions, please contact us at

Email: eas.info@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

or go to our website

www.dwp.gov.uk/eas
Secondment opportunities - Housing Benefit Strategy Division

There are a number of opportunities within the HB Strategy Division for people from LAs to join us for six months, starting in early 2011, you will be based at Caxton House in central London.

The secondments bring with them the opportunity to work on a number of important issues relating to HB and CTB. Most urgent is the implementation of the changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) from April 2011.

The responsibilities expected of a secondee include

- engagement with stakeholders
- revision of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) good practice guidance
- revision on guidance on direct payments to landlords
- encouraging landlord engagement

We also need support to deliver other changes to policy, e.g. pushing forward proposals to reform CTB announced in the Spending Review in October 2010 and the introduction of a 10% reduction of HB for long-term jobseekers.

Secondees will need to

- be highly motivated, with an experienced background in HB/CTB
- have strong team working skills and be able to assist DWP colleagues in pushing forward a range of issues relating to the future of HB/CTB
- bring together information from a wide range of sources to develop detailed guidance that will be used by LAs on a daily basis
- have strong communication skills with the capability of producing effective written material
- have project management skills
- have knowledge of the existing data flows between DWP and LAs

We want to take advantage of your experience of working with HB and to also draw on your knowledge of the interpretation of existing guidance and procedures.

If you are interested in a career development opportunity, and are at S01/S02/PO1/PO2 level, please send your CV by email to (email address below), no later than 21 January 2011.

We are not normally able to pay for any costs incurred in getting to Caxton House on a daily basis but may be able to make an exception for the right candidates.

For further information please contact Ben Aylott on 020 74495320

Email: ben.aylott@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Identity Cards

The Government announced plans last year for the cancellation of identity cards. A new Identity Documents Bill, invalidating cards from 21 January 2011, passed through Parliament on 21 December 2010. This means Identity Cards should no longer be accepted as evidence of identity from midnight 21 January 2011. For more information visit the Identity and Passport Service website.

Cards for Foreign Nationals are not affected by the Bill and remain as valid forms of identity with supporting documentation. These cards are now referred to as Biometric Residence Permits (also called Residence Permits). For more information on Biometric Residence Permits visit the UKBA website.

If you need any further advice or information please contact Email: Lindsay.Scott@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Administration Subsidy

In November 2010 we published HB/CTB circular S5/2010 which detailed the methodology used in calculating 2011/12 allocations for individual LAs. If you have any technical queries on your particular allocation please contact Andrew Curphey who would be more than happy to help.

Email: Andrew.curphey@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Tel: 0207 44 95483

Funding for 2012/13

In the past we announced funding for each year over Comprehensive Spending Review 2007. This time around, we have only announced the funding (and distribution) for 2011/12. The same can be said for both Jobcentre Plus and Employment Providers too. The decision regarding 2012/13 funding will be made later this year.
Implementing the Local Housing Allowance changes - April 2011

You should all by now have received by Email

- HB/CTB circular A25/2010
- a toolkit of model letters and leaflets, which can be tailored and branded to suit your local needs

If you have not received either of these products contact us straight away to ensure they are sent to you.

These letters and leaflets are the first tranche of products that we are developing to help you implement the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) changes. We welcome your suggestions and ideas on what you would like to see included in any further products.

To help with communicating the changes you will receive six DWP branded A3 posters. General DWP leaflets will also be available to order via the DWP website www.dwp.gov.uk. PDF versions of the poster and leaflet are available for download.

We want to set up an informal team of LA advisers to work with us to facilitate smooth implementation, the team will

- test new communication products
- give feedback on how implementation is going
- make suggestions and put forward ideas on how we can support you further in implementing the changes, and
- be a point of contact for local authority advisers

The team will do most of the work electronically, by Email, website, telephone etc. We will make sure we do not burden people with too much work at a busy time, but the team will provide an invaluable service and the feedback received will be taken into consideration during the implementation process.

We are looking for volunteers so if you would like to be part of the Local Authority Advisory Team then send us an Email letting us know of your interest.

Email: Jennifer.Witchell@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Secondment opportunity - Contributing to the design of Universal Credit

The Universal Credit Programme is delivering a fundamental shift in the way the Government supports citizens who either cannot work, or their income from work and other sources is insufficient for their needs. This includes an element towards a customer’s housing costs in the calculation of Universal Credit.

The Programme is looking for proactive, positive individuals who have an excellent working knowledge of HB processes and related services delivered within the LA. You must have extensive experience and a strong grasp of strategic delivery issues.

Applicants will need to be flexible, adaptable and able to fully integrate into the Project Design Team with the primary focus in the following areas:

- representing the LA business perspective and bringing knowledge and experience on customer impact, business design, implementation issues, planning requirements, processes etc
- working with a range of others across LAs and drawing on wider expertise and knowledge
- providing practical help and support in the development of a range of products
- supporting the development of customer based solutions and outcomes while managing and resolving issues and risks
- developing communication products specifically aimed at LA audiences
- developing relationships across DWP/HMRC and LAs to ensure the successful delivery of Universal Credit

This is a high profile role in a challenging and exciting area of work that will provide an excellent opportunity for you to develop your experience and skills. Having the right credentials, strategic outlook and background experience is more important than current grade or position. There are a number of posts available.

Location
Preferably Yorkshire or London but negotiable for the right person (the role will include regular travel and overnight stays).

Duration
Starting as soon as possible – and likely to last for six months (with possible extension).

Further information
For further information please contact Beverley Heath on 07799 861187
For more information on Universal Credit you can visit www.dwp.gov.uk or www.directgov.co.uk
Please provide your CV to Email: beverley.heath@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Closing date is Friday 14 January 2011.
‘Exempt’ supported housing cases and recent changes to temporary accommodation subsidy

In November’s HB Direct we advised you that a new subsidy scheme for people in temporary accommodation would be extended from April 2011, to include, among others, cases where a registered housing association is the landlord.

There has been some concern that the latest temporary accommodation changes will also affect homeless cases in ‘exempt’ supported accommodation. This was never the policy intention and so we are writing now to confirm that expenditure on those living in exempt accommodation will not be subject to the revised subsidy scheme for people in temporary accommodation. Subsidy for people in exempt accommodation is a separate policy area which is currently under review.

Full guidance on the temporary accommodation subsidy rules, from 1 April 2011, will be published in the next few weeks. ‘Exempt accommodation’ is supported housing provided by a housing association, registered charity, voluntary organisation or county council that is the landlord and responsible for providing care, support and supervision for its tenants.

If you have any queries please contact

Email: joseph.stacey@dwp.gsi.gov.uk