Editorial

As we draw to the end of another typical British summer it’s time for our usual update. During the summer the team have taken the opportunity to spend time out and about. The Universal Credit project team have been visiting many of you to see your teams in operation and to hear your views about future housing support delivery.

The ATLAS team bring you an update this month. The first phase of data feed continues to work well and we are getting positive feedback from many local authorities on the speed and efficiency of the new capability. As we approach the next phase of rollout the team will be providing you with the information you need to plan and prepare for the Autumn.

There’s also an update about the move to the Single Fraud Investigation Service. We’ll be consulting with LAAs soon to discuss the options for moving to the new service ahead of Autumn discussions with ministers.

The conference season is nearly upon us and I look forward to seeing many of your at your Autumn gatherings.

Julia Sweeney

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Distribution enquiries
Universal Credit (UC) Update

Surveys
By the time you read this you should have received a copy of the LA HB/CTB Staffing Survey. This follows on from the recent LA Transition Survey and further aims to provide baseline information for the UC Business Case. We really appreciate you completing this and thank for you for your efforts completing the first survey. Remember you can email us directly with general queries on the survey at the email below or if you need any help completing the survey itself, please contact Darren Yaxley at GfK NOP on 020 7890 9759 or darren.yaxley@gfk.com.

This survey requests information specifically on LA staff. I want to reassure you that this is in no way an indication that decisions have been taken regarding staffing policy for UC and LAs future role in delivery. As the recent announcement from our Permanent Secretary (as issued to your Chief Executives) about the delivery model confirms we will continue to work with you on the details of delivery and your role in the implementation period and indeed the longer term.

Engagement
As development of UC progresses we have started to increase our engagement activity to focus of specific aspects and in particular how it will impact on LAs and what your involvement in future delivery could look like. The UC Business Change Team is out and about visiting many of you and we have set up a new LA Transition Working Group (in a similar fashion to POG) which met for the first time in August. We appreciate that not everyone can attend workshops and working groups and are now considering how best to keep you all informed on the key issues that come out of all our engagement activity.

It's that time of year again when many of you are gathering in numbers to listen and discuss welfare reform and its many implications for local government and UC obviously features heavily in this. We are trying to ensure we attend events such as CIPFA workshops and the IRRV conference, as we really value meeting many of you face to face at these events, particularly at a time of great change.

Unofficial UC Website
You may have come across a website about Universal Credit - http://wwwuniversalcredit.co.uk/category/news-features/. I want to clarify that this is not a government website. The Universal Credit Programme is currently developing a web site about Universal Credit specifically for LAs which we hope to launch by the end of September if not before. Once the site is ready to access we will let you know.

Darren Baker
LA Transition Team
Housing Delivery Division
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Single Fraud Investigation Service

Thanks to all who applied for secondment to the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) project team. We had a really encouraging response. Interviews were conducted in August and the successful applicant will start later this month.

Work on developing options for creating SFIS continues. We are meeting your Local Authority Association (LAA) groups during the next two weeks to discuss the options in detail and get their input. We then envisage engaging your chief officers to get their views before finalising recommendations to Ministers in October. Once we have their decision we will publish a special SFIS update to let you know how LA benefit fraud investigators, managers and support staff will come under the umbrella of SFIS from 2013, and also provide more information on how the detailed design of SFIS will be taken forward.

Also, following the national investigators conferences we attended a few months ago, we are now considering ways (e.g. teleconferences, regional events) of enabling as many of you as possible to participate in direct two way communication with us. More details to follow.

Meanwhile please be reassured that although progress is being made, no decisions have yet been taken and we will be engaging with your LAA representatives and chief officers before doing so.

John Fitzpatrick – john.fitzpatrick1@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
SFIS project manager

Automatic Transfers to Local Authority Systems (ATLAS) Phase 2

ATLAS is now delivering award data to you from HM Revenues and Customs. Phase 2 will deliver the new, ended and changed awards for most DWP benefits.

A list of the benefit notifications to be delivered in phase 2 is available from ATLAS and shows what you can expect to receive following implementation. An updated Frequently Asked Questions document has also been published.

The project will be completing an early adopter period from 21 November for two weeks, so we can assure the end to end phase 2 functionality prior to national rollout on 5 December.

Details on volumes are being finalised and will be issued to you by mid-September 2011, allowing you to prepare for the impact of go-live. Staff will notice that the DTA server enhancements have been rolled out, deleting old and/or inaccessible files on the server.

As way of a reminder, the project only uses secure e-mail to distribute documents to the Benefit and Revenue managers and ATLAS points of contact. If you are not receiving these communications please send an e-mail with your GCSx/GSx.e-mail to the address shown below.

If you have any queries about ATLAS please contact us via: QH.HBINFOFLOWSPROGRAMME@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK, or see the contact details on the HBIFP ATLAS webpage.
Student Uprating 2011/2012

In previous years the disregards for books, equipment and travel for those vulnerable students eligible to claim income–related benefits such as HB and CTB have been uprated in line with increases to the student travel grant.

The percentage increase is aligned to that used by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) for their student travel grant. BIS has decided to freeze their student travel grant for the 2011/2012 academic year. BIS has also frozen the maintenance grant levels for 2011/2012 at the same level as the previous year.

As a result DWP will not increase the disregards for books, equipment and travel for the 2011/2012 academic year, and a Student Uprating circular will not be issued this year.


For further advice and information about this item, please contact Jahnara.Begum@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Non State Pension Uprating 2011

An urgent bulletin, HB/CTB U2/2011, is being issued on Monday 5 September and should be published on the HB area of the DWP corporate website later in the week.

This bulletin is being issued following discussions with the Practitioners Operational Group and follows on from bulletin HB/CTB G6/2011 issued in June 2011, which advised that in some Pension Credit cases the rate of non-State Pension (NSP) has been incorrectly increased by reference to the September Retail Price Index (RPI) rather than the Consumer Price Index (CPI) during the Uprating 2011 exercise.

The Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) plans to run a scan over the weekend of 10 and 11 September 2011 to identify and correct those Pension Credit cases where the NSP has been auto-increased by RPI in error during the Uprating 2011 exercise.

If you are on the distribution list to receive urgent bulletins from us but have not received HB/CTB U2/2011 then please contact us using the email address below.

housing.correspondenceandPQs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk