Editorial

I do hope that you managed to get a good break over Christmas and the New Year and that the weather is not causing too many problems. As you might imagine, I want to concentrate this month on the Housing Benefit reform consultation that the Government has now launched. The consultation document Supporting people into work: the next stage of Housing Benefit reform was published on 15 December and you can find it on the DWP website using this link http://www.dwp.gov.uk/supportingpeopleintowork. You can also get more information from the IRRV, hbinfo and Charted Institute of Housing websites. As the name suggests, we are concentrating on what Housing Benefit can contribute to help people move into work. We already know from research that a lot of people are unaware that they can claim Housing Benefit when in work, and we are currently promoting a Housing Benefit awareness campaign with help from key stakeholders. Details can be found on the Direct.Gov website www.direct.gov.uk. And we also know that the transition to work is a very important time, and we want to explore whether there are any improvements we could make to the run-on, for example by allowing customers who have been in receipt of a qualifying benefit for at least a year to receive Housing Benefit, paid at the out of work rate, for three months. We would also like to explore a system of fixed period awards for customers receiving in-work Housing Benefit payments. These awards, which might be fixed for six months, would remove the need for working customers to report fluctuations in their earnings, or other circumstances, outside of a fixed period. The aim of these measures would be to remove much of the risk and uncertainty experienced by customers when they move to work.

The consultation is also about how we make the system fair and affordable. So we will be looking at how to set fair and clear benefit rates. This includes how we set Local Housing Allowance rates and how best we can define the geographical areas, or Broad Rental Market Areas, that we use. We will also look at whether the payment of Housing Benefit in the private rented sector should be made conditional on housing meeting certain defined standards in terms of quality, energy efficiency and carbon footprint.

I hope you will find the opportunity to read through the document – it isn’t that long! We are looking for responses by 22 February and we would very much welcome your views, given your experience of operating the scheme. We will be discussing the proposed reforms with your Local Authority Associations and the IRRV Benefits Conference next month will provide another opportunity for debate. And, of course, we will keep you posted on progress, both during and after the consultation.

Email: Paul.Howarth@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Real time verification

Earlier this year, in consultation with DWP, SunGard Public Sector piloted their data matching and risk model for new claims and ‘in claim’ activity. The ‘in-claim’ results were published in issue 94 of HB Direct. The evaluation of the new claim pilot is now available. The DWP has been fully involved in the quality assurance of data and monitoring of pilot outcomes.

The solution was piloted by Glasgow City Council and London Borough of Lambeth.

Its aims were to

• provide a risk score at the point of entry for each new claim to determine the likelihood of fraud and error being present, enabling the LA to apply verification checks proportionate and appropriate for the level of risk posed by each claim
• validate and match NINOs from new claims against a cross-boundary claimant register and deliver full claim details of matched claims back to the assessor’s desktop in real time

Main conclusions verified by the Department’s analysts from the pilot were

• The risk model successfully differentiated between high, medium and low risk claims within the pilots, with the likelihood of fraud and error in the high risk category more than three times that of the low risk. Further live trials will verify whether these results can be replicated in all LAs.
• Risk and claimant information was delivered to the assessor at the time of claim within two seconds.
• On average 57% of claims were identified as low risk and 23% as high risk.
• Claim processing times for low risk claims were reduced by 37% on average.
• Overall claim processing times were reduced by 32% at Glasgow and 12% at Lambeth, as Lambeth elected to focus some released resources on visiting all high risk claimants pre-payment.
• Around 1.5% of NINOs were successfully matched with claims in other LAs, using a claimant register covering 15% of LAs spread throughout the UK, suggesting 10% would match against a full register.
• Lessons learnt from the first two pilots ensured the implementation of the packaged solution was achieved within 10 days at a third local authority.

The solution is now being rolled out commercially to more authorities in a wider controlled trial programme monitored by the DWP.

Contact us to find out how your LA can be involved in the programme in 2010.

‘Taking this innovative approach to verification has seen improvements in processing times and customer satisfaction whilst continuing to securely protect the public purse’ said David Ashmore, LB Lambeth

Full report available on www.sungardps.com/aspiren

For further information please contact Email: james.rawlins@sungardps.com
EAS CIS Implementation Project update

Welcome to update 5 on the EAS CIS Implementation Project. We have made good progress having identified the technical elements of the CIS / EAS link-up and initiated the pilot of the DWP National Registration Authority.

Key items for this update are

1 Trainer role: We are looking for LA Secondees to provide training on the EAS system to LAs nationwide. This opportunity has a closing date of January 15th [http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/la-secondee-article-eas.pdf]

2 Technical support for implementation: The current pilot has given us much greater insight into the technical steps that you will need to go through to connect to both the EAS website and the new CIS front-end, and the kind of support that Revenue & Benefits managers might need throughout this implementation process. We have captured some of this insight here [http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/eas-cis-pilot-technical-update-nov09.pdf]

3 Piloting the system: Thanks to everyone who has responded to our request for helpers to pilot the system. We are currently conducting the small implementation pilot but are looking for volunteers for the large implementation pilot [www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/eas-tor-pilot.pdf]

4 LA Agents and Sponsors: Many thanks to everyone who responded to our initial letter, we now have 100% response rate. We will be writing out to all Sponsors, Agents and Revenue & Benefits managers of the DWP National Registration Authority to confirm your roles and what happens next. We will also be providing a letter to be presented to your technical support lead to inform them of the steps they will need to take.

Please write to us at Email: eas.info@dwp.gsi.gov.uk if you have any further queries or questions and check out the website for the latest news and information at www.dwp.gov.uk/eas.

Can you help?

To support the ongoing work we all do to drive down benefit fraud, we’re keen to get in touch with probation staff or other colleagues in your area who work with people who have been prosecuted for benefit fraud.

If you know of anyone who would be happy to have an initial chat with us about their work with offenders, please contact Joanna Hennessy in the DWP Communications Team.

Email: Joanna.Hennessy@dwp.gsi.gov.uk, telephone 0113 232 4783.
Credit Reference Agency data-matching pilot

The HB Direct Fraud and Error Special issued in October reported that the Credit Reference Agency (CRA) data-matching pilot was in its final stages, we have good news to report following evaluation of the pilot.

The pilot was looking at the potential benefit of using data held by a CRA to identify loss within the HB/CTB working age non-passported caseload specifically in non-residency, undeclared non-dependents, landlord/tenant relationships, possible sub-letting and living together.

The pilot has been successful in identifying hard to find fraud, eg living together fraud (LTF) using Experian’s Financial Association data and this was reiterated by the pilot LAs in a workshop held in the summer. Most successes resulted from referral rules based on two risk flags

- **R06** - one or more undeclared cohabiters* have been found at the claim address
- **R08** - a financial association has been found between the claimant and an undeclared cohabiter

* a cohabiter being another person at an address other than the claimant.

During the pilot 2,021 cases were actioned by the nine pilot LAs which resulted in 80 sanctions and prosecutions. Of those cases 475 were either R06/R08 which resulted in 77 sanctions and prosecutions. The pilot LAs also had the use of Investigator On-line (IOL), provided by Experian LTD, to investigate these cases.

As LTF was by far the most successful match, we will be pressing ahead with national rollout of these matches. We are looking at how we can jointly take this forward and will be contacting you shortly with further details. We hope to rollout these data-matches in spring 2010.

Thanks to Bury, West Oxfordshire, Blackpool, Chester, Warrington, Derwentside, Rotherham, Leeds and Basildon for taking part in the pilot.

If you have any questions please send them to Email: CAXTONHOUSE.HBDM-CRA@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
FRAIMS Local Authority Enquiry Pilot

The FRAIMS Local Authority (LA) Enquiry Pilot was launched on 2 November 2009 and ran for six weeks enabling LAs to request information about cases in an e-mail sent directly to FRAIMS via a secure specific e-mail address.

Preston, North Lanarkshire and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea authorities participated in the pilot with their corresponding Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) teams.

The Enquiry Service can be used to

- sift fraud referrals - Investigators can check whether the person has any previous history of benefit fraud
- establish whether a live investigation is ongoing by FIS, avoiding duplicate investigations
- check previous sanctions to determine what sanction is appropriate

Initial results from the pilot show

- quick and complete responses received some within the hour
- information received was clear and easy to understand without additional training
- a reduction in enquires to FIS – a decline to just one per week in North Lanarkshire
- potential to increase fraud results by identifying where a customer has previously been interviewed regarding a benefit fraud

It is planned roll out the system to 15 more LAs and discussions are underway to decide where this will be.

Further information about this pilot is available from

Email: Lynda.Evans@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Order your Working Benefits leaflet and factsheets

Last month, we told you about the launch of the Working Benefits campaign, from DWP, to raise awareness that going back to work doesn’t mean that customers give up all their benefits.

Almost everyone can be better off working, than getting ‘out-of-work’ benefits. Extra support for customers while they work - from Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Working Tax Credit - could give that extra boost to someone working part time or on a low wage. We have developed campaign materials to help you explain this to customers, to encourage them to go back to work, without the fear of losing all their benefits.

You can now order printed copies of the adviser factsheets to brush up your own knowledge, and copies of the customer leaflet The benefits of working to show your customers the support available, when they go into work.

Go to our web page at www.dwp.gov.uk/workingbenefits to find out how to order. You can also get ideas for partnership working and watch our short film of people’s stories about benefits and work.