

# Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Circular

Department for Work and Pensions

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## HB/CTB A6/2010

### ADJUDICATION AND OPERATIONS CIRCULAR

<b>WHO SHOULD READ</b>	All Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) staff
<b>ACTION</b>	For information
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Referring Housing Benefit overpayments to Debt Management

### Guidance Manual

The information in this circular does not affect the content of the HB/CTB Guidance Manual.

### Queries

If you

- want **extra copies of this circular/copies of previous circulars**, they can be found on the website at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/local-authority-staff/housing-benefit/user-communications/hbctb-circulars/>
- have any queries about the
  - **technical content of this circular**, contact Meryl Morris  
Tel: 01443 688962  
Email: [meryl.morris@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:meryl.morris@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)
  - **distribution of this circular**, contact Corporate Document Services Ltd Orderline  
Email: [orderline@cds.co.uk](mailto:orderline@cds.co.uk)

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# Referring Housing Benefit overpayments to Debt Management

## Introduction

- 1 On 23 November 2009 HB/CTB bulletin G20/2009 was issued to local authority (LA) staff. The bulletin
  - contained a copy of the revised Debt Management/Local Authority Service Level Agreement (SLA), and
  - detailed a new process for referring Housing Benefit (HB) overpayments to Debt Management for recovery from 1 December 2009
- 2 Since the publication of HB/CTB bulletin G20/2009, a number of issues have been identified which are clarified in this circular.
- 3 This circular aims to ensure that all LA staff are aware of the
  - content of the revised SLA which has been signed off by Practitioners Operational Group (POG) and **highlights key information**
  - changes in the referral process for HB overpayments
- 4 LAs are requested to comply with the new process and revised SLA.

## Standardised National Referral form – Appendix 6 of the SLA

- 5 All LAs **must** use the Standardised National Referral form, Appendix 6 of the SLA, when referring HB overpayments to Debt Management Client Referral Centre Wales, Porth. **From 1 March 2010 any referral that does not use Appendix 6 will be returned to the LA as a non quality referral.**
- 6 When completing the Standardised National Referral form (Appendix 6 of the SLA)
  - remember to use UK dates. American dates will not be accepted because they are misleading and will cause errors (eg 02/12 = UK date: 2 December, American date: 12 February)
  - record the customer's **current address** which can be found on Customer Information System (CIS)
  - use a reference number that will identify your customer account (eg invoice or claim number) **not** the creditor reference number. The creditor reference number is no longer required because there are no new referrals being administered by Third Party Payment system
  - complete **all** fields
  - do not save referrals in JPEG format. Debt Management does not have the appropriate software to open these files

- 7 When you have completed the Standardised National Referral form (Appendix 6 of the SLA)
- send to Client Referral Centre Wales via email or post (see para 39 and 40 of HB/CTB bulletin G20/09)
  - when sending by email, name each attachment using the customer's National Insurance number for reference purposes
- 8 Please see the table below which has been split nationally into geographical areas for logistical reasons.

Local Authority	Type	E-mail address	Postal Address
Welsh LAs	Referrals only	<a href="mailto:porth.housingbenefitwales@dwp.gsi.gov.uk">porth.housingbenefitwales@dwp.gsi.gov.uk</a>	Debt Management(P)HBEN PO Box 171 Mitcheldean Gloucester GL17 OXH
Scottish LAs	Referrals only	<a href="mailto:porth.housingbenefitscotland@dwp.gsi.gov.uk">porth.housingbenefitscotland@dwp.gsi.gov.uk</a>	Debt Management(P)HBEN PO Box 171 Mitcheldean Gloucester GL17 OXH
English LAs	Referrals only	<a href="mailto:porth.housingbenefitengland@dwp.gsi.gov.uk">porth.housingbenefitengland@dwp.gsi.gov.uk</a>	Debt Management(P)HBEN PO Box 171 Mitcheldean Gloucester GL17 OXH

### Change of Circumstances form – Appendix 7 of the SLA

- 9 **Always include your telephone number on the Change of Circumstances form, Appendix 7 of the SLA.** This enables Contact Centre agents to clarify information and process changes of circumstances within SLA targets.
- 10 **Send all Appendix 7s and any other post to the Contact Centre identified on the notice of recovery.** Postal addresses are included in HB/CTB bulletin G20/09. **However, if no notice of recovery is held send Appendix 7 to Dearne Valley Contact Centre.**
- 11 As an alternative you can use the following e-mail addresses, provided your LA uses Government Connect. **Do not use the following e-mail addresses for Third Party Payment enquiries.**
- CC Bradford  
[CCBRADFORD.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK](mailto:CCBRADFORD.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK)
  - CC Corby  
[CCCORBY.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK](mailto:CCCORBY.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK)
  - CC Dearne Valley  
[CCDEARNEVALLEY.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK](mailto:CCDEARNEVALLEY.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK)
  - CC Nuneaton  
[CCNUNEATON.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK](mailto:CCNUNEATON.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK)

- CC Trafford  
[CCTRAFFORD.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK](mailto:CCTRAFFORD.HOUSINGBENEFITS@DWP.GSI.GOV.UK)

- 12 Please do not send Appendix 7s or post to Client Referral Centre Wales Porth. Only use the e-mail addresses for Porth to forward Appendix 6 overpayment referrals. **Appendix 7s or post sent to Porth addresses will not be processed.**

## Service Level Agreement

- 13 Debt Management has a target of 20 working days in which to instigate recovery or notify LAs that recovery is not appropriate. When deciding the date for administrative control LAs must allow extra time to receive the referral outcome notification **in addition to** the 20 working days. Debt Management recommends an additional five days before enquiring about individual cases.
- 14 Debt Management liaison staff will attend as many LA network meetings as is practical. Please send invitations to Meryl Morris to consider ([Meryl.Morris@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Meryl.Morris@dwp.gsi.gov.uk))
- 15 Liaison staff from Client Referral Centre Wales Porth are currently carrying out a telephone campaign to contact all LA overpayment teams, to discuss these changes.