

# Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Circular

Department for Work and Pensions

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## HB/CTB A5/2007

### 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>	Submission of annual self-assessments against the HB/CTB Performance Standards for 2006/07

### 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 [www.dwp.gov.uk/hbctb](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/hbctb)
- have any queries about the
  - **technical content of this circular**, contact details are given at the end of the main part of this circular
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## Submission of self-assessments against the HB/CTB Performance Standards for 2006/07

### Introduction

- 1 This circular gives guidance on
  - the timetable for submissions against the HB/CTB performance standards for 2006/07
  - completion of self-assessments
  - reporting the number of interventions completed for PM10
  - self-assessments for 2007/08

### English single tier authorities

- 2 English single tier authorities will undergo a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) in 2007. As part of this process, the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate (BFI) assesses the HB and CTB services provided by councils against the HB/CTB Performance Standards. The assessment is based on a full year's performance data. For CPA 2007 this is the financial year 2006/07.
- 3 As in previous years single tier authorities need to
  - complete a self-assessment, and
  - provide a narrative report
- 4 The submission period for your self-assessments is between Monday 18 and Friday 29 June 2007. Send the
  - self-assessment to the Housing Benefit Data Service (HBDS)
  - narrative directly to the BFI. For full details of the process see *Appendix A*.

### English District Councils and Welsh and Scottish LAs

- 5 BFI will not be undertaking CPA assessments of the benefits services in English District Councils in 2007, see *Appendix B* for more information on the District Council Framework. Instead, District Councils in England and all LAs in Wales and Scotland should submit an annual self-assessment to HBDS between 18th and 29th June 2007. Please contact [performance-framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:performance-framework@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) if you cannot meet the deadline giving your reasons.

### How we use your self-assessments

- 6 Your self-assessments will feed into our risk-based approach to inspection and performance monitoring. Non-submission of performance data is taken into account when making decisions about our interventions programme.

- 7 Self-assessment data is held on the DWP website at <http://www.workandpensions.gov.uk/asd/hobod/index.php?page=national>  
The website will be updated with the 2007 self-assessments later this year.

### **Completion of self-assessments**

- 8 Your self-assessment should cover your performance over the 2006/07 year and be based on the scoring methodology for that year. Guidance on how to calculate yearly totals for the performance measures is contained in the Performance Measure Guide found with the Accelio self-assessment tool on the Housing Benefit Data Service website <http://www.knowledgenetwork.gov.uk/hbds>
- 9 The self-assessment tool is in the same format and is used in the same way as the self-assessment tool for last year's assessment. If you have not used the tool before, instructions on how to use it are at *Appendix C*. Please note that you need to download the Self-Assessment Form 06-07 template for this year's self-assessment.
- 10 When deciding if you have satisfied an enabler, providing you had the necessary policy, procedure or process in place on 31 March 2007, you can count it as met. It is not necessary to submit any evidence to support your self-assessment.

### **Performance data for interventions completed (PM10)**

- 11 When we made changes to PM10 from April 2006, we advised that data on the number of interventions completed would be collected by the HBSD/IAD scan and placed on the Housing Benefit Operational Database (Hobod). Some LAs have queried the information on the database because it does not match their own local records of interventions completed.
- 12 Our analysts are investigating these discrepancies but, in the meantime, for the self-assessments we are prepared to accept your own figures. For the purposes of the CPA, provide BFI with details of the evidence you hold in the narrative that you submit to them. The BFI inspectors will collate this information and forward it to the Department.

### **Arrangements for self-assessments during 2007/08**

- 13 From the end of June 2007, HBDS will not be accepting data returns made by Accelio. We will update the template for 2007/08 and LAs can use it to self-assess. BFI will request a printed copy of the self-assessment if an inspection is due.
- 14 Changes are being made to inspection and CPA for 2008 and we are still considering what needs to be in place for future self-assessment. The introduction of the new Performance Framework by Communities and Local Government from 2008 means that we will be making major changes to the HB/CTB Performance Standards. For more information see *Strong and prosperous communities – the local government white paper – Communities and Local Government*. We will be updating you regularly on progress.

## Queries

- 15 Enquiries about how to use the self-assessment tool or software problems should be clearly named SAT Query and sent to [HB-PERFORMANCE-DATA@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HB-PERFORMANCE-DATA@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)
- 16 Enquiries about the CPA process and methodology should be made to Brian Keating. Tel: 01423 83 2928. Email: [brian.keating@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:brian.keating@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)
- 17 General enquiries about the Performance Standards and self-assessments can be made to Louise Hughes. Tel: 0207 712 2577. Email: [performance-framework@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:performance-framework@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)

## Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) methodology for single tier councils in 2007

### Introduction

- 1 As part of the CPA process, the BFI assesses the HB and CTB services provided by councils.
- 2 As announced in 2006, all future single tier assessments will be based on a full year's performance data. For CPA 2007 this is 2006/07.
- 3 The BFI has written to all Chief Executives and Benefit Managers of single tier councils formally starting the process for CPA 2007.

### CPA 2007 process

- 4 Basing the CPA of Benefits Services on the Department's Performance Standards provides continuity and ensures that there is a clear understanding of what an effective and efficient benefits service should be achieving in terms of outputs and key processes.
- 5 For CPA 2007 English single tier councils must
  - complete a self-assessment using the Department's Accelio self-assessment tool (Self Assessment Form 06-07) against the current HB/CTB Performance Standards for the period ending 31 March 2007, and
  - complete a narrative report which will be sent to CPA 2007 contacts in LAs in late April 2007 (this will also be available nearer the time on the BFI website [www.bfi.gov.uk](http://www.bfi.gov.uk)). The report should give details of
    - the improvements made
    - new enablers met, and
    - factors that have affected performance during the year
  - submit the report to the BFI by 29 June 2007
- 6 The Accelio self-assessment tool is available on the Housing Benefit Data Service website <http://www.knowledgenetwork.gov.uk/hbds>
- 7 The BFI's approach and methodology aims to minimise the level of intrusion in, and work required by, councils. The evidence requirements for this year will be significantly reduced to include key documents that the BFI need to see.
- 8 In addition to these key documents you will need to provide evidence to support any additional enablers you have met since the CPA 2006 assessment.
- 9 The results from the self-assessment, together with reported performance for the full year 2006/07, will provide the basis for the BFI assessment. Subject to assurance testing and consideration of any significant exceptional circumstances (see paragraph 10) this provides your score for the Benefits Service for CPA 2007.

- 10 Significant exceptional circumstances would typically be unforeseen events that have seriously affected your performance in 2006/07 and caused you to invoke your business continuity plan. We anticipate that these occurrences are rare.
- 11 The CPA report also shows your
- performance for each quarter in 2006/07, and
  - full year's performance
- 12 Where there is compelling evidence, the BFI applies its judgment to adjust the score to a level commensurate with the council's performance. This is intended to ensure that
- the BFI assessments can withstand a test of reasonableness, and
  - the score (and associated terminology) is recognised by users of the service
- 13 The BFI will continue to use the
- agreed 4-point scale in line with other inspectorates undertaking service assessments
  - established single word labels (Excellent, Good, Fair and Poor) for each score, to provide a clear and understandable description of the level of current performance
- 14 Assessments will initially be office based although a short visit may be necessary to discuss evidence and undertake assurance testing. The BFI will be contacting all single tier LAs on an individual basis during April 2007 providing full details of their process and requirements.
- 15 Full details of the BFI's process and methodology will appear on the website at [www.bfi.gov.uk](http://www.bfi.gov.uk)

## CPA – District Council Framework

- 1 On 21 July 2006 the Commission published the CPA – District Council Framework from 2006.
- 2 All 238 District Councils continue to receive annual use of resources assessments and direction of travel statements. From 2006, the Commission only undertakes CPA re-categorisation activity if
  - a council requests re-categorisation and is able to demonstrate significant evidence of improvement, or
  - the Commission identifies evidence of significant deterioration
- 3 Re-categorisation takes place through corporate assessment. The methodology has been streamlined since 2003/04 and no longer contains diagnostic service assessments. However, the categories remain comparable with those reported in 2003/04 and the category labels remain the same
  - Excellent
  - Good
  - Fair
  - Weak
  - Poor
- 4 The framework will involve a two-stage approach to
  - decide if there is sufficient evidence of a potential category change; and if so then
  - undertake a corporate assessment following which a change in category may be warranted
- 5 Decisions about whether or not to undertake re-categorisation activity are made regionally by Commission panels, which include peer representatives. If a panel decides that there is evidence of sufficient improvement or deterioration to justify recategorisation activity, this takes place through a corporate assessment.
- 6 Full details of the methodology, process and timescales for requesting a re-categorisation can be found on the Audit Commission website at [www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)
- 7 The BFI is not intending to undertake CPA assessments of Benefits Services in district councils during 2007/08.

## Downloading and using the 2006/07 HB/CTB Performance Standards self-assessment tool

### How to use these instructions

- 1 We recommend you read these instructions thoroughly before using the self-assessment tool.

### Introduction

- 2 The self-assessment tool
  - is a form template with a file extension .XFT
  - contains all the performance measures and enablers which make up the 2006/07 HB/CTB Performance Standards in the form of
    - questions
    - a summary of your scores
- 3 The self-assessment tool can be used to derive scores for
  - the performance measures by theme
  - the enablers by theme
  - the performance measures and enablers for a single theme
  - a full self-assessment
- 4 To use the self-assessment tool you must have the Accelio Filler software installed on your PC. Every LA was sent a copy of the software in May 2003. Please check with your IT section if you are unable to locate the software. Inform HBDS via e-mail if you are still unable to locate the software.
- 5 We understand that some of you may access to the internet on a different PC to the one where you hold your Accelio software. In that case, we advise that you follow the instructions below for saving the self-assessment tool to your system. The tool will then need to be transferred onto the PC with Accelio software. This can be done by
  - e-mailing the tool, or
  - copying and transferring via a CD or floppy disk

## How to download and save the Performance Standards form

6 The following paragraphs give a step by step guide on how to download the tool.

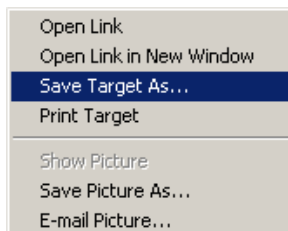
### Downloading

7 To download the form from the HBDS website

- connect to the internet
- type the website address into your internet browser  
<http://www.knowledgenetwork.gov.uk/hbds>
- click on the **Data Returns** button
- click on the **Performance Standards** button
- scroll down until you see the following icons



- right click your mouse on the icon labeled 'Self Assessment Form 06-07', a pop up menu will appear – select 'Save Target As...'



- a standard Windows **Save As...** dialogue box will now appear allowing you to select where on your local PC or network you want to save the form. It might be helpful to create a new folder '2006\_07 Performance Standards' and save it there
- click on **Save** to save the form
- the **Download Complete** dialogue box appears indicating the form has downloaded successfully

8 In some cases your LA firewall may prevent you saving the file to your systems. If this happens, contact your local IT support. If your IT support cannot help and you are unable to download from the internet, contact HBDS via e-mail at [HB-PERFORMANCE-DATA@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:HB-PERFORMANCE-DATA@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) as we can send you a copy of the form by email.

9 Once you have saved the self-assessment tool, you can open and re-use it as many times as required.

## Opening and using the self-assessment tool

- 10 Having downloaded the self-assessment tool to a PC that contains the Accelio software, follow the following steps to ensure that the form opens successfully
- open the Accelio filler software, by clicking on
    - the **Start** button at the bottom left of your screen, selecting **Programs** and then **Accelio filler software**. If you are unsure how to do this, ask your IT support
    - **File**, then **Open form**, an **Open Form** dialog box displays, browse to where you previously saved the self-assessment tool, click on the self-assessment tool file and open it
- 11 Having opened the self-assessment tool file, you can start your self-assessment, see *Answering questions on the form*. Full guidance on reporting against the performance measures is given in the guide that accompanies the self-assessment tool on the internet.

## Answering questions on the form

- 12 Answer questions by
- clicking either the **Yes** or **No** buttons, or
  - filling in the responses to the questions in the boxes headed **Results**
- 13 If you move your cursor over the Results box, help text relating to the question appears. The same happens if you move it over the Yes button.

## The scoring

- 14 As you fill in your answers, some data appears automatically such as the grade and theme score in the Performance Measures section. All the totals for each section appear in the summary page.

## Saving your data

- 15 Save your answers regularly as you go along. To do this
- right click your mouse anywhere on the form, a pop up menu appears with the option **Save Data**
  - click on **Save Data**, a standard Windows **Save As** dialogue box appears
  - use this dialog box to give the data file a name and select where to save it on your system. The file will have an .XFD extension

## Exiting the self-assessment tool

- 16 In all cases when you have made changes to any of your answers since last saving your data, you see a dialog box **Save changes to.....** If you click
- **No**, any changes are lost

- **Yes**, you are given the opportunity to save your data before quitting, see **Saving your data**
  - **Cancel**, you return to the self-assessment tool
- 17 After saving your data, you can exit the self-assessment tool in a number of ways, including
- clicking the cross icon at the top right hand corner of the Accelio filler window
  - selecting **File**, then
    - **Exit**, this closes the self-assessment tool and the Accelio filler software
    - **Close**, this closes the self-assessment tool but leaves the Accelio filler software open

## Retrieving previously saved data

- 18 If you have already entered and saved some or all your answers, you may want to return to this data file.
- 19 Before attempting to open your data file it is important that you read and understand the following
- the file you downloaded from the internet is known as the self-assessment tool. It is a form template in which you enter data. The form template has the file extension .XFT
  - when you fill in the form template, all the figures you enter are saved as data in a separate file to the template. Data files have the file extension .XFD
- 20 To return to your previously saved data file, open the self-assessment tool using the method described above at item 10 (in short – open software, click open form) – do not try and open the .XFD data file directly
- from **File** select **Open Data....** **Warning note:** You may see a dialog box **Save changes to....**, if this appears, select **No**
  - **Open** dialogue box appears, use this to browse through your system to locate the data file you want to open

**Note:** You cannot load your data until you have opened the self-assessment tool. If you try, Accelio filler returns an error message.

## Tips for saving your answers

- 21 When you save your data, remember that this is saved as a separate data file to the self-assessment tool which you downloaded from the internet and saved to your system. You are therefore creating a separate data file which has the file extension .XFD.
- 22 When naming your data files, you might want to consider that more than one may be saved. It is therefore very important that you name files in a way that allows them to be preserved separately and not accidentally overwritten by using the same file name for different sets of data (.XFD files). If possible, use your LA name as a prefix as this makes identifying individuals sets of data much easier for us.