

# Sharing information to prepare for welfare reform

A Making Best Use of Stock Team Practice Note



## Introduction

A fundamental part of preparing for welfare reform, in particular the introduction of the social sector size criteria and the overall benefit cap in April 2013, is identifying the tenants who are affected so that you can target help and support effectively. Equally, local authority housing benefit (HB) teams need information about claimants, who is living with them and the number of bedrooms their homes have to enable them to assess claims accurately.

Some landlords are reporting that liaison and information sharing with HB teams is working well and is enabling both parties to prepare for the changes ahead. However, some have a less positive experience and others are unclear about what they can expect.

## Sharing information – what's allowed?

The welfare reform information sharing powers are set out in:

- sections 131 to 133 of the Welfare Reform Act 2012
- the Social Security (Information-sharing in relation to Welfare Services etc) Regulations 2012
- DWP's Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit circular HB/CTB A5/2012, published on 27 July 2012, explains how this can work in practice.

Regulation 6 sets out the purposes for which relevant information may be held and Regulation 9 how it may be used. So, HB teams and social landlords can share information to identify HB claimants who are or may be affected by regulations relating to under-occupation and/or the benefit cap and then provide them with appropriate advice, support and assistance.

## Something to think about

While the regulations are 'permissive', that is, they are couched in terms of what parties 'can' do rather than what they should or must do, the important thing to remember is the mutual benefits for HB teams, landlords and tenants of sharing data. It is therefore important to make contact and build good relationships with HB teams.



## Why share information?

HB teams, social landlords and tenants will all benefit:

- if HB teams know the age and sex of those living in a claimant's household and how many bedrooms their home has, they can accurately assess benefit entitlement and advise tenants of any amounts they need to pay
- local authorities face reduced subsidy if they make an error on something they should have known or if it's not the tenant's fault. So it's worth bearing this in mind when trying to persuade them to share information
- social landlords will know which tenants are affected by the size criteria and the benefit cap, be able to target advice and information to sustain tenancies and also assess and mitigate any business risk posed
- tenants will have accurate information about how welfare reform affects them and will be better placed to make informed decisions about their options.

## Learning from others

To support a consistent approach and minimise the burden on local HB teams, the South East London Housing Partnership has developed a simple framework for sharing information about tenants affected by the size criteria. The main elements of the framework are:

1. Social landlords will provide databases of all their stock to their local authority HB contacts. The databases will include:

- addresses including postcodes
- the number of bedrooms in each property
- if available and relevant, a HB reference number or the tenant's National Insurance number
- names of tenants (to be confirmed – and possibly the subject of further negotiation).

2. Social landlords will request that local authorities provide information about all of their tenants whose household composition does not match their bedroom entitlement – i.e. all of those who stand to lose benefit as a result of these changes. This information will compare the number of bedrooms tenants are entitled to for HB purposes with the actual number of bedrooms based on the social landlords' databases.

3. Local authorities, through named contacts and a secure means of relaying information, will provide social landlords with the information requested.

4. Shortly before April 2013, social landlords will provide local authorities with a 'final' stock database. For some social landlords this may also provide an opportunity to inform local authorities about forthcoming annual rent increases.

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## Useful information

Download a free copy of Making it Fit – a guide to preparing for the social sector size criteria  
[www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/Making%20it%20fit.pdf](http://www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/Making%20it%20fit.pdf)

Download a free copy of How to... help tenants to manage their money  
[www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/How\\_to\\_help\\_tenants\\_manage\\_their\\_money](http://www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/How_to_help_tenants_manage_their_money)

Contact CIH's MBUS team for a free visit to talk about preparing for welfare reform  
[mbus@cih.org](mailto:mbus@cih.org)

CIH has developed a web based Welfare Reform Impact Tool giving landlords and tenants the information and data needed to understand the impact and make decisions on the actions needed. Its unique features include:

- an organisational module to estimate the financial impact of each measure
- a personal calculator for individual tenants for use via your own website
- a phone application for tenants to download
- an output report from the personal calculator with valuable tenant profile data
- regular updates and policy information

For more details on this and the other training and resources CIH can provide contact [RMT@cih.org](mailto:RMT@cih.org) or by telephone on 024 76 851792.