

Housing Benefit Circular

Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House, Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NA

HB A4/2018

ADJUDICATION AND OPERATIONS CIRCULAR

WHO SHOULD READ	All Housing Benefit staff
ACTION	For information
SUBJECT	Short-term specified accommodation – New LA IT functionality requirement

Guidance Manual

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

Queries

extra copies of this circular/copies of previous circulars can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/housing-benefit-for-local-authorities-circulars>

- about the
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Short-term specified accommodation – New local authority IT functionality requirement

Measuring total Housing Benefit awards for short-term specified accommodation

1. In England, from April 2020, instead of housing costs (rent and eligible service charges) being met through the welfare system, short-term specified accommodation providers' services will be directly commissioned by local government and funded by grants from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). A more detailed explanation of this policy statement made in October 2017 can be found in **Annex A**.
2. Government has committed that in England, the level of funding through grants in 2020-21 for short-term specified accommodation provision will be the same as it would have been through the welfare system, with equivalent funding devolved to the Scottish and Welsh Governments.
3. To do this, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is working with MHCLG and the Scottish and Welsh Governments to identify the sums of Housing Benefit (HB) being paid in each local area on short-term specified accommodation to ensure accurate grant allocations for local authorities (LAs) and funding to devolved administrations from 2020.

Action and timings for LAs

4. Therefore, from April 2018 onwards there will be a requirement for LAs to identify HB short-term specified accommodation cases when assessing new HB claims or change of circumstances **via LA IT systems**.

Process for recording a new claim or change of circumstance as 'short-term specified accommodation'

5. LAs will need to ensure they accurately record the identification of short-term specified accommodation on their IT systems in line with their individual IT supplier process guidance.
6. LAs should follow steps detailed in IT suppliers release notes for this change. All suppliers have completed work to your LA IT systems that will enable you to complete the steps given. This will ensure the information set is correct, in turn, ensuring the correct Management Information is provided to DWP.
7. We have been assured by all IT suppliers that the relevant release notes detailing what steps to take have been sent to LAs. If you have not received this, you should contact your LA IT supplier.

Definition of short-term specified accommodation

8. The full definition of Specified Accommodation is set out in circular HB [A8/2014](#). The following categories of specified accommodation should be regarded as short-term in nature:
 - homelessness hostels
 - other types of accommodation, usually/often homelessness-related, including transitional supported accommodation for vulnerable young people such as care leavers or teenage parents; offender/ex-offender; substance or alcohol misuse; veterans, or mental ill health
 - refuges and other housing with support, for victims of domestic abuse
 - dispersed accommodation with support
 - bail accommodation for offenders/ex-offenders, those under the Bail Accommodation and Support Services (B.A.S.S) for England and Wales.
9. Length of tenancy agreement should be ignored when deciding whether or not accommodation is short-term. Short-term accommodation will, however, feature planned move-on or transition to settled accommodation within 2 years.
10. Claims related to other specified accommodation that is not short-term in nature should continue to be identified. Your process for recording these claims may have changed as such. In that case, please refer back to your IT supplier's guidance.
11. The government policy statement on supported housing in **Annex A** refers to a time period of up to 2 years in relation to short-term supported or specified housing.
12. Some homelessness specified accommodation may be intended to accommodate residents who may be staying longer than 2 years.
13. If a provider refers to this policy statement and strongly insists that the accommodation concerned is definitely intended for stays that are longer than 2 years, then the claim should not be identified as 'short-term'.
14. In the absence of definite information from a provider to the contrary, LAs should identify the above listed categories as 'short-term' in all cases.

General needs 'temporary accommodation' and 'housing first'

15. This exercise **applies only** to specified accommodation, so **excludes** general needs temporary accommodation and also excludes housing first accommodation (where permanent affordable housing is provided as quickly as possible to those experiencing homelessness).

Annex A

Reform of funding for housing costs for supported accommodation

The government policy statement announced on 31 October 2017 set out a new high level framework for the future funding of housing costs in supported housing. In England, for short-term specified (or supported) accommodation, from April 2020, instead of housing costs (rent and eligible service charges) being met through the welfare system, short-term specified accommodation providers' services will be directly commissioned by local government, and funded by grants from MHCLG. Details of the statement can be found on www.gov.uk and sets out the current definition of short-term supported housing as:

Accommodation, with support, accessed following a point of crisis or as part of a transition to living independently, and provided for a period of up to two years or until transition to suitable long-term stable accommodation is found, whichever occurs first.

It is important to make clear however that government's proposals do not involve a requirement to assess individuals' length of stay in supported housing. The two years mentioned in the proposed definition for short-term supported housing refer to the type of or nature of supported housing provision, rather than actual stays by individuals. Decisions on the length of an individual's stay will remain the responsibility of providers and or care/support workers. Furthermore there is certainly no intention that individuals would need to leave or be transferred from an existing placement in short-term supported housing solely because the length of their stay had exceeded two years.