

Department for Work and Pensions

U.K. Government department streamlines form processes and eliminates significant postage and peripherals costs using Adobe® LiveCycle® technology

Department for Work and Pensions

www.dwp.gov.uk



Industry

Government

Challenges

- Integrate with legacy systems
- Reduce error rates
- Minimize administrative costs

Solution

- Forms Automation
DWP is using Adobe LiveCycle Forms to automate local authority claims processes.

Results

- Significantly reduced error rates
- Freed staff to focus on higher-value activities
- Eliminated costs of postage and disks
- Improved services to local authorities and citizens

Systems At A Glance

- Adobe LiveCycle Forms
- Adobe LiveCycle Reader Extensions

Building efficient processes for today and tomorrow

The U.K. Government's Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) plays a vital role in the economic and social well being of Great Britain and its people. The department helps people to achieve their potential through employment so that they can provide for their children and work and save for secure retirement.

The housing benefit team at DWP interfaces with local authorities within England, Scotland, and Wales to reimburse them for payments of council tax rebates, housing benefits, rent allowances, and rent rebates to constituents. The complex processes involve 408 local authorities, transfers amounting to £16 billion, and approximately 1,200 claim forms each year.

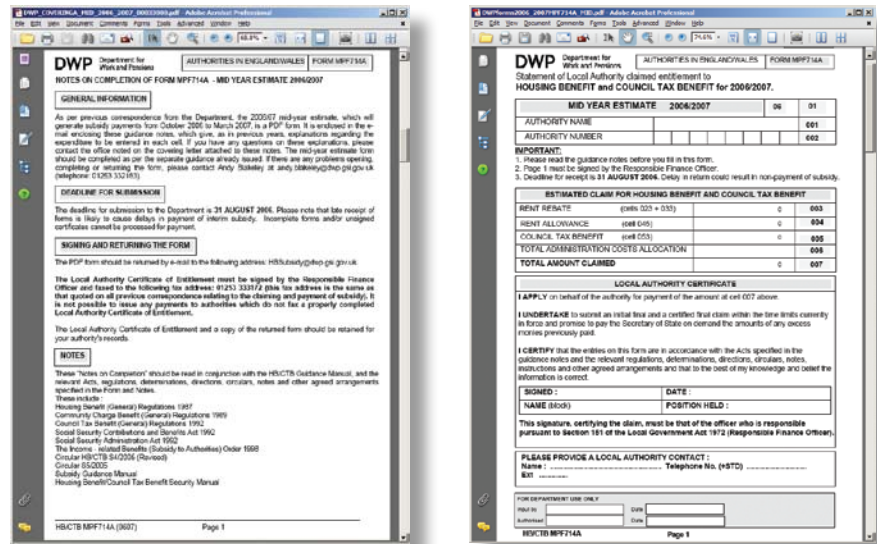
The Chief Accountant at DWP felt that there were inefficiencies within the existing process. "The key concerns were reliability, efficiency, and the likelihood that the system would continue to degrade due to inherent limits," explains Stuart Brown, programme manager, Information Systems Directorate at DWP.

Local authorities are reimbursed monthly by DWP based on a series of estimates called Claims for Payment. At the beginning of each year, local authorities complete a form with a forecast of their entire claim for that year. Halfway through the year a form giving a more accurate forecast is completed. At year's end, a final claim is made and the actual figures are submitted so that DWP can make the necessary extra payments or adjustments.

Previously, each time a submission was due five floppy disks were mailed to each local authority for them to complete the claim. The use of floppy disks meant that each year over 6,000 floppy disks were manually mailed by the DWP housing benefit team, with more than 1,200 mailed back to DWP for processing. "This was a massive postage and computer peripherals expense," Brown comments. After receiving information on the floppy disks, the housing benefit team manually entered the data into a bespoke piece of software and formatted the data for transfer into the DWP mainframe so payments could then be made. "This was extremely labour intensive," adds Steve Forshaw, project manager, Information Systems Directorate, DWP.

In many cases, the local authorities couldn't use the software provided by the DWP housing benefit team so the process became clerical at both ends. In addition, the age of the system meant that more recently the housing benefit team was unable to use its standard workstations and needed to have an additional desktop computer to connect to the legacy database. Finally, the team often experienced significant problems when calculations within the software did not work correctly.

The housing benefit team at DWP reimburses local authorities within the United Kingdom for payments of council tax rebates, housing benefits, rent allowances, and rent rebates to constituents based on a series of estimates called Claims for Payment submitted at the beginning of the year and again halfway through the year. In addition to the forms, developed using Adobe LiveCycle solutions, local authorities also receive supplementary guidance notes, covering letter, and monitoring sheets in PDF.



“The new Adobe forms have led to a significant reduction in errors, and therefore an improvement in validation levels.”

Stuart Brown,
Programme manager, Information
Systems Directorate,
DWP

Streamlining processes and reducing error rates

Forshaw and Brown realised that the solution would need to involve the use of electronic forms and the creation of a new database to streamline the payment process. “We wanted to use this opportunity to streamline the process,” says Brown. “We needed a solution that would not only better manage the administration and return of forms, but we also wanted to use the forms to automatically generate the files needed for the DWP mainframe to actually make the payment.”

DWP has an outsourced IT contract so it looked to its supplier, Atos Origin, to recommend a software product and vendor for the electronic form element of the project. Deploying the electronic forms would happen alongside the development of a bespoke database application.

Atos Origin suggested Adobe LiveCycle and DWP felt it provided an ideal digital solution without local authorities having to gain access to the DWP network. “Internet-based solutions would have necessitated local authorities having access to the DWP network and were considered to be prohibitive due to cost and associated security issues,” says Forshaw.

The forms were developed using Adobe LiveCycle solutions, and local authorities use free Adobe Reader® software to complete them. They are complex forms with more than 100 fields and also contain several Java™ based calculations. “If someone enters data into a cell, then the form will automatically place that data into all other relevant fields on the form. There is also validation incorporated into the form to ensure that automatic processing performs correctly,” Forshaw explains.

The team also had to create slightly different versions for Wales and Scotland because of the differences in the way local authorities operate. In addition to the forms, the supplementary guidance notes, covering letter, and monitoring sheets have also been created as PDF documents.

Ticking all the boxes

The new process involves preparing the Adobe forms as a bulk e-mail that is sent to local authorities as a dynamic form that can be completed electronically. They have six weeks to complete and return the forms. When the forms are returned, the data is automatically entered into the new database, and the housing benefit team is notified if further checking and approval is required. The database then generates the file for the bank payment to be made via the DWP mainframe.

“The new process means that the manual elements have been removed, saving time and money. Equally important, we have a system that will take us into the future,” says Forshaw.

The housing benefit team of just eight no longer has to prepare and package more than 6,000 floppy disks each year, resulting in significant cost savings in terms of postage and peripherals. In addition, team members can now use their time more effectively.

DWP used Adobe LiveCycle solutions to develop reimbursement forms for local authorities. Free Adobe Reader is used to complete the complex forms that have more than 100 fields and several Java based calculations. When the forms are returned to DWP the data is automatically entered into a database for processing and payment. The forms automation has resulted in a significant cost and time savings as well as a reduction in error rates associated with form completion.

ESTIMATED RENT REBATES GRANTED TO TENANTS OF NON-IRA PROPERTIES 2006/07

Call 001 Authority name in capital letters.

Call 002 Authority code number (i.e. the 9 digit number supplied by the DWP)

Call 003 Amount of total estimated rent rebate subsidy as calculated in calls 002 and 003

Call 004 Amount of total estimated rent allowance subsidy as calculated in call 003

Call 005 Amount of total estimated council tax benefit subsidy as calculated in call 003

Call 006 Amount in respect of administration costs

Call 007 Total of calls 003 to 006

HOMELESS PEOPLE IN BOARD AND LODGING ACCOMMODATION

Call 008	Expenditure up to and including the threshold.
Call 009	Enter the estimated expenditure in respect of the part of the rent, which is up to and including the threshold on homeless people in board and lodging accommodation (including fuel & breakfast).
Call 010	Expenditure between the threshold and up to and including the cap.
Call 011	Enter the estimated expenditure in respect of the part of the rent, which is above the threshold and up to and including the level of the cap on homeless people in board and lodging accommodation (including fuel & breakfast).

ESTIMATED RENT REBATES GRANTED TO TENANTS OF NON-IRA PROPERTIES 2006/07

EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	008
HOMELESS PEOPLE IN BOARD AND LODGING ACCOMMODATION	
Expenditure up to and including the threshold.	009
Expenditure between the threshold and up to and including the cap.	010
Expenditure above the cap.	011
HOMELESS PEOPLE IN LONG TERM ACCOMMODATION	
Expenditure up to and including the threshold.	012
Expenditure between the threshold and up to and including the cap.	013
Expenditure above the cap.	014
HOMELESS PEOPLE IN SHORT TERM LEASED ACCOMMODATION	
Expenditure up to and including the threshold.	015
Expenditure between the threshold and up to and including the cap.	016
Expenditure above the cap.	017
OVERPAID RENT REBATES GRANTED TO TENANTS OF NON-IRA PROPERTIES	
Expenditure in respect of eligible overpayments.	018
Expenditure in respect of technical error and recovered DWP OPA.	019
Expenditure in respect of local authority error.	020
ESTIMATED FULL RATE SUBSIDY	021
(Call 003 - (calls 010 + 011 + 014 + 017 + 018 + 019 + 020))	
SUBSIDY CLAIMED AT REDUCED RATE	022
(Call 009 + 010 + 012 + 013 + 015 + 016)	
TOTAL SUBSIDY (calls 021 + 022 + 020)	023

“We have a more efficient way of working with local authorities, and we saved money by eliminating postage and peripherals costs. Adobe LiveCycle provided a cost-effective electronic solution that fully met the Department’s business requirements.”

Stuart Brown,
Programme manager, Information Systems Directorate,
DWP

The automation has reduced the error rates associated with form completion. “We have automated forms as much as possible in order to simplify the end to end process. The new Adobe forms have led to a significant reduction in errors, and therefore an improvement in validation levels,” says Brown.

The free Adobe Reader software offered a real advantage in ensuring that local authorities adopted the technology. “The housing benefit team just keeps in close touch with local authorities to ensure they have correct versions in advance of form deadlines,” says Forshaw. As the team had been using the previous system since the early 1990s, the change was, he says, “quite radical.” However, he continues, “we have had positive feedback from the housing benefit team. They feel the forms have definitely helped make the process more efficient. The team’s time has been freed as they don’t have to manually mail all those floppy disks and they no longer need two separate workstations.”

As Brown concludes, “Ultimately, the goals the Chief Accountant set in motion have been achieved. The existing system has been replaced and improved upon. We have a more efficient way of working with local authorities, and we saved money by eliminating postage and peripherals costs. Adobe LiveCycle provided a cost-effective electronic solution that fully met the Department’s business requirements.”

For More Information

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