



# Summary Minutes

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	DWP LAA Steering Group
<b>Date:</b>	13 February 2013
<b>Location:</b>	Caxton House Room 6.03
<b>Attendees:</b>	<p><b>DWP:</b> Andrew Parfitt, (Chair), Mont Goldman, (Secretariat), Geoff Scammell, Yvonne Smith, Steve Imeson, Alan Sullivan, Joy Thompson, Jonathan Bottomer, Manny Ibiayo, Huw Meredith, Mel Frankham, Judith Hicks, Jenita Chelva (Observer), Angela Hargreaves (observer)</p> <p><b>Audit:</b> Lisa Williams (Welsh Audit Office)</p> <p><b>DCLG:</b> Danny Rothberg.</p> <p><b>LAAs:</b> Rose Doran, Sonika Sidhu, Lesley Pigott, Valerie Pearce, Nigel Minto, David Graaff, Colin Wallbank, Matthew Evans, Howard Mason, Andrew Stevens, Pat Durkin, Steve Carey</p> <p>Dial – in: Peter Meehan, Chris Gibbs, and John Rosenbloom.</p>
<b>Apologies:</b>	Bill Hern, Debra Levison John Swinnerton and Anne Cairns.

## 1. Welcome and Introductions:

Andrew Parfitt opened the meeting and introductions were made round the table and for those dialing in.

## 2. Matters Arising

Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

The LAA asked for it to be noted on the January minutes that the calculation of eligible rent for a claimant renting in the social and private sectors is not affected by the uprating of benefits, *and that this will apply to Universal Credit.*

Action Points

The January action points were cleared.

## 3. Updates:

### Universal Credit (UC)

DWP introduced the update paper issued prior to meeting.

The Steering Group noted the content of the paper.

## Framework For Universal Credit Local Support Services

DWP informed the meeting that the Framework For Universal Credit Local Support Services had now been published on the website. The framework had been drawn up through collaborative working with the LAAs and teams such as face to face design. DWP thanked all those concerned.

The framework will detail which areas LAs can offer support as delivery partners in UC and will be a definitive document for planning for phase 2, and will allow for close and meaningful working between local Jobcentre Plus offices and LAs.

The framework sets out:

- The expected role for LAs in delivery partnership.
- Types of claimants who will need additional help.
- Types of services envisaged to be needed, e.g. triage, personal budgeting and online services.
- What the partnerships between LAs and JCP will look like.

With regard to funding, DWP explained that more time was needed for in depth work with stakeholders. This would be undertaken over the next few months.

DWP added that the next steps on the framework were likely to include 2 streams of work:

- i) Implementation for phase 2 from October 2013
- ii) A refreshed, Mark 2 of the framework for publication in October 2013 to draw from the experience of the Demonstration Projects and the pathfinders to allow planning for the 2014/15 financial year.

The LGA thanked DWP for its contribution, adding that further debate was needed around models for funding in respect of DWP's preferred option of passing the funding directly to JCP.

The LAAs pointed out that the detailed schedule for roll out was needed.

The LAAs asked when they could see examples of the online end to end claim process.

DWP pointed out that a demonstration event took place on 01 February and agreed to request another similar event for the LAAs.

## DCLG

DCLG highlighted the key messages from their update paper.

The LAAs raised the following points, taken as actions for DCLG.

- The clarification note on mixed age claimants needed further clarification to allay any confusion as to how couples, where one is a pensioner, will be treated.
- LAAs were concerned about the amended proscribed default regulations in respect of changing circumstances of claimants.
- LAAs asked for confirmation when the transition grant funding will be released.

## Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

DWP introduced the update paper issued prior to the meeting.

The paper set out:

- An update on the pilots, for which Oldham has been added, with further planned volunteer sites for 2013/14.
- Clarification on legal issues.
- Data sharing for investigating fraud.

The key area for discussion was around how the pilots will deal with Council Tax fraud, and in particular how prosecutions involving Council Tax fraud as well as whether DWP benefits can be heard as one case.

#### SFIS Amending Regulations

DWP introduced a paper which was tabled at the meeting. The paper advised the Steering Group of the proposed regulations and amendments to existing regulations to support SFIS and to enable LAs to investigate offences relating to UC and PIP in certain circumstances. This builds on the SFIS pilots.

DWP sought the Steering Group's approval for a foreshortened consultation period to be completed by the end of April. The Steering Group approved this shortened consultation period.

The LAAs also asked for clarification around whether LA staff who will be part of SFIS, but whose salary is paid by the LA could investigate Council Tax Fraud.

An action point was taken for DWP to provide clarification on whether LA staff who will be part of SFIS, but whose salary is paid by the LA could investigate Council Tax Fraud.

#### **4. Benefit Cap**

DWP updated the meeting on three aspects of the Benefit Cap:

- i) Phasing.
- ii) The 4 LAs to go live in April 2013.
- iii) National Rollout.

##### Phasing

The phased roll out had been announced on the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2012.

DWP explained the rationale behind the decision to phase in the Benefit Cap in April 13 across the 4 London LAs. This was to:

- Provide a soft landing
- Test the end to end process in a controlled environment.
- Understand claimant handling strategies

- Learn lessons for national roll out.

DWP are working closely with the 4 LAs that will go live in April 2013. DWP said that:

- Regular working sessions between DWP and the 4 LAs are ongoing.
- Ministers have met with 3 of the 4 Council Leaders and Chief Executives. Meetings with the 4<sup>th</sup> LA have been arranged.
- Delivery will be based on co-location of DWP and LA staff working with affected claimants, initially analysing the data scans to ensure correct information is recorded, visiting to support those potentially affected, and ultimately providing joint support for claimants beyond April 13
- The end to end design has been shared with sub POG and the recently set up LA Implementation assurance group. Case studies are being worked through and will be published in formal guidance.
- The LA IT suppliers will be involved at all stages
- The four LAs have been asked to formally submit additional requests for new burdens based solely on being the first to go live. The project will consider these in due course.

Regarding the scans, the LAAs expressed concern around the accuracy and data lag.

DWP acknowledged that the data lag is an issue for which work is ongoing, including a request for more frequent scans. Detailed analysis of the scans is ongoing across the 4 LAs going live first.

The LAAs also pointed out the potential impacts of the wider welfare reforms to cause additional burdens.

DWP agreed that it was a busy time with a number of reforms landing in a similar window. The National Rollout principles are:

- Around de-risking.
- That all applicable stock cases will be capped by the end of September 2013.
- A 100% manual check will be carried out on each case before it is sent over to the LA to consider capping.

With regard to national rollout, the LAAs strongly recommended that rollout should be by LA by LA, and that each LA's Benefit Cap caseload should be completed before they are sent across. DWP noted these views.

The LAAs pointed out that LAs need to know the start date for national rollout as soon as possible.

DWP explained that direct mail letters will be issued to all benefit cap stock cases in March 2013 once DWP has confirmed National go live date.

## **5. Supported Exempt Accommodation**

DWP explained that an issue had arisen around the definition of Supported Exempt Accommodation.

The LAAs pointed out that the definition contained in the current regulations excluded accommodation owned by LAs and some accommodation owned by Housing Associations, e.g. where the care provider is a managing agent rather than the landlord. DWP explained that it was not the intention to compromise providers' income streams and urgent work was needed to ensure they were protected.

The LAAs asked whether the introduction of the new arrangements for Temporary Accommodation and Supported Exempt Accommodation could be paused until the issues around definitions have been clarified.

Temporary Accommodation:

- The Temporary Accommodation sub group met in December and January.
- Discussion was frank and open and a number of issues were identified.
- Recommendations have been put before Ministers for which decisions are awaited.
- Progress was made around new burdens and the need for evidence.
- Further advice on direct payments to LAs has been put before Ministers for which an official response is awaited.

The LAAs pointed out that in supporting people back into work any time limiting exemptions, if granted, should be a reasonable length, e.g. 3 to 4 months.

The LAAs expressed their thanks for a constructive sub group meeting.

## **6. AOB**

LA Transition Working Group (LATWG)

DWP updated the Steering Group on the recent meeting of the LATWG, highlighting.

- A request for a LA representation on the notifications taskforce for the development of notification letters has been passed to the UC programme.
- Concern was expressed over the need for an overarching Equality Impact Assessment on benefit reforms.
- DWP was asked to clarify 2 aspects of UC Phase 2;

i) The likelihood of phase 2 including manual transfer of data.

Whether sharing data through secure e-mail will be for each claimant case or in batches.

**7. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the DWP LAA Steering Group will take place on Wednesday March 13th at 11.30am at Caxton House.

<b>Contact:</b>	Mont Goldman
<b>Email:</b>	Mont.goldman@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
<b>Direct line:</b>	020 7449 5327