



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	DWP LAA Steering Group
Date:	13 March 2013
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	DWP: Andrew Parfitt, (Chair), Kath Murphy (Secretariat), Bill Hern, Geoff Scammell, Steve Imeson, Jonathan Bottomer, Manny Ibiayo, Huw Meredith, Jim Donnelly, Simon Peters, Laura Smethurst, Simon Cribbens and Laura Webb DCLG: Clare Brunton LAAs: Rose Doran, Lesley Pigott, Matthew Evans, Howard Mason, Andrew Stevens, Pat Durkin, Steve Carey Dial – in: Peter Meehan, Chris Gibbs, John Rosenbloom, Ruth White and Steve Carey
Apologies:	Mont Goldman, John Swinnerton, Gordon Jackson, Valerie Pearce and David Graaf.

1. Welcome and Introductions:

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

2. Matters Arising

Following an announcement by the Secretary of State on 12 March, DWP will be laying emergency amending regulations to clarify the size criteria rules for two specific groups of Housing Benefit recipient, foster carers and armed forces personnel. DWP intends writing to request permission to forgo the normal consultation arrangements as there is limited time available to lay the regulations. The LAAs asked if a copy of the regulations could be included with the letter to give Steering Group members an opportunity to comment.

An action point was taken for DWP to include a copy of the regulations for comment with the letter that is being issued on Friday 15 March

Court of Appeal Judgement: Burnip, Trengove and Gorry: an Urgent Bulletin was issued on 12 March advising local authorities that the Secretary of State had decided not to pursue the Gorry appeal further and the suspension had been lifted.

Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

Action Points

February's action points were cleared

3. Updates:

Benefit Cap Project

DWP had provided a written update for the Group which had been issued in advance of the meeting. The Project is continuing to work very closely with the 4 local authorities on the costs of administering the cap. All have submitted business cases and in response a letter will be issued to the Chief Executive of each authority on 14 March.

A letter was issued to all local authorities on 7 March advising that national rollout will commence on 15 July and be completed by the end of September. DWP agreed to have further discussions with members of the Group about the best way to manage migration over the summer period. The LAAs expressed a preference for a big bang rollout in each authority. COSLA would be happy to fall in line with authorities in London and the South East as Scotland has a smaller caseload of people affected by the cap in Scotland. WLGA agreed that this was also the position in Wales.

Update from the LA Transition Working Group

DWP provided a brief update as the Group had already received the written update on Universal Credit in advance of the meeting. It was noted that the LAAs had raised their concerns about the lack of an overall impact assessment for the combined measures in the Welfare Reform Act.

DCLG

The LAAs asked about the position with the unspent transition funding. DWP advised that the unspent funding would not be shared out.

DWP advised the Group that a joint DWP/DCLG/HMT meeting to discuss subsidy would be taking place that afternoon. DWP confirmed that there were no plans to merge the administration and Council Tax reduction scheme funding for 2014/15 or 2015/16.

The LAAs asked if there was a distribution formula for Council Tax reduction and any new burdens. DWP explained that once the baseline funding had been agreed with DCLG and HMT it would come back to the Group with a principles paper and options to discuss. DWP also informed the Group that the final figures given to HMT in the next three weeks would include all the assumptions mentioned by the LAAs. These discussions with HMT and DCLG would involve going through each assumption to ensure transparency in the final settlement.

The LAAs felt that this was a big issue for the Group particularly as it still did not know the details of the Universal Credit migration roll-out schedule. DWP noted the concerns expressed by the LAAs.

Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

DWP had no further update to the paper that had been issued prior to the meeting. They are looking to progress the Oldham pilot, the information they gather will help to inform the evaluation.

4. Universal Credit “In a Box” Demonstration

Accenture provided a demonstration of the Universal Credit application to be used by the Pathfinders. The LAAs raised their concerns about the conditionality rules for workers who are working full time but are on low earnings. DWP explained that work is ongoing on this area of policy.

5. Treatment of non dependent deductions in Universal Credit

DWP provided an update to the Group. Under Universal Credit there will be one flat rate of “housing costs contribution” in respect of non-dependents. This reduces complexity, reduces the number of changes of circumstances that have to be processed and acts as a work incentive.

This deduction will apply to all non-dependents that are either working or expected to work.

The following exemptions will apply:

- the non-dependent is under 21 years
- the non-dependent is in receipt of Pension Credit, a Disability benefit, or Carers Allowance
- the non-dependent is responsible for a child under 5 years.

Universal Credit will not attempt to identify if two adult non-dependents are in a relationship. Each will be allowed a room under the size criteria but each will be expected to make the contribution unless exempt.

The biggest change to the exemptions is that 21 to 24 year olds receiving an income related benefit are currently exempt from making a contribution. There will not be an automatic exemption for this group under Universal Credit.

The LAAs asked whether there would be any transitional protection, and how LAs could determine proof of earnings.

The LAAs noted that the non-dependent deductions for someone currently in work are higher than the proposed deductions in Universal Credit.,

6. Regulations regarding Croatia’s accession to the EU

The DWP International Unit provided further details in addition to the paper that was issued in advance of the meeting.

In Summary Croatia will join the EU on 1 July 2013, the Home Office will be applying restrictions to Croatian nationals who come to the UK to work. DWP will be laying regulations defining the access to benefit. DWP be carrying out a very short consultation and will then be issuing guidance via a Housing Benefit circular to all local authorities.

7. AOB

It was agreed that the Terms of Reference for the Steering Group needed refreshing.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 10 April 2013, Room 6.03 Caxton House, usual start time of 11.30.

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