



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	DWP LAA Steering Group
Date:	08 May 2013
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	<p>DWP: Andrew Parfitt, (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Bill Hern, Steve Imeson, Huw Meredith, Mel Frankham, Darren Baker, David Beeson, Jonathan Bottomer</p> <p>LA: Zena Cooke</p> <p>DCLG: Andrew Keck</p> <p>GLA: Simon Cribbens</p> <p>LAAs: Rose Doran, Lesley Pigott, Matthew Evans, Colin Wallbank, Andrew Stevens, Pat Durkin, Val Pearce</p> <p>Observer: Sue Francis</p> <p>Dial – in: Peter Meehan, Chris Gibbs, Ruth White, Steve Carey and John Rosenbloom</p>
Apologies:	John Swinnerton, Gordon Jackson, Valerie Pearce, David Graaff, Howard Mason, Anne Cairns
1. Welcome and Introductions:	<p>Andrew Parfitt opened the meeting and introductions were made round the table and for those dialing in.</p>
2. Matters Arising	
Minutes	<p>The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.</p>
Action Points	<p>Steering group members noted DCLG's response to the concerns raised at April's meeting. They commented that they had raised the issue of the need for primary legislation for voluntary attachment to earnings some time ago. DWP explained that there are some operational issues and that it is in dialogue with DCLG.</p> <p>Steering Group members asked when and how LAAs can feed into the process.</p> <p>DCLG agreed to report back to colleagues on the LAA's concerns regarding its response to the action point.</p> <p>The April action points were cleared</p>
3. Updates:	

LA Transition Working Group (LATWG)

DWP updated the meeting on the recent LATWG meeting, highlighting key areas of interest:

- LATWG members have asked DWP to clarify the full impact of UC on passported benefits and specifically areas such as free school meals.
- DWP has agreed to provide a summary of Pathfinder data, demographics, ages, numbers of change of circumstances and numbers of people claiming housing costs included in their UC award. This should include a claimant case study.

The LATWG were updated on Local Support Service funding. The group looking at the funding options has discussed the responsibility and options for managing the funding.

Benefit Cap

DWP updated the meeting:

First Phase:

- The four London LAs are now in week 4 of activity.
- Just under 4000 households have been affected.
- IT and business processes are working well.
- One council has referred to the exercise as an example of joined up working and that implementation has gone smoothly.
- As expected some issues have been highlighted through phased rollout, such as how to cap households with caravans.
- A preliminary session to work through lessons learned has taken place with the 4 phased rollout LAs; and a formal session is scheduled for two weeks time.
- The four LAs have been taking part in regular teleconferences and the ramp - up has been agreed.
- Functionality for Phase 1 is working accurately and according to plan, and the support teams in Belfast and Stratford are working well.

Best Practice Events:

- National best practice events are scheduled for the first two weeks in June 2013, and invitations to LAs will be issued in the next week.
- The agenda will be agreed with the four London LAs.

Governance:

DWP proposed that the POG sub – group be wound up, as events have moved forward sufficiently to warrant this action. Steering Group members were content with this and DWP will now formally write to the sub – group.

National Implementation:

DWP referred the meeting to the workshop scheduled for May 9th. He explained that the purpose of the event is to ensure full understanding of the options available and discuss issues and concerns, and to hear the views of members of the LAA Steering group on the preferred options for national implementation. The aim is reach consensus with a view to a final decision if possible by the end of May 2013.

It was agreed that Steering Group members unable to attend would pass their views to an attending representative to bring forward at the workshop.

DWP was keen to work with the LAAs on the options for national implementation, and that the schedule for national implementation had yet to be determined. He added that Ministers are aware of this consultation process, and content with this approach.

Universal Credit (UC) Pathfinder

The UC Pathfinder at Ashton- Under- Lyne Jobcentre went live for new claims on April 29th.

- Wigan, Warrington and Oldham Jobcentres are taking steps to trial some of the elements, in particular the Claimant Commitment.
- All claims have been made online, with queries taken over the phone, but no end to end claims to date.
- There have been no significant problems with the IT.
- The number of claims are broadly in line with expectations.
- There have been no issues regarding operational readiness.
- Tameside LA had received one claim.
- There has been considerable media interest, with the coverage, in the main, neutral to positive.

With regard to the wider LA community, DWP explained that apart from the circular setting out the position regarding Pathfinder claimants who move to another LA, DWP has not issued any specific communications on the Pathfinder to all LAs. DWP asked whether the Steering Group were content with this approach. The Steering Group were content with this approach.

DWP added that LAs bordering the Pathfinder area have been engaged.

DWP confirmed that evaluation of the Pathfinder would include interaction with Local Council Tax Support schemes.

The Steering Group asked about the length of time it would take from application for UC to receipt of entitlement, as this would have a bearing on Council Tax Support.

An action point was taken to inform the Steering Group of the length of time it would take from application for UC to receipt of entitlement.

Fraud and Error

The Steering Group noted the written update from SFIS, and no comment was made.

DCLG

The Steering Group noted the written update from DCLG, and no comment was made.

4. HB Reforms

Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy

DWP explained that:

- Following DWP's decision not appeal against the ruling for Gorrie, in respect of disabled children, guidance has been produced.
- DWP had no plans for any further legislation.
- A number of Judicial Reviews are due for hearing from May 15th.
- Assurance work is continuing with over 80 LAs.
- DWP has commissioned a consortium for the evaluation. It is led by Ipsos-MORI and includes the Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research and Institute for Fiscal Studies.
- Administrative data should be available in early autumn.

The Steering Group raised a number of issues:

- LAs are experiencing an increasing number of issues around one or more adults in a household in receipt of DLA who state that they are unable to share a room.
- LAs are experiencing an increasing strain on their DHP budgets.

Supported Exempt Accommodation

- DWP is making gradual progress, and plans to reconvene the specialist group.
- DWP is aiming to issue guidance and lay regulations in the autumn.

The Steering Group pointed out that:

- LAs are experiencing increasing issues with Registered Social Landlords.
- There are some issues around repossession of council property.

DCLG agreed to feed back to their colleagues LAA concerns around gaining repossession of council property.

Temporary Accommodation

From discussion the following points emerged:

- The specialist working group would benefit from DCLG representation.
- Under occupation reductions in temporary accommodation owned by councils are proving to be a difficulty, particularly in Scotland

DWP was aware of the Upper Tribunal decision and its consequent implications for night shelters.

5. Universal Credit (UC) Finance

DWP introduced a set of slides on UC finance and LA engagement;

The slides set out:

- The four key areas in which UC implementation will impact financially on LAs and how an understanding of this will inform the UC Business case and the calculations for new burdens and future administration grant decisions..
- The LA finance and commercial group; its remit and composition.
- Version 1 of the cost base modeling work which has been undertaken with LAs to understand the impact on business as usual resources of HB claimant migration to UC and Pension Credit.
- Version 2 of the cost base modeling; taken up by the Cost Model Taskforce to understand the impact of HB claimant migration to UC and Pension Credit on:
 - Costs related to HB and Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) which can be eliminated from the LA cost base.
 - Costs related to shared delivery infrastructure which will be required for LCTS.
 - Resources required to support migration processes and UC local support services.
- The Local Support Service financial group; its remit and composition.

The major point for discussion was around the future subsidy allocation and methodology, particularly for 2014/15 and the dependencies around the migration schedule for UC. LAAs emphasised the importance of keeping the Finance and Commerce Group informed.

All parties will continue to work together to develop the allocation methodology for 2014/15.

6. AOB

Andrew Parfitt explained that following last month's discussion on the future direction of the Steering Group, a draft version of an amended Terms of Reference would be circulated for comment following the meeting.

Andrew added that over the coming months DWP will be giving some further thought to its strategic engagement with local authorities, which may result in further changes to

the nature of the Steering Group.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 05 June 2013, Room 6.03 Caxton House, usual start time of 11.30.

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