



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	DWP LAA Steering Group
Date:	05 June 2013
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	<p>DWP: Andrew Parfitt, (Chair), Julia Sweeney, Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Bill Hern, Huw Meredith, Dave Gaskell, Dean Blower, Mark Cramer, Bunmi Shodeyi</p> <p>DCLG: Andrew Keck, Claire Cooper</p> <p>LAAs: Rose Doran, Lesley Pigott, Matthew Evans, Andrew Stevens, Pat Durkin, Val Pearce, Howard Mason, David Graaff, Ben Dixon. Paula Holland, Steve Carey</p> <p>Dial – in: Steve Imeson Peter Meehan, Chris Gibbs, and John Rosenbloom</p>
Apologies:	John Swinnerton, Gordon Jackson, Simon Cribbens, Howard Mason, 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.

Action Points

Action points April 02 and May 01 are to remain open.

Regarding an action point from May's meeting, DWP explained the position around the time taken from making a claim to UC and being regarded as in receipt.

3. Updates:

DCLG

The LAAs noted the update paper on Localising Council Tax Support which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

With regards to DCLG's response to concerns raised by the LAAs, the LAAs pointed out, that it did not fully reflect their concerns around making it easier for claimants and or LAs to have deductions made from benefits to pay off Council Tax debts.

DCLG explained the policy decisions taken by DWP colleagues, adding that it will attend a meeting with the Valuation Tribunal and refer back to DWP. DWP added that it would

take a more active role in working with DCLG to look at this issue.

LA Transition Working Group (LATWG) and UC

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

Passported Benefits:

- An important discussion took place on passported benefits, with a risk workshop planned for June 7th. The passporting team is keen to establish a dialogue with local authorities about these issues

Pathfinder:

- The key area of discussion was around processing times and how this would affect awards of Short Term Benefit Advances.

LA Led Pilots:

- Some results from the analysis are emerging; full results of the analysis will be shared when they are available. The Pilots team is increasing their engagement with the Local Support Service framework.

Direct Payment Demonstration Projects:

- The key areas of discussion were around take up of personal budgeting support and there was interest in whether any patterns had emerged around non payment of rent. The criteria and process for determining alternative payment arrangements are being worked through.
- With regard to the emerging picture, DWP added that the projects have been extended and an interim evaluation will be undertaken as well as the final evaluation covering the extended period.

Benefit Cap

DWP updated the meeting.

Phased:

- All households which required capping have been capped, with the exception of some households where grace periods are appropriate.
- The cap has been accurately applied with 100% system checks, as well as manual team leader checks being carried out before sending to LAs.
- Changes of circumstances on cases already capped are now being processed.
- Some issues have been identified, these include:
 - the need to liaise with LA IT suppliers on improvements needed for notification letters before national roll out
 - Whether there is a better way of dealing with the data held by LAs on affected children in a capped household.

Best Practice Events:

- A series of nine regional events has been scheduled over the next two weeks, the first had taken place on 04 June and the feedback had been positive.

National Rollout:

- Following the special meeting with LAAs on 09 May, at which consensus had been reached; a letter has been issued to LAAs setting out the agreed options and tranches.
- The session had been a productive one, taking into account different standpoints.
- A formal letter communicating the approach to national implementation was issued to LA Chief Executives on 3 June; and a response to individual issues raised by the LGA and London Councils, who also supported the approach, will follow shortly.

DWP formally thanked the LAAs for their support.

With regard to issues around the data on children held by LAs, Steering Group members explained that LAs are not always kept up to date on changes to benefits that do not necessarily affect HB. They added that more work was needed around Management Information (MI) for LAs.

Fraud and Error (SFIS)

DWP updated the meeting.

Pilots:

- The pilots commenced in November 2012, have been running for 6 months and a formal evaluation is due in September.
- The first prosecution has been successfully completed. It took 5 months from start to finish and included several benefits. More prosecutions are in the pipeline.
- A fifth pilot in Oldham will be linked to UC pathfinder with more pilots across the pathfinder areas being added later in the year.
- Additional pilots are planned for Cornwall, Southampton, Cardiff and Birmingham, DWP added that SFIS is looking at organisational options for SFIS rollout, and has worked with SOG and other key stakeholders. He went on to say that SFIS is taking a proactive approach to engagement through the knowledge hub for SFIS, and is also considering using Huddle.

The LAAs raised two key issues, taken action points for clarification:

1. Whether the Chief Executive or SFIS is responsible for fraud in a LA area.
2. The divide between DWP benefits and Local Council Tax Reduction, in respect of prosecutions.

4. Options Paper for HB Transitional Funding

DWP referred the meeting to the paper which had been circulated prior to the meeting. Last year the focus had been around changes to LHA and this year the focus is around the impact of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy.

In response, the LAAs pointed out that they would like to see the figures for all LAs for the transitional funding proposal, before they could make a judgment.

An action point was taken for DWP to provide the figures for all LAs for the transitional funding proposal, and for the matter to be cleared by correspondence.

5. Passported Benefits

DWP gave an overview of the progress made around the interaction between passported benefits and UC.

- UC replaces 6 DWP/HMRC benefits and is paid monthly.
- The responsibility and administration for passported benefits remain with the owning Other Government Departments (OGDs) or Devolved Administration (DAs) as appropriate.
- In the interim, most of the existing processes will remain the same, and OGDs/DAs are working with DWP to ensure passported benefits continue to be delivered under UC.
- Dialogue is ongoing with OGDs and devolved administrations to simplify the eligibility rules in the context of UC.
- The transitional approach to the development of passported benefit eligibility criteria during the phased UC roll-out means that the eligibility criteria for pathfinder will not necessarily be the long term eligibility criteria.
- Pathfinder claimants will have access to Help with Health Costs and Free School Meals if appropriate.
- As UC progresses the passported benefit information on the award notification would become more tailored to the claimant.
- DWP is working to the SSAC report in respect of a long term strategic solution.

6. AOB

DCLG advised the meeting of the forthcoming changes to personnel to the Council Tax Support Team.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 03 July 2013, Room 6.03 Caxton House, usual start time of 11.30.

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