



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	DWP Local Authority Associations (LAA) Steering Group
Date:	02 October 2013
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	<p>DWP: Andrew Parfitt (Chair), Clare Elliott, Bill Hern, Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Huw Meredith, Mel Frankham, Julie Willoughby, Dave Jackson, Manny Ibiayo, Jenita Chelva</p> <p>Audit: Ann Cairns – Audit Scotland</p> <p>DCLG: Danielle Houghton, Hulya Mustapha</p> <p>LAAs: Sonika Sidhu, Valerie Pearce, Ben Dixon, Andrew Stevens, Chris Gibbs, Pat Durkin,</p> <p>Dial – in: Peter Meehan, Steve Carey</p>
Apologies:	Rose Doran, Lesley Pigott, John Swinnerton, John Rosenbloom, Colin Wallbank, Matthew Evans, Nigel Minto, Simon Cribbens, Howard Mason

1. Welcome and Introductions:

DWP 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

The action points from the August meeting were cleared.

3. Updates:

Benefit Cap

The Project Manager thanked all of the project's partners, particularly members of the Steering Group, Local Authorities, DCLG and other stakeholders for their continued

support throughout this process.

The meeting was updated on the following:

- DWP has worked through all Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 stock cases available for processing and sent these to Local Authorities.
- national implementation has been delivered as planned.
- the Project Manager will be writing to all Local Authority Chief Executives regarding the end of Tranche 2 and that all cases have been sent and what the ongoing arrangements will be until Universal Credit is fully in place.
- there have been good examples of joint working between DWP and LAs
- at the IRRV Conference in Telford this week DWP, in conjunction with a LA are running best practice workshops on how claimants have been supported
- LA by LA data should be available in November or December
- the next statistics release is due on Thursday 3 October and will reflect the national number capped as recorded in Local Authorities August official HB returns
- the 100% check undertaken by our Belfast Team will continue through live-running. Also Single Points of Contacts (SPOCs) will remain in place. In the longer term we will continue to discuss issues through forums such as this Group and Practitioner Operations Group (POG)

LAs are key stakeholders and the project will be approaching all LAs by means of a questionnaire to assist in the lessons learned process.

The LAAs raised three issues.

- i) The amount of work LAs have had to undertake with affected claimants, particularly lone parents with children under 5 years, has been time consuming, creating additional burdens.
- ii) Whether any future modeling included an extension of the cap.
- iii) Whether DWP intended to target lone parents with children under 5 with regard to supporting people into employment.,

The LAA asked whether a post implementation review was planned.

An action point was taken to check the progress on the post implementation review.

Fraud and Error Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

DWP referred the meeting to the recommendation made by the Fraud, Error and Debt Programme Board to establish a single organisation for SFIS led by DWP which was communicated to a wide range of stakeholders on 6 September.

The LAAs referred DWP to a letter issued by the Minister.

Follow up meetings are planned with Security Operations Group (SOG) and with DCLG,

LGA and the devolved administrations. Work is ongoing regarding TUPE, and that it is hoped to share the conclusions from these discussions with the Steering Group in due course.

The LAAs expressed concern about how the SFIS developments had been communicated; pointing out that the recommendation had been announced without an accompanying circular. They added that Steering Group's strategic remit should have made it the principle forum for discussion. DWP explained that it had been agreed at previous LAA meetings to discuss the detail of SFIS with SOG, and to date regular communications had taken place, but she agreed to ensure future communications included the Steering Group, and that a presentation could be given to the November Steering Group if required. The options, including to wait until 2017, when the migration to UC has been completed were discussed at the May meeting of SOG, and a presentation could be given to the November Steering Group if required.

The LAAs asked whether a letter will be issued to LA Chief Executives.

An action point was taken to follow up the LAA's point concerning a letter to the LA Chief Executives.

The LAAs asked about any potential impacts on Administration Subsidy for 2014/15 in respect of possible TUPE arrangements. The recommendation was that there are no changes in 2014/15 as this is a transitional year.

The LAAs asked how any potential split of housing costs from UC would affect SFIS, DWP advised SFIS brings together a single benefit fraud investigation so its introduction, in this situation would continue to bring benefits.

Universal Credit

DWP updated the meeting, expanding on the responses to the action points from September's meeting. With regard to the action point around Free School Meals (FSM) and the pathfinder, automatic entitlement is only applicable for the claimant group in the Pathfinder. Information can be found on the DFE website. Entitlement for FSM in UC for the longer term has yet to be decided.

The LAAs asked about links to the Government Assisted Digital, Project run by the Cabinet Office. DWP acknowledged that the links needed strengthening with Local Support Services Framework (LSSF), and the LSSF team would be following this up.

LA Transition Working Group (LATWG)

DWP updated the Steering Group on the recent meeting of the LATWG, highlighting the key points of discussion:

- An update on pathfinder confirmed the percentage of claims which had been made online and that the numbers seeking personal support for budgeting.
- concern was expressed around the impact on wider LA services of applying the claimant commitment to households. It was agreed to invite those in DWP who are responsible for this area of work to attend a future TWG meeting

- discussion took place around the Direct Payment Demonstration Project, and in particular the results of the Sheffield Hallam University report concerning rent collection and arrears. It was agreed that more detail was needed for further discussion at a future meeting
- the meeting was updated on the current position regarding UC migration. All options are being considered and impacted to see which is most deliverable.

DWP is aware of the need for clarity on the UC migration and once a firm decision on the options has been made it will be shared with the Steering Group.

DCLG

In response to a query from the Steering Group, DCLG clarified the position around the default scheme for LCTS for 2014/15.

A discussion followed on funding for pensioner uprating; it will not be funded by DCLG. It was agreed to strengthen the links between the Council Tax Forum, where this had been discussed, and the Steering Group.

4. Allocation of 2014/15 HB Administration Subsidy

The meeting discussed the allocation of 2014/15 HB Administration Subsidy.

With regard to the funding for 2014/15, DWP outlined the principles and methodology for distribution; CTB weightings are excluded. The impact of the efficiency savings on the available funding makes the use of netting and capping to equalise the distribution no longer appropriate for this year.

DWP was seeking agreement on the methodology from the Steering Group, following which a submission would be put before the Minister, and once agreed a circular will be issued.

In the discussion that followed the LAAs expressed concern around the reduction for efficiency savings, referring to the letter from Lord Freud.

COSLA was concerned about the continued efficiency savings reductions in HB Admin subsidy and the detrimental impact it was having on the HB service at a time of increased pressure because of the wider welfare reforms.

The LAAs noted the impact of reduction for efficiency savings in respect of the reduction in the grant from DCLG.

The LAAs were unwilling to agree the methodology set out in the paper until they have seen the distribution from DCLG agreed at the Local Council Tax Partnership Forum, enabling them to make an informed decision. *(Note: following the meeting the DCLG distribution was issued to the LAAs with a deadline to respond to DWP by 09 October)*

An action point was taken for Steering Group members to look at both DWP and DCLG distribution figures to consider the overall impact for 2014/15, and respond to DWP by 09 October. *(Note: subsequently an ad-hoc Steering Group was convened on 16 October where a further options paper was tabled for discussion, with a recommendation which was agreed by the group.)*

DWP stated that it is everyone's interest to announce the HB Administration Subsidy for 2014/15 as soon as possible. The principles for the distribution had been agreed at July's Steering Group meeting, including the removal of all references to CTB. Steering Group members pointed out that synchronicity with DCLG was a key factor.

DWP added that schemes for England Scotland and Wales will be different from 2015/16 onwards taking into account the added complexities resulting from the UC migration, and consequently this discussion will need to commence at an earlier date.

5. AOB

Four items of AOB were brought forward:

- i) LAA asked whether there is an overall plan for Supported Exempt Accommodation. It was agreed that DWP will provide an update for November's meeting.
- ii) Whether any progress has been made on reviewing governance structures around the Steering Group and LATWG.
- iii) Whether DCLG has had any responses to their letter issued to all English LAs concerning HRA funding to top up DHPs.
- iv) With regard to the paper on LHA Targeted Affordability Funding, the LAAs pointed out that more detail is required, particularly around the models behind each option, before they can make any conclusions.

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 06 November 2013, Room 6.03 Caxton House, usual start time of 11.30.

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