



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	DWP Local Authority Associations (LAA) Steering Group
Date:	06 November 2013
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	<p>DWP: Andrew Parfitt (Chair), Clare Elliott, Bill Hern, Malcolm Mattack (Secretariat), Huw Meredith, Mel Frankham, Chris Woods, David Gleave, Jenita Chelva, Peter Haley, Yvonne Smith</p> <p>DCLG: Danielle Houghton, Clare Brunton, Hülya Mustapha</p> <p>LAAs: Sonika Sidhu, Valerie Pearce, Rose Doran, Ben Dixon, Andrew Stevens, Pat Durkin, Colin Wallbank, Matthew Evans, Nigel Minto, Howard Mason, Richard Hyslop.</p> <p>Dial – in: LAAs. Peter Meehan, Lesley Pigott. Cabinet Office Karen Cleale.</p>
Apologies:	Chris Gibbs

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 October meeting were cleared. Albeit Action Point 3 related to Administration Subsidy, for which there was an urgent update from DCLG.

DCLG advised that for the processing figures, a revised circular would be issued immediately. The figures for Wales and Scotland were correct

An action point taken for the LAAs to get a view from LA reps about whether they would like discussions re 2015/16 HB subsidy to take place at the main LAA meeting; or prefer to set up a sub-group.

3. Updates:

PSN

The meeting was given a detailed description of the current situation regarding PSN, including the number of organisations who were compliant. However, Cabinet Office

warned of the considerable difficulties faced by organisations in meeting the compliance criteria, citing historic non-compliance with GCSX, IT Health Checks, and HMG Baseline Personnel Security Standard (BPSS) checks not being carried out.

Seven organisations (all LAs) had completed transition through PSN. It was expected a further 3 would completed on 7 November. It was reported a further 281 appointments had been booked between November and March 2014.

LAAAs asked if:

- details of LAs who had successfully gone through the process could be shared in order to support and guide others through the process, to share positive messages.

DWP and PSN responded they did not feel an ad-hoc group was necessary but support should be targeted to help those who need it most. The preferred option would be to work with the small minority who needed support. The process was subject of a 'risk-register' with a Red Amber Green status marker.

There was an escalation process used to compel organisations where issues are identified to come up with realistic plans in order for service to continue. It was stressed PSN are in daily contact with LAs where there are problems.

An action point was taken for PSN to supply list of LAs who had successfully completed transition and to provide update for the next LAA Steering Group.

Universal Credit:

DWP gave a verbal update advising Universal Credit:

- A secondee from an LA has joined the Design and Build Team. It was expected the expert knowledge would help feed into planning work
- Ministers are expecting to give further detail on delivery options to include
 - migration
 - rollout and
 - transition.

In response to LAAAs' questions regarding sharing information about the options, DWP remains committed to doing so at an appropriate time. However, at this point the situation is still subject to change. The Programme deems engagement with all delivery partners as critical and will share further information when it can, at which time there will be an opportunity to understand the position and identify any associated risks from an LA perspective.

LAAAs referred to the perceived uncertainty over HB.

In reply DWP referred to the:

- letter sent by Lord Freud on 1 August 2013, which stated HB funding will be unaffected by UC in 2014-2015
- UC Ministerial update due later in the autumn.

Transition Working Group (TWG)

DWP gave an update on the latest meeting of the LA TWG that also covered:

- an explanation of the statistical analysis relating to the direct payment

Demonstration projects

- an update from the LA secondee into the design and build team
- an update on progress with the local support services framework

DCLG

DCLG confirmed that future uprating of the default scheme for LCTS would be in line with HB.

Benefit Cap

DWP advised Steering Group of the recent Judicial Review in respect of Benefit Cap. The judgment found in favour of DWP and dismissed the case on all grounds. All LAs had been notified by way of HB Urgent Bulletin 8/2013.

LAs confirmed this had been received.

Updates to LAs from Benefit Cap will follow in November, December and January 2014.

DWP drew attention to a lessons learned exercise being carried out by Benefit Cap Project Team. Members will receive a questionnaire designed to take no longer than 10 minutes.

There is scope for additional comment if Members have time. Feedback is important to the Benefit Cap Project Team and members' views valued as part of this exercise.

An action point was taken for the LGA to liaise with LA reps to see whether they would find a resource to share best practice from the implementation of Benefit Cap useful.

4. Items for Discussion

Fraud and Error Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

DWP gave a presentation covering the background to SFIS and the recommendation to introduce SFIS as a single organisation within DWP during 2014-15. DWP outlined the plans for implementation, and the changes affecting investigation and prosecution procedure.

LAs referred the meeting to letters received by LAs relating to fraud performance.

DWP was conscious of staff concerns and agreed to analyse the responses from LAs in order to address any issues arising relating to SFIS.

The recommendation for SFIS is that welfare benefit fraud investigations and prosecutions will sit within DWP but SFIS would still (where legally permitted) continue to work with LAs.

DWP went on to describe the circumstances in relation to setting up the 'new' service and the issues relating to staff.

The SFIS project is also happy to consider any additional communications.

Supported Exempt Accommodation:

The Group had sought a discussion on this topic.

DWP reviewed events in the development of reform so far, including the 2011 Consultation, the announcement in September 2012 by ministers of the long term aim of a localised solution, and a short term response to the unintended effects of other housing benefit reforms. Lord Freud had issued a letter to the sector in April 2013 acknowledging the need to address the sector's concern over provision that was not formally "exempt" but operated under similar conditions. The sector was complex and

covered a wide range of working age client groups.

There was a shortage of reliable data about local authorities' current expenditure and designation of "exempt" accommodation. DWP made an appeal to Steering Group to ask colleagues to improve the quality of SHBE returns.

DWP expected consultation to resume with stakeholders from the sector, including local authorities and devolved administrations, in the first half of 2014.

LAA's asked if SHBE was the right way to collate data. DWP pointed out that collection of the basic data through SHBE remained the most pressing requirement.

5. AOB

Items of AOB brought forward:

DWP asked in order to proceed with next year's Admin Subsidy if LAA's wanted to set up a sub-group to make recommendations to Steering Group or whether the discussions should take place within the Steering Group. LAA's said they would consult with members and report back.

There being no other items for discussion the Meeting was closed at 13:30 hours.

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be:

Wednesday 4th December 2013, Room 6.03 Caxton House

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