



# Summary Minutes

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	DWP Local Authority Associations (LAA) Steering Group
<b>Date:</b>	05 March 2014
<b>Location:</b>	Caxton House Room 6.03
<b>Attendees:</b>	<p><b>DWP:</b> Andrew Parfitt (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Bill Hern, Huw Meredith, Mel Frankham, Dean Blower, Malcolm Nicholls, Manny Ibiayo, Chris Kearney, Ratnam Maheswaran, Richard Grennan, Barry Cassels, Peter Haley, Dave Jones, Darrell Smith, David Mckenlay, Chris Franks</p> <p>Observer: Robert McLaren</p> <p><b>DCLG:</b> Margaret Uhure, Leon Bond, Nick Burkitt</p> <p><b>LAAs:</b> Laura Caton, Ben Dixon, Lesley Pigott, David Graaff, Pat Durkin, Howard Mason, Matthew Evans, Howard Mason</p> <p>Dial – in: Peter Meehan, John Rosenbloom, Andrew Stevens, Steve Carey</p>
<b>Apologies:</b>	Colin Wallbank Valerie Pearce, John Swinnerton, Rose Doran, Chris Gibbs

## 1. Welcome and Introductions:

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

### Matters Arising

#### Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

#### Action Points

DWP updated the meeting on the latest position regarding PSN in respect of Baseline Personnel Security Standard, agreeing to issue the latest Cabinet Office guidance which has been issued to LA IT teams. Steering Group members pointed out that it would be helpful if such guidance could in future be issued to Revenues and Benefits managers.

LAAs referred the meeting an item of correspondence concerning the Autumn Statement, and the intention to cap the Welfare Budget, which includes HB, from 2015/16. It was agreed that this should be a substantive item for discussion for the April meeting.

LAAAs asked about working groups for subsidy. DWP explained that the Oversight working is mainly an internal group looking at all funding streams for LAs, with external bodies such as LAs to be invited when appropriate. DWP added that the intention is to set up a working group with LA representation to work through the subsidy arrangements for 2015.

### **3. Updates:**

#### **Universal Credit (UC)/Transition Working Group (TWG)**

##### **UC**

##### **TWG**

DWP highlighted some of the key items discussed at the recent TWG meeting.

Transition and Migration:

- the focus is on delivering the plan outlined in the Ministers' statement, looking particularly at the end state and impacts on LAs
- a small working group with 6 of the LAs represented on TWG has been set up, and a 'deep dive' workshop has taken place
- this workshop identified issues such as data sharing, the amended timeline, availability of resources and automation amongst others. Initial findings were discussed at TWG.

LA Led Pilots

- DWP is aiming to publish a refreshed Question and Answer (QA) document around the end of March
- formal evaluation is taking place and with the aim of publication in the summer.

Local Support Services Framework (LSSF)/Draft UC Transitional Amendment Regs 2014

- the meeting was updated on the latest position regarding LSSF and current work on developing the UC Transitional Amendment Regulations.

DWP added that partnership and funding arrangements in the live service sites are being considered closely to ensure that appropriate elements can be taken forward into expansion to the north west of England.

##### **DCLG**

The LAAAs asked whether there had been any progress on laying the amended Prescribed Requirements regulations, pointing out that at this time LAs have begun the process for annual billing.

DCLG explained that the regulations were in the process of being laid, but would need

to confirm the exact date. They agreed to feed back the LAAs' concerns to colleagues.

An action point was taken for DCLG to refer LAA concerns concerning the timetable for the Amending Regulations to colleagues.

*[Note; subsequent to the meeting, the regulations were laid on 5 March.]*

### **Fraud and Error Single Investigation Service (SFIS)**

DWP set out the latest position in respect of SFIS.

Staffing:

- the project has written to all LA Chief Executives, sharing a copy with the Steering Group. Steering Group members were disappointed that they had not been sighted on the letter prior its issue
- staff will be transferred under Section 38 of the Employment Relations Act 1999

The LAAs pointed out the implications for HR. DWP explained that it is hoped that the letter will address these concerns, along with additional engagement taking place with LA associations.

Implementation:

- phase 1 will commence in summer 2014 with a number of pilot sites & 2 new ones, followed by an evaluation process
- phase 2 will run from October 2014 – March 2016
- a series of road shows covering England, Scotland and Wales are planned to run from late March to May 2014. LA will be invited to send delegates.

Governance:

- SFIS has set up a Project Steering Committee, but will also continue its engagement with Security Operations Group (SOG) and the Steering Group.

Additional Funding:

- DWP has agreed a funding package to support the continued delivery of corporate fraud in LAs once SFIS is implemented
- the allocation of this funding will be agreed by DCLG and the Devolved Administrations.

The meeting discussed issues around Local Government Funding for 2014 and beyond. In the discussion LAAs raised the following key concerns around reductions for 2015/16:

- they were disappointed at the level of consultation on the reductions in their grant from 2015/16
- the reductions do not appear to take the continuing requirement for LAs to investigate LCTS fraud

- they disagreed in principle to DWP clawing back money from each council's central funding (Revenue Support Grant)
- there are issues around efficiency savings
- the reductions are based on staff costs, however LAs are funded by caseload
- the reductions could impact on performance levels

The LAAs agreed to provide a formal response to the SFIS programme.

#### **4. New Burdens Funding 2014/15**

DWP introduced the draft circular on additional funding to help LAs meet the costs of implementing the changes to welfare reform in 2014/15. DWP explained that the aim was to distribute the funding as early as possible in the new financial year. DWP went on to explain that the circular sets out the overall funding broken down into component parts, i.e.

- The area of activity.
- The basis for distribution.
- The amount to be allocated to each activity.

The substantive addition was related to the administration of the unintentional RSRS exemption discovered at the start of the year.

DWP explained the methodology for the new burdens costing. Administration of the loophole will affect LAs differently but that the estimate is based on some expected activities which include work required to identify affected cases, costs for contact letters, complex reassessments, communicating decisions and subsequent appeals.

The LAAs questioned DWP's assumptions on the number of affected cases and also the impact on DHPs, DWP confirmed that the costs were based on a conservative estimate of the number of cases that would require some examination, and were not based on any estimate of the final number of affected claimants.

The LAAs agreed to submit any comments on the draft circular by 14 March 2014.

#### **5. Credit Union Expansion Project**

DWP explained that at a recent meeting the LGA representative had advised that the Steering Group should be sighted on the objectives of this project.

DWP set out the background and rationale for modernising and expanding Credit Unions.

The Steering Group were content with the approach taken by DWP...

#### **6. Funding for Local Welfare Provision**

DCLG and DWP updated the meeting on the current position regarding funding for local welfare provision.

When Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants were ended, funding was transferred to LAs in England and the Devolved Administrations for 2013/14 and 2014/15. Any funding for 2015 onwards was the subject of the recent spending review.

Funding will be drawn from general funds.

In line with previous Ministerial commitments a review will be carried out in 2014/15. DWP is currently working with DCLG and the LGA to develop this.

The LAAs pointed out that there is a need for unambiguous communications to LAs.

## **7. Draft UC Transition Regulations**

DWP explained that the timing for these regulations has been governed by the expansion of UC. For example, the gateway criteria contained in the pathfinder regulations will need to be removed and in future, will need to be specified in Commencement Orders.

DWP added that the UC Transition Regulations were put before the Transition Working Group.

The LAAs advised that formal consultation would be appropriate in this case.

*[Note; subsequent to the meeting, formal consultation letters were issued to LGA, Welsh LGA, COSLA and London Councils on 07 March. The date for responses is 17April.]*

## **8. Supported Accommodation**

In discussion it emerged that some members who represented LAAs for statutory consultation purposes had not received the letter sent to them on 14 February in respect of amending regulations about supported housing. DWP apologised for this. The letters had been issued to some email addresses that turned out to be incorrect.

*[Note: subsequent to the meeting, the consultation letters and amending regulations were issued to the LAAs on 06 March.]*

DWP explained that consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee would take place in the afternoon following this meeting.

*[Note: SSAC informed the Department on 11 March that it decided not to seek formal referral of the draft regulations]*

DWP gave the background for these amending regulations which provide further protection from the benefit cap and from Universal Credit's monthly payment cycle for claimants living in certain types of supported housing that do not satisfy the currently used definition of "exempt accommodation".

The new definition of "specified' accommodation" includes supported housing, where

support and housing are not the responsibility of the same provider, refuges and local authority “hostels” providing care and support, bringing into line the objectives set out in the letter of April 2013 from Lord Freud to the Supported Accommodation sector.

## 9. AOB

No items of AOB were brought forward for discussion.

**Date of Next Meeting** The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 09 April 2014, Room 5.21/22 Caxton House. [***Note: This meeting was subsequently cancelled as a ‘round the table’ meeting and items to be cleared by correspondence; the next ‘round the table’ meeting will take place on Wednesday 07 May Caxton House starting at 11.30***]

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