

Practitioners Operational Group (POG)
Wednesday 23 January 2013
Caxton House

Summary Minutes

Attendees:

Lesley Pigott	Camden
Pam Richardson	Gateshead
June Deans	Glasgow
GwynThomas	Westminster
Alan Sinclair	Edinburgh
Paul Ellery	Kensington & Chelsea
Martin O'Neill	Birmingham (Dial in)
Peter Haley	DWP Housing Policy Division (HPD) Chair
Alan Sullivan	DWP HDD
Rob O'Carroll	DWP PIP
Tressy Wojtowicz	DWP PIP
John Isaac	DWP HPD
Karen Buckley	DWP HDD (Dial in)
Ruth White	DWP Information and Data Services (Dial in)
Mont Goldman	DWP Housing Delivery Division (HDD) Minutes

Apologies:

Jane McManus, Mark Underwood, Frankie Cartwright, Marion Smith, Alison McGrory, Mark Gillmore, Paula Holland, Karl Thomas and Jane Thomas.

1. Minutes/Action Points/Matters Arising

Peter Haley opened the meeting.

Introductions were made round the table, and for those dialling in.

Minutes:

The minutes for the previous meeting were agreed.

December Action Points:

Mont Goldman updated the meeting on the December action points.

The action points were cleared.

2. Zambrano Rights

DWP introduced the background, and explained that following the judgement in 2012, DWP, DCLG, HMRC and Home Office amended regulations

prescribing access to benefits and other rights. DWP has not issued any specific guidance for LAs as the subject matter is rather narrow.

DWP asked POG for its views on whether any guidance for LAs was needed. POG members said that guidance would be welcome. The guidance should provide:

- A summary of the judgement.
- Some detail on the case itself, and any implications.
- Any changes made to regulations, particularly HB regulations.

DWP noted POG's comments adding that a circular will be issued.

3. Data Matching Scans

DWP explained that Information & Data Services Division (IDSD) has started to receive a number of work requests from individual LAs requesting data-matching or scans to enable them to carry out activities relating to some element of welfare reform. The volume of requests was becoming an issue, as resources were stretched.

DWP suggested a more co-ordinated and joined up approach to enable Information & Data Services to prioritise such requests.

POG members were uncertain whether a need existed for Individual LAs to make requests for data matching and scans and that any generic requirement should be highlighted through the LAA Steering Group. They suggested that this item be kept as a 'watching brief' and that if IDSD continued to receive ad hoc requests then it would be helpful to see a summary list of the request types and the LAs requesting them, and if appropriate this could be discussed at either the February or March POG meeting.

It was also suggested that DWP should contact Rose Doran, the LGA lead for LA liaison.

4. Benefit Cap

DWP updated the meeting, on the phased roll out announcement in December 2012:

- On 19 December the announcement was made that there will be a phased rollout commencing in April 2013 with 4 London LAs.
- Jobcentre Plus District Managers contacted the 4 Chief Executives.
- The Benefit Cap project contacted the Revenues and Benefits Managers and issued letters to the 4 Chief Executives and to the remainder of LAs.
- A General Information Bulletin was issued on 21 December.

DWP added that significant discussions with the 4 LAs are ongoing and that they have been given access to senior DWP officials. It is an advantage that

the 4 LAs feed into one Jobcentre Plus Benefit Centre, (Stratford) as this will ensure ease of support and control.

A meeting with the four LAs as a collective is scheduled for 25 January, and now all 4 LAs are represented on the POG sub-group.

National Phased roll out of the cap is due to start in the summer with all stock claims capped by the end of September 2013. DWP will provide more detail on the implementation plan next month.

DWP will consider any additional requests from the 4 LAs for additional funding relating to costs that arise specifically from early implementation.

With regard to Dual claims, DWP explained that a paper has been presented to the Benefit Cap Project Board.

DWP added that a circular clarifying this issue will be issued to LAs.

Referring to LA IT, DWP explained that no changes would be required to the IT plans for the 4 LAs as they were still delivering to the same timescale.

A discussion followed, focussed on the rollout to the remainder of LAs. DWP suggested that national roll out would be big bang from the summer 13 with all the stock caseload capped by the end of September 13. POG raised concerns about this approach, and strongly recommended that rollout should be by LA, and that each LA's Benefit Cap caseload should be completed before they are sent across. DWP agreed to put the case made by POG to the Project.

5. PIP

Following discussions at previous meetings, DWP led the meeting through a set of slides highlighting:

Background:

- Disability Living Allowance (DLA) will be replaced with a new benefit called Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for people who are aged 16 to 64 on or after 8 April 2013. PIP will be introduced on a gradual basis, from 08 April 2013.
- DWP is reforming Disability Living Allowance to make it fairer, more transparent and sustainable.
 - DWP is introducing a more objective assessment under PIP, with a face-to-face consultation for most people
 - Most awards under PIP will be for a fixed term period, except where that would be inappropriate – awards will be reviewed regularly
- In designing the assessment for PIP, and the entitlements it will bring, the existing passporting arrangements (under DLA) have been taken into account and maintained wherever possible.

- DWP has published details on how the main passports provided by other Government Departments will work.

Documents Published on 13 December:

- The responses to 2 major consultations will inform the affirmative regulations.
- The technical note placed on the website shows a slower reassessment timetable for DLA recipients than had been originally proposed; the vast majority of DLA claimants will be invited to claim Pip from October 2015.
- The high level outline of the approach to evaluation sets out proposals
- DWP is committed to commissioning and publishing two independent reviews of the operation of the assessment for PIP – DWP intends to complete the first review by the end of 2014, to allow for any required changes to be implemented by October 2015.

Reassessment Strategy – Revised Plan:

- From 08 April 2013 new claims to PIP will be taken in the North West and part of the North East of England. This is intended to test the IT and business processes.
- From 10 June 2013 new claims to PIP will be extended to all remaining areas of GB.
- From 07 October 2013 reassessment will start with a phased approach which is a more gradual introduction.
- From October 2015 all remaining DLA recipients will be invited to make a claim for PIP.

Passporting:

- There is a commitment to minimise any changes to current arrangements.

PIP and ATLAS:

- First test files are planned for week commencing 28 January for Initial validation. Joint Integration testing for data transfer will commence 08 February. LA IT suppliers raised no questions at the recent Software Suppliers Forum.

Communication and Engagement; Approach and Practice:

Approach:

- The slide set out the main objectives for stakeholder engagement and Direct and secondary claimant contact, and how these are interlinked.

Practice:

- The slides set out the types of communication and their intended recipients, as well as a detailed outline for messaging by age groups.

Supporting PIP go - live April 2013:

- For stakeholder engagement, core products have been developed outlining PIP in its stages of implementation. These include;
 - Claimant journey.
 - Quick guides and presentations aimed at LAs for which POG agreed to assist in their development.

Additional Planned Activity:

- Between February and March the annual benefit rate letter containing information on PIP will be issued to existing DLA claimants.
- The PIP support organisation toolkit will be issued.
- An e-mail will be issued to secondary contact organisations, including LAs and other government departments, asking them to secure support and signpost to the tools available.
- LA guidance will be issued to LAs by May 2013. POG will be given sight of the draft.

PIP Toolkit:

- The toolkit will comprise of factsheets, editorial content, including information specific to LAs and tools such as quick guides and leaflets.
- Drafts of specific information for LAs will be passed to POG for their comments.

Written updates of progress against milestones will be produced for the Steering Group.

Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP)

DWP introduced the background to AFIP, explaining that:

- The purpose of AFIP is to ensure that severely injured service and ex service personnel are protected
- AFIP will be launched in April 2013, and will be available to those entitled to a 50% Guaranteed Income Payment under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme

- The MOD will be contacting all eligible veterans prior to April 2013.
- The MOD will introduce legislation for AFIP in an amendment to the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme order.
- The MOD will take the new claim and determine eligibility.
- The claim will be administered by DWP for payment and ongoing claim maintenance.
- Eligible individuals will have a choice to claim either AFIP or PIP.
- Passporting arrangements will be the same as for PIP.

DWP explained that at its commencement, AFIP will be a clerical solution, with low volumes anticipated, adding that a scan of stock cases indicated approximately 700 customers with potential entitlement.

There will be a need to notify LAs of any award of AFIP.

POG members pointed out that each LA has a named GCSX contact for dealing with the Benefit Cap and recommended that AFIP should liaise with the Benefit Cap project for the list.

POG members raised the following queries, taken as action points:

- DWP was asked to clarify uprating arrangements, and which part of Veterans Agency will be handling uprating.
- DWP was asked to clarify whether AFIP will be under the umbrella of War Pensions due to passporting rights.
- DWP was asked to clarify the legislative status of AFIP in relation to HB.

6. AOB

Supported Exempt Accommodation

POG members raised an issue around the definition of supported exempt accommodation in respect of exemptions from the Benefit Cap or social sector size criteria.

POG members also raised a supplementary question in respect of the exclusion of LA temporary accommodation from the exemption to the benefit cap and social sector size criteria.

DWP pointed out that the Steering Group and the Temporary Accommodation sub group were more appropriate forums to take this forward.

Payment Deduction Programme

In response to the message sent to POG by the Payment Deduction Programme, POG members are content with the current level of LA representation.

7. Date of Next Meeting

The next scheduled meeting of POG is Wednesday 20 February 2013 at Caxton House.