



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	POG
Date:	27 March 2013
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	DWP: Geoff Scammell (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Brian Brighthouse, Dean Blower, Alan Sullivan, Gregg Harrison LAAs: June Deans, Alan Sinclair, Matthew Evans (Dial in), Martin O'Neill, Gwyn Thomas, Pamela Richardson Devolved Administrations:
Apologies:	Lesley Pigott, Karl Thomas (Wales), Paul Ellery, Mark Gillmore, Frankie Cartwright, Alison McGrory, Jane McManus, Mark Underwood

1. **Welcome and Introductions:**

Geoff Scammell 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

Mont Goldman updated the meeting on the action points from the February meeting.

3. **Burnip Tengrove and Gorry**

DWP updated the meeting following the court decision last year, explaining that in the cases of Burnip and Tengrove, HB regulations had been amended. In relation to the decision on Gorry, DWP had considered appealing the decision; this is no longer the case and Urgent Bulletin U2 2013 was issued on 12/03/2013. The Bulletin set out where suspensions should be lifted and arrears paid.

DWP went on to say that no details on volumes were available but it was anticipated

that a limited number cases would meet the tests set out in the guidance.

POG members pointed out that whilst until now the numbers had been negligible, this is likely to change with the removal of subsidy for spare bedrooms in the social sector, with LAs being required to gather evidence in a greater number of cases. In this respect LAs would need clearer guidance on discretion around the complexities of the nature and levels of disabilities.

DWP agreed that clear guidance was needed on what LAs should look for, for example medical evidence. This would inevitably involve LA discretion and the treatment of each case on its merits.

DWP explained that it was collecting evidence of the implementation of the reforms, and that this could include the extent to which local authorities were dealing with cases of these types, and the administrative impact. DWP would be considering what further guidance is required alongside the necessary regulatory changes.

POG members pointed out that the removal of the spare room subsidy could create a surge in applications for additional DHPs and the associated administrative costs. DWP explained that a draft circular on additional funding for LAs to deal with DHP applications amongst other things would be presented to the April Steering Group for discussion.

POG members added that there are Judicial Reviews awaiting decisions.

DWP confirmed that at present, a local authority can only consider an additional bedroom where severely disabled children are required to share a bedroom.

4. Benefit Cap

DWP updated the meeting on the Benefit Cap, topics covered included:

- Data scans sent to LAs.
- Letters issued to claimants.
- DWP administration and checking procedures.
- IT Testing.
- Special Customer Records.
- Breaks in claim.
- Dual HB claims in different LAs.
- Supported Exempt Accommodation.
- Phased and national rollout.
- Additional Burdens.
- Guidance.

With regard to national rollout, DWP explained that an options paper will be presented to the April Steering Group for discussion.

POG members reiterated their preference for a “big bang” approach and asked to see the options paper.

POG members added that high volumes of Temporary Accommodation cases where the LA is the landlord could have a significant impact on DHP budgets.

5. Non Dependant Deductions

DWP explained that this topic had been discussed at the March Steering Group and referred to POG for further discussion.

POG members raised a technical issue around the current treatment of non dependants, and how they will be treated under UC. POG members explained that LAs will require a breakdown for non dependants and questioned whether LAs would have access to information regarding non earned income.

An action point was taken as POG members asked whether they could see any sample UC notifications for the next meeting.

6. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

DWP explained that the correspondence between POG and DWP referred to at the March meeting had taken place, with a satisfactory outcome.

The MoU has been quality assured through POG and will be issued shortly.

[Note: subsequent to meeting, the MoU was issued on 02 April].

The MoU includes access to CIS for Localised Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Local Welfare Provision, as well as HB. It retains references to CTB in case of any residual casework.

With regard to capacity issues, DWP explained that CIS was now on 2 servers, and that each LA could register up to five staff and that if more were needed the LA should write to the Local Welfare Provision project. Work is ongoing for access to DHP, subject to legal advice.

POG members expressed concern that the Project for Local Welfare Provision had issued guidance on how to register users on EAS for Local Welfare Provision without reference to POG.

7. AOB

APOLLO

DWP referred POG to the paper issued prior to the meeting.

The purpose of the APOLLO LA CIS Register is to help the ease of access for DWP staff to LA data, for example it has been agreed that UC staff will only speak to LA staff included on the register.

DWP asked whether POG endorsed the recommendation set out in the paper for adding for adding LA staff to the existing register.

POG were content with the principles set out in the paper.

The meeting discussed how best to include individual LAs in the process.

ATLAS

DWP updated the meeting on the ATLAS CIS Interest Refresh.

DWP explained what the refresh will achieve in respect of how SHBE returns can be used in conjunction with CIS “intelligent” scans.

DWP set out the options presented by CIS colleagues to take this forward.

PIP

DWP referred POG to a request for assurance from the PIP implementation team regarding readiness for go live. POG pointed out that as none the LAs in Northwest corridor were represented at this forum, they could not give any assurance, and recommended that the LAs concerned should be canvassed individually.

POG members queried an anomaly between PIP and DLA, around the loss of the higher rate premium in DLA when a claimant is hospitalised for 4 weeks.

An action point was taken for DWP to seek clarification on an anomaly between PIP and DLA, around the loss of the higher rate premium in DLA when a claimant is hospitalised for 4 weeks, which is not replicated in PIP.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of POG will take place on Wednesday April 24th at 10.30am at Caxton House. This meeting was subsequently cancelled.

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