



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	Practitioner Operations Group (POG)
Date:	17 July 2013
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	<p>DWP: Geoff Scammell (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Julie Willoughby, Fiona Mcleish (Dial-in) Veronica Hinds (Observer)</p> <p>LAAs: June Deans, Paul Ellery, Helen Paine(for Pam Richardson), Mark Gillmore Gwyn Thomas, Dial-in: Lesley Pigott, Matthew Evans, Martin O'Neill</p> <p>Devolved Administrations: Karl Thomas (Wales)</p>
Apologies:	Jane McManus, Alan Sinclair, Mark Underwood, Colin Wallbank, Alison McGrory

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 May's meeting were cleared.

3. DWP Information/APOLLO

In response to a query from POG members at May's meeting, DWP explained the current position for LAs seeking benefit information from DWP when that information is not available on Customer Information System (CIS). DWP explained that the APOLLO list held by DWP staff contains the names of all of the staff in LAs who have the right to obtain DWP benefit information without the need for consent. The process in place to obtain the relevant information is for the person in a LA who is on the list to contact the appropriate DWP office by phone. DWP added that instructions have been issued to

DWP staff to include providing information for local welfare provision, Blue Badge and Fairer Charging.

4. Benefit Cap

DWP updated the meeting.

Phase 1

- The last meeting of the Directors' group took place 2 weeks ago. Consequently any issues the 4 phased rollout LAs wish to raise should be brought to POG as national implementation has commenced.

National Implementation:

- The national rollout of the benefit cap commenced on Monday 15 July and capping is proceeding as planned.
- The project has issued letters to all LA Chief Executives.
- The IT is working well with no reported problems, and numbers to be capped will gradually increase.
- Tranche 2 is likely to start in week commencing 12 August with 40 LAs, 20 of which will be in London.
- POG should now be the forum at which change requests are considered. For example there is potential for automating change of circumstances (done without LA intervention) and the project is currently talking to software suppliers about feasibility and will then go through POG. This was discussed at the last Directors' group two weeks ago.

DWP LA National Implementation Planning Events

- Nine events have taken place across the country with representation from 249 LAs.
- The events covered benefit cap design and the end to end process, and included presentations from the 4 phased LAs and Jobcentre Plus.
- The evaluation has shown that LAs found the presentations helpful, along with the opportunity afforded for networking.
- DWP Single Points of Contact (SPOC) have been established and are taking part in weekly teleconferences with their LAs.

DWP informed POG of the products available on the website, including Core Narrative, FAQs, Fact sheets, general Bulletins. A factsheet for claimants will be added once it is signed off.

The project intended to e-mail Revs & Bens managers to gather some feedback on how useful the products have been and sought POG's agreement on this course of action. POG were content with this process.

There were two statistics releases on 3rd July:

- Pre-national implementation statistics April - May on phased roll out households.
- Data on JCP activity regarding claimants who have been identified as potentially impacted by the Benefit Cap.

Discussion followed and POG members raised the following points:

- A number of enquiries have been received around Working Tax Credits (WTC), and in particular, around exemptions for persons in a household in receipt of WTC.

An action point was taken for DWP to provide further clarification around exemptions from the cap.

- With automation ceasing after the ATLAS process, to be followed by a process involving email, whether there was any scope for further automation.
- The need for a claimant who has been capped and then has a further child to report this as a change of circumstance in the normal way.

Information Gather

DWP explained that following consultation through POG, a light touch approach had been agreed. Ten LAs will be initially supplying the information.

POG members pointed out that more clarification was needed around recording the award of DHPs. They added that in their responses to the consultation they had pointed out the difficulties which some LAs would face in completing the returns. They added that some LAs are experiencing issues around co-location.

DWP said that each LA would be contacted individually about their respective comments.

DWP pointed out that co-location had been one of the key factors for success in the 4 lead boroughs, and that one of the LAs had extended their hub to increase co-location.. Feedback from the 4 lead authorities had been positive..

5. AOB

POG members wanted to know if there was any further update on proposed changes for definitions for Supported Exempt Accommodation, especially for LA Owned properties. DWP explained that work on this is ongoing with stakeholders including DCLG, and is tied into the work being carried by SITRA. It is important to understand the totality of supported accommodation in order to protect levels of funding.

POG members added that multi agency meetings are taking place in Birmingham and that outcomes could be passed to DWP.

DWP informed the meeting that UC Transitional HB regulations will come into force in October 2013. Once drafted they will be subject to normal consultation including SSAC.

6. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of POG will take place on Wednesday August 21st, 10.30 – 12.30, Caxton House room 6.03. [**Note: This meeting was subsequently cancelled, along with the meeting scheduled for September, as a 'round the table' meeting, and items to be cleared by correspondence; the next 'round the table' meeting will take place on Wednesday 23 October 2013 Room 6.03 Caxton House starting at 11.30]**

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