



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	Practitioner Operations Group (POG)
Date:	20 November 2013
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	<p>DWP: Geoff Scammell (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Duramani Karim, Chris Kearney, Amit Soule, Carol Martin, Sylvia Haslehurst (Dial-in) Alexander Suswillo, (Dial-in), Dean Blower, Ursula Brennan</p> <p>LAAs: June Deans, Matthew Evans, Gwyn Thomas, Mark Gillmore, Frankie Cartwright</p> <p>Dial-in: Martin O'Neill, Lesley Pigott, Pam Richardson</p>
Apologies:	Jane McManus, Alan Sinclair, Mark Underwood, Colin Wallbank, Alison McGrory, Paul Ellery, Karl Thomas
1. Welcome and Introductions:	<p>DWP opened the meeting and introductions were made round the table and for those dialing in.</p>
2. Matters Arising	<p>Minutes</p> <p>The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.</p> <p>Action Points</p> <p>The action points from October's meeting were cleared.</p> <p>The LADs team had provided a full response to the query concerning ETDs and retrospective periods where a sanction has been applied, and DWP agreed to circulate the up to date contingency arrangements in respect of PSN</p> <p>POG members asked whether DWP could give a response to the issue raised under AOB at October's meeting around challenges received from welfare rights organisations on notifications for the benefit cap which contain no right to appeal. DWP explained that the matter was under consideration and a response would be issued.</p>
3. PSN Update	<p>DWP updated the meeting on the number of LAs that have achieved compliancy.</p>

Migration

- 410 LAs and County Councils Delivery will need to be migrated; 10 have been successfully migrated thus far.
- The Migration Plan is owned by Cabinet Office and supported by DWP.
- Migration will continue through December with a significant ramp-up between January and March.
- Meetings with Cabinet Office are ongoing.

In response to an issue raised by POG around access to Customer Information System (CIS), DWP explained that it is not related to CIS capacity or PSN infrastructure. The incidents are live and ongoing and seem to relate to LAs that have made changes to their configurations as a part of the PSN compliance process. DWP confirmed that once the incidents have been resolved the learning will be shared with POG.

4. DHP Reporting

POG members had requested this item for discussion, particularly around whether LAs should be reporting on the actual amount spent or the amount committed to spend.

DWP explained that it has asked for the amount committed to spend as this gives a clearer indication of the levels of demand, which will inform thinking around future allocations.

In response to concerns raised by POG around how auditors will regard this, DWP pointed out that the monitoring of DHPs under discussion would be treated separately from any accounting relating to subsidy.

The discussion focused on the technical issues around completion of the monitoring spreadsheets for the first quarter. Some LAs had experienced software problems recording the committed spend as the software was configured to produce actual spend amounts only. Some LAs were completing the spreadsheets manually,

POG members suggested that an item could be placed in a General Bulletin explaining that this monitoring relates to general budgeting information.

POG pointed out that more detailed guidance would be needed for the monitoring information required for the next quarter. It was agreed that the draft circular will be issued to POG for their comments.

DWP asked for POG's views on which would be easier for LAs to report on, committed or actual spend. POG pointed out that there are differences in how LAs award DHPs and consequently some guidance would be helpful. They added that for consistency, reporting actual spend over a six month period would be more straightforward.

POG asked whether there was any information on the DHP allocation for next year. DWP said that information should be available in early January.

Additional DHP Funding

DWP informed the meeting that 12 bids for the additional DHP funding have been

received and processing is underway. The closing date for bids is 03/02/2014.

5. Housing Benefit Amendments: Transition from DLA to PIP

DWP explained that that in respect of the transition from DLA to PIP, two issues have been identified which affect the effective dates for people transferring from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payment (PIP), and which will require amendments to the Housing Benefit regulations.

The first issue impacts on the award of premiums and comes into effect when transition occurs at the same time as a change in circumstances, for example uprating or a declared increase in rent.

The second issue concerns PIP claimants who are hospitalised. PIP continues to be paid for four weeks. To shadow this, the HB child care disregard qualifying conditions as well as the qualifying conditions for various premiums refer to PIP while a person is in hospital.

DWP went on to say that the amendments will mirror those when ESA was introduced and are aimed at protecting premiums and ensuring a seamless transition from DLA to PIP.

DWP pointed out that these amendments are part of a wider package of regulations and need to be in place by the end of March 2014. Consultation letters will be issued shortly, giving POG an opportunity to submit comments by 13 January 2014. DWP confirmed that the software suppliers are aware of these issues and that a formal letter will be issued to them.

6. UC Rent Data Sharing

The purpose of the presentation was to open a discussion seeking POG's views as a part of a wider stakeholder engagement plan.

The presentation set out:

- An overview of UC.
- Key areas to focus on, such as the requirement for proportionality when sharing data, and the legal basis for information sharing
- Data sharing maps illustrating possible data sharing touchpoints between claimants, DWP and landlords and vice – versa, showing examples such as Alternative Payment Arrangements (APA)...
- Some key questions around data sharing.

DWP explained that an internal assessment is planned for completion by early 2014.

DWP added that areas where DWP has the ability to share information, and where regulations will need amending will need to be identified.

POG members asked about automation of information from landlords in respect of UC and issues around rent increases. DWP explained that legislation will need to be amended so that information can be stored in a secure location, and that options are currently under consideration.

POG members pointed out that the larger Housing Associations have different systems and that funding for IT costs could become an issue.

POG members suggested that the “HB Safeguarding” measures used by LAs could be examined to see what works well.

DWP explained that all options are being considered within financial and legal constraints.

In summary, clarity is necessary to determine landlord requirements and what information DWP will need to pass to landlords.

7. Housing Support for Pensioners

DWP informed the meeting of the consequential impact on the planned reforms to Pension Credit of bringing forward the reforms to state pensions. DWP acknowledged the consequences for LAs in respect of delivery to pensioners.

POG was disappointed that this had not been mentioned at November’s Steering Group, adding that strong messaging will be needed and referred to medium to long term situations where a claimant in receipt of UC reaches pension age.

DWP pointed out the need to work through the consequences together.

8. AOB

POG referred the meeting to the circular concerning changes to the size criteria rules for disabled children. They queried the guidance particularly where LAs had awarded an extra room for a disabled child prior to the court judgment which triggered the change in regulations.

An action point was taken for DWP to check and clarify the guidance, if required, on awards of an extra room for disabled children prior to the court judgment which triggered the change in regulations.

POG members pointed out some of the issues facing LA staff around gathering and verifying evidence of disability from claimants.

An action point was taken for DWP to check and clarify the guidance, if required, on gathering and verifying evidence of disability from claimants.

Date of Next Meeting

The next POG will take place on 11 December Caxton House Room 6.03. 10.30 – 12.30 [**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 29 January 2014 Room 6.03 Caxton House starting at 11.30]**

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