



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	Practitioner Operations Group (POG)
Date:	26 March 2014
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	<p>DWP: Geoff Scammell (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Peter Haley, Darrell Smith, Fiona Bolam, Fiona Mcleish, Kay Wilkinson, Tom Stewart Dial in Beverley Winnemore, Paddy Wild, Martin Little</p> <p>LAAs: Paul Ellery, Gwyn Thomas, Pamela Richardson, Frankie Cartwright, Julian Stanbury Dial-in: June Deans, Matthew Evans, Martin O'Neill</p>
Apologies:	Jane McManus, Alan Sinclair, Mark Underwood, Colin Wallbank, Alison McGrory, Karl Thomas, Mark Gilmore
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>Updates on the action points from January's meeting had been issued as correspondence in February.</p> <p>DWP agreed to refer POG's request for general guidance around First Tier Tribunal responses on issues such as Size Restriction and Benefit Cap to colleagues in Decision Making and Appeals for a response.</p>
3. Data Exchange for Universal Credit (UC) and Supported Accommodation	<p>DWP introduced the topic. The LAA Steering Group at its meeting on 5 March had remitted to POG discussion on the information exchange mechanism for supported accommodation.</p> <p>DWP explained that regulations protecting supported accommodation, and widening</p>

some of the definitions come into force for Housing Benefit on 10 April 2014 and for UC on 03 November 2014. Under UC, there is a hybrid arrangement for paying housing costs through Housing Benefit and that there is a requirement for LAs and UC to keep each other informed of the types of accommodation, from 03 November, under the Specified Accommodation regulations..

To this end DWP proposed establishing a small working group to look at the data exchange mechanism. DWP sought offers from POG members to join the group that would also include members of the UC design team.

DWP pointed out that a data exchange mechanism between LAs and UC was already in place for the pathfinders, and that consistency of design would be a key issue. Expansion of UC pathfinders was on a controlled basis. The data exchange mechanism would need to be known by the end of spring, and in place by August 2014; consequently a timetable of meetings will need to be arranged within the next two weeks.

DWP added that the working group would explore the day to day practicalities and will also help to develop a greater understanding of the types of properties involved.

POG members were agreed in principle to joining the working group and it was agreed that they could recommend colleagues with pertinent expertise. It was also agreed that members of the Transition Working Group should be invited to join this working group.

Perceived Abuse of Supported Accommodation Rules

POG asked whether there had been any further developments around abusive and collusive arrangements involving Supported Accommodation.

DWP explained that questions around this issue had been included in the recent Insight Survey and that there had been a roundtable discussion with a number of LA HB teams affected by contrived claims. Discussions with LAs had been helpful in understanding the problems they faced.

DWP intended to carry out more work with LAs that had responded to the Insight Survey and also to tease out some further information from those LAs that had not fully responded.

4. Claimant Commitment and My Work Plan for U 18s

DWP explained that this initiative is concerned with ensuring that claimants take greater responsibility for themselves, and the products have been successfully trialed. DWP explained that there was a need to introduce this for claimants under 18. POG's views were sought on the appropriateness of the questions set out in the forms for completion by claimants under 18.

POG asked for clarification around sanctions and whether HB would be stopped as well as JSA.

DWP confirmed that in such cases it is only JSA that is stopped and currently there are no plans to introduce sanctions for HB.

With regard to the regulations for UC, POG asked whether housing costs would be sanctioned.

An action point was taken for DWP to check whether sanctions to housing costs will apply within the regulations for UC.

POG asked how LAs will be notified of sanctions and whether ATLAS will be used for this

An action point was taken for DWP to pass POG's query around notification of sanctions to colleagues for a response.

With regard to the appropriateness of the questions set out in the forms for completion by claimants under 18, POG agreed to refer this to their colleagues in Youth Services and respond to DWP.

5. IGS Scan

POG explained the reason behind bringing this request to the meeting. A colleague in the LA community had requested a scan from DWP to identify 'hard to reach' claimants, for example, repeat claims.

Colleagues from DWP ISG, who carry out the scans, have advised that it is not cost effective to carry out scans for individual LAs, but economies of scale would mean if a number of LAs could confirm that the scan would be of significant use, then ISG could consider.

POG members suggested that an article in HB Direct would be a way to take this forward.

6. RTI Bulk Data Matching

DWP set out the background to the exercise and the preferred option for transmission into LAs.

DWP explained that the outcome of the checkpoint meeting held on 21 March was that the preferred option is PGP Encrypted emails, adding that an alternative option could be that used by the National Fraud Initiative.

POG members pointed out that in the discussion that took place at January's POG, a preference had been expressed for SHBE to be used as route by which feedback could be provided. They also asked whether ATLAS could be used as the conduit for this exchange of data. DWP explained that the lead-in time for changes to ATLAS precluded its use as a tactical solution, and that ATLAS was seen as a long term strategic solution. DWP also said that high level discussions between the ATLAS team and the software suppliers are ongoing.

POG members pointed out that there will be issues around volumes and the complexities of the work involved which may affect response times.

POG members wanted to know what the data would look like. DWP explained that work on the requirements and design was ongoing.

POG members pointed out the differences between HB and UC with regard to the discretion that LAs have for super-cession and revision.

DWP summarised POG's concerns about the preferred option for transmission into LAs.

It was agreed that LAs would need as much historic data as possible and will need as much notice as possible particularly around what will be required of them.

POG agreed to collate their responses and submit them to DWP.

7. Pension Working Practice

DWP advised POG of a change in working practice in Pension Centres. Work has commenced to increase the numbers of telephone claims, following an exercise which had shown that telephone claims yielded a quicker turnaround for claims. The evidence requirement was not being reduced.

To aid this process, LAs would be asked to signpost claimants to claim by telephone; this will be carried out in conjunction with National Partnerships and Local Pension Centre Liaison.

The SLA between Pension Centres and LAs has been in place for the last three years. DWP asked POG whether the SLA could remain in use for the next six months, pending UC and the introduction of the Single Tier Pension. POG agreed to the proposal regarding the SLA.

8. AOB

Debt Management SLA

POG was content to sign off the Debt Management SLA subject to the removal of references CTB, which may no longer be valid since 01 April 2013.

Single Fraud Investigation Service

The meeting was advised that at a recent Security Operations Group (SOG) meeting it had been recommended that POG was the appropriate forum to look at issues around the work between now and the end of summer in respect of the introduction of SFIS. POG members agreed to this request in principle but pointed out that they could not look at funding issues. It was agreed to set up a POG meeting to focus specifically on the introduction of SFIS.

Date of Next Meeting The next POG will take place on 28 May Caxton House Room 6.03.
10.30 – 12.30

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