



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting: Practitioners' Operational Group (POG)

Date: 29 October 2014

Location: Caxton House Room 6.03

Attendees: **DWP:** Geoff Scammell (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Barry Dennett

Dial in: Michelle Heath, Ann Pinchin, Liz Wright, Sue Shillito

LAAs: Julian Stanbury, Frankie Cartwright,

Dial-in: June Deans Les Roberson Pamela Richardson

Apologies: Paul Ellery, Gwyn Thomas, Alan Sinclair, Colin Wallbank, Alison McGrory, Karl Thomas, Chris Boylett, Matthew Evans, Martin O'Neill

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

AP Oct 04 2014: The action point was carried forward.

The remaining action points were cleared.

3. ATLAS/ETD Merge

DWP updated the meeting on the ATLAS/ETD merge:

- Implementation took place over the weekend of 25/26 October.

- There are 10 early adopter LAs.
- It was decided to implement with Income Support and Pension Credit cases only.
- The 10 early adopters received their first batch of files on Monday 27 October.
- Contact with the 10 LAs has revealed that thus far implementation is proceeding smoothly with no reported incidents.
- Work is ongoing to resolve the issues with JSA and ESA cases, and as soon as a solution has been worked out, LAs will be notified.

POG agreed the national implementation date of 12 January 2015.

POG asked about the continuation of Electronic Transfers of Data (ETD).

DWP confirmed that ETDs will continue to be issued to LAs until March 2015, adding that the early adopters are cross checking the merged file against the ETD.

DWP explained that a project has been set up to resolve issues around uprating and LAs will be advised of progress. POG pointed out that LAs face a deadline of around mid February to commence the process of notifying claimants.

4. Fraud and Error Performance Measurement (LA engagement with the Housing Benefit (HB) Review Process)

Following discussions at the October meeting, DWP advised the meeting of some proposed changes to the process, particularly around the 10 day consideration policy and the escalation process if there is no contact after the 10 day period.

DWP explained that a template has been designed to ease the process for LAs. The template is intended to improve feedback in respect of the final outcome.

DWP added that the proposals also include a process whereby reminders for cases outstanding at the end of the 10 day consideration period will be issued every five days.

The process will also confirm LA receipt of the referrals.

Discussion followed, mainly around LA perceptions of the process.

The discussion highlighted issues around audit trails for receipt of the referrals, and the need for the Revenues and Benefits manager to be kept informed.

POG agreed that the proposals are positive and need to be communicated to LAs.

5. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

DWP gave a brief overview of the purpose of the MoU and explained the background to the revision following POG's approval in February to extend the existing MoU for six months.

DWP went on to say that this revised MoU was under internal review including HMRC. The revision includes:

- Data assurance standards in line with the introduction of Public Services Network (PSN).
- Data sharing for Adult Social Care Financial Assessments.
- Some further amendments to avoid duplication.

DWP added that work is ongoing regarding Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), and once approved DHPs will be included in the final version of the MoU.

DWP explained that that a further draft will be produced to take POG'S comments into account. DWP asked POG to submit their comments by 14 November, so that the revised iteration can be issued to POG for final sign - off in early December.

In the discussion that followed, POG's initial comments included:

- Where the High Level Data Assurance standards duplicate the PSN Code of Connection, no further detail should be required.
- In respect of data retention, clarification is needed around the phrase 'operational purposes'.
- Access from abroad will need to be defined.
- The inclusion of Local Council Tax Reduction Schemes.

6. AOB

POG asked for some guidance around the administration of Housing Benefit claims where there is a Universal Credit claim in payment.

Advice and guidance would be helpful on DWP expectations for handling of these claims.

An action point was taken for DWP to consider whether guidance can be issued with regard to claimants in receipt of UC moving to another LA area and claiming HB, particularly where the accommodation falls into the Supported Exempt or Specified category.

Date of Next Meeting The next POG will take place on 26 November, Caxton House Room 6.03. 10.30 – 12.30

Subsequently; the November 26 meeting did not go ahead and items were cleared by correspondence to POG members.

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