



# Summary Minutes

Title of meeting: DWP Local Authority Associations (LAA) Steering Group

Date: 10 December 2014

Attendees: **DWP:** Andrew Parfitt (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Clare Elliott, Chris Franks, Mel Frankham, Mabel Wanogho, Mark Craimer, Gillian Scott, Sarah Froud, Sam Higley, Robin Dent, Chris Wood, Darren Baker  
**Dial-in:** Clare Elliott, Paddy Wild  
**Observers:** Diana Lusikila, Shirley Collins

**DCLG:** Margaret Uhure,

**LAAs:** Dan McCartney, Pat Durkin, Daniel Drillsma-Millgrom, Lesley Pigott, Howard Mason,  
**Dial-in:** Peter Meehan, Steve Carey, John Rosenbloom

Apologies: Chris Gibbs, Valerie Pearce, Paul Ellary, Andrew Stevens, Colin Wallbank, Matthew Evans, Rose Doran

## 1. Welcome and Introductions:

DWP opened the meeting and introductions were made round the table and for those dialing in.

### Matters Arising

#### Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

#### Action Points

Action point November 01 2014: DWP explained that due to the risks and uncertainties, the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) project would be unable to provide an illustrative list of the LAs affected by the reduction from subsidy in 2016/17. The action point was cleared.

Action point November 02 2014: The mapping exercise for all of DWP/LAA consultation forums is ongoing. DWP agreed to produce a paper in January for discussion at February's meeting. The action point was carried forward.

Action point November 03 2014: The action point was cleared.

## **2. Updates:**

Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

DWP updated the meeting.

- The next tranche of Phase 2 implementation went live on 01 December, with 57 staff transferred from 19 LAs.
- Lessons have been learned from previous tranches and new processes are in place.
- There will be no further implementation until February.
- Recommendations from the joint Working Group on corporate and benefit fraud have been discussed with the DCLG Minister; and the recommendations will now be taken forward.
- The Service Level Agreement (SLA) is under review with stakeholders.

A steering Group member informed the meeting that the experience undergone by Leeds in transferring to SFIS had been very positive.

The Steering Group asked about the timescales for the review of the SLA. DWP explained that the review will run until January with aim of a revised SLA as soon as possible.

DCLG

The Steering Group raised three issues taken as action points.

**AP Dec 01 2014:** DCLG was asked to provide an update on New Burdens.

**AP Dec 02 2014:** DCLG was asked to advise on the timetable for the Prescribed Regulations, as LAs will be commencing their billing shortly

**AP Dec 03 2014:** DCLG was asked to provide an update on the consultation on Local Welfare Provision.

Universal Credit (UC) / LA Transition Working Group (TWG)

DWP advised the meeting that:

- A further 8 Jobcentres have gone live, covering 40 LAs.
- The rollout in the North West will be completed by 15 December, covering 96 Jobcentre areas and 45 local authorities.

- The details for tranche 1 have been published; tranche 1 will run from February to April 2015 in 150 Jobcentres covering 78 LAs across England, Scotland and Wales.
- The draft regulations for the consultation on data sharing have been passed through SSAC; the consultation will run from 10 December 2014 to 12 January 2015. It can be accessed here –

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/universal-credit-data-sharing-between-dwp-and-local-support-providers>

- The national expansion of Universal Credit will be for single claimants who would otherwise have been eligible for Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) including those with existing Housing Benefit and Tax Credit claims.

A Steering Group member pointed out that following the Smith Commission, Scotland will be able to change the frequency of payments of UC; the Steering Group asked about potential impacts for England and Wales. DWP explained that this will follow the introduction of the digital service and consequentially should not impact on live service.

TWG

DWP updated the meeting on the recent TWG meeting:

- There was a session on data sharing between UC and LAs.
- Reporting on the live service; handover sessions will take place with tranche 1 District Managers, and work is in hand on supporting products. Master classes are being held with District Managers (DMs) and Senior Partnership Managers.
- The meeting discussed the timetable for the new iteration of the business case and commissions are planned for the New Year.
- DWP Housing Policy Division updated the meeting on their priorities.
- Regarding UC Design and Build; the Sutton digital service is now live.

Council of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) raised an issue around Scottish powers and in particular where DWP is encouraging Social Landlords to move their claimants to direct payments for HB, prior to the introduction of UC. DWP explained that this was a trial intended to smooth the passage to UC.

Fraud & Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS)

DWP updated the meeting:

- FERIS was launched on 24 November with a letter from the Minister to all LA Chief Executives and Benefit Managers, followed by a letter to all LAs setting out the details.

- The scheme consists of incentive payments, Startup funding and Bid Funding.
- A circular giving guidance was published on Gov.uk; the circular set out potential LA payments in line with thresholds and start-up funding.
- Learning from the initial weeks of the scheme will be used to prepare Q&A which will be published as a HB Circular.
- An engagement strategy has been developed with the Performance Development Team who will contact all LAs before 23 January to encourage their participation.

DWP explained that as a result of LAs challenging the baselines a revised set will be issued to ensure the thresholds are fair.

### **3. HB Fraud and Error Accuracy Indicator**

DWP explained that the purpose of the indicator will be to:

- Raise awareness and visibility of the need for accuracy in fraud and error across the LA community.
- Help to reduce losses through fraud and error.
- Take the varying caseloads into account.
- Support the management of HB performance.

DWP explained that a range of options were discussed at a workshop held in the previous week, and that the option taking the percentage of expected changes of circumstances that were identified using Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) is the preferred option as it is cost effective and easy to understand. DWP added that further workshops with LAs are planned as is engagement with the LAAs.

The Steering Group expressed concern as to whether the indicator would be used to publish league tables. They added that Scotland faces particular issues around lower rents and that there is a need to consider differing caseloads across the UK.

DWP noted the position in Scotland and confirmed that it was not the intention to publish the indicator as a league table.

The Steering Group pointed out that the complexities in HB cases needed to be taken into account as part of the process.

The Steering Group asked to be notified of any further F&E Indicator workshops (avoiding February-March) in order to ensure that some LAA representatives could participate in its development, and to sign off the HB F&E Accuracy Indicator before publication. DWP explained that there are no plans to publish FERIS performance data, and that the Steering Group will be invited to further F&E Indicator workshops, and form part of the Quality Assurance process for future FERIS communications.

#### **4. Revised Increase to State Pension Age for Men and Women**

DWP advised the meeting of the revised timetable for the changes to the State Pensions age (SPA) for women, following the Pensions Act of 2011. There is an accelerated timetable for SPA equalization for women to age 65 from April 2016, and the extension of SPA to age 66 for men and women to commence 2018 is brought forward.

DWP explained that a project has been set up to deliver the changes across its systems, and that there should be no changes to LA processes.

#### **5. Pensions Upgrading**

A communication had been issued on 09 December to all LAs explaining that the larger than expected ATLAS file containing full details of the Pensions System Upgrading had failed. DWP explained that the intention had been to issue a file containing more accurate customer details. Despite assurances from DWP suppliers over capacity, the file had failed due to the complexity and number of records. DWP went on to say that work has commenced to look into the root causes as to why the file had failed, and to look at feasibility for the future.

#### **6. Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) 2015/16**

DWP explained that a paper setting out options for methodology and distribution will be issued to the Steering Group in early January for their comments.

The LGA pointed out the impacts, particularly in London, of Reduction of the Spare Room Subsidy and the benefit cap.

The Steering Group pointed out a potential issue around Temporary Accommodation, which is excluded from UC, where claimants receiving UC become homeless. They stressed the need for a long term commitment to the provision of a more sustainable mechanism for Temporary Accommodation costs.

#### **7. Autumn Statement**

DWP summarised the parts of the Autumn Statement relevant to LAs.

Regulations on Attribution of Earnings are due to be laid, and details of the Targeted Affordability Fund affecting LHA rates will be issued to the Steering Group before any announcement.

#### **8. AOB**

A request from the Programme Manager, Department of Finance and Personnel, Rate Rebate Replacement Programme, Northern Ireland seeking membership of the Steering Group was put before the meeting.

The general feeling from the Steering Group was that this additional membership was not appropriate at this time.

It was proposed that the meeting scheduled for 14 January should not go ahead and items to be cleared by correspondence. Mont Goldman will issue an email to this effect seeking the members' approval.

*Note: subsequent to the meeting and in response to Mont Goldman's email it was agreed that the next round the table meeting will take place on 11 February.*

**Date of Next Meeting:** The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 11 February, Room 6.03 Caxton House.

**Contact:** Mont Goldman

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