



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	DWP Local Authority Associations (LAA) Steering Group
Date:	11 February 2015
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	<p>DWP: Bill Hern (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Neil Johnson, Huw Meredith, Mel Frankham, Mabel Wanogho, Helen Coates, Martin Little, Janet Wilkinson, Sam Higley, Robin Dent, Manny Ibiayo, Beverley Winnemore, Liz Wright, Wayne Norfolk</p> <p>Dial-in: Clare Elliott, Paddy Wild</p> <p>Observers: Erwan Dugelay, Denise Khan, Polly Strickland</p> <p>DCLG: Margaret Uhure,</p> <p>LAAs: Rose Doran, Dan McCartney, Pat Durkin, Daniel Drillsma-Millgrom, Lesley Pigott, Howard Mason, Paul Ellary,</p> <p>Dial-in: Peter Meehan, John Rosenbloom</p>
Apologies:	Chris Gibbs, Valerie Pearce, Andrew Stevens, Steve Carey,
<p>1. Welcome and Introductions:</p> <p>DWP opened the meeting and introductions were made round the table and for those dialing in.</p> <p>The new Deputy Director of Housing Policy Division (HPD) was introduced.</p> <p>Matters Arising</p> <p>Minutes</p> <p>The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed, and the action points from December's meeting were cleared.</p> <p>2. Updates:</p> <p>Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)</p> <p>Steering Group asked about the process when SFIS decides not to prosecute a case referred by a local authority (LA). Steering Group also mentioned that some LAs had concerns about lack of responses to these cases. DWP confirmed the review of Service Provision was underway.</p> <p>DCLG</p>	

The Steering Group raised a query taken as an action point.

DCLG was asked whether any consideration could be given to amending the Council Tax Prescribed Regulations to align with Housing Benefit (HB).

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

DWP highlighted:

- The list of sites for tranche 1, (February to April) and tranche 2 (May to July) have been published.
- Discussions with the LAs for tranches 3 and 4 are underway.
- Data sharing regulations will be laid on 13 February.

Transition Working Group (TWG)

From the recent TWG meeting DWP highlighted:

- New work looking at how housing costs are handled in UC which will feed into the design work for the digital service as well as the business case.
- The update given on Universal Support Delivered Locally, including the aim to refresh the framework for autumn 2015.
- The update given on the digital testing in Sutton.

Steering Group referred the meeting to concerns around the effectiveness of the interface between UC and Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs).

3. Real Time Information (RTI) – Strategic Implications

DWP explained that in its current state, RTI is a tactical solution using historic data for purposes of detection.

In pointing out the implications for wider use, DWP explained that HMRC is rolling out RTI across all employers and pension providers, and how this process will work. The scope is limited to PAYE income and tax approved pension schemes, and the focus will move from detection to prevention.

DWP explained how the AGILE process will work, using a test and learn, user - centric approach to develop a small scale Minimum Viable Product. A prototype has been developed with Pension Credit.

The LAAs will be consulted on rollout to LAs.

The Steering Group felt that this represented a positive development and asked about engagement with the software suppliers. DWP explained that the initial product would be delivered to desktops and would differ from the bulk data match in that it would not be integrated with DWP or LA systems; this could be re-visited once the test and learn process has been completed. DWP explained that there is a Memorandum of

Understanding (MoU) with HMRC and guidance for LAs will be produced.

4. RTI Bulk Data Matching 2015/16

DWP set out:

- The background.
- The proposals for continuation until an alert service is implemented.
- The proposal to keep the new burdens amount at the same level as 2014/15.
- The proposal to retain the error subsidy easement.

DWP added that the focus will be on new claims and also to re-visit claims looked at in 2013/14. There should be no recognisable change in output, and the duration of the overpayments should be shorter.

Continuation is planned for April 2015, and work with analysts on volumes is underway. This will be shared with the Implementation Working Group.

The Steering Group commented that the feedback from LAs has been positive, although they questioned the adequacy of the funding granted for new burdens.

DWP referred the meeting to the Early Outcomes survey carried out by Housing Delivery Division (HDD). If LAs have issues relating to the timescales for processing of RTI referrals HDD have said they would be happy to provide free consultancy with a view to reviewing current processes.

5. New Burdens Process

DWP explained that Housing Delivery Division (HDD) wishes to discuss with Steering Group members a process for engaging more effectively with LAAs on new burdens; where it can work alongside representatives to understand the implications of each initiative to ascertain appropriate support measures, including the provision of new burdens payments.

The Steering Group emphasised the importance of engagement at the earliest practical stage to identify any potential issues. They referred to the HB Gateway, use of correspondence and adherence to the strategic remit of the Steering Group.

6. DHP 2015/16

DWP introduced the discussion topic. DWP thanked members on the steering group for their comments and assured them they had been carefully considered. It was acknowledged that for the DHP allocation most LAs will see a reduction in funding in 2015/16 due to the reduction in funding.

Steering Group asked about the recycling of any LA underspend and whether re-allocation to 'carry over' into the following year could be possible. DWP explained that this would not be possible 'in-year' or currently at the end of year due to accounting procedures, but noted the steering group's point.

The Steering Group raised an issue around the administration of DHPs in relation to awards where HB is not in payment, for example UC. They pointed out that this could

lead to new burdens as software will need to be amended.

The LAAs expressed their disappointment formally in respect of the allocation and funding for DHPs for 2015/16.

7. Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Schemes (FERIS)

DWP updated the meeting:

- 371 LAs have opted in, representing 99% of the HB caseload.
- 320 LAs have applied for Start - Up funding.
- There have been 13 applications to the Bid Fund.
- 41 LAs have opted in but have not applied for Start - Up funding.
- An early learning report will be written in February, and an evaluation will be conducted by September (taking account of 6 months performance data).
- Decisions on applications for Start - Up funding or to the Bid Fund will be made within 20 working days.
- The majority of applications for Start - Up funding have been approved.
- Where an application has been declined, feedback has been given to the LA and the Performance Development team has engaged with the LA to support resubmitting the application.

FERIS Options 2015/16

DWP summarised the options, highlighting:

- The background to the 2014/15 scheme and the need to write to LAs explaining key arrangements for 2015/16.
- LA baselines and thresholds.
- The three options for the timeframe for the scheme for 2015/16 in respect of maintenance funding.

Steering Group asked about the Early Learning Report. DWP explained that the focus will be on the early implementation of FERIS particularly gathering learning from the LA experience to feed into 2015/16 arrangements.

It was agreed that the lead for the Local Government Association (LGA) will co-ordinate Steering Group responses to the options paper within one week following the meeting.

8. LAA Representation on Groups

DWP gave the background in response to a LAA request for a discussion around whether a process of rationalisation can take place in respect of the many working groups and consultation forums on which LAA leads and advisors sit.

DWP explained that there are many such groups, mainly concerning Fraud, Error (F&E) and Debt (FED) and UC. F&E and UC have only recently reviewed their governance arrangements. UC has discussed this at their Partnership Forum with regard to strengthening how engagement groups can feed into their programme governance. UC is also in the process of refreshing the membership of their engagement groups.

The Steering Group agreed that Security Operational Group (SOG) should be wound up as a separate forum, and amalgamated into Practitioners' Operational Group (POG).

With regard to the TWG and the Steering Group, it was suggested that DWP should look into the practicalities of running both meetings on the same day. DWP advised the meeting that in the short term this would probably not be practical. For the longer term a firm commitment was made to align these meetings.

9. AOB

DWP advised the meeting that analysis has indicated that approximately 30,000 cases have been closed on DWP legacy systems but remain open on LA systems as passported cases. The intention is to test and validate this assumption in 2 LAs before implementing a wider solution.

With regard to HB for people under 25, Lesley Pigott reminded the meeting of the LA's duty of care.

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