



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	Practitioners' Operational Group (POG)
Date:	25 March 2015
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	<p>DWP: Bill Hern (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Barry Dennett, Lesley Cunningham Dial in: Paul Coombs, Karen Buckley</p> <p>LAAs: Paul Ellary, Gwyn Thomas, Martin O'Neill, Mark Gillmore Dial-in: Frankie Cartwright, Pamela Richardson, John Rosenbloom, Les Robertson, Carol Cleland, Jean Cheeseman, Paula Doherty</p>
Apologies:	Clare Elliott, Karl Thomas, Chris Boylett, June Deans, Colin Wallbank, Matthew Evans, Andrew Hyatt, Charles Taylor, Iain Marshalsay

Welcome and Introductions:

DWP opened the meeting and introductions were made round the table and for those dialing in. Former members of Security Operations Group (SOG) were particularly welcomed.

Matters Arising

Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

Action Points

An action point was taken for DWP to consider POG's concerns over the impact of DHPs in UC and the need for guidance.

In respect of the revised processes for the HB Review. POG asked for an agenda item to fully summarise the changes to the process following recommendations they had previously made.

3. Amalgamation of POG and SOG

DWP opened the discussion with a summary of the discussion that took place at the March Steering Group meeting.

DWP explained the rationale behind the merging of SOG with POG, in particular the rollout of Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) and the resulting impacts on

operations in local authorities (LAs). It was confirmed that SOG had reached a natural conclusion at its January meeting with no outstanding action points.

It was agreed that the current POG Terms of Reference will need to be revised.

Discussion followed on the future direction of the Group. The following key points emerged:

- POG's role as part of the Quality Assurance (QA) process for Bulletins and Circulars.
- There are no standing items to be carried forward from SOG.
- A possible move to bi-monthly meetings was discussed.
- With influx of SOG members a wider cross section of LAs will be represented.
- A forward look will be produced for future meetings..

With regard to Circulars, DWP agreed that POG members should be part of the QA process for HB circulars but this would need to be reconciled with the role of the Steering Group.

4. Scottish Rate of Income Tax (SRIT)

DWP explained that from April 2016 the Scottish Parliament has been granted powers to set a SRIT based on residency. The project for IT changes and communications is being led by HMRC, and DWP is working closely with HMRC to align communications. POG was asked to consider the impacts on LAs and how best to communicate this. POG pointed out that that the impact should be equivalent to annual increases in the base rate of tax and the minimum wage. As such, general awareness should be sufficient for LA staff in England, Wales and Scotland.

It was agreed that DWP will draft a circular and include POG in the QA process. This will be produced and issued to align with the issue of the HMRC Customer letter informing Scottish residents regarding SRIT and the new tax rate set by the Scottish Parliament.

5. Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

DWP updated the meeting.

Concerning LA access to FRAIMS; DWP explained that this will be possible and that in order to maintain the current arrangements a re-request will need to be completed, this being due to the continued roll out of SFIS creating different reasons for access. Once the re-request is received it will be passed to DWP's Data Security Team.

The meeting discussed the issue of Administration Penalties (Ad Pen) DWP agreed to seek clarification around the process for DWP Ad Pens.

Review of National Framework/Service Level Agreement (SLA)

DWP explained that responses have been received from internal sources and from members of POG, and the impacts are under consideration, particularly around use of Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) and overall timescales. It is planned to issue the updated document at the end of March for sign-off.

POG pointed out that funding remains a key issue. DWP explained that negotiations are underway with a view to a decision by June.

The meeting discussed issues around Compliance in respect of feedback from DWP on LA referrals,

6. Employee Authentication Service (EAS) Masterclasses

DWP referred the meeting to some of the concerns raised by auditors following the annual accreditation for 2014.

DWP explained that measures were agreed with auditors including updating the training and guidance. To this end a series of masterclasses for LAs has been set up to run from 21 April until 8 June. DWP added that the response from LAs has been positive, with 10 out of the 17 venues full. The aim of the masterclasses is to increase the skill levels for Sponsors and Agents, which should result in reducing the rejection rates experienced by LAs. The revised training material will be available to those LAs unable to attend.

A POG member explained how the process for Sponsors is run in his service.

7. AOB

POG raised an issue around potential Qualified subsidy claims in relation to the item contained in HB General Bulletin G3 17 March. The issue is concerned with Risk Based Verification (RBV) and whether baselines must form an integral part of the LA's policy. An action point was taken for DWP to issue further clarification. POG members were invited to join a teleconference and subsequent follow-up meeting to be arranged by UC, to look at scenarios around migration to UC.

Date of Next Meeting The next POG will take place on 29 April; Caxton House Room 6.03. 10.30 – 12.30 Note: subsequent to this meeting, the meeting scheduled for 29 April did not take place

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