



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	Practitioners' Operational Group (POG)
Date:	27 May 2015
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	<p>DWP: Bill Hern (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Barry Dennett, Marco Almeida, Keith Costello, Satish Parmar, Mabel Wanogho Dial in: Peter Dennis, Dawn Singer</p> <p>Local Authority Associations (LAAs): Paul Ellary, Gwyn Thomas, Frankie Cartwright Dial-in: Martin O'Neill, Pamela Richardson, John Rosenbloom, Emma Shields, June Deans</p>
Apologies:	Clare Elliott, Karl Thomas, Chris Boylett, Colin Wallbank, Matthew Evans, Andrew Hyatt, Charles Taylor, Iain Marshalsay, Les Robertson, Carol Cleland, Jean Cheeseman, Paula Doherty, Mark Gillmore

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.

An action point was taken for DWP to look into the implications for software suppliers in respect of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) in Universal Credit (UC), as well as implications for Management Information (MI) on the use of DHPs in UC.

3. Persons From Abroad

DWP summarised the restrictions on benefits for EEA nationals.

DWP also summarised the classifications around residency and worker status.

DWP added that in July 2014 a 100% validation check was carried out on all decisions.

DWP advised the meeting on EEA Nationals access to UC, dependent on their right to reside status.

DWP referred the meeting to DWP Decision Makers Guidance which has been published on Gov.uk. POG members felt that the guidance clarified some areas such as the rules on 5 year residency. POG members suggested that it would be helpful for LAs if

this guidance could be issued in the form of a circular.

An action point was taken for DWP to issue the Decision Makers Guide to LAs in the form of a circular.

4. Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Schemes (FERIS)

DWP updated the meeting on recent developments in FERIS.

Maintenance Fund

- The deadline for applications is 30 May and to date 50% of LAs have applied with more expected over the next few days.

In response to POG's query about baselines and falling caseloads, DWP explained that this issue had been included in the Subsidy circular S3/2015 issued in March 2015, in respect of the impact on caseloads of UC. DWP added that a review linked to UC is planned. This review would also take into account wider economic aspects resulting in fewer people claiming benefit. The approach and methodology to the review will be shared with the Local Authority Associations (LAA) Steering Group and POG. Baselines may be revised in line with the methodology following the review.

HB Fraud & Error Performance Information

- A workshop was held with 12 LAs, including POG members, to look at risk groups.
- Two models for risk groups were discussed, the one based on the existing Housing Benefit Matching Service model, and a new model focusing on the higher risk categories.
- The participating LAs preferred that the existing model be used for performance information and the new model be shared with LAs to help them with targeted interventions.
- The next workshop will take place in the afternoon of 24 June, following POG.
- Following the next workshop a decision on the risk groups and methodology will be taken and shared with the LAA Steering Group and POG.

5. Abolition of Assessed Income Periods (AIP)

POG members challenged the assumption that the abolition of AIPs would not result in new burdens for LAs, pointing out that the volumes for changes of circumstances would increase, creating extra work. DWP agreed to discuss this further with colleagues in policy.

It was agreed that issues around new burdens would be discussed at the next LAA Steering Group.

6. Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

DWP set out the:

- Latest position on implementation and rollout.
- Current position of the Service Provision and Service Level Agreement (SLA)
 - Consultation has taken place but the LAAs have not yet endorsed these products.
 - Work is ongoing on new burdens and the working group, including members of POG will meet on 2 June.

With regard to the updated and expanded LA Information Exchange Form (LAIEF), POG members pointed out that the form is already large and cumbersome, adding that their suggestion to enable the Fraud and Error Service (FES) to access LA document management systems would be a better alternative. DWP advised the meeting that this suggestion had been turned down on legal grounds.

POG members asked to see the legal advice concerning FES access to LA document management systems.

In general discussion POG members pointed out that some LAs are still experiencing long delays in obtaining responses to referrals. DWP explained that FES is looking into ways to improve response times. DWP also pointed out the importance of the escalation route, and the MI which is being developed.

DWP clarified the position on the issuing of Administrative Penalties, and how LAs will be consulted.

POG members pointed out that MI will be required for referral statistics. DWP confirmed that this was under development.

7. Real Time Information (RTI) Letter Issued 18 May 2015

DWP referred the meeting to the letter issued to LAs on 18 May on behalf of the RTI project. DWP explained that:

- RTI Bulk Data Matching has been extended to 2015/16.
- New burdens have been approved by the DWP Fraud and Error Programme Board.
- The project is currently working on anticipated volumes for 2015/16.
- The first files have been issued.

8. Pension Annuities

DWP highlighted the new measures and their possible impacts on means tested benefits. DWP advised POG of the HM Treasury consultation and their intention to invite POG members to a series of workshops.

POG agreed that once the dates and venues were confirmed, invitations could be issued.

9. POG Revised Terms of Reference

The revised Terms of Reference were agreed and it was decided to change to bi-monthly meetings following the 24 June meeting.

10. AOB

POG members raised an issue around pre-employment checks (Disclosure Scotland) for compliance with PSN.

An action point was taken for DWP to provide clarification on requirement for pre-employment checks for existing staff.

DWP responded to POG's concerns concerning notifications issued by Jobcentre Plus which refer to Local Welfare Provision. DWP confirmed that steps are being taken to have this reference removed.

Date of Next Meeting The next POG will take place on 29 July; Caxton House Room 6.03.
10.30 – 12.30

Contact:	Mont Goldman
Email:	Mont.goldman@dwp.gsi.gov.uk
Direct line:	020 7449 5327