



Summary Minutes

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

Date: 28 July 2015

Location: Caxton House Room 6.03

Attendees:

DWP: Neil Johnson (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Chris Franks, Sue Francis, Clare Elliott, Sam Higley, Bill Hern, Mark Cramer, Idaros Yusuf, Adrian Shooter

Observers: Dee Khan, Caroline Todd, Marie Cave, Alan Brown, Debbie Whetton, Julie Miller

DCLG: Alan Millward

LAAs: Rose Doran, Pat Durkin, Daniel Drillsma-Millgrom, Matthew Evans, Paul Ellary

Dial in: Lesley Pigott, Peter Meehan, Steve Carey, John Rosenbloom

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, and the action points were cleared.

2. Updates:

Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

The LAAs stated that the new burdens for SFIS did not reflect the work that would need to be undertaken by LAs. The LAAs asked whether DWP will be producing LA performance information in respect of SFIS.

An action point was taken for DWP to consider whether it will produce LA performance information in respect of SFIS.

DCLG

The LAAs asked about timescales for the Council Tax Support Schemes Review, and in particular whether funding levels for 2016/17 will take the budget changes into consideration.

An action point was taken for DCLG to check on the timescales for the Council Tax Support Schemes

3. July Budget

DWP thanked the Steering Group for its help in the preparations for the Budget negotiations with HM Treasury.

DWP gave the meeting the background to the changes announced in the Budget.

In general discussion, the LAAs asked about:

- data on impacts on LAs, particularly around the reductions to the benefit cap;
- the Impact Assessment for households in respect of the removal of the Family Premium;
- the modeling around the freeze on Local Housing Allowance and how this affects the Targeted Affordability Fund (TAF).

With regard to the reductions to the benefit cap, the Steering Group commended the joint working process adopted for the implementation of the benefit cap in 2014 and asked for the same process to be adopted for these changes. It was agreed that the benefit cap will be a standing item for Steering Group meetings and correspondence updates.

4. Spending Review

DWP gave the meeting a background to the Spending Review and its focus on Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) savings.

The aim is to produce a final cohesive package for Administration Subsidy by the end of December. Indicative figures will be shared with the Steering Group, and the Steering Group will be consulted on the methodology for distribution.

5. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)

DWP outlined the background to the settlement for DHPs over the period of the Spending Review, highlighting the following:

- the commitment to DHP funding represents an acknowledgement of the importance of DHPs in protecting vulnerable claimants;
- there will be a specific allocation of DHP funding for each year of the Spending Review;
- DWP will look at whether the methodology for allocating DHP funding can be improved.

The LAAs pointed out that the administration of DHPs can create additional burdens for LAs. They also referred to the uncertainties around how DHPs will operate in Universal Credit.

In looking at allocation methodology, the LAAs asked DWP to consider over and underspends and whether allocated amounts can be rolled over, adding that there is a need to understand how and why over and underspends occur. DWP will be looking at trends and will continue its engagement with the Steering Group.

DWP also advised the Steering Group of the amounts allocated for each year of the Spending Review to 2020.

The LAAs asked about DHPs in UC where the formula differs in respect of the net housing cost.

6. Housing Benefit Caseload Management Information

DWP explained that it will be publishing information on LA level fraud and error performance information to meet the standards of Official Statistics.

DWP set out:

- the types of performance information which can be produced giving a series of examples;
- how expected levels of reductions within each Risk Group are set, and how the Risk Groups are produced;
- the replacement of the current model for risk scoring;
- some detail of how and what will be published, and an example of what the published information might look like,
- the non published information which will be sent to LAs.

The LAAs asked whether underperforming LAs would be subject to sanction. DWP explained that this information does not represent a target in that it enables DWP to identify problems.

With regard to Risk Groups, the LAAs pointed out that as migration to UC progresses, LAs will be left with increasingly high risk cases.

It was agreed that following the meeting, DWP would write to the LAAs with the key questions for the group on the development of local authority level performance data on caseload accuracy.

With regard to the letters to LA Chief Executives and Revenues and Benefit Managers, the Steering Group asked for more time to digest the content in order to give their views on what information should be sent and to what level in the organisation.

7. AOB

The Steering Group referred to the Abolition of Assessed Income Periods and asked for a discussion on new burdens at the next meeting.

Date of Next Meeting: The next Steering Group meeting will take place on 09 September.

Contact: Mont Goldman

Email: Mont.goldman@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Direct line: 020 7449 5327