



Summary Minutes

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

Date: 11 November 2015

Location: Caxton House Room 6.03

Attendees: DWP: Neil Johnson (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Chris Franks, Jon Walton, Manny Ibiayo, Adrian Shooter, Robert Irvine, Sam Higley, Jane Lucas, Chris Wood, Caroline Todd, Asha Vyas

Dial in: Clare Elliott, Michelle Kevill

Observers: Mark Browne, Craig Millar, Beverly Bramall, Richard Hyslop

DCLG: Wayne Caffell

LAAs: Daniel Drillsma-Millgrom, Paul Ellary, Lesley Pigott,

Dial in: Matthew Evans, Colin Wallbank, Peter Meehan, Chris Gibbs

Apologies: John Rosenbloom, David Lock, Pat Durkin, Howard Mason, Rose Doran, David Graaff, Steve Carey, Andrew Stevens, Les Robertson

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 September meeting were agreed, and the action points were cleared.

2. Updates:

Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

DWP highlighted:

- pension packs have been issued to LA staff transferred into DWP, giving them three months to take independent advice on whether to transfer their pensions;

- Fraud and Error Service (FES) are conducting an review and reminders on the correct procedures are being sent to live SFIS sites;
- over three hundred LAs, (representing 69%) have been rolled out with 785 people having been transferred to DWP.

DWP advised the meeting that the roll out will have been completed by the 1st March 2016, and at that time the SFIS implementation arm will be wound up. FES will continue to update POG on operational issues.

With regard to new burdens, DWP explained that any new burdens, once agreed will be paid for the forthcoming years, and that SFIS is looking at mechanisms to pay any new burdens after the project is closed.

The LAAs asked about the results and outcomes of the HDD survey. DWP Housing Delivery Division (HDD) Performance Consultants are looking at a number of LAs in respect of the end to end process, and work is ongoing. A similar survey is being carried out in Wales under the auspices of the Welsh LGA.

DCLG

The Local Council Tax Support Review team is in place and the shortlisting process for the Chair is underway. The Review team is planning to attend some of the IRRV forums in December.

The LAAs asked whether Universal Credit (UC) would be in the scope of the Review. The independent Chair will have the final decision on what will be in and out of scope.

The LAAs asked about the Prescribed Regulations, explaining that there is an urgent need to see these regulations, or at least the draft, as Local Authorities (LAs) need to consult on their Local Council Tax Reduction schemes.

3. Changes to the Benefit Cap

DWP explained the policy intention behind the changes to the benefit cap, with reference to behavioral change and the critical nature of the support packages along with LA support; the aim will be to build on the support provided for the original benefit cap.

Initial notifications cannot be issued until Royal Assent has been granted, and this is dependent on the parliamentary timetable. When notifications are issued it will be important that all support arrangements are in place, and that flexibility in the support offered will be essential.

DWP confirmed that existing support for vulnerable claimants would continue as well as existing exemptions. DWP is looking to build on the previous liaison arrangements, and no new liaison routes will be added.

In summary and giving a forward look, DWP explained that:

- the project is currently at the design stage, looking at funding, the implementation period and initial consultation;
- once Royal Assent has been granted and LA support arrangements are in place, initial notifications will be issued;
- LAs will be regularly updated on anticipated volumes.

The LAAs referred to the specific steering group set up for the first benefit cap, and how helpful this had been.

With regard to roll out, the LAAs queried whether it will be phased, and if so, recommended discussions with individual LAs before issuing a full set of notifications.

The LAAs also pointed out that LAs will need sight of the scans as soon as possible.

The LAAs asked about how the cap will be treated in UC, particularly as it will be applied to the whole amount of UC, which could mean that LAs will have to use Discretionary Housing Payments.

4. Subsidy Update

DWP updated the meeting:

- the results of the Spending Review will be announced on 25 November;
- the total amount of subsidy for 2016/17 has not yet been determined;
- discussions around netting and capping will need to commence sooner rather than later;
- meetings with analysts are ongoing.

The LAAs pointed out their duty to consult with members. It was agreed that clearance by correspondence would be appropriate following the 09 December meeting.

5. DHP Allocation for 2016/17

DWP updated the meeting:

feedback has been received from the October correspondence;

- data is being used from the mid year returns;

The LAAs asked whether underspends could be carried over.

The LAAs referred to the four core components on which the allocations are based, and suggested that for 2017/18, a fifth strand could be added to reflect the July budget changes.

6. Spending Review/2016 Priorities

DWP outlined the current position:

- regulations have been laid for changes to the Family Premium and the rules on HB Backdating
- The regulations will be debated in the House of Commons

8. AOB

No further items of business were brought forward.

Date of Next Meeting: The next full meeting of the LAA Steering Group will take place on 13 January 2016 in Caxton House room 6.03 starting at 11.00.

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