



Summary Minutes

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

Date: 13 January 2016

Attendees: DWP: Clare Elliott (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Darren Baker, Manny Ibiayo, Adrian Shooter, Christopher Tucker, Mike Keegan, Jane Lucas, Donna Ellis, Fiona Mcleish, Bridget Devanney, Preema Sajadah, Ann Cairns

Dial in: Tracey Stevens, Jim Donnelly

Observers: Iris Shone, Andy Mclean, Jane Watson,

LAAs: Daniel Drillsma-Millgrom, Paul Ellary, Pat Durkin,

Dial in: John Rosenbloom, Matthew Evans, Peter Meehan, Lisa Hayward

Apologies: Lesley Pigott, Chris Gibbs, Colin Wallbank, Caroline Todd, David Lock, 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 November meeting were agreed, and the action points were cleared.

2. Updates:

Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

DWP highlighted:

- The intention to issue guidance by the end of January on the handling of low level Housing Benefit (HB) fraud cases to operational staff within LA fraud teams and DWP Fraud and Error Service (FES)
- The roll out for December bringing the year to date numbers to 339 Local Authorities (LAs) with 792 staff transferred to DWP
- The issue of 365 Pension Option Packs to staff transferred to DWP between July 2014 and May 2015.

DWP reported back on the Housing Delivery Division (HDD) Performance consultants' survey into the SFIS end to end process:

- 32 LAs were chosen at random
- the HDD Performance Consultants identified examples of good practice that can be shared
- a new governance group will be set up between HDD and FES (and the SFIS project while it still exists) where all the issues being progressed can be monitored through to completion
- the intention is that any new changes coming from this group that potentially impact on LAs will be shared with LAA Steering Group for consultation.

Universal Credit (UC)

DWP updated the meeting:

- Tranche 4 for Live Service commenced week commencing 04 January
- roll out of Live Service is on schedule for completion by March 2016
- the next UC LA Steering Group will focus on planning requirements for LAs.

Subsidy

DWP advised the meeting that the Subsidy circular had been issued and no significant queries have been received so far.

With regard to the draft article containing advice about the verification of electronic claims issued to the Steering Group and Practitioners' Operational Group (POG) for their comments, DWP explained that comments have been received and taken into account. The intention is to publish the article in January's Bulletin.

The Associations thanked DWP for taking their and POG's comments into account.

Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP)

DWP thanked the Associations for their comments on the paper on the distribution of DHP funding in 2016/17. A submission will be put to the Minister taking into account comments received. Once the submission has been agreed by the Minister the Steering Group will be informed by correspondence.

The Associations queried the methodology used in light of the new Benefit Cap. DWP explained that the methodology used takes into account expected changes in caseloads along with the wider impact of the new Benefit Cap.

The Associations pointed out the importance of taking the timetable for the implementation of the new cap into account.

The Associations asked whether DWP has accepted that use of DHPs in UC is significantly more complex than use of DHPs in HB. DWP added that there is an intention to update the DHP guidance later in the year to include more complex examples. The Associations asked for the draft guidance to be issued to POG for their comment before it is published.

The Associations asked whether there was any update on administration funding for DHPs. DWP agreed to update the Steering Group by correspondence before the March meeting.

The Associations asked whether there was any update on the wider strategic thinking around DHPs post 2016/17. It was agreed that an update would be provided for the March meeting.

3. Employment Support Allowance (ESA) Work Related Activity Component (WRAC) Removal Project

DWP sought approval from the Associations to engage with LAs and the LA IT suppliers on the lower level impact of the legislative change announced in the July 2015 Budget. DWP explained that amendments to the HB Regulations will be required and this will be taken forward as a separate project, with workshops on the requirements to take place; hence the need to engage with LAs and their IT suppliers.

DWP illustrated:

- which claimants will be affected, as this change will affect new claims to ESA from April 2017
- the changes affecting HB
- activities already underway
- next steps to be taken.

The Associations asked about engagement with Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Devolved Administrations, in respect of Local Council Tax Reduction Schemes.

DWP explained that the LA IT software suppliers will need the final requirements by October 2016, for implementation in April 2017. DWP added that that the changes should mainly impact on LA IT systems rather than LA processes, and that the aim is to minimise the burden of engagement on LAs in respect of the workshops.

4. Benefit Cap

DWP advised the meeting of the planning assumptions for the introduction of the new Benefit Cap. DWP pointed out that these assumptions are dependent on Parliamentary approval and Royal assent.

DWP explained that:

- the approach to implementation will be similar to that of the first Benefit Cap
- scans identifying potentially affected households should be issued to LAs and to DWP colleagues in the spring
- updated scans will follow in late summer/autumn
- following the spring scans a mail drop to inform potentially affected claimants is planned.

The letters will signpost claimants to additional information and advice on Gov.UK and/or a discussion with a Jobcentre Plus Work Coach.

DWP added that once Ministerial approval has been granted, a letter will be issued to all LA Chief Executives, providing planning information and the offer of further detailed engagement.

The project will also be engaging at a local level with Jobcentre Plus Partnership Managers to more fully understand and discuss with LAs specific local issues and challenges. HDD consultants can help in these discussions.

The project is looking at options for implementation of the new cap levels and following Royal Assent, will discuss in greater detail with the group. The project will continue to update the Steering Group and POG.

5. Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Schemes (FERIS) 2

DWP updated the meeting on Case Management Information (CMI) and the FERIS 2.0 Scheme Design.

DWP explained that these are proposals and subject to approval from the Fraud Error and Debt (FED) Programme Board.

CMI

DWP updated the meeting on the proposed revised CMI which takes into account feedback received from the letter sent to all LAs at the end of September.

DWP went on to say that the proposals were put before the Design Group, containing LA representation, for LAs to identify any potential issues and inform the team by 18 January. Once comments from the Design Group have been received a letter will be issued to all LAs.

Proposed FERIS 2.0 Design Scheme

DWP illustrated the differences between FERIS 1 and the proposed version for FERIS 2:

- FERIS 2 is intended to resolve the issues around baselines and thresholds by removing the cliff edge by which LAs that have performed above baseline but have missed out on the lower threshold.

In summary DWP:

- reiterated that these proposals are subject to agreement from the FED Programme Board
- explained that that scheme is intended to be more realistic addressing some of the key issues raised by LAs in respect of FERIS 1
- emphasised the need for flexibility to reflect the roll out and impact on caseloads of UC
- advised that Maintenance Fund forms will be issued in February following the final decision and sign-off of the business case
- explained that the application form will be streamlined and can be signed off by Revenues and Benefits Managers
- advised that Maintenance funding will be paid as a lump sum
- advised that a new scheme for 2017/18 will be considered as a result of the impact of the wider use of Real Time Information (RTI).

6. AOB

The Associations asked for the following topics to be discussed at the March Steering Group meeting:

- the Review of Supported Accommodation
- the Wider Use of RTI Pilot.

Date of Next Meeting: The next full meeting of the LAA Steering Group will take place on 09 March 2016 in Caxton House room 6.03 starting at 11.00.

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