



Summary Minutes

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

Date: 09 March 2016

Location: Caxton House Room 6.03

Attendees: DWP: Bill Hern (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Caroline Todd, Adrian Shooter, Wayne Norfolk, Jane Lucas, Louise Reilly, Judith Hicks, Frank Meakin, Chris Franks, Darrell Smith, Darran Nuttall, Natalie Keogh

Dial in: Steve Kempson, Kay Bendall, Carol Krahe

DCLG: No attendees

LAA: Daniel Drillsma-Millgrom, Lesley Pigott, Andrew Barbour, Andrew Stevens

Dial in: Paul Ellary, Matthew Evans, Peter Meehan, Chris Gibbs

Apologies: Howard Mason, Colin Wallbank, Rose Doran, David Graaff, David Lock, Steve Carey, Lisa Hayward

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

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and New Burdens

In response to the Associations' concerns about new burden funding for the administration of DHPs, DWP confirmed that new burden funding will be available.

The LAAs were particularly concerned about the volume and complexity of DHP claims associated with Universal Credit (UC), where Housing Benefit (HB) is not in payment. In respect of the DHP Guidance, DWP explained that the draft guidance will be presented to Practitioners' Operational Group (POG) for their comments, and will include guidance for the use of DHPs in UC.

2. Updates:

Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

Frank Meakin highlighted:

- the final Go Live has been completed with the remaining 24 LAs, transferring 41 staff to DWP, bringing the total number of staff that have transferred to 910 (of which 870 were LA staff)
- a communications strategy is being drafted for all future communications.

The LAAs expressed concern around the level of funding for Single Points of Contacts (SPOCs)

The LAAs raised an issue around lack of information regarding performance and activity. They particularly noted issues around compliance cases where lack of initial activity can lead to larger overpayments in the future.

Switch off of LA Powers

DWP explained that it is consulting on a set of regulations affecting HB.

These regulations are designed to tidy up the legislation in respect of prosecutions, now that DWP will be responsible for investigating and prosecuting HB fraud cases. These powers will come into force in April 2016. With regard to LA prosecutions ongoing at this time, LAs will be able to complete the process; however, they will not be allowed to start any new prosecutions once the powers come into effect.

The LAAs were content for DWP to take this forward.

Universal Credit

DWP highlighted:

- the roll out for UC Live Service is approaching its conclusion (April 2016)
- the transition to Full Service will commence in May 2016 with phases 1 and 2 to run through to December 2016 the transition to Full Service will expand from February 2017 to include a greater number of LAs
- information on the phase 1 and 2 transition can found here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-transition-to-full-service>
- Details of those sites transitioning in 2017 will be released by end of July 2016 and those sites transitioning in 2018 will be released by the end of September 2016
- One of the main issues that the UC LA Steering Group is currently looking at concerns Temporary Accommodation in UC.

Funding for UC in 2017 and Beyond

DWP advised the meeting that a new future funding model for UC, to start in April 2017 is at the early discovery stage. UC is looking at how DWP funds LAs across the board with a few LAs to try and streamline the process and develop a better method of funding UC.

The LAAs pointed out that meetings to discuss District Partnerships Agreements could be rationalised if DWP took into account shared services existing within the LA community, using such tools as the Local Government Association Shared Services map.

DCLG

The LAAs asked about the Local Council Tax Scheme Review (LCTS), and when the report would be available.

They also noted that the late issue of subsidy details had caused problems for LAs in respect of their budget preparations.

3. Uprating Savings Credit Cases

DWP explained that there are 2 key issues:

- i) Mistiming of batch runs within the DWP estate which resulted in LAs receiving only a part of the information required. This has been resolved.
- ii) The way DWP benefit systems report uprating to CIS:
 - this would require changes to DWP legacy systems which would not be workable as the legacy systems have a limited lifespan
 - LA IT suppliers have been approached for a solution, and 2 of the three main suppliers have developed a solution.

The LAAs pointed out that a de-minimus should be considered to avoid the HB Review recording and extrapolating low level errors.

4. Benefit Cap

DWP highlighted:

- the letters issued 3 weeks ago to LA Chief Executives along with the publication of the LA bandwidths
- the legislative process, which is ongoing and subject to Royal Assent
- that all carers entitled to Carer's Allowance will be exempt from the benefit cap, as will all recipients of Guardian's Allowance. These changes will be brought in by regulations later in the year.

Scans

DWP explained that once Royal Assent has been granted, a scan will be run to identify affected claims. DWP referred to the HB Circular regarding LA SPOCs for the scans, adding that DWP will be unable to send the scan to any LA where a SPOC has not been identified. DWP explained that some LAs have not yet responded to the Circular and follow up action will be required.

Mail Shots

DWP advised that shortly after the scan is issued a mail shot will be posted to affected households; this activity will take place after elections in London, Scotland and Wales.

A second scan will be run in late summer and capping activity will begin in the autumn.

The LAAs were concerned that the timing for the commencement of capping activity will need confirmation as soon as possible.

Application of the cap

DWP outlined some high level options and assumptions around how the cap might be applied.

The LAAs pointed out that their preferred option would be as it was applied for the original cap.

The LAAs also asked about funding for the administration of the increase in the use of DHPs. DWP explained that the Benefit Cap project is working with Housing Delivery Division (HDD) on any potential new burdens, and proposals will be presented to the Steering Group as soon as possible.

5. Wider Use of Real Time Information (WURTI)

DWP illustrated:

- the background to the project and the key difference between the RTI bulk data match and strategic wider use digital service
- the Agile methodology and the development of the Minimum Viable Product (MVP)
- the wider use of the RTI service which will increase the accuracy of claims entering the system and will keep payments correct during the life of the claim
- what the current MVP consists of, which is a user interface and an alerts service. The MVP is currently being tested
- the next steps including engagement with POG.

6. Supported Accommodation Review

DWP updated the meeting on the latest position regarding the review:

- the evidence review, including a provider survey is in its final stages
- the intention is to complete the review by the end of March 2016, long term options for reforming the funding arrangements are under consideration
- DWP has attended conferences as well as cross Whitehall meetings
- senior officials will visit some Supported Accommodation schemes.

The LAAs referred to exemptions from the 1% reduction in social sector rents and the benefit cap and the potential effect on definitions.

In respect of the LHA cap, the LAAs asked whether it would apply to claimants migrated to UC, whose tenancies started before April 2016. DWP indicated that they would not (i.e. the protection would survive the migration to UC).

The LAAs referred to relevant work done by POG several years ago.

The LAAs asked how the Management Costs for Temporary Accommodation, which have now been passed to DCLG have been calculated.

7. Fraud and Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) 2

DWP updated the meeting:

- Maintenance Fund bids for 2016/17 are currently being evaluated. LAs have responded positively to the FERIS design changes
- despite the tight deadline for completing and returning Maintenance Fund applications there has been an increase in the number of LAs applying; 88% of LAs have applied for 2016/17 funding compared to 80% in 2015/16
- early signs are encouraging:
 - a large number of LAs are funding FERIS activities over and above the maintenance funding available
 - a common feature of LA action plans include additional resources to action optional RTI and:
 - there appears to be an increased take-up of IT functionality funded through the FERIS innovation fund.
- applications from 146 LAs have already been approved
- some LAs have been asked to provide additional information to support their application
- all LAs applying for maintenance funding will be notified by the end of this financial year.

8. AOB

No items of business were brought forward

Date of Next Meeting: The next full meeting of the LAA Steering Group will take place on 11 May 2016 in Caxton House room 6.03 starting at 11.00.

Contact: Mont Goldman

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