



Summary Minutes

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

Date: 11 May 2016

Location: Caxton House Room 6.03

Attendees: DWP: Clare Elliott (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Manny Ibiayo, Chris Wood, Caroline Todd, Adrian Shooter, Paul Selby, Carol Krahe, Chris Franks, Natalie Keogh, Mike Keegan, Robert Irvine, Katie Riley, Gordon Pal

Dial in: Bev Winnemore, Kay Bendell, Moira Smith

Observers: Ella Oyortey, Kath Murphy

DCLG: No attendees

LAAs: Rose Doran, Lesley Pigott, Paul Ellary, Andrew Stevens, Howard Mason, Matthew Evans,

Dial in: Peter Meehan, Chris Gibbs, Colin Wallbank

Apologies: Andrew Barbour, Daniel Drillsma-Millgrom, 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.

DWP reiterated the strategic remit for the Steering Group, and the operational remit for Practitioners' Operational Group (POG). Housing Policy Division (HPD) and Housing Delivery Division (HDD) will give the Steering Group a regular overview of current and potential future developments.

Matters Arising

Minutes

The minutes of the March meeting were agreed, and the action points were cleared.

2. Updates:

HDD Overview

- LA speed of processing performance statistics reflect a strong performance from LAs despite financial pressures

- Fraud and Error statistics will be published on 19 May
- for FERIS 3, lessons learned from FERIS 2 will be built in, although the challenge will be different, and will need to reflect the Wider use of Real Time Information (WURTI) and roll out of Universal Credit (UC)
- consideration is being given to replacement arrangements for Public Sector Audit Appointments.

DWP explained that HDD is looking at the New Burdens structure, taking in the totality of change and the extent of the overall impact on Local Authorities (LAs). The overall intention is to develop a better understanding of the impact of change on LAs, developing a coherent picture to create a structure for New Burdens to reflect that impact.

DWP informed the meeting that a project is underway in respect of data sharing for the Blue Badge Scheme.

The Optional Real Time Information will be launched in June, and engagement on WURTI has commenced. WURTI will be developed using Agile methodology.

HPD Overview

DWP advised on the following:

Supported Accommodation:

- early findings from the evidence review are being reviewed.
- the review, when it is published will inform the direction of travel
- cross Whitehall discussions are ongoing, and once concluded a process of consultation will commence.

The representative from the Local Government Association pointed out that the uncertainties around this policy area need clarification for 2017/18. DWP explained that the announcement in July should provide clarity for the short term, with consultation planned in respect of the longer term position.

Removal of HB for 18 – 21 year olds:

- HPD is working through the detail, and plan to lay regulations in the autumn.

The LAAs asked about the transfer of Temporary Accommodation management charges to Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

An action was taken for DCLG to provide an update to the Steering Group on the transfer of Temporary Accommodation management charges.

DCLG

The Steering Group noted that recommendations from the review of Local Council Tax Schemes (LCTS) should include improving the legislation.

The Steering Group asked for more detail on the following:

- the timetable for the formal response to the review of LCTS
- the next stage
- Liability Orders.

UC

DWP updated the meeting on the following:

- the national expansion for UC Live Service was completed at the end of April
- the roll out for Full Service is on course, and details for phases 1 and 2 are available on the .gov.uk website here - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-transition-to-full-service>
- work is ongoing to develop the detail of phase 3, (February 2017 - April) of the roll out for Full Service

DWP added that for the 2016/17 Delivery Partnerships some enquires have been received around the rationale behind why the funding has changed between 2015/16 and 2016/17. UC is in the process of drafting a letter that will be issued to all LA Chief Executives to provide more detail.

With regard to future funding, DWP explained the UC is looking at the totality of funding across the Department, in order to ascertain the best method for funding LAs for UC in the future.

3. Administration Subsidy 2017/18 – Allocation Principles

DWP explained the methodology which takes the impact of UC into account.

DWP referred to 3 options:

1. Using the same methodology as 2016/17.
2. Using a forecast of the caseload, through which the allocation for all LAs will be based on a caseload forecast taking UC roll out into account.
3. To allocate the UC reduction, based on expected UC savings, separately, based on the roll out schedule for the UC full service.

DWP recommended the third option as their preferred approach.

DWP explained that the allocation is usually resolved six months before the start of the financial year. However, with dependency on the UC roll out it is proposed to bring this to resolution in November.

The LAAs pointed out that clarity around the migration timetable is needed for LA planning purposes.

The LAAs were content with option 3 although they were of the opinion that netting and capping could still be retained for the first part of the calculations. DWP agreed to this.

The LAAs added a caveat in that it should be subject to review in 2017/18.

The Steering Group noted that the roll out schedule for UC Full Service will be crucial. DWP acknowledged LAA concerns.

DWP explained that once the UC roll out schedule is known, the figures can be worked out, options will be presented to September Steering Group and firmed up in November.

The LAAs raised an issue around subsidy for Local Council Tax Reduction Schemes concerning the transfer of funding following the abolition of Council Tax Benefit.

4. Benefit Cap

DWP updated the meeting:

- a series of letters has been issued to LA Chief Executives and shared with the Steering Group and Practitioners' Operational Group (POG)
- scan data was issued to LA Single Points of Contact between 09 and 13 May
- the project is on course to issue notification letters from 24 May over a 10 day period.

DWP explained how the amount for New Burdens had been calculated, in light of the expected increase in take up for support.

The meeting discussed the methodology for roll out. The LAAs strongly recommended that the same methodology used for the first cap should be adopted this time, i.e. LA by LA. They explained that this would take local issues such as fairness and equity into account. They pointed out that the 'round table' approach adopted for the first capping exercise had worked well. DWP will take forward the suggestion of a 'round table' meeting.

The LAAs asked whether funding for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) can be carried over.

5. HB Fraud Issue Progression

DWP explained that:

- awareness of the issues around Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS) had led to a consultancy exercise looking at the issues from a LA perspective
- the exercise concluded with 17 recommendations, one of which was to set up an internal governance group
- a second commission to review the end to end process came up with a further 18 recommendations.

DWP went on to say that at the inaugural meeting of the governance group a significant number of the 35 recommendations were closed as completed and resolved.

DWP explained that as the bulk of these had happened by March 2016, HDD is now seeking issues from LAAs that have occurred after March 2016 to take forward.

The LAAs referred to the publication of Management Information (MI). DWP explained that this is one of the more serious remaining issues, and that it is planned to develop MI across the whole process.

The LAAs asked about phase 1 and 2 referrals. DWP explained that this issue is open and live and a process is place with Fraud and Error Service (FES) to resolve the more serious cases.

The LAAs welcomed the action that has been taken.

With regard to communications, it was agreed that an article in HB Direct would be best way to report on progress.

6. AOB

A long standing Steering Group member informed the meeting that this would be their last meeting as they will be retiring in July. On behalf of the Steering Group, DWP thanked the member for their commitment over a significant number of years.

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

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