



Summary Minutes

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

Date: 09 November 2016

Attendees: DWP: Clare Elliott (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Adrian Shooter, Catherine Garman, Caroline Todd, Bethany Staff, Chris Franks, Jason Perrott, Andrew Hibble, Janet Wilkinson, Amanda Sowerby

Dial in: Robert Irvine, Steve Kempson, Kay Bendell, Paul Selby, Michelle Spencer, Sheena Parker

DCLG: Mercy Adebisi

LAAs: Andrew Stevens, Alex Sewell, Jennifer Wynter, Paul Ellary, ,

Dial in: Rose Doran, Matthew Evans, Howard Mason Peter Meehan, Chris Gibbs, Howard Mason

Apologies: Andrew Barbour, Steve Carey, Colin Wallbank, Lisa Hayward, Natalie Keogh

1. Welcome and Introductions:

DWP opened the meeting and introductions were made round the table and for those dialling in.

Matters Arising

Minutes

The minutes of the September meeting were agreed. A factual error concerning the introduction of the policy limiting support to two children was corrected. The policy will be introduced in 2017.

The action points were cleared.

2. Updates:

Housing Delivery Division (HDD) Overview

DWP advised on the following key areas:

Administration Subsidy 2017/18:

- HDD is working with analysts in respect of distribution which includes Universal Credit (UC) impacts

- once the 2017/18 financial settlement has been determined, there will then be an ad hoc meeting with Steering Group representatives later in November the aim to discuss allocations
- the ad hoc meeting will discuss the options, including netting and capping
- a circular will follow.

New Burdens

DWP advised the meeting that:

- for the removal of the Work Related Activity Component in Employment Support Allowance (ESA), work is underway to consider New Burdens, with a view to issuing a circular in January 2017.

Housing Policy Division (HPD) Overview

DWP advised on the following key areas:

Supreme Court Judgment in respect of the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy:

- judgment has been passed on 7 cases, 5 in favour of DWP and 2 against
- guidance will be issued to Local Authorities (LAs).

Supported Housing

- following September's announcement regarding Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates in the social sector and a new funding model for supported housing, a consultation document will be published.
- once claimants are subject to monthly assessment in UC, this could impact on the model for short term accommodation and this was something DWP and DCLG are keen to explore through the consultation document
- the consultation was published on 21st November and can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/funding-for-supported-housing>

Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)

- The allocations for 2017/18 are being finalised and will be subject to Ministerial approval

The LAAs asked how the consultation with Scottish LAs would work. .

DWP referred to the consultation on the Consequential Changes in respect of the Work Related Activity Component in ESA, thanking the LAAs for their co-operation.

On limiting Support to 2 Children and the consequential changes to Housing Benefit (HB), the aim was to begin a consultation with the LAAs by the end of the year.

UC

DWP updated the meeting on the following:

- the UC LA Steering Group met recently
- two further Jobcentres have gone live with Full Service; Melton Mowbray and Workington
- further details of the roll out schedule to 2018 will be published soon.

The meeting discussed an issue in Live Service, concerning single people in Temporary Accommodation who are being placed in UC, and the advice being given in respect of HB.

DWP acknowledged the LAA's concerns, adding that this issue will be addressed at the next UC LA Steering Group. DWP added that the new Rent Verification form should help to resolve the issue. The LAAs referred to the impact on London LAs.

The LAAs asked about HB debt in UC. DWP advised that work is underway to understand the debt position and options.

Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG)

DCLG referred the meeting to the Local Council Tax Support (LCTS) report and recommendations; a response is planned for publication in Spring 2017.

DCLG explained that it is identifying key stakeholders including DWP and the LAAs.

DCLG went on to highlight some key areas:

- DCLG is looking at legal powers in respect of the 31 January deadline for LCTS to be agreed
- for collection of arrears, LAs want to seek voluntary attachment to earnings
- there is concern around data sharing for LCTS recipients as UC is rolled out.

3. Benefit Cap

DWP updated the meeting:

- implementation commenced on 7 November
- there were issues around the files for automated cases
- the issues have now been resolved and a note acknowledging the inconvenience caused has been issued to all LAs
- New Burdens will be reviewed at the end of year and in the round
- the project will issue clarification in respect of Managed Payments to Landlords (MPTL).

The frustration felt by the LAAs in respect of the issues around the implementation was noted, and it was agreed that MPTL should be discussed at the next Practitioners' Operational Group (POG) meeting.

The LAAs pointed out that POG could be involved in any further testing to prevent a repeat of some of the issues. DWP explained that a review of the issues around testing is underway.

4. Wider Use of Real Time Information (WURTI)

DWP set out:

- the background to WURTI and its intention to prevent fraud and error
- the current position in respect of service testing with 6 LAs
- the WURTI alerts service
- roll out along with migration risks and assumptions
- issues raised by LAs.

The LAAs strongly challenged the assumption that no new burden payments will be required as, in their view, additional work will be required.

The LAAs added that more detail is needed in respect of volumes and thresholds. DWP explained that, initially the alerts will only be triggered for start or end of employment or receipt of pension only.

The LAAs pointed out potential issues around multiple employers.

Steering Group members questioned the timing of the roll out in January, as it will coincide with LAs annual billing.

DWP explained that LAs had asked whether WURTI could be used with Tax Credit information.

DWP pointed out that the project will need:

- IP addresses for all LAs
- LAs to open their firewalls to connect to WURTI.

5. **Fraud & Error Reduction Incentive Scheme (FERIS) 3**

DWP updated the meeting:

- the baselines and thresholds for quarters 1 and 2 will be the same as the previous FERIS regime
- a review will take place in August 2017 to determine the correct thresholds in the light of WURTI experience
- the FERIS 3 team will be working with the WURTI project
- the Maintenance Fund will be launched by letter in January
- LAs will need to re-apply but a light touch approach will be deployed.

6. **Future Audit Arrangements 2018/19**

DWP outlined the current position:

- the Department is aiming for a system similar to the existing system
- work is ongoing with PSAA Ltd in an advisory capacity
- the tests in respect of the subsidy claim will be the same as are currently used
- Chief Finance officers will be informed and the circular should be issued early in the New Year
- this applies to England only; Scotland and Wales are being kept informed
- LAs should procure services on this basis.

DWP asked the Steering Group to nominate a selection of LAs to take part in a detailed review of the instructions. The LAAs suggested that an item in HB Direct would yield a wider spread of LAs.

DWP added that existing subsidy workshops and masterclasses for experienced staff will be expanded. The LAAs suggested that the IRRV Regional Forums could be used for this.

7. **AOB**

No further items of AOB were brought forward.

Date of Next Meeting: The next full meeting of the LAA Steering Group will take place on 17 January 2017 in Caxton House room LG 5/6 starting at 11.00.

Contact: Mont Goldman

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