



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting: Practitioners' Operational Group (POG)

Date: 29 November 2016

Location: Caxton House Room 5.21

Attendees: **DWP:** Adrian Shooter (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Paul Selby, Darren Baker, Amanda Sowerby, Mike Taylor, Alan Brown, Robert Irvine

Dial-in: Kay Bendell, Adrian Landeg, Andrew Hibble, Louise Reilly, Fiona Mcleish, Paddy Wild, Phil Smith

Observers: Karen Ward, Diana Lusikila

LAAs: Paul Ellary (RBKC), June Deans (Glasgow), Mark Gillmore (EK Services), Adrian Mills (Anglia Revenues), Gwynn Thomas (Westminster), Frankie Cartwright (South Staffs)

Dial-in: Chris Boylett (Newham – London Councils), Pamela Richardson (Gateshead), Jean Cheeseman (South Bucks), Matthew Evans (Wrexham), Paula Doherty (Dumfries & Galloway)

Apologies: Les Robertson (Fife), Sian Peters (Birmingham), Karl Thomas (Wales), Colin Wallbank (Welsh LGA), Andrew Hyatt (RBKC), Charles Taylor (E Renfrewshire), Iain Marshalsay (Ceredigion)

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 previous meeting were agreed.

Actions

Transfer of Capital Rules: DWP updated the meeting; there have been some technical issues with the transfer of Capital Rules. Testing is ongoing and a meeting with the pilot Local Authorities (LAs) has been arranged.

With regard to future funding streams, DWP explained that a paper will be shared with the Local Authority Associations Steering Group in December.

2. HB Fraud Referral Process Improvements

DWP is aware of LA concerns regarding the Single Fraud Investigation Service.

To this end Fraud & Error Service had set a specialist referral team based in Taunton, to improve the process

DWP set out some proposals around:

- LA generated referrals and the use of the Local Authority Information Exchange Form (LAIEF).
- non-LA generated referrals and the use of the LAIEF
- LAIEF form improvements
- low level fraud cases and the performance outcomes that FES can claim

POG responded favourably to DWP's proposals.

In summary, the meeting reached a consensus. The LAIEF will need as much detail as possible as this can affect any escalation route.

POG's overall view was positive, noting that DWP had taken their comments on board. It was agreed that in determining what makes a good referral, local liaison will be a key factor.

POG members advised that requests for witness declarations are increasing.

3. Debt Management Update

DWP updated POG on the analysis of debt which is underway, leading the meeting through a series of activities, giving the latest position on:

- debt forecast (HM Revenues & Customs and DWP)
- debt forecast Housing Benefit (HB)
- understanding the impact of debt policy in Universal Credit (UC) on LA HB debt
- analysis of multiple debtors
- analysis of likely earnings levels for UC claimants.

DWP added that the key issue is the rising level of HB debt.

4. Benefit Cap

DWP updated the meeting on the following:

Implementation:

- implementation took place on 07 November as planned

- to date, cases processed and grace period requests received are marginally ahead of profile
- automation of cases is live in all but 3 LAs
- regarding the technical issues prior to implementation, lessons have been learned and the inconvenience caused to LAs has been acknowledged.

With regard to Managed Payments to Landlords (MPTL) DWP explained that UC will issue clarification in December. Further guidance is planned and the draft will be shared with POG prior to its issue.

POG members asked about data sharing and in particular around the relevance of full UC data prior to capping.

The meeting discussed concerns around how claimants are using Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), and, in respect of MPTL, liability for rent.

POG reminded DWP that it can be of assistance in respect of identifying sites for testing.

5. Wider Use of Real Time Information (WURTI)

DWP set out:

- the background and aims of the WURTI project
- the current position in respect of testing
- Management Information (MI) and feedback from LAs
- the Alerts service
- LA roll out and migration; assumptions and risks
- the proposed roll out schedule.

POG members raised the following points:

- a majority of the test LAs have reported that WURTI generates more work
- the DWP evaluation should include the end to end process
- pilot LAs are still having to write out to claimants to obtain additional information to support the claim

DWP explained that this will feed into the evaluation process, as verification activity will vary. A Good Practice guide is planned.

On a wider issue, POG members asked whether WURTI could be used for Local Council Tax Reduction (LCTR).

Roll out:

- cost of implementation and new burdens need to be resolved before rollout commences in January
- January is not the right time to commence roll out as LAs will be engaged with Annual Billing and the benefit cap.

POG members queried whether UC roll out, and Benefit Cap had been factored into the roll out schedule.

POG members referred to issues with Customer Information System (CIS) when they move to WURTI.

Housing Delivery Division (HDD) agreed to provide an update for POG in relation to access to CIS when LAs move to WURTI

DWP summarised some of POG's key concerns:

- a balanced view is needed from the MI, which measures the impact on fraud and error along with processes and procedures
- there is a major concern around the timing for commencing the roll out
- a definitive answer is needed on the question of New Burdens.

6. General Referral Matching Service (GRMS)

DWP outlined a project to move the current 'out sourced' data matching service (GRMS) into an 'in house' securely managed data matching environment. The project approach will be to dual run the new service alongside the current service, in order to minimise disruption.

DWP provided further technical detail of what the new suite will contain.

7. Automated Transfer to Local Authority Systems (ATLAS)

Data Hub

Letters had been issued to LA Revenues and Benefits Managers concerning the issues around the Data Hub. The letter described the issues and root causes. HDD is working with DWP suppliers on a daily basis.

Glass Cubes

POG pointed out that Glass Cubes remains difficult to understand. DWP acknowledged POG's concerns, adding that HDD is looking into this and asking Glass Cubes to provide some options.

8. AOB

Pension Credit and Savings Credit cases will be subject automated uprating this year. Retirement Pension cases will not be subject to automated uprating this year.

Date of Next Meeting: The next POG will take place on 31 January 2017 Caxton House Room 5.21. 10.30 – 12.30.

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