



# Summary Minutes

**Title of meeting:** Practitioners' Operational Group (POG)

**Date:** 31 January 2017

**Location:** Caxton House Room LG 5/6

**Attendees:** **DWP:** Darren Baker (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Darrell Smith, Andrew Hibble, Martin Little, Catherine Garman, Gary Rodgers,

**Dial-in:** Paul Selby, Kay Bendell, Fiona Mcleish, Paddy Wild, Phil Smith, Karen Macaulay, Mike Bond, Paul Moad

**Observers:** Diana Lusikila

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

**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.

Managed Payments to Landlords (MPTL)

DWP explained that a revised version of the bulletin item along with revised guidance will be issued to POG as soon as possible.

*Note: subsequent to the meeting, the revised bulletin and guidance, taking POG's comments into consideration was issued on 03 February 2017.*

Wider Use of Real Time Information (WURTI)

POG welcomed the resolution of the Customer Information System (CIS) downtime issue.

DWP explained the roll out process, and how earnings can be verified without recourse to further correspondence.

## **2. Supported Accommodation**

DWP responded to issues raised by POG, who in turn have received enquiries from providers.

2018 - 2020 and beyond

DWP explained that there are some issues around transition post 2020 and discussion with Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG) is required.

With regard to 2018/19, DWP pointed out that there is a need to plan for a new scheme for 2019.

DWP explained that there will be four independent reports in addition to the consultation responses and that there will be a green paper later in the year once the responses have been considered.

POG members referred to the fit between local authority (LA) Temporary Accommodation and Universal Credit (UC), and how this impacts on short term emergency accommodation. DWP are considering options for how this is to be handled.

With regard to the Management Fee in Temporary Accommodation, DWP explained that this will be covered by a grant from DCLG.

## **3. Debt Update**

DWP highlighted:

- Recent activity including:
  - the brief issued to senior DWP leaders which called for debt including Housing Benefit (HB) to be considered a Departmental priority
  - work ongoing with LA IT suppliers
  - work ongoing with a number of volunteer LAs to analyse recovery data, which will be shared with POG, once it has been finalised.
- Next Steps including:
  - the creation of a HB debt specific strategy and activity plan
  - ongoing analysis of the impact of UC.

The meeting discussed the establishment of a Debt Working Group.

POG referred to options for an automated approach to bulk matches with greater access to employer details to facilitate Direct Attachments to Earnings for those no longer in receipt of benefits.

#### **4. Payment Deduction Programme (PDP) Update**

DWP set out:

- the background
- an explanation of the issues and their effects
- ongoing research
- the recommendation that each LA takes part in reconciliation of Debt Management (DM) and LA data
- an overview of the data provided in the extracts along with some guidance to help LAs decide the appropriate action on each case
- the next steps to refer back to POG once DM have finalised plans for roll out.

POG noted that the exercise is welcome, giving their agreement in principle for the exercise to go ahead.

POG asked to see any evaluation of PDP.

#### **5. Limiting Support in HB to 2 Children**

DWP explained the key points including the implications for LAs.

POG referred to the limited number of potential cases and asked whether a dedicated email or phone line could be established with HM Revenues & Customs (HMRC).

#### **6. Home Office Data Share**

DWP referred to an approach to support the reporting of migrant cases, where the Home Office (HO) have identified HB claimants who may no longer have leave to remain in the UK, and may not have a continued right to receive HB, therefore resulting in an overpayment.

DWP led the meeting through:

- the background to the pilot
- pilot findings, issues and DWP's response to those issues
- funding considerations
- a proposal to distribute the stockpiled cases to their owning LAs in February 2017
- the need to establish a single point of contact (SPOC) in each LA.

POG referred to potential issues around changes of address and asked about immigration status flags on CIS.

POG pointed out that the information needs to be clear in order for the LA to make a correct decision, as cases can be complex. DWP explained that the data will have been fully cleansed through HO and HMRC.

POG agreed to the proposal.

## **7. AOB**

### Changes to Removal of the Room Subsidy

DWP explained the current position following the Supreme Court judgement. Draft guidance is needed as soon as possible, and will be issued to POG for Quality Assurance as a matter of urgency before it is issued to LAs.

### Optional Real Time Information (RTI)

POG agreed the delivery of Optional RTI between the hiatus period of February to April 2017.

**Date of Next Meeting:** The next POG will take place on 29 March 2017 Caxton House Room Lower Ground 5/6. 10.30 – 12.30.

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