



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting: Practitioners' Operational Group (POG)

Date: 27 September 2017

Location: Caxton House Room 2.30

Attendees: DWP: Darren Baker (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Adrian Shooter, Paul Selby, Chris Franks, Kay Bendell, Darrell Smith

Dial-in: Adrian Landeg

Observer; Paul Diu

LAAs: Paul Ellary (RB Kensington & Chelsea), June Deans (Glasgow), Gwynn Thomas (Westminster), Adrian Mills (Anglia Revenues), David Kinnair (Birmingham)

Dial-in: Mark Gillmore (EK Services), Lisa Fuller (Renfrewshire), Matthew Evans (Wrexham), Paula Doherty (Dumfries & Galloway), Pam Richardson (Gateshead)

Apologies: Chris Boylett (LB Hackney), Les Robertson (Fife), Colin Wallbank (Welsh LGA), Andrew Hyatt (RB Kensington & Chelsea), Charles Taylor (East Renfrewshire), Iain Marshalsay (Ceredigion), Colin Graham (Dumfries)

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.

Action Points

Action points were cleared.

Forward Look

DWP introduced the Forward Look as a future standing item; the timing of publication will be quarterly. The product will be issued to all LAs. POG members suggested that a column showing methods of communication could be a useful addition.

POG members queried whether the Wider Use of Real Time Information (WURTI) alerts rollout along with timescales should be included. The meeting went on to discuss the overlap of communications in respect of Universal Credit (UC). DWP explained that a review of communications within UC is at transitional stage, looking at how best to manage communications henceforth. DWP pointed out that current thinking is around producing UC Circulars along similar lines as the General Information Bulletins. The eventual outcome should be Local Authority (LA) based rather than separate communications strands for UC and Housing Benefit (HB).

2. UC Update

DWP updated the meeting on the following key points:

The UC Full Service Support Pack:

- the pack has been sent to Partnership Managers
- it is interactive, in PDF format.
- Partnership Managers will issue the pack to LAs as part of implementation
- the pack is not substantially different from previous versions
- the file will be relatively large, 5.5 megabytes.

Roll out and Expansion:

- scaling up is on track to commence in October
- the roll out will be according to the published schedule
- Local Authority Associations' (LAA) concerns were put on record at the Programme Board.

[subsequent to the meeting Neil Couling has since written to all LAs confirming expansion is on track]

UC Support Funding

- letters to Chief Finance Officers and Revenues and Benefits Managers were issued on 26 September
- New Burdens payments will be issued in the near future, more detail will be included a UC Circular

Quarterly Engagement Workshops:

- the latest round of workshops has been completed
- over 100 LAs have attended the workshops
- Lessons learned will be shared with POG.

Universal Service Management Information (MI):

- Quarter 1 MI has been shared with Districts
- there has been a high proportion of nil returns.

POG members referred to recording Assisted Digital, and in particular the 100 word limit. They also referred to functionality for quarters 3 and 4, pointing out the need for a like for like comparison. POG members also asked about data sharing for 2018/19.

Partnership Forum:

- feedback from the Partnership Forum will be presented to the next LA Welfare Steering Group and POG.

Managed Migration:

- a meeting with the LAA leads will take place week commencing 02 October
- the initial stages will be discussed at the 18 October LA Welfare Steering Group and a subsequent POG meeting.

3. LA Fraud Referral MI

DWP asked POG for their views on the LA Fraud Referral MI, subsequent to its publication.

POG members stated their preference for publication of the data on a quarterly basis. This would tie in with caseload statistics. POG members were of the view that the MI could have a positive effect, as currently, lack of feedback is an issue for LA staff.

It was agreed that the first publication should be badged as test data.

5. Single Fraud Investigation (SFI) Service Level Agreement (SLA)

DWP referred to proposals which had been put to POG, thanking those POG members for their contribution to the review meeting. The original SLA was issued in 2014 and needed revision to reflect the current reality.

DWP pointed out that timings are not set in stone, and that the SLA will set out a clear route for escalation.

6. Timing of Employee Authentication Service (EAS)

POG members explained that with the approach of year end, LAs will need to know what will be involved in respect of the replacement for EAS.

DWP explained that the existing service has a deadline for termination of February 2018. The replacement is on track for delivery in February 2018. DWP confirmed that testing will take in November 2017 to ensure no gaps in the access to Customer Information System (CIS). DWP added that this is an Agile run project, and will be an improvement on the existing service.

Specialised Supported Housing/

With regard to Supported Housing, DWP gave the meeting an outline of the current position.

Work is ongoing with DCLG and the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

With regard to Specialised Supported Accommodation in England, DWP asked for POG's views on how best to gather some meaningful data from LAs, particularly around top levels of rent and contractual rent.

POG members suggested that an item in HB Direct could garner significant feedback.

POG pointed out that Scottish LAs are experiencing similar issues. They added that SHBE statistics could be unreliable as the flags do not cover Specialised Supported Housing.

They also pointed out that the definitions in UC for Specified Accommodation needed clarification.

8. AOB

- 1) POG members referred to the request for LA volunteers for weekend work on CIS. DWP explained that no funding is available and that the project is small scale with possibly only one user at one LA required. POG pointed out that more detail would be required.
- 2) POG members raised an issue around Payment Deduction Programme cessations. They also asked about progress on the reconciliation exercise.
- 3) DWP referred to a letter issued to LAs on 19 September, concerning the HB Debt Recovery Service, adding that this represented an extra tool for the recovery of debt stock, being more up to date and part of a wider strategic approach. DWP is looking at how best to develop an efficient service; the direction of travel remains unchanged, and communication will be a key issue.
- 4) DWP referred to the LA Insight Survey, and the next wave, pointing out the advantages in consulting POG on topics and areas by correspondence. POG agreed to take this on board.
- 5) DWP advised that the draft Memorandum of Understanding, (MoU) for access to CIS which had been issued to POG for comment, is now being revised for the final version which should be issued to LAs in the near future.

Date of Next Meeting: The next POG will take place on 29 November 2017 Caxton House Room 5.21. 10.30 – 14.00.

Contact: Mont Goldman

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