

Practitioners' Operational Group

Terms of Reference

1.0 Practitioners Operational Group

1. The Practitioners' Operational Group (POG) operates under the umbrella of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)/Local Authority Associations (LAA) Welfare Steering Group (Steering Group) to provide a sounding board and interchange forum for officials and LAA nominated local authority practitioners on any matter relating to the development of: Housing Benefit administration, Universal Credit operational impacts for LAs, fraud and error and compliance issues.

2.0 Remit

- 2.1 Its remit includes discussion of, and operational input into policy development as well as consideration of operational issues referred to POG by the Steering Group. It also deals with the operational interaction between the LAAs and DWP in respect of annual Service Level Agreement (SLA) reviews and closer working issues.
- 2.2 The group reports back to the Steering Group on its work and outcomes. Where possible, POG will be a decision making body, only referring matters to the Steering Group where a higher level strategic steer is required.

3.0 Terms of reference

- 3.1 The group will be responsible for:
 - providing operational insight into Housing Benefit (HB) reform proposals, and ad hoc DWP proposals impacting on HB administration such as the introduction of Universal Credit;
 - reviewing and signing off draft SLA documents at times set out in the SLA key milestone delivery timetable;
 - providing quality assurance and clearance of HB circulars as detailed in methods of working;
 - communicating the outcomes from POG discussions through the formally agreed DWP and LAA communication channels;
 - providing operational insight into all matters impacting on fraud and error, and compliance issues,
 - considering and developing solutions and opportunities for improved joint-working arrangements between SFIS and LAs;

- exploration of, and input into, strategies and performance measures designed to support the achievement of fraud and error-related aspirations;
- encouraging the development and sharing of good practice in relation to counter-fraud and error activity;
- QA for any fraud and error related circulars prior to distribution to LAs.
- Providing operational insight into Universal Credit operational impacts for LAs to support the full roll-out of the benefit nationally;
- proposing development of initiatives in support of the above.

4.0 Membership

- 4.1 Chair – Housing Support Division (HSD) representative generally Head of Operational Policy and Planning

LAs – nominated representatives from the LAAs (Local Government Association, Association of London Government, Confederation Of Scottish Local Authorities, Welsh Local Government Association)

DWP – as required

5.0 Methods of working

- 5.1 The Group will:

- hold meetings at a monthly frequency. A programme of meeting dates will be set in advance for each calendar year;
- provide expert views on technical guidance within agreed time spans through:
 - written clearance of non-contentious items as and when required
 - written clearance of those HB circulars discussed and developed within the POG meeting framework;
 - quality assurance and written clearance of HB developed outside of the POG meeting framework.
- commission one-off workshops charged with developing particular ideas or resolving specific issues or where specific technical expertise is required.

6.0 Secretariat support

- 6.1 Provided by Housing Support Division.