



# Summary Minutes

<b>Title of meeting:</b>	DWP Local Authority Association (LAA) Steering Group
<b>Date:</b>	10 June 2015
<b>Location:</b>	Caxton House Room 6.03
<b>Attendees:</b>	<b>DWP:</b> Neil Johnson (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Chris Franks, Sue Francis, Manny Ibiayo, Sam Higley, Helen Kelly, Alison Evans, Saima Tarapdar, Imogen Blood, Lewis Hill <b>Observers:</b> Richard Wood <b>Audit Scotland:</b> Ann Cairns <b>DCLG:</b> Margaret Uhure, Wayne Caffell <b>LAAs:</b> Rose Doran, Pat Durkin, Daniel Drillsma-Millgrom, Lesley Pigott, Valerie Pearce, Colin Wallbank, David Lock, Howard Mason
<b>Apologies:</b>	Peter Meehan, David Graaff, Paul Ellary, John Rosenbloom, Chris Gibbs, Matthew Evans, Andrew Stevens, Clare Elliott

## 1. Welcome and Introductions:

DWP opened the meeting and introductions were made round the table.

### Matters Arising

Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

## 2. Updates:

Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS)

Implementation is approximately half way to completion and over five hundred staff have transferred from LAs to DWP.

The LAAs pointed out the importance of performance data for LAs in respect of SFIS. They also stressed the importance of the lessons learned during SFIS implementation, as this would be of particular relevance for the rollout and migration to UC. It was agreed that when produced, the lessons learned should be shared with the Steering Group.

DCLG

The LAAs asked about the Private Members' Bill regarding Council Tax Support, noting the implications for LAs. They added that this Bill could also carry implications for the Prescribed Regulations for pensioners.

The LAAs asked about the independent review of Council Tax Support. DCLG explained that the review will report its findings by April 2016.

## Universal Credit (UC)

- The Scotland Bill has had its second reading and will now pass to Committee stage.
- The ongoing restructuring of the engagement strategy for delivery, will see the establishment of a replacement forum to the Transition Working Group (TWG) and a specific UC Steering Group with LAA representation, which will run in parallel with the LAA Steering Group.
- The first meeting is planned to take place in July.

## Subsidy

DWP updated the meeting. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) hearing delivered six recommendations in respect of incentives for LAs to reduce the levels of fraud and error. A LA survey has been commissioned with responses due by the end of June. From this survey and input from focus groups, a set of options will be developed and shared with the Steering Group in draft, before reporting back to PAC at the end of August.

### **3. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs)**

The Steering Group discussed DHPs, and whether the intention is to maintain the current levels of funding. DWP is engaged in ongoing discussions with HM Treasury. DWP acknowledged the LAA's concerns around how DHPs are allocated and administered, particularly around multi year allocations.

LAAs pointed out the inherent risks attached to DHP levels.

### **4. Welfare Savings**

DWP explained that once any new measures in the forthcoming summer budget are known, it will link to discussions around DHPs.

The LAAs pointed out the wider implications for support for Temporary Accommodation with impacts on Housing, Children and the Health agenda.

In general discussion the LAAs raised the following points:

- The implications of the Smith Commission for the Scottish government.
- New measures could create new burdens.
- Working in partnership with DWP on the introduction of the benefit cap had been a positive experience and it is hoped that this approach will be used in implementing any reductions to the benefit cap.
- Any savings for HB in relation to cases migrated to UC will be dependent on the UC migration timeline.

The LAAs asked about in year reductions in respect of Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL), and also whether any evidence they could gather on the use of DHPs would be useful. DWP referred the meeting to the Chancellors announcement on in year budget reductions and said that any analysis of DHP spend is of course helpful.

### **5. Devolution (Smith Commission)**

DWP gave the meeting a background into the establishment of the Smith Commission, and an update on the subsequent Scotland Bill, which received its second reading on 8 June.

DWP explained that the Bill contains 12 clauses relating to welfare.

The LAAs pointed out that there could be cost implications with regard to the variance of frequency for housing cost payments in UC.

A Wales Bill is planned for the autumn.

## **6. Supported Accommodation Review**

DWP gave the meeting the background into the review, explaining that detailed analysis has been commissioned as this is regarded as vital to supporting the lives of the most vulnerable.

The aim of the project is to develop a robust evidence base for England, Scotland and Wales.

- Stage 1 comprises a desk based review of existing data sets and engagement with stakeholder providers.
- Stage 2 will involve fieldwork including a LA survey and a separate provider survey.

From stage 1, a partial picture has emerged, Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE) data appears to under represent this sector.

The process for Stage 2 aims to address the evidence gaps and to generate a robust evidence base.

- LAs will be surveyed on-line, postally and by telephone, and this survey will differ from the LA Insight survey on the Subsidy Regime.
- The survey will be road tested with some LAs.

DWP explained that buy-in from the LAAs is important, as they can play a role in encouraging LAs to participate in the survey.

The meeting discussed how best to contact the relevant people in LAs – beginning with the most senior. It was agreed that the survey should be sent to Section 151 Officers (England and Wales) and 95 Officers (Scotland).

The LAAs noted the importance of the survey.

## **7. AOB**

The meeting discussed the appointment of the new Ministers.

It was agreed to convene the next meeting on a date following the Budget on 8 July.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The date of the next meeting will be 28 July, following the July Budget, and will take place in Caxton House.

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