



## Summary Minutes

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

**Location: Caxton House Room 2.30**

**Attendees: DWP:** Darren Baker Housing Delivery Division (HDD) (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat) HDD, Paul Selby HDD, Adrian Shooter HDD, Rob Bridgewater Fraud Error & Debt, (FED) Chris Franks, Universal Credit (UC)

**Dial-in:** Kay Bendell, Anne-Marie Read, Marion Joass (All HDD)

**Local Authority Associations (LAAs):** Paul Ellary (RB Kensington & Chelsea), Gwynn Thomas (Westminster), David Kinnair (Birmingham), Chris Boylett (LB Newham), Mark Gillmore (EK Services)

**Dial-in:** June Deans (Glasgow), Matthew Evans (Wrexham), Pam Richardson (Gateshead), Lisa Fuller (Renfrewshire)

**Apologies:** Mandy Fathers (West Oxford), Adrian Mills (Anglia Revenues), Les Robertson (Fife), 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

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

The following action points remain open:

AP March 01 2018: DWP explained that Housing Policy Division (HPD) had responded to POG's concerns around the Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) regs to be amended to enable a DHP to be awarded before a UC claim is decided and their response will be issued to POG.

It was agreed to invite HPD to the next POG meeting and to arrange a teleconference in the interim.

POG advised that out of date versions of form MGP1 are being issued by Service Centres. A further action was recorded to ensure that DWP Operations are using the correct MGP1s

POG members felt that that the entry in the UC Issues Resolution Log on Corporate Appointees did not fully address their concerns. DWP explained that the information contained in the log is current and represents all the information that can be communicated at the present time.

POG noted the minutes from the recent Local Authority Welfare Steering Group meeting.

## **2. UC Issues Resolution Log/UC Update**

POG reviewed the Issues Resolution Log by exception.

POG asked whether there were any plans to change policy in respect of Automation of Transition to UC Housing Payment. DWP confirmed that at this time there are no such plans.

### UC Update

DWP updated the meeting on the following:

#### Roll out

- scaling up continues with 389 Jobcentres now live with Full Service
- as at 10 May 2018 the caseload stood at 920, 000, of which 37% are in employment.

#### Universal Support

- with regard to any additional funding, evidence gathering from Local Authorities (LAs) is continuing in respect of their costs
- 373 LAs have signed up for Universal Support 2018/19, an increase on 366 in 2017/18
- all LAs signed up for Universal Support in 2017/18 have been notified of their end of year reconciliation payment
- all LAs signed up for Universal Support in 2018/19 have been notified of their 50% upfront Quarter 1 payment
- work is underway to prepare payment schedules for New Burdens
- an internal review of Universal Support is looking to obtain feedback from users and providers on Universal Support. DWP will provide a summary of findings and recommendations in autumn 2018
- 2018/19 Universal Support Quarter 1 Management Information (MI) returns are due on 15 July
- the on line facility for claiming an advance of UC is now live.

POG discussed how claimants are referred for Universal Support, and how this should not be solely from Jobcentres.

POG members also pointed out that Managed Migration is their major concern. DWP explained that 2 consultations are ongoing and once they have concluded, more detailed plans can be shared.

### **3. Data Sharing**

DWP updated the meeting on the following areas of interest:

#### *Impact of the recent Windrush issues on the Home Office Data Share*

DWP set out the latest position, including action on Housing Benefit (HB) passported cases and further data shares.

POG pointed out that it will be difficult to identify these cases, and that DWP had been helpful.

#### *Employee Authentication Service (EAS) Replacement*

DWP set out:

- project status and key points
- current status in respect of Connectivity, end user migration, Champion led Admin set up, Local Admin Application and Central Admin Application.

DWP added that fixes for issues with the greatest LA impacts have been prioritised.

POG complimented the project on how much better EAS Replacement was to the old EAS. DWP referred to the challenging timetable for delivery.

#### *State Pension annual uprating automation project*

DWP advised the meeting that the automation of State Pension Uprating is on track for delivery by the end of the calendar year, as set out in the recent General Information Bulletin. DWP referred to previous attempts which had failed, adding that in accordance to previous discussions, there would be no change in priorities.

#### *Data Matching Tool*

DWP set out in detail what the product is and how it will work.

#### *Automation of the Transition to UC Payment*

DWP explained that funding has been agreed and details have been agreed with the Software Suppliers and that automation is on track for delivery at the end of the financial year.

#### **4. Counter Fraud Compliance Directorate (CFCD) Update**

DWP updated the meeting:

- wider use of the Data Hub for transfer of data is being considered
- an item on New Burdens Funding has been published in HB Direct
- the variance across LAs in the time taken to action fraud referrals has been acknowledged, and an improvement to the process is under development.

#### Service Level Agreement (SLA)

DWP advised the meeting that the SLA had been issued to LA Chief Executives in May, and approximately 50% had been signed and returned. DWP explained that the SLA should be seen as the basis for local workable agreements.

#### MI

- quarter 4 for 17/18 data has been issued
- MI for Quarter 1 2018/19 will be issued in early August
- where actions on referrals are low, HDD Performance Managers will be available to offer support.

POG highlighted the need to ensure MI is accurate if it is to be used in any funding allocation methodology for referral New Burdens going forward.

#### **5. Self Employed Scan**

DWP updated the meeting

- since the last POG, where this activity was raised, the test data is now with the volunteer LAs
- anecdotal reaction so far has been positive, in that this is a worthwhile exercise
- a business case is being developed for the internal Investment Committee
- further details will be discussed at POG, once funding has been agreed.

POG suggested that any good practice guidance issued prior to the launch should include HB case law pertaining to self employed cases. POG also asked to ensure that FES staff were aware of this activity as it could result in an increase of referrals for self employed cases.

## **6. Verify Earnings & Pensions (VEP) Update**

DWP set out:

- background, context and purpose
- VEP Roadmap
- integration - progress and priorities
- integration, priorities and benefits.

DWP explained that:

- 4000 alerts have been completed and engagement through Single Points Of Contacts (SPOC) is continuing
- there is a phased approach to roll out, with fluctuating earnings to be rolled out later in August
- Customer Information System (CIS) interest automation should result in a decrease of nugatory alerts
- HB Data Integration and Earnings and Alerts Integration will maximise the performance of the alerts.

DWP confirmed that the planned workshops will be face to face, with a teleconference for those LAs unable to attend. DWP added that lessons learned from the first tranches will be shared, and that feedback from the front line will be key for funding and design for VEP 2019/20.

## **7. Proposed HB Direct/General Information Bulletin (GIB) Replacement**

DWP explained the rationale behind merging these 2 communications documents. Editorials will be shared among the HDD Grade 6's to give LAs a greater insight into the range of activities being carried out. DWP added that where there is an urgent need for communication outside of the regular publication date, a 'light' version of the document can be issued.

POG members were in general agreement with the proposals, pointing out that GIBs have contained important items not published elsewhere, and that it would be important to maintain the index found on .gov.uk.

POG members asked whether the merged document could include pertinent items on UC. DWP explained the current position and view in respect of

separate UC Bulletins whilst UC Full Service is being rolled out. Once roll out has been completed, UC could be included in any merged HB/GI document.

The meeting discussed a title for the document. POG members felt that the title should infer a Newsletter style approach, as an informal approach will draw in LA staff.

## 8. **AOB**

POG members referred to the Temporary Accommodation Working Group mentioned at the June LA Welfare Steering Group. They asked to be updated in respect of any outcomes, pointing out that they have a potential role to play.

A POG member raised an issue around duplication in respect of the Data Hub. DWP acknowledged that this is a long standing issue, and that a fix to the issue had already been commissioned, to be implemented sometime in the next few months.

More generally, POG members raised concerns about the ongoing high number of issues each day relating to the Data Hub. DWP agreed, and said that nearly all incidents are resolved within hours. There is no one single cause. Some issues were supplier related. When this has been the case, DWP is able to fundamentally fix things and seek their apology. Many of the daily issues are however related to DWP architecture and internal systems.

**Date of Next Meeting:** The next full meeting of POG will take place on 19 September 2018 Caxton House Room 2.30 10.30 – 14.00.

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