



# Summary Minutes

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| <b>Title of meeting:</b> | POG  |
| <b>Date:</b>             | 20 February 2013   |
| <b>Location:</b>         | Caxton House Room 6.03   |
| <b>Attendees:</b>        | <p><b>DWP:</b> Geoff Scammell (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Brian Brighthouse, James Ablewhite, Sarah Hall, Steven Todd, Tressy Wojtowicz (Dial in), David Farrar (Dial in), Jon Copestake (observer)</p> <p><b>LAAs:</b> Lesley Pigott, Frankie Cartwright, June Deans, Alan Sinclair, Matthew Evans (Dial in), Martin O'Neill (Dial in)</p> <p><b>Devolved Administrations:</b> Karl Thomas (Wales)</p> |
| <b>Apologies:</b>        | Gwyn Thomas, Paul Ellery   |

## 1. Welcome and Introductions:

Geoff Scammell opened the meeting and introductions were made round the table and for those dialing in.

## 2. Matters Arising

### Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

### Action Points

Mont Goldman updated the meeting on the action points from the January meeting. All the action points were cleared.

## 3. PIP Written Update

The written update had been circulated prior to the meeting. DWP asked POG for their feedback.

POG pointed out that LAs could experience a significant increase in contact from claimants as a result of the uprating letters, despite the message that no contact was necessary at this time.

POG members noted the written update.

With regard to ATLAS, DWP explained that the LAs involved in the testing were in the North West and North East of England.

POG members were concerned that the testing covered the key software suppliers.

POG members pointed out that any tactical solution for April and May 2013, resulting from delays to ATLAS would need to be clarified as soon as possible.

[ *Subsequent to the meeting, the PIP consequential regulations have been published, this is the link to the regulations:*

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2013/388/contents/made> ]

#### **4. Supported Exempt Accommodation**

Geoff Scammell opened the discussion, explaining that DWP had been looking at this issue for some time, with particular regard to the most effective use of money. He added that the intention is to protect provider funding and in the short term to treat these cases broadly as now through LA housing benefit teams under existing DWP legislation and funding arrangements. People in supported 'exempt' accommodation will still be able to claim and receive Universal Credit (UC) but their housing costs will be provided separately. It is intended to develop a long term solution.

In the November issue of HB Direct LAs were asked to provide information to identify these cases to enable DWP to baseline the current spend.

From the discussion that followed, key points to emerge were:

- Issues around accommodation which does not strictly fit the definition as set out in regulations.
- The differences between Supported Accommodation and Supported Exempt Accommodation.
- Issues around the definition as set out in existing regulations.
- Issues around the Social Sector Size Criteria in respect of the definition as set out in existing regulations.
- The broad spectrum of Supported Accommodation run by LAs, including Women's' refuges.
- The need for a link between the landlord and the service provider.
- Situations such as rebate cases in the private sector where service provision is not exempt as it not provided by a RSL.
- Complexities around service charges for LA owned property.
- All Supported Accommodation must be included in the funding.
- With regard to treatment in UC, cases will need to be identified as the migration rolls out.

POG members pointed out that some LAs will struggle to identify Supported Exempt Accommodation in the Social Sector, and suggested an urgent circular to clearly set out what is required.

An action point was taken for DWP to consult with its analysts on what information is required and how best it can be gathered.

Geoff thanked POG members for a constructive discussion.

## **5. Payment Deduction Programme (PDP)**

DWP referred the meeting to the paper on UC debt migration circulated on 14 February.

The paper explains the agreed clerical solution for the migration of a small number of Housing Benefit debt cases with an ongoing recovery of a housing benefit overpayment for phases 1 and 2 of the migration of HB cases to UC.

The paper also sets out the intention to develop contingency arrangements.

POG members pointed out that LAs would deal with a clerical solution but flagged up potential resourcing issues.

A discussion followed around rent arrears and Council Tax arrears. POG pointed out that liaison with DCLG was needed in respect of changes to their legislation for voluntary attachment to benefit, which could lead to an increase in cases for migration.

DWP pointed out that this is a scoping issue and agreed to check whether Council Tax arrears and rent arrears were included in the scope for PDP or whether this is an issue for UC.

## **6. Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**

DWP explained that the current MoU expired June 2012 and that an extension to April 2013 had been agreed at POG. A revised MoU has now been redrafted to include Localised Council Tax Reduction Schemes and Local Welfare Provision, as well as HB. The revised MoU covers data sharing arrangements and contains no changes to existing conditionality. The MoU has been re-worded to include any County Council responsible for Local Welfare Provision.

POG referred to an email on data sharing issued by DWP.

POG agreed to contact DWP to clarify the position.

Mont Goldman will send out the revised MoU to POG members for their comments, subject to clarification from DWP.

## **7. Loss of Benefit**

DWP referred the meeting to the slide pack on the changes to Loss of Benefits, which had been circulated on 14 February.

POG members noted the slide pack.

DWP confirmed that LAs will still be able to issue cautions, and that Loss of Benefit

sanctions will apply solely to DWP benefits.

**8. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of POG will take place on Wednesday March 27th at 10.30am at Caxton House.

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