



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting:	POG
Date:	22 May 2013
Location:	Caxton House Room 6.03
Attendees:	DWP: Geoff Scammell (Chair), Ursula Brennan (Secretariat), Julie Willoughby LAAs: Frankie Cartwright (dial in), June Deans, Paul Ellery, Matthew Evans, Alison McGrory, Gwyn Thomas, Pamela Richardson, Julian Stanbury Devolved Administrations: Karl Thomas (Wales)
Apologies:	Lesley Pigott, Mark Gillmore, Jane McManus, Alan Sinclair, Mark Underwood, Colin Wallbank

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

Geoff Scammell updated the meeting on the action points from the February and March meetings.

With regard to what information on Supported Exempt Accommodation is required and how best it can be gathered, DCLG have commissioned Sitra to find out what is happening on the ground.

DWP said that the information would be useful even if it wasn't available until later in the year as it will augment the information it is collecting through SHBE.

POG members suggested that LA's could also help.

Burnip Tengrove and Gorry: DWP acknowledged that changes to the way the spare room subsidy operates for disabled children following the Gorry judgment is likely to lead to more work for LAs in processing these cases. However, there is also likely to be less demand for DHPs which will mean some balancing savings.

POG members asked when the decision for the current Judicial Review cases was likely to be handed down. DWP advised that the decision will give clarity to the application of the Gorry case.

3. Benefit Cap

DWP updated the meeting on the Benefit Cap at week 6.

The majority of cases have now been capped and the business IT processes are working well. The project has received good feedback from the LAs and it is a good example of joined up working between DWP and LAs. The project has been looking at the lessons learned to see what can be improved before national roll out.

The first draft of the options paper for national implementation has been issued and seen by LAAs who have sent in their views. A decision on the rollout of the national implementation will be made shortly but should start in July 2013 and final cases capped by September 2013. Details of how the national version will look are not yet available. DWP advised POG members that a series of best practice / planning events are planned for various locations around the UK. Letters about the events were issued to Chief Executives and Revenue and Benefits Leaders the previous week.

DWP confirmed that it would be possible for the devolved administrations to be included in the workshops; .

POG members asked when the workshops are to be held and what will be covered. They are planned for 4 – 14 June; it will be a joint event for LA and DWP and will cover:

- Experience of current roll out
- What's worked well
- National implementation

POG members asked whether issues with scans would be addressed before the national rollout. DWP said that new scans were due out this week and the numbers on them are going down. Before the cap was applied to a claim there was also a manual checking process.

An action point was taken for DWP to look at any issues arising from the scans produced for the initial pilot rollout of the benefit cap and report back to POG.

POG members wanted to know about people on IB who were excluded from the pilot group but not the national rollout.

POG members queried the timetable for completing the conversions from IB to ESA. DWP explained that the latest position is that it expects to complete the IB Reassessment Programme in April 2014.

Benefit Cap Pilots

POG members asked if there is an agreed turnaround time for replies to emails. DWP said that queries were answered within 24 hours.

DWP said that the pilot has given it an opportunity to look at a number of issues including the key pressures such as homeless duty and the cap.

DWP said that DCLG and DWP Ministers were to meet with the lead authorities.

POG members asked how changes of circumstances are being handled in the pilots. DWP said that another team in the Benefit Cap project is dealing with this issue and there are no problems. A final check is made on claims before information is passed to LAs for the benefit cap to be applied.

5. PIP

POG was content with the written update provided ahead of the meeting.

6. Night Shelters

POG members wanted to know if DWP would be issuing new guidance or amending regulations as a result of the Upper Tier (UT) decision concerning the night shelter in Anglesey.

DWP advised that there were several aspects to the UT decision in respect of the shelter in Anglesey which led to the judge concluding that it couldn't be classed as a home for HB purposes.

The decision relates to a central tenet of housing benefit that cannot be changed as a result of the judgment. DCLG has asked HomelessLink to carry out a study of night shelters to ascertain how prevalent the Anglesey model is.

An action point was taken for DWP to issue some guidance to LA's to explain the impact of the UT decision and that the judgment confirmed the regulations.

POG members stated that there is concern in Wales that the judgment could be extended by HB teams to Bed and Breakfast accommodation. DWP explained that more guidance will be issued once it has had further discussions with DCLG.

DWP confirmed that the UT decision also applies to UC.

Supported Exempted Accommodation (SEA)

DWP explained that DWP and DCLG are still working towards a solution. Providers are asking DWP to widen the definition.

POG members asked about the timeframe for providing a solution for SEA and discussion was focused around whether it is an issue at the moment. DWP said that it was working towards a short-term solution that protects current provision for October 2013 when the next phase of UC rollout begins.

DWP will engage with stakeholders in developing a long term solution. Timing of that depends on its ability to secure a slot for primary legislation in the fourth session of this

Parliament.

The Welsh Government is working to 2015 for the transfer of money under devolution.

The discussion moved onto what LAs should do whilst DWP is working on a new model for funding SEA. DWP said that they shouldn't start re-designating properties and should continue to provide funding.

7. AOB

DWP communications issue

POG members raised an issue around obtaining information from DWP local offices on complex cases.

Size criteria

POG members raised an issue concerning the re-designation of properties as a result of the removal of the bedroom subsidy. They asked if DWP could issue additional guidance to ensure that LA's adopt a consistent approach to these cases.

DWP were aware of the issue and were looking at possible solutions. An update will be provided.

UC Update

POG members asked several questions about the rollout of UC. They wanted to know if LA's will be given the option to choose when they rollout to UC.

DWP said that the UC timetable is an issue under active consideration, and that the UC transitions team understand that the administration of HB is a key part of the migration strategy and that LAs need certainty.

DWP also confirmed that pensioners will continue to receive HB beyond the UC rollout period;, consequently LAs will have a continuing role for some time.

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