



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting: DWP Local Authority Welfare Steering Group

Date: 18 October 2017

Location: Caxton House Room 5.21

Attendees: **DWP:** Darren Baker (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Chris Franks, Annette Madden, Kay Bendell, Marion Joass, Liz Crowther, Julie Smith, Graham Roberts, Raj Kang, Beverley Walsh

Dial in: Susan Johnston, Caroline Todd, Simon Lunn, Phil Eskdale-Lord, Mike Bond, Sharon Young, Steve Frakes

Welsh Government: Linda Davis

DCLG: Kelly Verney, Mercy Adebisi

LAs: Rose Doran, Lisa Hayward, Sarah Price, Sam Ashton, Matthew Evans, Tim Savill, Ian Brown, Mark Fowler, June Deans, Lee Hemsworth, Michael McClements, Adrian Mills, Andy Croucher

Dial in: Susan Donald, Simone Hines, Jayne Henderson, Peter Meehan, Helen Paine, Howard Mason

Apologies: Clare Elliott, Karina Stibbards, Andrew Stevens, Zena Cooke, Jennifer Wynter, Frank McGregor

1. Welcome and Introductions:

DWP opened the meeting. Introductions were made round the table and for those dialing in.

2. Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed. Some errors in respect of who had attended were noted.

The minutes for Practitioners' Operational Group (POG) and the Partnership Forum were noted.

Action Points

The action points were cleared.

3. Universal Credit (UC)

Expansion

DWP referred the meeting to the letter issued on 02 October to all Local Authorities (LAs), confirming that roll out of the Universal Credit Full Service is progressing with its scalability as planned.

The representative from the Local Government Association (LGA) asked whether a written response to the letter from the all of the Local Authority Associations (LAAs) to Sir Robert Walmsley would be forthcoming. DWP explained that a letter in response had been issued to the LAA Chief Executives on 17 October.

Steering Group members enquired if there would be another letter, as the 02 October letter only covered the period October 2017 – January 2018.

DWP advised the meeting that a further letter to LAs will be issued in February, following January's firebreak.

LA Engagement Events

DWP updated the meeting on the recent Quarterly LA Engagement Workshops. Three events had taken place in September in Rugby, Hammersmith and Newcastle. The events had been well attended and from the evaluation sheets, response had been positive. The events focused on four themes:

- Landlord Portal
- Universal Support
- LCTR automation
- Temporary Accommodation

DWP added that representation from Service Centres had proved to be helpful. The next round of events is due to commence in December 2017, and the aim is to develop the format for the events as roll out continues.

DWP confirmed that the workshops are aimed at LAs live with UC Full Service or about to migrate to Full Service. In Scotland a joint DWP and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) event is planned for Scottish LAs including those currently in Live Service as well as those about to migrate to Full Service and will take place on 31 October in Glasgow.

Steering Group members pointed out that national issues needed to be captured in the form of a high level issues log, which should set out DWP's position on each issue. This should be subject to review, ideally at this forum.

DWP added that the review of UC Communications should encompass some of the national issues in communications such as UC Circulars.

The Steering Group agreed that strategic issues involving commissioning evidence gathering from LAs should form part of a specific work programme.

Managed Migration Options

DWP led the meeting through:

- the challenge, with the important additional element being Transitional Protection
- the background including:
 - what Managed Migration is, i.e. where DWP triggers the move to UC from legacy benefits
 - the requirement for claimants to make a new claim to UC
 - how Transitional Protection will work, and the conditions for entitlement
 - the closure of existing legacy benefit claims even for those who do not make a claim to UC
 - work ongoing to finalise the regulations
- tactical volumes, (Budget 2017) of households to be Managed Migrated by legacy benefit
- Managed Migration phases including early testing prior to legislation, through to national roll out to run from autumn 2019 to March 2022
- the options for consideration, including the option to migrate all legacy benefits together
- other things to consider such as fiscal challenges to ensure that options must be financially viable
- next steps including working with POG on the lower level detail.

The following key points emerged from the ensuing discussion:

- issues around Employment Support Allowance (ESA) breaks in claim and the Work Capability Assessment are likely to impact on eligibility for Transitional Protection
- whether DWP is engaging with landlords for those in receipt of HB
- getting the data share right will be key
- caseloads and caseload management will need further analysis
- transitional Protection will be considered as part of the UC award.

London Councils asked about potential exemptions to the loss of Transitional Protection, e.g. for domestic violence. Members also asked about Housing Benefit (HB) Run On.

4. Debt

DWP set out:

- policy features for recovery of debt in UC
- the recovery process
- a forward look recognising concerns raised by LAs
- the priority order of deductions.
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With regard to the recovery process, DWP explained the key responsibilities for LAs and Debt Management, and how the interface forms the key part of the process.

Steering Group members discussed a number of items around debt and debt recovery including:

- the maximum deduction limit
- priority Order of Deduction, and the positioning of HB recovery;
- not referring to a “single debt account” as it does not include LCTRS debt but rather calling it a “single welfare debt account”
- how debts are recovered, whether it is by the age or amount of the debt– debts are recovered in the order they are sent in to DWP.

Steering Group members asked for worked examples for a range of scenarios in respect of the recovery process.

Steering Group members also pointed out that the lack of an automated process for Council Tax deductions is an issue for most LAs, as are Council Tax recoveries.

Steering Group members asked whether there are any statistics for debt stock and how recovery is going. DWP explained that its analysts are looking at debt stocks, current and projected, with a view to forecasting for the next five years. Also DWP analysts are looking to provide details on how debt recovery is going within UC.

The meeting then discussed multiple debts and the priority order for deductions.

5. Temporary Accommodation and UC

DWP advised the meeting of the current position in respect of the treatment of Temporary Accommodation in UC. Cross Government agreement is

needed to make any change to the current arrangements. Cross Government agreement has yet to be reached, although the various departments involved are working towards this. It is hoped to reach a short to mid term solution in the near future, and then to start to consider a longer term solution. Steering Group members asked about the timeframe for any announcement. The meeting then discussed loss of liability in respect of UC generated changes of circumstance, and the issues around use of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) and whether changes would be made to DHP regulations to allow payments to be made in this respect.

6. HB Administration Grant Allocation

DWP gave a brief update on the progress being made on the options for allocation. DWP explained its internal budget process for sign - off for the budget for 2018/19.

The Administration Grant will be comprised of two elements:

1. Core subsidy.
2. UC savings.

DWP explained the two options currently being worked on, but it was felt that a further meeting will need to be convened to discuss the options, once the overall amount has been signed off by DWP. Steering Group members were of the view that part of this process should incorporate the work carried out with LA Chief Finance Officers in terms of determining the overall cost of delivery and therefore the size of the overall amount. Steering Group members referred to caseload complexities and the number of reassessments per case now that are not reflected in the allocation.

Steering Group members referred to movement within the UC roll out whereby some LAs have been deferred which will mean a larger than assumed caseload. DWP said that variances in caseloads will be taken into account.

7. Housing Costs and Homelessness Paper Following the Partnership Forum

DWP and LGA thanked Steering Group members for their comments on the paper.

DWP explained that the Steering Group's views were aired. The Forum was broadly supportive of the aims and intentions of the paper.

The group discussed whether the Partnership forum was the right forum with sufficient capacity to move key areas of the paper forward, or whether Task and Finish groups or a more policy focused forum should be commissioned.

It was agreed that the paper could form the basis of a work programme, and that it could feed into the Issues Resolution Log.

DCLG would be keen to work with any Task and Finish groups, and the Welsh Government has its own Homelessness Group.

It was agreed that a cohesive approach is needed.

8. Social Housing Green Paper

In respect of the Social Housing Green Paper, DCLG updated the meeting on the planned events around engagement with tenants.

DCLG is engaging with the LGA, particularly around LAs with no housing stock but responsibility for Social Housing.

Steering Group members asked about the cap on LHA in the social rented sector. It was agreed that this should form part of the agenda for the next meeting as it will have wide ranging implications.

9. AOB

One item of AOB was brought forward:

- 1) Wider Use of Real Time Information (WURTI) funding, and in particular potential new burdens for using the WURTI tool. This related to a PDT engagement that identified the increased time/resource required to access WURTI tool when the LA often has to still contact the HB claimant for further information as well. This was discussed in a workshop with the 6 test LAs and the WURTI project agreed to take it away.

Date of Next Meeting: The next full meeting of the LA Welfare Steering Group will take place on 23 November 2017 in Caxton House room 6.24 starting at 11.00.

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