



Summary Minutes

Title of meeting: DWP Local Authority (LA) Welfare Steering Group

Date: 12 June 2018

Location: LGA Beecham Room

Attendees: **DWP:** Darren Baker (Chair), Mont Goldman (Secretariat), Kay Bendell, Chris Franks, Ryan Hagley, Rebecca Bowers

Dial in: Caroline Todd,

Observer: Nic Vaughan

Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG): Kathy Bee

LAs: Rose Doran, Ian Keating, Lisa Hayward, Sam Ashton, Ian Brown, June Deans, Matthew Evans, Tim Savill, Andy Cameron, Sarah Price

Dial in: Asha Vyas, Adrian Mills, Peter Meehan, Helen Payne, Zena Cooke, Jayne Henderson

Apologies: Clare Elliott, Annette Madden, Kelly Verney, Simone Hines, Howard Mason, Sheila Haig, Andrew Stevens, Jennifer Wynter, Susan Donald

1. Welcome and Introductions:

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

2. Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

Action Points

The action points were cleared.

DWP further updated action point April 07 2018. With regard to automation, quotes from the Software Suppliers have been received and will now be subject to the Universal Credit (UC) governance process.

3. Temporary Accommodation Discussions

MHCLG reminded the meeting of the decision to move Temporary Accommodation (TA) back into Housing Benefit (HB). This is a temporary solution and MHCLG is working together with DWP develop options for a long term solution. Currently there are four options:

1. Retaining HB.
2. Incorporate into UC.
3. Devolved funding through a grant.
4. Splitting the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) pot with an amount set aside for special accommodation, and core funding through UC.

Work has begun to look at the detail within the four options, such as the continuation of the roll out of UC and the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

MHCLG explained that workshops with a number of LAs are planned to look at the best way forward.

MHCLG is seeking information from LAs by way of a questionnaire in respect of the temporary solution, and that the information sought falls into two categories:

1. Data on the volume of homelessness.
2. A narrative on whether the temporary solution has been effective.

MHCLG explained that the focus for now will be around LAs with high volumes of homelessness. This will then be expanded to include LAs with lower volumes of homelessness.

It was agreed that there is a need to understand how claimants have experienced the temporary solution.

The Steering Group pointed out that not all LAs with high volumes of homelessness are on UC Full Service.

4. Report from Practitioners' Operational Group (POG) Meeting 16 May

key points of discussion were:

- Supported Exempt Accommodation: discussion was around the increasingly high rents which are impacting on decision making
- Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) funding: the discussion was around the extra pressures caused by UC
- the meeting also discussed the Self Employed Review, the Data Share Review, and priorities for Software Suppliers.

Conversations have been ongoing with DWP Housing Delivery Division (HDD) concerning the exercise on fraud referrals carried out with 40 LAs. It would appear that the Management Information (MI) returns have been inconsistent, particularly around measuring over a four week period, and that

some LAs in the exercise have experienced difficulties in completing the spreadsheets manually. Further discussion on this will be routed back through POG

5. UC Issues Log, UC and Universal Support (US) Update

UC Issues Log

DWP highlighted and updated the key issues in the log, seeking responses:

Data Sharing:

In relation to the root and branch review of UC data sharing with LAs, Steering Group members asked for the inclusion of HB Stop Notices.

They added that it would be useful to notify landlords where the claim has been made but no entitlement exists to mitigate rent arrears issues.

Debt Recovery

The Steering Group asked whether the focus is on recovery or whether UC can be seen as a precipitator of debt.

The Steering Group pointed out that levels of debt are increasing as a result of DWP initiatives such as Verify Earnings and Pensions (VEP) Alerts. DWP explained that UC is in discussion with Fraud Error & Debt (FED) with a view to passing this issue to the Finance Group to progress.

Steering Group members pointed out that there are differences between arrears and overpayments.

The meeting agreed that it is important to take the customer journey into account.

DWP pointed out that work is progressing to provide LAs with details on how debt recovery within UC is going. This information will be made available in due course once it has been cleared for distribution.

Consent

The Steering Group asked whether any consideration had been given to vulnerable claimants, particularly with regard to mental health issues.

The Steering Group pointed out that the update did not sufficiently address issues around appointees, and in particular issues around system access. DWP explained that this has been logged with the Research and Design team and that they were fully aware of the issues Gateshead have raised and have been in contact with the council.

Universal Support

DWP referred to the Quarter 4 Universal Support MI, and issues around data cleansing that have delayed the end of year reconciliation process.

The meeting discussed whether the spreadsheets are working for all LAs, and whether the levels of detail are appropriate. Steering Group members were of the view that MI should be linked to outcomes.

DWP pointed out that the MI templates have been designed with controlled fields to help DWP with processing the data. DWP acknowledged that LAs have their own arrangements for collating the information and it may be time consuming for them to complete but without standardised controlled templates the problem of inputting the data on the DWP end would be exceptionally increased.

Contact with UC Service Centres

Previous requests for Single Points Of Contacts (SPOCs) at Service Centres had not been addressed in the update.

The meeting discussed the Issues Log in general terms. It was felt that it covers many issues, and in some cases more detail would be helpful. This was of particular emphasis in relation to the ambiguities around vulnerable claimants, where a coherent conversation is needed.

DWP pointed out that the Issues Log is about keeping a watching briefing on the high-level issues and to provide updates where possible.

The Steering Group enquired as to whether they could get an update as to what happens at the Claimants with Complex Needs Steering Group.

Another issue to be considered for the log concerned Trusted Landlords and the Landlord Portal.

UC/US Engagement

DWP gave the meeting an overview of the current position.

Roll Out

Roll out has ramped up and to date, 330 Jobcentres are now live with Full Service, with another 18 due to go live from 13 June 2018.

LA Funding (US)

2017/18 Quarter 4 MI has been reconciled, and payment schedules are being compiled with the aim to issue payments in the next fortnight.

Universal Support Take Up

372 LAs have signed up for 2018/19, 7 have declined and one has not yet responded.

US Review

An internal report on the 'Go Look See' visits is being drafted. The report will look at training, guidance and communications, and a more detailed overview will be issued to external stakeholders

LA Quarterly Engagement Workshops

These events are ongoing, with recent events held at Basildon, Middlesbrough and Bristol, with a further 6 events scheduled for June.

UC Announcement (including Managed Migration)

DWP summarised the content of the letter issued to LAs on 07 June. The details will be contained in legislation which needs to be laid.

DWP confirmed that it had received questions from Steering Group members, which will be answered in due course.

Steering Group members hoped that they and POG could help to shape how Managed Migration will work in practice, and how challenges can be overcome.

A Steering Group member brought the meeting's attention to concerns voiced by Pensioner Groups around Pension Credit and whether any work has commenced to look at alternatives. DWP explained that at this early stage, conversations and 'blue sky' thinking have started.

DWP confirmed that guidance on the changes to Severe Disability Premium mentioned in the letter will be issued prior to implementation.

DWP added that the detail of the changes will underpin the business case. Steering Group members queried whether the business case could be subject to challenge.

6. LA Funding Allocations and Proposed Timelines

DWP set out:

- current progress on HB Administration Subsidy
- the proposed timeline from May 2018 to October 2018.

DWP introduced the three options for future allocations, including:

- the methodology for each option
- a comparison of the options across LAs

- a summary of all of the options.

DWP summarised of the outcomes from discussions at the LA Funding Group meeting (22 May 2018). The preference decided by the group was for option 2, which represented the least change for LAs.

7. AOB

No items were brought forward for discussion.

Date of Next Meeting: The next full meeting of the LA Welfare Steering Group is scheduled to take place on 15 August 2018 in Caxton House room 5.22 starting at 11.00.

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