

.000000Practitioners Operational Group (POG) Meeting  
Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> September 2008  
CIPFA Building, Robert Street London WC2N

Minutes

**Attendees:**

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Danielle Wells      | DWP HBSD (Chairperson)                       |
| Sabby Mahal-Riordan | DWP HBSD (Secretariat)                       |
| Wayne Norfolk       | DWP HBSD                                     |
| Jackie Daly         | DWP HBSD                                     |
| Malcolm Mattack     | DWP HBSD                                     |
| Cheryl Weaver       | DWP LAPD                                     |
| James Boyd          | Pension Service                              |
| Chris Bullen        | Jobcentre Plus                               |
| David Sebczak       | Jobcentre Plus                               |
| Gary Trent          | Rent Service                                 |
| Michelle Charles    | Debt Management                              |
| Debbie Paul         | Debt Management                              |
| Chris Jones         | Debt Management                              |
| Lesley Pigott       | LB Camden/LGA/Steering Group Representatives |
| Gwyn Thomas         | Westminster City Council/London Councils     |
| Mark Underwood      | LB Bexley                                    |
| Frankie Cartwright  | South Staffordshire Council                  |
| Alison McGrory      | Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council        |
| Ian McCardle        | City of Bradford MDC                         |
| Julie Holden        | Tandridge District/LGA                       |
| Judith Johnson      | Cherwell District Council/LGA                |
| David Collier       | Birmingham City Council                      |
| Paul Ellary         | Kensington & Chelsea                         |
| Margo Hodgson       | Glasgow City Council/ COSLA                  |

**Apologies:**

Lyn Sutherland (LB Barnet) and Jane McManus (Leeds City Council)

## 1. Welcome and Introductions

Danielle Wells welcomed all attendees and introductions were made.

## 2. Minutes/Action Points/Matters Arising

### Minutes

LA representatives asked about the backdating changes following the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) report. Danielle Wells confirmed that SSAC paper on backdating had been issued yesterday with the Government response and the outcome would be circulated to LAs. The main change is temporary modification to working age backdating period to six months, subject to good cause with a view to review. Guidance would be going out as we spoke as the regulations had been laid yesterday.

### Action Points

Action Point 01/07/08: Circulate guidance on exempt accommodation to POG members as soon as possible.

LA representatives had received draft guidance on exempt accommodation but requested that the deadline for comment be extended to the end of the month. This was agreed

Action Point 02/07/08: DWP HRAD colleagues to write to the appropriate secretariats about LA volunteers to participate in testing derivation code.

Appropriate secretariats had been contacted to seek volunteers. However, LA representatives confirmed that Welsh LAs had expressed concerns about SHBE data not matching and an update on the latest position would be required.

**Action Point 01/09/08: Jan Ripley to provide an update on Welsh LA SHBE data not matching**

## 3. Rent Service Update

Gary Trent provided the following update from the Rent Service (England):

### Performance

- Current Performance is good and the churn rate for is approaching 50% per month

## Heffernan Judgement

- Rent Service had issued a statement to all LAs and clarified several points. Which are that the localities were too broad as there are twenty varieties of lettings currently available.
- Once the Rent Service had made progress they would publish localities. The Rent Service was committed to getting the BRMA reviews actioned again.
- Rent Service would consider the Heffernan Judgement and issue guidance
- The guidance was currently with lawyers and the outcome would be published on the internet.

## **4. Jobcentre Plus Update**

David Sobczak and Chris Bullen asked the LA representatives their comments on the papers sent out prior to the meeting regarding the change to the way benefits were paid by Jobcentre Plus. These changes are being managed by Periodicity and Payday Project and would bring about change from April 2009.

This change would align the vast majority of working age benefits to be paid a minimum of fortnightly, in arrears and on a common pay week-ending day linked to the individual's National Insurance number.

The aim was to simplify the benefit system by trying to get everybody paid to specific period, fortnightly in arrears. The change did not cover Disability Allowance, Carer's Allowance and Attendance Allowance.

LA representatives' acknowledged the papers circulated as mentioned above. As this change did not have direct impact on HB/CTB a small communication would be appropriate to make LAs aware of the change to payment periods.

LA representatives also asked as part of the Jobcentre Plus performance update, whether it would be possible to obtain data or receive an indication if unemployment was going up.

**Action Point 02/09/08: Chris Bullen to establish if there is Jobcentre Plus data available which shows unemployment is going up.**

## 5. Pension Service Update

James Boyd provided the following verbal update on the Pension Service:

- There was a new management structure and Team in place and we are looking at circulating information to various parties.
- The new Team had agreed in principle about the need for performance information but not confirmed what performance information should be circulated yet.
- HB/CTB plan to lay regulations to allow claims without signatures are still going ahead.
- There were also outstanding security issues for example do we download telephone calls from customers for possible fraud interests. Some of these issues might not be resolved, before we go live in October and we might need to put an interim solution in place.
- Rapid Review claims ½ million cases have been cleared, but we still had ½ the review cases to clear manually.
- Finally, Ministers have made it clear that every opportunity should be given to customers to claim before the backdating provisions change. Over 300,000 mail-shots would be sent out starting from 15<sup>th</sup> September to encourage customers to claim Pension Credit.

## 6. ESA Update

Jackie Daly and Wayne Norfolk provided the following update on ESA:

### Operational Guidance

- The ESA operational guidance was on the DWP website. The voice recording departmental solutions guidance would be updated.
- There have been 244 responses or 60% of LAs had responded to the ESA operational readiness survey and early findings have shown that joint working with Jobcentre Plus was going ahead. However, if any LAs have encountered problems with working they should contact Jackie Daly.

### ETD

- An anomaly had been identified which means that all ESA income related ETD would be output as Jobseekers Allowance ETD.

- We had tried to get this matter resolved by Release 1, but could not get an agreement in time for 27<sup>th</sup> October. However, we hope to fix this by 8<sup>th</sup> December.
- For the period in between one of the solutions was for Jobcentre Plus to notify the LAs on clerical documents that ESA had been awarded

LA representatives acknowledged the update on ESA, but were surprised that the problem with the ETD had been raised now so close to the ESA go live date. However, LA representatives did agree to have Jobseekers Allowance ETDs whilst the problem was being resolved.

## **7. Debt Management Update**

The following Debt Management update was provided by Debbie Paul, Michelle Charles and Chris Jones:

### Notifications Issues

- In July 2008 it was established that system generated notices to LAs were not being issued and this affected about 281 LAs. A written apology was sent to the affected LAs
- In the meantime clerical notifications were being issued whilst changes to the system generated notices took place on 25<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> October.

### Review of Partnership Agreement

- Debt Management Executive Meeting (DMET) would be looking at LA work in a strategic meeting in October
- Debt Management representatives would come back to the next scheduled POG for 29<sup>th</sup> October to provide an update and agree a way forward for reviewing the DM/LA Partnership Agreement, but in the meantime the current Partnership Agreement stood.

LA representatives acknowledged the update but requested clarification as to why some LAs were told that they could not speak to Debt Management when tried to contact them.

Debt Management representatives confirmed that there was no policy intention to prevent LAs from contacting any Debt Management centres but if specific examples could be forwarded they would be happy to look into the matter.

**Action Point 03/09/08: Danielle Wells to forward specific examples of where LAs have had difficulty in contacting the Debt Management contact centres.**

## **8. Code Of Connexion (COCO) Update**

Wayne Norfolk provided the following update on COCO:

- The Information Flow Team had been busy liaising with various parties on whether they would be able to comply with COCO and some had confirmed that it will be difficult as the requirements would not just be impacting the Benefit Delivery sections of LAs.

LA representatives expressed concerns that many LAs might not be ready to comply with Government Connect requirements by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008. It was agreed that an urgent working group would be set up in consultation with the Secretariats of the various DWP/LAA groups to look at the issues relating to COCO and Government Connect.

The Working Group meeting took place on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2008.

## **9. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Update**

Malcolm Mattack confirmed that the new draft of the MOU prohibited staff from using home kits under COCO. LAs would have to provide secure equipment.

## **10. AOB**

### HB/CTB Forms

Recently several HB/CTB forms had been sent out for POG members review and LA representatives felt that rather than just send the HB/CTB forms it would be helpful if the main changes were summarised.

Danielle Wells confirmed that these thoughts would be forwarded to the individual who circulated the HB/CTB forms.

### HBMS Matches

LA representatives confirmed that a letter had been sent out to Chief Executives regarding poor compliance with HBMS matches. LAs have done the work but not transferred the data, because they have not been asked to send the data back.

### VOA Forms

LA representatives said they would prefer to have a PDF version of the Verification of Assets (VOA) form rather than the current form in the HB/CTB Guidance Manual which was of poor quality.

Danielle Wells confirmed that she would forward the LA representative's comments to the DWP Officer responsible for the VOA forms in the HB/CTB Guidance Manual.

**The next POG meeting would be held on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2008**