

SECURITY OPERATION GROUP (SOG)

Minutes of the SOG meeting held on Thursday, 17 January 2008 at The Thistle Hotel, Charing Cross, London

Attendees:

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| Cathy Payne | DWP HBSD(Chair) |
| Jill Hawtin | Bradford |
| Diane Baker | Peterborough |
| Karen McNeil | East Ayrshire |
| Steven Carey | Leeds |
| Terry Ritchings | Wandsworth |
| Tracey Banfield | Bradford |
| John Rosenbloom | Manchester MBC |
| Jan Roxby | London Councils |
| Jean Cheeseman | South Bucks |
| Daren Nowlan | South Kesteven |
| Jackie Dye | Camden |
| Dave White | JCP FIS |
| Ian Gibbins | JCP Partnership |
| Darren Shillington | Audit Commission |
| Tim Savill | Audit Commission |
| Jane Perfect | DWP LAPD |
| Mary Collins | DWP FESD |
| Mark Craimer | DWP HRAD |
| John Viggers | DWP HBSD |
| Graham Dove | DWP HBSD |
| Ann Bayless | JCP FIS |
| Bridget Smartt | DWP HBSD (Minutes) |

1.0 Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Elaine Turner (Carlisle), Andy Hyatt (Kensington and Chelsea), Michelle Charles (Debt Management Cardiff), Simon Lane (Brent), Kathy Bateman (Lambeth) and James Ablewhite (DWP HBSD).

2.0 Welcome and Domestic

- 2.1 Cathy Payne welcomed all to the meeting

3.0 Note of the last Meeting/Matters arising/ Action Points

- 3.1 The LAA representatives had the following comments on the previous minutes and action points:

- Para 3.2: They asked for the record to be corrected. They would like the NFI figures sent with the agenda and not the minutes. Graham

Dove agreed and said this will be done when data movement is resumed.

Action Point Jan 1: Graham Dove to ensure NFI data accompanies the agenda

- Para 3.7: The issue of the WIB4A's being recorded by local FIS offices had not yet been communicated to LAs.

Action Point Jan 2: HBSD agreed to take this matter forward.

- Para 7 FRAIMS: Have the sanctions from LAs been recorded on FRAIMS and can a note be sent prior to the next meeting.

Action Point Jan 3: Graham Dove said that he would look into this issue.

Action Point Jan 4: Dave White to advise group on the length of time sanctions information can be retained by DWP.

3.2 Action point Nov 3 New PM10 Measures – will be discussed later as an agenda item.

3.3 Action Point Oct 2 NFI: The LAAs said they are not sure why the data movement embargo impacts on them obtaining the NFI figures. Graham Dove said that he understands that the data is not being communicated back to GMS. Cathy Payne said that as it electronic transfer, the embargo should not be an issue.

Action Point Jan 5: Dave White said he will take this up as well and advise the group.

3.4 Action point Nov 4 DWP Drop Door leaflets campaign: John Viggers said if the local authorities do not want to participate, then MARCOMMS will not use that LA in the exercise. The LAAs thought this a sensible approach.

3.5 Transfer of data. Cathy Payne updated the meeting.

3.6 Review of PM10 targets – Agenda item.

3.7 Fraud and Error Action Plan – Agenda item.

3.8 Action point 5 – Model Comms: Ian Gibbins advised that Jackie Evans had discussed the possibility of placing model comms posters on JCP offices. JCP previously had a strong line about branded lines/placement. Now this has changed Jackie Evans is currently liaising with JCP and will update SOG at the next meeting.

3.9 Action point 6 Customer Compliance: The group was told that they will be given details about the workshop at a future meeting.

- 3.10 Action point 7 Pins training: Pete Shaw advised that the queries from Diane Baker at Peterborough, and Andy Hyatt had been resolved. Nick Jennings at Huntingdonshire had also agreed to host PINS foundations events.

Regarding training in Scotland – All priority events have now been scheduled and are currently with Andy Mclean for arrangement.

4.0 Review of PM10/PM16 targets for 2007/08

- 4.1 John Viggers gave an update on a Ministerial meeting held recently. He has decided that the scoring for PM10 will be based on the first 6 months data of 2007/08; the 120% target has been reduced to 110%. Mark Craimer added that the proposal was to score PM16 on the half year, based on 45% of all sanction activity occurring in the first six months not 50%.
- 4.2 The LAA representatives expressed their disappointment. They commented that they are struggling to understand what the new measures will prove based on the 6 months figures. The LAs work programmes cover the whole year, and some focus effort on the second half. These proposals will give a distorted picture and be scored for CPA on inappropriate figures. They asked the view of the Audit Commissions. Overall this is an adverse decision for the LAs.
- 4.3 John Viggers advised that this is the best of a number of options to resolve an unforeseen circumstance. LAs still have to educate their customers and will get benefits from this as the Right Benefit Indicator is still about reporting change of circumstances and finding ways of identifying them.
- 4.4 Tim Savill added that comments can be included in of the current consultation on CPA 08/09.
- 4.5 The LAAs further wanted to know if any allowances will be made for those LAs who were involved in the targeted mailshots pilot where customers were told not to report changes. John Viggers said individually the outcome suggested that it was not evident that this had had an adverse effect on reporting.
- 4.6 The LAAs said that PM16 offers a different set of issues but seems the same answer has come about. Do the figures Mark Craimer suggests reflect the increases achieved by the LAs over the previous year? Mark Craimer said that he is reasonably certain that the scores will be higher than last year's. The data will be available mid February to confirm this.

John Viggers said that LAs must be made aware that only the first 6 month work on interventions will be counted, so that decisions on resources can be made.

- 4.7 John Viggers asked if there were particular comments on the PM16 proposals? The LAAs said there were not. The meeting agreed that DWP would:
- produce an urgent communication to LAs;
 - come back to SOG with further proposals on PM16 when the data was received;
 - discuss with the Audit Commission the implications for CPA;
 - report back to Ministers on the outcome of their discussions and let LAAs know the outcome.

5.0 New Performance Framework

- 5.1 Tim Savill from the Audit Commission (AC) gave a presentation on Benefit Fraud in the new inspection regime. They will be looking at the use of resources in fraud and will include guidance for auditors on the prosecution process, when to prosecute, the corporate approach and verification and prevention measures.
- 5.2 Guidance will be published later this year to support this assessment. There will be option at the end of the assessment process, triggered by for example, unsatisfactory performance, ministerial directive, services, outcomes or users at risk. These cannot be addressed by other means and will be different to the BFI approach. They will also be working closely with colleagues in Audit Scotland.
- 5.3 The LAAs thought that the assessment seemed dominated by fraud activity but the Right Benefit indicator was led more by error. Feedback to the Audit Commission will reflect error initiatives not fraud.

6.0 NFI

- 6.1 Darren Shillington also gave a short presentation of the new NFI initiatives.
- 6.2. The LAA representatives commented that they have never received feedback from DWP on the cases sent to the NFI. Neither were they invited by DWP to participate in a joint investigation. Graham Dove said that an evaluation is due so these comments will be taken on board. Dave White added that not all cases may be suitable for investigation. John Viggers said that the objective is to get the best solution across the piece.

7.0 Fraud and Error Action Plan - update

- 7.1 Graham Dove said the Fraud and Error Policy Team are in the process of updating the information on the Action Plan projects for the Strategy Delivery Board (SDB) including timelines and milestones and will be brought back to SOG after the next SDB in April. He presented an up to date list of all current and closed projects but confirmed that

the full effect of all initiatives cannot be measured at present. SOG were happy but asked for operational issues emerging to be brought to them.

- 7.2 **Welfare Reform Act.** Graham Dove added that everything is on course for April. There is another meeting of the Implementation Group on 31 January and he will be giving a presentation at the IRRV conference in Harrogate in February.

8.0 SSFA

- 8.1 Graham Dove introduced his paper by saying that there were concerns that Social Security Fraud Act Authorised Officers (AOs) current list was not up to date and too many officers were in place. We are now looking to update the current information for both DWP and LAs. There was growing concern that the assurances the Minister had given on restricting numbers when the Bill was going through Parliament, may be being disregarded. There also needed to be a division between investigation and intelligence gathering officers. Furthermore it is believed that Local Authorities are leaving NAFN as they have to pay whereas the training for SSFA AOs is given by DWP for free.

- 8.2 The LAAs:

- agreed that this is not an acceptable and needs to be brought under control. The limit should be one per LA.
- raised the issue of confusion between SSFA AOs and ordinary AOs; Graham Dove said he would ensure that information to all LAs would stress the difference.
- said that the Department should also ask how many times the SSFA AOs are asking for information

Action Point Jan 6: Graham Dove to draft a note to the LAs to go in the General Bulletin and to check training controls.

9.0 Disclosure of personal information - witnesses

- 9.1 Graham Dove had circulated a paper prior to the meeting. A number of local authority investigation staff had recently questioned the reasons behind DWP's Prosecution Division (PD) request for details of a local authority investigators' disciplinary record and previous convictions, where they have signed witness statements. The note recommended that LAs be made aware of the reasons as soon as possible:
- 9.2 PNC checks only apply if a person pleads not guilty. Any LA who signs up to the SLA with Prosecution Division will have to abide by it.

- 9.3 Steven Carey said they accepted that information is required but this is not straight forward. There is concern that DWP may lose this sensitive data. He also asked that, come the changes in April, will DWP do PNC checks and LAs have a duty of care for their staff.
- 9.4 They pointed out that some LA Fraud Managers ask for an annual declaration from their officers instead of on a case by case basis.

The LAA representatives said they were broadly happy with the principle but suggest that the other issues be evaluated for future consideration.

Action Point Jan 7: Graham Dove to find out whether DWP will do PNC checks on LAs' behalf and vice versa on witnesses, following the April changes.

10.0 AOB

- 10.1 **AD Pens** - A note was circulated from Judith Hicks prior to the meeting. The LAA representatives said that work still needs to be done on issues raised in 2003. The lack of empirical evidence is because no review has taken place since 2003. A wider review is therefore necessary.

- A cap can also be considered for the future.

Action Point Jan 8: Mary Collins said she will come back to the next meeting about the possibility of a review. She will also look at the financial implications and additional statistics from the LAs.

- 10.2 **Magistrates Court Guidelines** – Graham Dove gave details of the website at which LAs can give their views on the proposed changes to these guidelines.
- 10.3 **Claims – false from the outset** – The Appeal Court judgment of 21 December 2007 on claims false from the outset was raised. DWP will send out guidance if there are ramifications for LAs.
- 10.4 **Cautions** – the issue of cautions being offered on behalf of DWP and LAs is investigated by DWP.

Close.