

Practitioners' Operational Group (POG) Terms of Reference

1.0 Practitioners Operational Group

1.1 The Practitioners' Operational Group (POG) operates under the umbrella of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)/Local Authority Associations (LAA) Steering Group (Steering Group) to provide a sounding board and interchange forum for officials and LAA nominated local authority practitioners to discuss issues and explore strategy proposals in development with specific emphasis on housing and council tax benefit administration.

2.0 Remit

2.1 Its remit includes discussion of, and operational input into, policy development as well as consideration of operational issues referred to POG by the Steering Group. It also deals with the operational interaction between the LAAs and DWP in respect of annual Service Level Agreement (SLA) reviews and joint/closer working issues.

2.2 The group reports back to the Steering Group on its work and outcomes. Where possible, POG will be a decision making body, only referring matters to the Steering Group where a higher level strategic steer is required or where issues relate to matters of funding and subsidy.

3.0 Terms of reference

3.1 The group will be responsible for:

- providing operational insight into Housing Benefit reform proposals, and ad hoc DWP/IR/ODPM/SE proposals impacting on HB/CTB administration;
- considering and developing solutions and opportunities for improved joint-working arrangements between LAs and Jobcentre Plus, the Pension Service, the Rent Service , IR, Debt Management and the Appeals Service;
- where appropriate, providing a forum for discussion of those issues and matters that affect joint - working between LAs and Jobcentre Plus, the Pension Service, the Rent Service, IR ,Debt Management and the Appeals Service;
- exploration of, and input into, strategies and performance measures designed to support achievement of the administration and the fraud and error related PSA targets;

- encouraging the development and sharing of good practice in relation to HB and CTA administration;
- reviewing and signing off draft SLA documents at times set out in the SLA key milestone delivery timetable;
- providing quality assurance and clearance of HB/CTB A, S and F circulars as detailed in methods of working and in discussion where appropriate with colleagues on the Fraud Operational Group;
- communicating the outcomes from POG discussions through the formally agreed DWP and LAA communication channels;
- proposing development of initiatives in support of the above.

4.0 Membership

4.1 Chair – Housing Support Division (HSD)

LAA – nominated representatives from the LAAs (Local Government/Welsh Local Government Associations, Association of London Government, Convention Of Scottish Local Authorities)

DWP – as required representatives from HSD, Housing Benefit Security Division, The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate, Fraud Strategy Unit, The Pension Service, Jobcentre Plus, The Appeals Service, The Rent Service and Debt Management and Inland Revenue

Other interested stakeholders will be invited to contribute on specific topics as necessary.

5.0 Methods of working

5.1 The Group will:

- hold meetings at a six weekly frequency. A programme of meeting dates will be set in advance for each calendar year;
- provide expert views on technical guidance within agreed time spans through:
 - written clearance of non-contentious items as and when required
 - quality assurance and written clearance of HB/CTB A & S circulars;

- commission one-off workshops charged with developing particular ideas or resolving specific issues or where specific technical expertise is required;
- commission special sub-groups to take forward major developments (eg Pension Credit Working Group and Tax Credit Working Group) reporting back to POG.

6.0 Secretariat support

6.1 Provided by Housing Costs Business Stream.