



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION, DOCUMENT

Streamlining Welsh Benefits Steering Group meeting: 23 September 2024

Streamlining Welsh Benefits Steering Group meeting held on
23 September 2024.

First published: 23 September 2024

Last updated: 23 September 2024

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Attendees

Steering Group members

- Fran Targett, Chair
- Emma Willis, Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA)
- Helal Uddin, Ethnic Minorities and Youth Support Team
- Joanna Goodwin, Centre for Digital Public Services (CDPS)
- Katie Till, The Trussell Trust
- Matthew Evans, Welsh Revenues and Benefits Managers group
- Miranda Evans, Disability Wales
- Nigel Griffiths, Bridgend CBC
- Simon Hatch, Citizens Advice Cymru
- Steffan Evans, The Bevan Foundation

Also in attendance

- Adrian Devereux, workstream facilitator
- Angela Endicott, workstream facilitator
- David Willis, Welsh Government
- Emma Morales, CDPS
- Glyn Jones, workstream facilitator
- Launa Anderson, Welsh Government
- Leah Whitty, workstream facilitator
- Mel James, Welsh Government
- Paul Neave, Welsh Government
- Sam Pidduck, Welsh Government

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Apologies

Amanda Main (Caerphilly CBC), Claire Germain (Welsh Government), Jen Griffiths (Local Government Chair SRO Group), Karen McFarlane (Children in Wales), Lindsey Phillips (WLGA), Lisa Hayward (WLGA), Victoria Lloyd (Age Cymru),

Chair's welcome

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and thanked them for their contributions to the project in the past month.

The Chair informed members that Anna Friend has moved on from the Steering Group and that the Core Team and Senior Responsible Officer Group (SRO) will be working to ensure sufficient local authority representation on the Steering Group and Workstreams to fill the gap.

Members were reminded that following the Cabinet reshuffle, this programme of work is still the responsibility of Jane Hutt in her role as Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Trefnydd and Chief Whip. Jane Hutt's support for the work of the Steering Group was noted. The Chair informed the group that she would be seeking a meeting with the Cabinet Secretary to provide a progress update on work to date.

Finally, the Chair noted that she had been unable to meet with the LG SRO Group Chair since the last meeting of the steering group but arrangements to meet are in progress.

Action point 1: Core Team to work with SRO Group to fill the role left vacant by

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Anna Friend's departure from the Steering Group and Workstreams.

Action point 2: Chair to meet with LG SRO Group Chair.

Workstream update

In introducing this item, EM referred members to the Workstream Highlight Report circulated to members for discussion.

EM informed the group that the majority of Workstreams have held their kick-off session and subsequent meeting(s). These meetings have focused on each Workstream's set of priorities and understanding of the required tasks to progress against them. Much of the work is still in a planning stage, however design/data and phase 1 have begun to consider sequencing their activities and to explore how to map local authority services in collaboration with the SRO Group.

EM raised that as Workstreams progress, there is a high level of inter-dependencies between workstream priorities and a meeting of the Workstream facilitator is arranged to discuss the handling of joint interests to avoid any duplication.

A key barrier to the progress of the Workstreams is the lack of local authority membership. It was noted that this risk has been escalated to the SRO Group and together with the Core Team they will continue to encourage Local Government participation across the programme of work.

NG offered to speak to his colleagues in Bridgend and other local authorities and see if anyone would be interested in joining a Workstream. Thanking NG for his offer, the Chair requested this is co-ordinated / fed-back through the WLGA and Core Team.

DW noted that in collaboration with Matthew Evans and SRO Group, the Phase 1 Workstream issued an initial baseline survey to all local authorities requesting basic information on their administrative processes relating to Schools Essentials Grant, Free School Meals and Council Tax Reduction Scheme. EM and CDPS colleagues have done a preliminary analysis and will share the results once completed.

Action point 3: Core Team to continue to source additional Local Government participation in Workstreams in collaboration with the SRO Group.

Action point 4: NG bring to the attention of WLGA/Core Team if any of any interested parties who would like to join a Workstream.

Action point 5: Core Team to share the analysis of the initial Phase 1 Baseline Survey.

SRO Group update / local authority membership

EW informed the group that the SRO Group met on 23 September and welcomed PN, MJ and EM to present the first draft of the Phase 1 Route Map. EW confirmed the SRO Group will be centrally co-ordinating a collective response from all 22 local authorities to the draft document and provide this to the Core Team by 14 October 2024.

GJ requested clarification on how Workstreams put forward proposals for information gathering exercises or workshops. EW requested GJ send a summary the Workstream's ask of the SRO Group/local authorities and WLGA/ Core Team will advise on the appropriate action.

Action point 6: SRO Group to provide feedback on the draft Phase 1 Route-map by October 14.

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Action point 7: GJ to send EW/Core team a summary of design/data's proposals and jointly discuss how to take them forward.

Risk log

DW provided members with an overview of the Project Risk Log, including the changes agreed at the last meeting and in line with concerns raised about appropriate local government representation on workstreams, a proposal to increase the RAG rating of the risk associated with Local Government participation.

Members discussed whether the risk associated with the inter-dependencies between workstream should have its RAG rating increased. It was decided that for the timing being the risk will be kept as-is but will be kept under view. In the meantime, the Core Team and Workstream facilitators will meet to discuss the raised interdependencies and agree how to best manage these.

Members agreed to remove the risk of UK elections from the Risk Log, noting at present the next General Election is not expected until c. 2029. However, noting the next Senedd election will take place in less than 2 years it was agreed to add a risk regarding this to the log.

A discussion was held regarding the Eligibility Workstream and the ability to make recommendations on changes to eligibility criteria. It is understood that increasing thresholds for eligibility is not under the mandate of this programme of work, but it is inevitable that discussions regarding aligning eligibility could lead to more people becoming eligible. It was agreed to highlight this as a risk on the risk register and the Workstream will be able to make recommendations to the Steering Group and Ministers once they identify any impacts of aligning eligibility criteria.

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Members discussed whether the project has reached a sufficiently mature stage to develop an initial and high-level Equalities Impact Assessment. It was decided the Core Team would take this forward and report back to the Steering Group. In the meantime, the group requested all Workstreams consider the impact on protected characteristics as they progress.

Action Point 8: Core Team and Workstream Facilitators to discuss the inter-dependencies between Workstreams.

Action Point 9: risk relating to the UK General Elections to be removed from the risk log and a separate log regarding the upcoming Senedd elections to be added.

Action Point 10: Core Team to explore whether the project is at a stage where an initial equalities impact assessment can be drawn up.

Draft route map review

MJ presented to the group a draft Phase 1 route-map for the streamlining of Welsh Benefits. The draft has been developed by a sub-group of the Steering Group and reflects the priorities of each of the 6 Workstreams.

MJ informed the group that the intention is for the draft route map to be presented to the Partnership Council for Wales for endorsement in November 2024. Prior to this, feedback and suggestions are being sought by the Steering Group, Workstreams and the Local Government SRO Advisory Group.

Members were invited to put forward their initial thoughts on the draft route map for discussion. It was agreed that all Steering Group members would provide written feedback on the draft answering a selection of key questions as well as providing their comments, suggested amends, and suggestion additions.

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Members agreed the draft route-map would be finalised and endorsed via written procedure.

Action point 11: all Steering Group members to provide written feedback on the draft Route-map by 14 October 2024.

Action point 12: draft route-map to be finalised by written procedure.

Minutes of last meeting

Members approved the minutes of the last meeting (24.07.2024).

Any other business and next meeting

The Steering Group will next meet on November 28 in a hybrid capacity via Microsoft Teams and the WLGA offices in Cardiff.

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