



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

**THE RT HON THERESE COFFEY MP**  
**Secretary of State for Work & Pensions**

Caxton House  
Tothill Street  
London, SW1H 9AJ

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP  
Chair  
Work and Pensions Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

22nd July 2020

*Dear Stephen,*

At my appearance before the Committee this morning I committed to providing you with a copy of the Terms of Reference for the Serious Case Panel. We will be publishing this document on Gov.uk shortly.

I have also attached copies of the minutes for the Serious Case Panel meetings that took place in March and July of this year. As I noted in my evidence this morning, in future minutes of each meeting will be published on Gov.uk within a month of each Panel meeting.

*Yours sincerely,*

*Theresa*

## **DWP Serious Case Panel**

### **Terms of Reference**

#### **Purpose**

The Panel will meet on a quarterly basis to consider serious systemic issues arising from cases and other insight, impacting on DWP customer experience and make recommendations to address these issues, in order to reduce the incidence of such cases in future. The Panel will not consider the specifics of individual serious cases, which will be managed separately through the appropriate processes (such as Complaints, which can be escalated to the Independent Case Examiner and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman).

#### **Referral of issues to the Panel**

The Panel will consider themes and trends that are directly informed by serious cases and customer experience insight. The themes and trends will be formulated on the basis of consideration of various sources of insight, for example:

- Coroners' reports
- Internal Process Reviews
- Complaints
- Reports from the Independent Case Examiner
- Parliamentary correspondence
- Ministerial correspondence

This is not an exhaustive list – other sources of insight will be considered as appropriate.

Based on the analysis of this insight, an overview of systemic issues and themes will be created and presented at each Panel for members' views on priority topics for discussion at upcoming meetings of the Panel. This overview of systemic issues and themes will be kept updated and continuously refreshed as new evidence and insight is developed.

#### **Accountabilities and objectives**

The Panel will agree to recommendations for organisational learning and where needed, will assign Director General or committee accountability for delivering these recommendations within the Department. Where a recommendation cuts across several areas, the Panel will determine Director General sponsorship to ensure split accountabilities are brought together.

The role of the Panel will be to:

- Review systemic issues and themes and agree whether and how DWP need to take actions to improve processes and outcomes.
- Agree recommendations, and assign accountability at the most senior level for taking forward improvement activity.

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- Oversee the monitoring of the delivery of agreed improvements to ensure that these are taken forward in a timely manner.
- Oversee the monitoring of themes and systemic issues to understand whether improvements are having the desired effect.
- Improve transparency of our review and learning processes, and provide appropriate internal and external assurance.

Ministers will be kept updated on the recommendations and progress in implementing these through regular Delivery Boards. The Director General for Service Excellence will be responsible for updating Ministers at these meetings.

### **Membership**

The Panel will be chaired by a Non-Executive Director. The Panel will be comprised of the DWP Permanent Secretary, DWP Directors General and the Independent Case Examiner.

### **Frequency**

The Panel will meet quarterly.

### **Attendance**

Members are required to attend in person wherever possible. In exceptional circumstances, teleconferencing facilities or deputisation may be permitted, subject to the decision of the Chair and on advice of the Secretariat.

Other guests may be asked to attend from time to time, for example to present on specific issues. The Chair will be apprised of the role of any guests.

### **Ways of working**

Secretariat will be provided by the Customer Experience and Organisational Learning division within Service Excellence. Secretariat will aim to circulate papers a week in advance of meetings of the Panel, and will agree and circulate Minutes within a fortnight following the meeting.

### **Public disclosure of information**

The Terms of Reference and minutes will be published on gov.uk from summer 2020. The department will aim to publish the minutes on gov.uk within a month of each meeting of the Serious Case Panel. The Serious Case Panel will be subject to the usual rules around Freedom of Information requests. Any further disclosure of information will be agreed by the Panel and by ministers, and these Terms of Reference will be updated accordingly.

### **Review**

The Terms of Reference will be subject to ongoing review in the first year of the Panel (March 2020 – March 2021) and thereafter on an annual basis.

### **Date of Latest Approval**

2 July 2020.



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**MINUTES OF THE SERIOUS CASE PANEL  
19 March 2020**

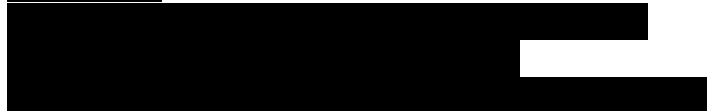
**Present:**

Chair – Sara Weller, Non-Executive Director (on behalf of Hayley Tatum)  
Peter Schofield, DWP Permanent Secretary  
Emma Haddad, Director General for Service Excellence  
Debbie Alder, Director General for People and Capability  
Neil Couling, Director General for Change  
Simon McKinnon, Director General for Digital  
Jonathan Mills, Director General for Policy  
Joanna Wallace, Independent Case Examiner  
Susanna McGibbon, Director General for Legal  
Laura Squire, Business Strategy Director (on behalf of Nick Joicey)

Presenters

Fiona Jones, Customer Experience Director  
Victoria Hughes, Customer Experience & Organisational Learning Deputy Director

Secretariat



**Apologies:**

Nick Joicey, Director General, Finance  
Hayley Tatum, Non-Executive Director and Chair  
John-Paul Marks, Director General for Work and Health Services

**1. Welcome and introductions**

The Chair thanked the group for their attendance at this busy time and emphasised the importance of having this meeting during the Covid-19 emergency to ensure that our customer's experiences and how we can learn from these continues to be a key priority for the Department.

**2. Governance and Accountabilities**

Victoria Hughes set out the proposed new governance arrangements for the Serious Case Panel and asked the group to agree:

**Decision 1:** The terms of reference – the Panel agreed, subject to some minor clarifications.

**Decision 2:** the proposed governance arrangements – the Panel agreed.

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In discussion, the Panel also agreed the following action points:

**AP1:** Victoria Hughes to share some examples of how different sources of customer insight would flow through the governance structures, for example, a customer complaint, an issue raised by frontline staff, a coroner contact etc.

**AP2:** Victoria Hughes to finalise the Terms of Reference.

### **3. Group Discussion – Themes**

**Fiona Jones presented the first of the papers on themes identified through serious cases and customer experience insight – *Paper 2: Stopping payments.***

The Panel discussed the issue where we may stop payments in circumstances where contact cannot be made with a customer and the potential impact of this. The Panel agreed two key actions:

**AP3:** The Customer Experience Directorate will lead a cross-cutting assessment of current processes to ensure consistency and ‘best practice’ processes are in place across product lines.

**AP4:** The Customer Experience Directorate will start a cross-government dialogue in the adult safeguarding space and suggest that government departments and agencies co-develop a way to join up to support vulnerable citizens where there is no clear lead department to provide that support.

**AP5:** Victoria Hughes to set timescales (in light of Covid-19) for the work to take forwards these recommendations.

**Fiona Jones presented the second thematic paper – *Paper 3: Underpayments and paying safely.***

The Panel considered issues around paying customers safely where a customer is due a large or atypical payment and this may present issues for their safety e.g. in case of substance abuse or vulnerability to criminal exploitation.

**AP6:** The panel discussed issues of ‘customer consent’ and agreed that the Customer Experience Directorate should lead a piece of work to develop ‘best practice’ guidance within the current legislative framework, which will be developed and implemented consistently across product lines.

**AP7:** The Panel asked for the timescales and prioritisation of the work to be updated in light of the Covid-19 response work.

### **4. AOB and close**

Members of the Panel thanked Fiona Jones, Victoria Hughes and their teams for their work in preparing for the Panel. The Chair thanked the Panel for dedicating attention to this valuable and important discussion at this time of emergency.



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**MINUTES OF THE SERIOUS CASE PANEL  
2 July 2020**

This meeting was held virtually over Skype.

**Chair:** Hayley Tatum, Non-Executive Director

**Members:**

Peter Schofield, Permanent Secretary  
Emma Haddad, Director General for Service Excellence  
Debbie Alder, Director General for People and Capability  
Neil Couling, Director General for Change  
John-Paul Marks, Director General for Work and Health Services  
Simon McKinnon, Director General for Digital  
Susanna McGibbon, Director General for Legal  
Mary Pattison, Director of State Pensions, Child Maintenance and Devolution (on behalf of Jonathan Mills)  
Laura Squire, Director of Business Strategy (on behalf of Nick Joicey)  
Joanna Wallace, Independent Case Examiner

**Presenters:**

Fiona Jones – Customer Experience Director  
Victoria Hughes – Customer Experience & Organisational Learning Deputy Director

**Additional attendees:**

Clare Talbot – Customer Insight Deputy Director  
Karen Gamester – Dispute Resolution Deputy Director  
Nicola McDonnell – Disputes Modernisation Programme Manager

**Secretariat:** [REDACTED]

**Apologies:**

Jonathan Mills, Director General for Policy  
Nick Joicey, Director General for Finance

**1. Welcome and introductions**

The Chair welcomed the group and acknowledged that this was her first meeting as Chair, as Sara Weller had kindly stepped into the Chair at the previous meeting. The Chair set out expectations to manage the meeting in a virtual format and reiterated the objectives of the Panel.

## **2. Update on actions and decisions**

Secretariat drew the Panel's attention to key points in *Paper 1: Actions Update*, highlighting progress being made in baselining guidance and policy around safeguarding and support for vulnerable customers. There was a short discussion around this to clarify expectations and timescales for delivery.

Secretariat drew the Panel's attention to some minor revisions to the Terms of Reference and gave the Panel an opportunity to reflect on these changes.

**Decision 1** – The Panel agreed the latest version of the terms of reference.

## **3. Group Discussion – Themes**

**Fiona Jones and Victoria Hughes presented the paper on the serious case theme – *Paper 2: Customer Dissatisfaction*.**

Fiona shared the work Customer Experience Directorate has undertaken to better understand the experience of expressing dissatisfaction with the Department's decisions or the service received. In a number of serious cases, the customer journey in expressing dissatisfaction and resolving issues has been lengthy and difficult. Fiona explored difficult points in the customer journey and the internal challenges. Victoria described work underway in Customer Experience Directorate to understand what drives customer experience, introducing tactical improvements in both the Complaints and Disputes journeys for our customers and the Panel noted the impact of Covid-19 easements on this improvement work. During the discussion the Panel made a number of decisions and commissioned further work as detailed below:

**Decision 2** – the Panel supported the tactical reform currently underway within Complaints and Disputes and recognised the limitations of this approach in addressing all areas of customer experience concern.

**Decision 3** – The Panel agreed with the recommendation to explore transformation opportunities to further improve customer experience, particularly around expressing dissatisfaction and resolving issues earlier, and recognised that the scope of this could be long term. The Panel asked that this work be aligned with the Target Operating Model and a plan produced to show the short, medium and long-term improvement options. Progress will be reported at the next meeting of the Panel.

**Decision 4** – the Panel asked that in addition to Decision 3, Customer Experience Directorate identify and take forward work as quickly as possible to drive immediate improvements in processes and customer experience to address the points in the customer journey discussed as part of this theme.

## **4. AOB and close**

The Chair and members of the Panel thanked Fiona Jones, Victoria Hughes and their teams for their work.