



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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Sir Stephen Timms
Chair, Work and Pensions Select Committee
House of Commons
LONDON
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Sent electronically

30 January 2024

Dear Stephen

ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS 2022-23 HEARING

Thank you for your letter of 15th January.

DWP is committed to supporting our customers and improving our services, especially in relation to the most vulnerable. The Department introduced Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders (ACSSLs) to assist colleagues when supporting vulnerable customers and facilitate join up with local organisations and agencies. In 2022/23, ACSSLs supported 12,000 customer cases, of which two thirds were referred by DWP colleagues and the remaining third by external sources like Local Authorities. More widely, all customer-facing colleagues have the training and tools in place to support claimants who express an intention of self-harm or suicide. To support claimants at risk, colleagues follow the Six Point Plan, including escalation to Emergency Services where appropriate.

Internal Process Reviews (IPRs) are an internal tool to support the continuous improvement of capability, culture, behaviour and processes across the Department. All IPR referrals are made by a DWP colleague. Referrals may be informed by a complaint being received from a customer, their representative, their MP, contact from a Safeguarding Adult Board or from an individual colleague's interaction with a customer and/or their claim. DWP colleagues are encouraged to make an IPR referral where they believe a case meets the following criteria:

- There is a suggestion or allegation that the Department's actions or omissions may have negatively contributed to the customer's circumstances, *and* a customer has suffered serious harm, has died (including by suicide), or where we have reason to believe there has been an attempted suicide; *or*,

- The Department is asked to participate in a Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR), a Significant Case Review (SCR, Scotland only), a Domestic Homicide Review (DHR), or is named as an Interested Party at an Inquest. In these circumstances, an Internal Process Review will be conducted regardless of whether there is an allegation against the Department.

You asked about the 29 IPR referrals made in 2022/23 that did not meet the criteria. 18 of these cases were referred following a customer death and 11 of the cases involved customer harm. Of the 60 IPR referrals which met the criteria and were accepted, 50 were referred following a customer death and 10 involved customer harm.

When a case is referred for an IPR there can be a range of outcomes. There is a process in place to encourage learning, including working with DWP Service Lines to raise awareness and improve clarity and effectiveness of existing and new processes and guidance. For example, where a customer has died but there is no allegation against the Department and therefore the criteria is not met, ACSSLs may support the referrer to learn from the case and remediate where possible. Where a referral meets the criteria and is taken forward for an IPR but, despite allegations, no significant errors are found in the Department's actions, feedback is shared with the relevant business area. When an IPR finds that DWP actions or omissions have negatively impacted a customer, any significant learning that can be taken from the case to improve customer experiences going forward is shared with the referrer and business area. Thematic issues are fed back to our Complex Needs team.

Information and evidence from IPR cases also helps inform wider DWP improvements through appropriate governance routes, including the Serious Case Panel. Examples of where learning from serious cases has been instrumental in improving services include changes to action to take when there have been two ineffective visits to someone in their home before claims are closed or suspended, along with introduction of processes to consider a customer's vulnerability before making large payments to them.

You also asked about the rise in mental ill health referenced in the PCS dossier and any data the Department could share relating to staff wellbeing in relation to workload. Absence for Depression, Anxiety and other mental health is presently at 1.29% vs. 1.16% in January 2023. There have been small fluctuations in the intervening year, but the trend is predominantly flat. We monitor all absence data carefully, including mental health related absence, and have a suite of resources available to support colleagues and Line Managers where needed.

In reference to the 2023 Civil Service People Survey: the results are for internal use until publication by the Cabinet Office People Survey Team on GOV.UK. The Cabinet Office make decisions about when they should be released, and I understand that they intend this to be before the end of March 2024. DWP will provide the Committee with the CSPS data for DWP on the date of publication.

Finally, the then Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression wrote to you on 20th September 2023 regarding the Departmental position on RAAC. That letter set out our strong management of the RAAC on our estate and the limited effect it has on our properties. To reiterate DWP has an entirely Leasehold estate made up of c.940 buildings in the UK, the largest leasehold estate in central Government. Where we have direct responsibility for the maintenance of these buildings, we have undertaken surveys in all these sites (as per the Minister's letter we undertook this programme during 2020-21 and have ensured this has been undertaken before any acquisition

since). Two of these sites were found to have RAAC. One is being remedied and the other monitored per Structural Engineer's guidance.

DWP occupies several hundred buildings where it is the minor occupier and/or does not have responsibility for the fabric of the building. Landlords have been contacted and we have 3 cases of RAAC in this cohort. These are all being managed in line with guidance from the Institute of Structural Engineers. There are 25 sites from this group where it is not known if RAAC exists. Our landlord management and legal teams have continued to seek engagement with the landlords of the remaining buildings - officials have written at least four times, including sharing the updated HSE-agreed wording. We continue to sit on the RAAC working group and have raised non-responsive landlords as a cross-Departmental issue.

I also wanted to take the opportunity to pick up one further point referenced in the hearing. The Committee asked about the overtime that the Department pays. Across DWP in 2022/2023 we paid a total of £62.1M which equates to 1.81% of permanent salaries across DWP.

Your sincerely
Peter Schofield

Peter Schofield CB
Permanent Secretary



Work and Pensions Committee

18 January 2024

Peter Schofield

Permanent Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions

(By e-mail only)

Dear Peter,

Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23

Thank you very much for giving evidence to the Committee on 10 December for our one-off session on DWP's Annual Report and Accounts 2022-23. We recognise the time and effort it will have taken to prepare for the session and the number of people involved. It was very helpful to have you answer our questions about particular aspects of the Annual Report and Accounts.

In the session, we discussed DWP's Internal Process Reviews (IPRs) and we asked about the 29 IPR referrals made in 2022-23 that were judged not to have met the criteria for being subject to an IPR. We would be grateful if you could explain the criteria for making these determinations, and also if you could provide as much information as possible about the 29 cases, including:

- how many involved death or serious harm, including attempted suicide; and
- the reasons they were judged not to have met the criteria for being subject to an IPR.

Also in the session, we asked about staff workload and the warning from the PCS of an "epidemic of mental ill health" among DWP staff and whether the number of people who had taken time off as a result of poor mental health had risen. We would be grateful if you could provide an answer to this question in writing. You also said the results of the latest civil service people survey showed an increase in the proportion of staff happy with their workload. Could you confirm whether these survey results have been published. If they have not, could you please provide us with them and any other relevant evidence you might have?

Finally, we asked about the number of buildings in the DWP estate that had been found to contain reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC). We appreciate that the then Minister for Social Mobility, Youth and Progression, Mims Davies MP, wrote to us last September to explain DWP's assessment at the time of the presence of RAAC in the estate. If any of the information in this letter is out of date, we would be grateful if you could provide an update in writing.

Once again, we would like to thank you for attending the evidence session and for your ongoing engagement with the Committee.

I would be grateful for your response to these questions by Wednesday 24 January 2024. As is usual practice with the Committee's correspondence, I will be publishing this letter and your response on the Committee's website.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Timms". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the name.

Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee