



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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Minister for Social Security and Disability
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
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London, SW1H 9NA

22 January 2025

Debbie Abrahams
House of Commons
London
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Dear Debbie,

Subject: Safeguarding vulnerable claimants follow-up

Many thanks for your letter dated 12 December 2024. I am pleased that the Committee is continuing the crucial 'safeguarding vulnerable claimants' inquiry. I am glad to provide an update on the department's work to provide additional support to all customers, especially those who are vulnerable and have complex needs.

Introducing a trauma-informed approach in Jobcentres

Since February 2024, the department has significantly progressed with introducing the Trauma Informed Approach to Jobcentres:

- The Trauma Informed Approaches team has been collaborating with the Local Services of the Future programme to test innovative redesigns of the Jobcentre front of house, introducing more Trauma Informed environments offering choice, privacy and clear direction.
- Early qualitative findings show that customers feel more comfortable, calm and able to engage in the redesigned environments compared to the current front of house design. We continue to work closely with external stakeholders, who are lending their expertise to the next phase of evaluation. Women's Aid, Rethink Mental Illness and the Red Cross have all been invited to participate.
- The Trauma Informed Approach team has conducted two phases of research in operational 'pulse points' including Jobcentres and service centres. These phases provided national insight to inform the programme assumptions and future phases of operational engagement. This has included engaging local authorities and public health organisations, to build better local multi-agency working to support customers.
- We are supporting the objectives of the 'Get Britain Working' white paper including working closely with the Work Coach Academy, the National Jobs and Careers Service programme and the department's commitment to supporting localism and community focussed multiagency working.
- Finally, we have supported University of Salford research into how trauma informed the department is at present, encapsulating the views of senior leaders, customers and stakeholders about benefits, including Universal Credit. This is due for publication in

2025. It will provide a baseline picture, and an opportunity to assess the value added by the programme in future years.

This period of discovery has been critical to assuring that the Trauma Informed Approach can be successfully embedded in Jobcentres across England, Scotland and Wales and has been further supported by additional work within the programme on service design standards, content design and customer experience standards.

When does DWP expect to introduce a standardised framework relating to its trauma-informed work

We have recently hosted initial discovery workshops with policy officials across the department on introducing our standardised framework. We are using lessons from introduction of the 'Family Test', which ensures that the perspective of families is applied by policy makers, and using opportunities presented through major upcoming changes in the department. The 'Get Britain Working' white paper provides a unique opportunity to make the Trauma Informed Approach drive positive and compassionate change into the heart of the department, making it a core pillar of design in the new service. We expect the standardised framework to be user-tested by Q3, 2025, with full roll-out by the end of 2025.

Family member requests to see an IPR

As explained by Elizabeth Fairburn, Customer Experience Director in March 2024, work was undertaken on proactively sharing all Internal Process Reviews (IPRs) with families. After discussions in the department, it was decided that this was not feasible, due to legal restrictions on sharing personal information, and the potential impact of sharing sensitive information with family members who may not be aware of it.

Although we cannot proactively share IPRs with families, we will consider sharing IPRs with family members upon request, on a case-by-case basis. This approach allows us to address specific legal considerations and potential impacts consistently for all requests. This does not affect the department's obligation to provide IPRs when legally mandated, such as when instructed by a coroner.

We plan to begin publishing anonymous information on IPRs, ensuring that individuals are not identifiable to the wider public, by the end of March 2025. This initiative provides an opportunity to consider how we can share certain information from the IPR with families, where requested, to demonstrate what was identified and learned through the IPR process.

I will ensure the Committee is updated with progress on this important work.

Appointee system improvements

As you are aware, the Serious Case Panel discussed the need for improvements to the department's current appointee process and a multi-disciplinary team was formed in 2023 to undertake this work, prioritising being able to provide a flexible service that protects the customer.

Our aim is to support people to access DWP services safely and ensure they have someone who can deal with their affairs appropriately. To provide an extra layer of protection for the customer, in September 2024, a pre-appointee check was implemented

across all benefit lines, which ensures that the appointee meets the requirement of having an appropriate relationship to the customer, minimising the risk of financial abuse.

To provide a faster and more flexible appointee service, we continue to work with DWP Legal and the Legislation and Parliamentary team on the legislative changes required to allow appointee applications by telephone. This requires a change to Regulations (57(3)(a)) requiring that appointees must make a written application.

Work continues on strengthening the appointee application form, ensuring we are putting appointees in place where there is a genuine need whilst also ensuring the right person is able to act on the customer's behalf.

The development and design of the 'add an appointee' digital service continues to make progress. Progressing this digital service will change the way appointees are recorded, eliminating duplication for both the customer and appointee. These changes will also support identification of potential fraudulent appointees, for example, an appointee who is acting on behalf of a high numbers of customers or someone who has previously been removed as an appointee.

I look forward to updating the Committee further on the implementation of a fully transformed appointee service.

Chief Medical Advisor and clinical governance

I hope the Committee found Dr Gail Allsopp's evidence on 8 January helpful in explaining how, since being appointed in September 2023, Dr Allsopp has successfully assessed the department's clinical governance, implementing a new safeguarding process for clinicians and assessment providers. Dr Allsopp provides another layer of assurance, contributing to the department's learning from serious cases via a newly established Clinical Governance Board as well as being on the Serious Case Panel. I'm aiming for a clinical governance annual progress report, providing transparency on completed safeguarding referrals across the department.

Serious Case Panel

We want to publish extra information in the Serious Case Panel minutes, which until now have been very cursory. We aim to increase transparency of our support and learning from serious cases, much of which is taken to the Panel.

Advanced Customer Support (ACS) information appeared in DWP's 2022/23 Annual Report and Accounts, including a section on the Serious Case Panel, and was expanded in the 2023/24 Accounts. This year's Accounts will include more on ACS.

The ['Get extra help and support to manage your benefits or pension'](#) GOV.UK page, introduced in June 2024, aims to assist citizens' navigation and understanding of the support the department can provide. This allows us to increase our presence on GOV.UK, and we plan to host there publications on ACS activities we are working on.

We are working on a standalone ACS publication, to appear in the coming weeks, to highlight work on improvements for customers requiring additional support. Some of these workstreams have been driven by the Serious Case Panel.

I am committed to increasing transparency across the department, and I want the steps we are taking to publish the learning from IPRs to demonstrate this. The material will highlight issues identified in reviewing serious cases, and improvements the department has made in response.

Advanced Customer Support (ACS)

There are two Gateway teams in Advanced Customer Support, fulfilling different and separate functions. The ACS Operational Delivery team manages referrals sent through to the Advanced Customer Support Senior Leader (ACSSL) Community, requesting additional support. The ACS Visiting Gateway Team supports the DWP Visiting Service and receive all referrals sent for core visits. The work of both teams, and the referral processes that feed into them, is outlined below.

ACSSL referrals

DWP staff are trained to support vulnerable customers, and have access to a wide range of guidance and signposting to support them. Where further specialist help is required, a web referral form can be completed sending a customer's case for ACSSL consideration. These are triaged by the ACS Operational Delivery Team who filter out inappropriate referrals, before the case goes to an ACSSL. All accepted referrals are tracked and monitored up to the point of closure.

Rejected referrals are ones where existing support and processes haven't been fully utilised, and the Gateway team send advice and will coach frontline teams on how to help the customer further with the support available to frontline colleagues.

Externally, ACSSLs share their contact details with relevant partners, and referrals can be sent direct to the appropriate local ACSSL. I know our ACSSLs welcomed the opportunity to demonstrate to the Committee last November their role in local engagement. They have developed around 1,500 new partnerships over the last couple of years and have monitored local trends. Contact with ACSSLs may also be made via local Partnership Managers, whose details are published on GOV.UK, allowing a quick route into the department. As with internal referrals, they are tracked and monitored up to closure.

Visiting Referrals

The national DWP Visiting Service provides additional face-to-face support across all service lines to customers who cannot access DWP services in any other way. A visit can be arranged for a customer if they need extra help to claim benefits, for example because they have complex needs, are disabled, are a vulnerable young person making a claim for the first time, have nobody else to support them or cannot claim benefits in any other way.

The ACS Visiting Gateway Team receive and triage all referrals for a core visit made by frontline colleagues. Referrals for a visit are made via the internal DWP Visiting Referral Tool. The Gateway Team can further support the Visiting Service by making contact with a customer over the telephone, supporting visit requests relating to: Move to Universal Credit, Benefit Entitlement Check, and Loss of Contact, removing the need for a home visit in some cases.

In addition to those calls, Visiting Gateway colleagues liaise with frontline colleagues, gathering additional details to ensure that the Visiting Officer has all the required information to support an effective visit. They will also book appointments in flexible visiting sites, which are local locations that offer an alternate setting for the appointment, if that is something that will support a customer's individual needs.

Customers can also be referred for a support visit by trusted partners, who include Citizens Advice and Age UK. These referrals are received by the Visiting Gateway Team via a dedicated email address, then following the process outlined above.

Universal Credit's 'Additional Support Area'

Universal Credit (UC) has an 'Additional Support Area' on the agent side of the UC service where colleagues can record and check additional support needs disclosed by the customer.

This is used in conjunction with recording key support needs in pinned notes, so staff can pick up key customer information. As well as support needs being held in one place in the 'Additional Support Area', colleagues can also update and close customer needs, ensuring all staff can see that customer's most up-to-date information. This area also shows accessibility needs, either declared directly by the customer on their account or via an agent. It shows 'current' and previously declared support needs, allowing agents a greater understanding of the support required. We recognise that vulnerabilities and complex needs are fluid and can change over time, and a holistic view of additional support needs allows tailoring of support.

An internal UC Additional Support campaign launched in October 2024, including internal communications, provided walkthroughs for all staff of the new additional support area. Guidance has also been updated, ensuring staff can quickly and easily understand how to update important information about a customer's additional support needs and what information is vital to include.

The role of the Work and Pensions Committee is crucial in helping the department improve the design and delivery of services. Please express my thanks to members of the Committee for their interest.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Timms', with a horizontal line above the name.

Rt Hon. Sir Stephen Timms MP

Minister for Social Security and Disability