

DWP - Adapting to Climate Change

DWP is acting now to adapt to the effects of climate change and to reduce the risks, by contributing less to the causes.

A 'Review of the Impacts of Climate Change on DWP Policies and Operations' was commissioned from the Meteorological Office at the beginning of 2007/8. The work was carried out across the summer and autumn of 2007 and involved staff from across the Department and its businesses.

The impacts identified by the Meteorological Office were wide-ranging and complex. They highlighted two high priority areas for adaptation to be addressed:

Issues that could impact on DWP policy or services, including amongst others:

- whether there will be a need for the thresholds for cold weather payments to be re-examined and whether a cooling-related hot weather payment may need to be considered;
- the impact of extreme regional weather and the potential increase in people failing to take out adequate insurance cover, on the demand for crisis loans;
- the disproportionate impact of climate change on the vulnerable who make up a large part of the Department's customers; and
- the long term impact on demographics that will impact the provision of support to tomorrow's pensioners.

Issues that could impact on DWP operations and suppliers, including amongst others:

- possible disruption to office efficiency during heat wave or other extreme events, if the working environment deteriorates;
- whether local and national business continuity plans are sufficiently robust to accommodate the impact of more frequent extreme weather events; and
- potential disruption to IT and other office services as a result of energy suppliers not being able to meet the peak demands for cooling.

Some, such as potential requirements for a hot weather payment and potentially a lesser need for the winter fuel payment, will only have an impact in the long-term. The number of acceptable solutions will be reduced if preparatory work is significantly delayed. Others such as the adequacy of the Department's business continuity plans may have an immediate impact, should the flooding events of the 2007 summer be repeated.

The report does not answer all the questions, and it has raised some new issues not previously identified, but it goes a long way to enabling the Department to plan adaptations for climate change.

We intend to revisit the review once the UK 21st Century Climate Change Projections (2008) (UKCIP08) have been launched (now expected early 2009). This will enable decision makers in both the policy and operations areas to identify climate change impacts with greater clarity and build adaptations more fully into their future plans.