

**DWP Customer Insight,
Customer Standards
Team**

**Equality Impact Assessment
Department for Work and Pensions
(DWP) Customer Charter**

Equality Impact Assessment for Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Customer Charter

Introduction

DWP has carried out an equality impact assessment (EIA) on the introduction of the DWP Customer Charter to meet the requirements and to ensure the Charter meets the requirements of the:

- Race Equality Duty;
- Disability Equality Duty; and
- Gender Equality Duty.

The assessment process is carried out to help make sure that:

- the Department's strategies, policies and services are free from discrimination;
- due regard is given to equality (specifically disability, gender and race) in decision-making and subsequent processes; and
- opportunities for promoting equality are identified.

This equality impact assessment considers the impact on our customers and staff of the introduction of a DWP wide Charter in terms of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, and race.

DWP Customer Charter

The DWP Customer Charter has been developed to support the delivery of a high quality service for all DWP customers. It outlines the standard of service customers can expect to receive when contacting DWP and applies to all our processes and services.

The Charter is based on research the Department carried out in 2008 to find out what was most important to its customers in their dealings with DWP. The following four 'Key Drivers of customer satisfaction' were identified:

- Right treatment;
- Right result;
- On time; and
- Easy access.

The DWP Customer Charter uses these 'Key Drivers' as its basis. Although there are already defined, specific service delivery standards in each of the different Agencies and business areas that make up DWP (including Jobcentre Plus, The Pension, Disability and Carers Service, and Debt Management), the new Charter provides a high level set of service standards which cover all areas of DWP.

Purpose and aim(s) of the DWP Customer Charter

The aim of the Charter is to provide customers, staff and intermediaries with a clear understanding of the level of service customers should expect to receive in their interactions with DWP. It provides a core set of service standards that apply across the

Department. These standards will enable DWP to measure customer service delivery across the Department in a way that is meaningful to customers and staff.

The Charter:

- provides a common set of service standards that apply across the whole of DWP;
- explains the standard of service that a customer can expect to receive every time they make contact with any part of DWP;
- tells customers how to complain if they are unhappy with the service;
- outlines, in headline terms what we expect from our customers in their interactions with us; and
- provides a consistent framework within which to describe Agency or business area operational service standards.

Who will benefit mainly from this proposal or change?

The Charter is of benefit to DWP customers, staff and customer representative organisations as it provides a clear explanation of the Department's service standards.

Involvement and engagement

Our activities in this area were centred on informal involvement and engagement supported by customer research.

Research carried out in 2008 that identified the 'Key Drivers of customer satisfaction' consisted of:

- 3,293 interviews with a cross section of DWP customers; and
- 463 interviews with intermediaries.

Following this, further development and 'testing' sessions were held, involving around 600 staff and 100 customers. The outcomes of this research and engagement underpinned the development of the Charter.

Staff involvement and consultation

The DWP Customer Insight team talked to staff to ask for their views on:

- what the Charter should look like,
- what it should contain, and
- how it could be made an integral part of their job, not just an information poster.

More than 2000 staff gave their views either at face-to-face discussions or via an Intranet poll.

The response from staff has been overwhelmingly supportive, with staff saying that the Charter provides a clear statement of what is meant by good customer service and a useful framework within which they can operate and review individual and team performance.

Staff have also helped to develop supporting products that will assist them in delivering the service standards contained in the Charter, such as a 'Line Manager's handbook' and a Charter pocket summary card.

Staff discussion sessions included staff that were representative of our workforce: males, females, from a range of ethnic backgrounds and people with disabilities. The Departmental Trade Union Side (representative of staff in the Department) was consulted on the development of the Charter.

Customer involvement

DWP held five customer discussion forums to assist with the development of the Charter. Discussion topics included:

- what the Charter would mean for customers;
- what it should look like; and
- what it might contain.

The forums included customers who were representative of a cross section of those using the Department's services. This included men, women, and people with disabilities, carers, lone parents, older people, and ethnic minority groups.

Intermediary involvement

DWP held discussion sessions with a range of specialist external organisations to gain their views on the Charter, including gaining their views on what it should contain and what it should look like. The following groups were involved:

- DWP Disability and Equality Forum;
- DWP Welsh Forum;
- Disability and Carers Service Advisory Forum;
- Jobcentre Plus Stakeholder Group;
- Policy and Strategy Forum;
- Ethnic Minority working party;
- DWP Annual Forum; and
- The Social Security Advisory Committee.

The above groups represent a wide range of customers' views, and include organisations with particular interest in disability, race, Welsh language, pensioners, jobseekers, and the support of those in poverty. It also includes groups who have an interest in policy development.

All stakeholder groups involved were keen to see an easy to use, one page document, that was engaging, based on core service principles and allowed for signposting to a greater level of detail elsewhere if required.

Additional consultation

Views on the Charter were also sought from DWP Legal group, DWP Diversity team, DWP Business Strategy Division and customer service teams from each DWP business area. Responses were very similar to those from customers and intermediaries and in particular these groups were keen that the Charter captured both what customers could expect from DWP, as well as what DWP expects from its customers.

Equality impact of the DWP Customer Charter of Service Standards

Impact for staff

Successful implementation of a DWP Charter will:

- encourage positive changes in the behaviour of staff within all DWP offices;
- enable staff to understand the service standards they are expected to meet;
- result in staff directing customers to the Charter and advising them of its contents. This will make customers aware of the standard of service they should receive.

Staff will receive briefings and guidance on an ongoing basis explaining how to implement the Customer Charter in their part of the organisation. They will also be given background information explaining the research and development activities that have been carried out, for example, information explaining the Key Drivers of customer satisfaction. This will help them to understand why the Charter has been developed, and how their actions impact on customers, including those who may have additional needs due to a disability, caring responsibilities or because they are from an ethnic minority group. Staff will have access to information via the Departmental 'Intranet' which is accessible to all staff including those with disabilities who access it using specialist technology such as Zoomtext. Large print copies of the Charter have been used in staff engagement sessions.

The Charter will apply to all staff regardless of age, gender, disability, or race.

Impact for customers

The Customer Charter clearly sets out the Department's position on the core service standards offered to customers in their dealings with DWP. The Charter builds on our existing obligations under the current range of diversity and equality legislation. It supports delivery of the legislation by recognising that customers have different needs that we need to seek to understand and adapt to.

We expect the Customer Charter will have the following positive impact on our customers. Customers will:

- have a clearer understanding of the standards of service that they should receive in interactions with any part of DWP;
- be clear on what it is we are expecting of them, in their interactions with us; and
- be clear about the action they need to take if they wish to make a complaint.

The Charter includes a reminder to customers to let us know if they need to communicate with us in a different way, in order to assist the Department in meeting its duty to promote equality for all. Alternative communication formats are provided for customers who have disabilities that mean they need alternatives to written or verbal communication, and for customers who do not speak English as a first language and who may therefore need help with interpretation and translation.

- The Plain Language Commission has approved the Charter wording.
- The Charter is available in Welsh and other languages on request.
- The Charter applies to all customers regardless of age, gender, disability, or race.

In line with the Department's policy on all leaflets, appropriate requests for the Charter to be provided in alternative formats will be actioned.

As well as the commitment to provide communications in alternative format the Charter raises customer awareness of the opportunity should they need to communicate in a different way. Current alternative formats offered by DWP include text phones, large print, Braille.

Conclusion

In carrying out this assessment of the development and delivery of the DWP Customer Charter we have not found there to be any negative impact on staff or customers, regardless of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, or human rights.

Indeed, delivering and embedding the DWP Customer Charter will have a positive impact on both customers and staff from all groups, as it provides information about the levels of service that customers should receive and what the Department required of them in return. As such it should help to manage expectations of the standard of service customer should expect to receive. It also acts as a tool for staff and customers to use to frame discussions about their expectations of one another.

The process we have been through to develop the Charter has enabled us to meet, and in some cases exceed, the minimum standards required for an equality impact assessment.

The scope of the work has been as wide as we could have considered, involving a diverse audience. Involvement and engagement with stakeholders has been wide ranging over 12 months, nation wide.

Publication and communication of the Charter has taken place internally and externally. The Charter is fully endorsed by the DWP Executive Team.

The impact that the Charter has is to be fully monitored and evaluated. Some examples of how this will take place are:

- Customer surveys will be based on the Key Drivers of Customer Satisfaction;
- views will be sought routinely and regularly on how the Charter is affecting customers and staff. This will take place by continued discussions with staff, intermediaries, and customer groups;
- the annual staff survey will assess how the Charter and actions arising from the Charter are affecting staff perception of customer service delivery within DWP;
- progress in implementing the Charter and any concerns identified will be reported to the DWP Executive team on a regular basis;
- the wording and effectiveness of the Charter will be monitored on an ongoing basis through customer feedback; and
- the Charter will form an ongoing piece of consultation with existing stakeholder representative and customer groups across the Department.

Next steps

Following the launch of the Charter, a series of communications to staff will encourage them to discuss it within their teams, raise awareness of its existence, and ensure they have a clear understanding of the role they play in making the Charter real across the organisation.

In addition, DWP Customer Insight will encourage all areas of the Department to review their current customer service standards to ensure they are fully aligned with the Key Drivers of Customer satisfaction, and to ensure that their services are easy to for all customers to access, taking account of their individual needs.

This Equality Impact Assessment will be reviewed when any substantial changes are made to the Charter wording or scope.

Contact

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