

Appendix 1

**LIAISON ARRANGEMENTS – JOBCENTRE
PLUS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

HOUSING AND COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

**GUIDELINES FOR DISTRICT EXTERNAL
RELATIONS MANAGERS**

1.0 AIM

1.1 This document sets out the District External Relationships Managers (ERMs) responsibilities in managing the relationship between Jobcentre Plus and Local Authorities (LAs) on administration and fraud issues arising from the payment of Housing and Council Tax Benefit. It includes information to help District ERMs implement new joint liaison arrangements to be provided through Jobcentre Plus/LA Joint Boards from April 2007. In particular, the document covers the following areas:

- Background to the new joint liaison arrangements;
- Nature of Jobcentre Plus's relationship with LAs in the payment of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit;
- Key principles of the new liaison arrangements;
- Roles and responsibilities of District ERMs;
- Escalation route for the resolution of issues; Moving on from existing Joint Regional and Joint Operational Boards;
- Management information
- Sharing information and good practice
- Future developments to support joint working.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Following organisational change within Jobcentre Plus, the Governmental Partnerships Team in External Relations and Communications Directorate was asked to undertake a review of the existing liaison arrangements covering the administration of housing and council tax benefit issues between DWP, Jobcentre Plus, LAs and others.

2.2 In response to the results of that review the Jobcentre Plus Operational Delivery Board and the DWP/Local Authority Association Housing Benefit Steering Group have now both agreed that from April 2007 new arrangements designed to strengthen the effectiveness of our liaison with LAs on benefit issues will be put in place.

3.0 NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP WITH LAs

3.1 The new arrangements apply to the relationship Jobcentre Plus has with LAs regarding customers who can be claiming both Jobcentre Plus Benefits and DWP Housing and Council Tax Benefits administered by LAs. Jobcentre Plus and LAs have a variety of interfaces covering the administration of Housing and Council Tax Benefit, including:

- Benefit Processing/Contact Centres - new claims, decision making and changes of circumstances;

- Customer Compliance - address incorrectness in benefit cases, carrying out robust face to face interviews with customers and encouraging future compliance;
- Fraud Investigation Service – joint investigations on Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit; and
- Nominated Officer - tracing and allocation of National Insurance numbers.

4.0 KEY PRINCIPLES OF NEW LIAISON ARRANGEMENTS

4.1 In developing the new liaison arrangements a good deal of flexibility has been built in to allow both Jobcentre Plus and LA partners to agree arrangements that reflect each organisations local circumstances.

4.2 However, there are some key principles that the Operational Delivery Board wanted and these must be applied across all the arrangements being put in place across England, Scotland and Wales. These key principles are:

- one tier of meetings rather than the two that was provided through Joint Operational and Joint Regional Boards;
- that tier to be primarily operational and focused on Jobcentre Plus's relationship with LAs over Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit (rather than being strategic or about DWP or Government wide issues); and
- ERMs to play a key role in ensuring Joint Board meetings operate effectively, in managing the relationship and resolving issues that cannot be dealt with through direct local contacts.

5.0 DISTRICT ERMs - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 Within Jobcentre Plus, the District Manager is responsible for the end-to-end customer experience within a District, even where functions are delivered outside the area, e.g. by Contact or Benefit Delivery Centres. For that reason we will be supporting local contacts between Jobcentre Plus and LAs by putting in place a network of normally District level, Jobcentre Plus/LA Joint Boards. Although one Board per District should be the norm, a cross-district basis, e.g. where a district covers more than one county and/or unitary authority may be substituted with the agreement of local authority partners. At the same time, Boards will need to agree who is best placed to chair the meetings. We expect that this would often be the District Manager.

5.2 Single meetings should normally be held covering both fraud and admin issues. There may be operational advantages for separate fraud and admin meetings to take place. If either Jobcentre Plus or LAs request this approach, it will need to be agreed by both parties. There is likely to be a need for relatively frequent Joint Board meetings to be

held to support the introduction of the new working arrangements. However, the expectation is that the number of board meetings will reduce as the new arrangements bed in. The number of board meetings to be held annually should be agreed with LA partners, although a minimum of two must be held every 12 months.

- 5.3 These arrangements have been designed around the relationship between Jobcentre Plus and LAs. Occasionally, the agenda may be such that it would be helpful if colleagues from Debt Management, the Pension Service (TPS) or Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) participated. This will need to be agreed by all parties locally as and when necessary.
- 5.4 District ERMs are responsible for the overall management of the local relationship with LAs on benefit and fraud issues. Clearly, most day-to-day issues can be handled through direct contact between the LAs and people in Jobcentre Plus offices, Benefit and Fraud and Contact Centre Directorates – as they are now in many instances. District ERMs will though need to be prepared to facilitate the resolution of issues when necessary. For this approach to work effectively issues will need to be resolved quickly during the course of normal day-to-day business (via e-mail/telephone contact) rather than being stored up for the attention of Joint Board meetings in the future. District ERMs will need to get in touch with relevant operational colleagues in Jobcentre Plus to establish their network of contacts. The table below illustrates typical issues that LAs could raise and the range of contacts that District ERMs will need to develop in Jobcentre Plus to enable day-to-day issues to be managed effectively.

Example of LA Relationship issue:	JCP contact to be established:
LA reports a delay in Jobcentre Plus processing new claims, which is impacting on the LA clearance time targets	District Performance Manager
LAs are receiving information from the Customer Management System (CMS) output, which is insufficient or incomplete.	Contact Centre Manager and/or the Financial Assessor Manager
LA customer has told them they have reported the change of circumstances (CoC) to Jobcentre Plus, yet the LA has not received notification from Jobcentre Plus.	Benefit Processing Manager
LA cannot contact anyone in Jobcentre Plus regarding Fraud issues	Fraud Investigation Service
LAs are investigating a customer regarding potential fraud and have discovered the customer has already been contacted by the Jobcentre Plus customer compliance team	Customer Compliance Manager
LAs customer does not have a national insurance number (NINO) but has applied for one at the local Jobcentre Plus office.	Local NINO interviewing team based at a small number of JCP sites in each region/country

- 5.5 Similar arrangements need to be developed within LAs. District ERMs will need to make contact with LAs, usually the Housing Benefit Manager, to establish a routeway for the new arrangements, e.g. which LAs will fit within the District boundary, whether single meetings covering fraud and admin issues or, meetings covering both agendas, will be held and agreeing and sharing contact details of relevant Jobcentre Plus/LA colleagues.
- 5.6 District ERMs should be aware that Jobcentre Plus is looking for an approach that is less bureaucratic, involves the right people and is more effective in resolving issues. However, in setting up the new arrangements District ERMs should look to build on those elements of the current relationship that work well, rather than simply dismantling them all and starting from scratch.
- 5.7 It is expected that people from the District ERM's and LA counterpart's network of operational contacts e.g. Benefit Delivery Centre, Jobcentre Plus office, Contact Centre, Fraud Investigation Service, LA housing benefit and fraud colleagues will normally attend Joint Board meetings to provide expertise on operational issues – who attends each meeting will depend on the agenda.
- 5.8 Jobcentre Plus/LA Joint Boards will support the day-to-day liaison work by focusing on:
- reviewing local working arrangements covered by the Service Level & Partnership Agreements;
 - performance, consideration of management information covering relevant performance across each organisation;
 - looking to resolve particular problems that it has not been possible to solve through day-to-day contacts;
 - identifying and sharing good practice; and
 - sharing information on new developments within policy and processes that impact on each organisation.
- 5.9 The Terms of Reference attached at Appendix 1 sets out the membership and key principles of the new Jobcentre Plus/LA Joint Boards.

6.0 ESCALATION ROUTES

- 6.1 Issues should be resolved at the lowest possible level e.g. by LAs, Contact Centre and Benefits and Fraud Directorate teams via e-mail/telephone. District ERMs are likely to become involved where local attempts to resolve issues are not achieved and escalation is required. Where issues cannot be resolved an escalation route via the Country/Regional ERM, ODN and the COO Gateway is in place. The Governmental Partnerships Team will be responsible for handling issues/changes requiring a national input. Details of the escalation

route are attached at appendix 2. District ERMs will need to agree a suitable escalation route within their LAs.

7.0 MOVING ON FROM EXISTING JRBS/JOBs

7.1 The table below sets out the key actions that District ERMs and the Governmental Partnerships Team will need to take in order to wind up existing JRBS and JOBS and put in place new liaison arrangements, including Jobcentre Plus/LA Joint Boards.

Key Actions	By Whom	By When
Establish network of contacts in Jobcentre Plus and LAs	District ERMs	March 2007
Hold discussions with Jobcentre Plus and LA stakeholders to agree the detail of the new Joint Board arrangements	District ERMs	March 2007
Contact JRB chairs to identify any outstanding issues that need to be resolved.	District ERMs	April 2007
Outstanding issues from JRB meetings to be forwarded to the Governmental Partnerships Team	District ERMs	April 2007
Outstanding issues from final JOB meetings to be resolved/raised through agreed escalation route for resolution	District ERMs	April 2007
Any outstanding issues from final JRB meetings to be raised with the DWP/LAA Housing Benefit Steering Group	Governmental Partnerships Team	May 2007
DWP/LAA Housing Benefit Steering Group decisions on outstanding issues from JRB meetings to be shared with relevant District ERMs.	Governmental Partnerships Team	May 2007
New Jobcentre Plus/LA Joint Board meetings to take place	District ERMs	From April 2007
Compile index of new Joint Board arrangements	District ERM and Governmental Partnerships Team	15 June 2007

8.0 INDEX OF NEW JOINT BOARDS

8.1 To support Joint Boards in their role of sharing information and good practice the Governmental Partnerships Team will compile an index of the new Joint Boards. To help us achieve this, District ERMs are asked to complete and return the stencil at appendix 3 to shirley.jones4@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk by 15 June 2007.

8.2 The index will also enable us to monitor progress being made in implementing the new arrangements.

9.0 MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

9.1 We have worked with a small number of stakeholders to identify a range of management information (MI) that Joint Board members will find useful in undertaking their performance monitoring/improvement role. The MI listed in table 1 below/overleaf is accessible to all Jobcentre Plus staff through the Jobcentre Plus MI portal and provides details associated with Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit performance (administration and fraud) across Jobcentre Plus.

Table 1 – Jobcentre Plus management information

Performance Target/KMI	Target/KMI Aim	Level of data	What it tells you
Average claim clearance times (IB, JSA and IS)	To process customers' new claims for benefit within a specified period.	BDC level.	Number of cases and clearance times. Latest and cumulative YTD.
Change of circumstances – clearance times (IS/JSA changes)	To process claims within actual average clearance times stated for each benefit.	BDC level.	Number of cases and clearance times. Latest and cumulative YTD.
Monetary Value Fraud and Error (MVFE)	Reduce the money lost on IS and JSA through: Customer fraud; customer error; and official error.	Regional/ Scotland and Wales level.	Total % of benefit and amount overpaid by fraud and customer and official error.
Criminal investigations	A regional performance indicator based on the requirement to deliver a target number of benefit fraud sanctions	Regional/Scotland and Wales level.	Profiled sanction cases. Total sanctions achieved. % of monthly/yearly sanctions achieved.
Customer compliance	To deliver a target number of changes, from which will be derived a total Monetary Value of Adjustment (MVA)	Regional/Scotland and Wales level.	Total activities. Profiled/actual changed cases. % of monthly/yearly profile achieved.

Performance Target/KMI	Target/KMI Aim	Level of data	What it tells you
			% of successful activities. Profiled/total monetary value of change. % of monthly/yearly profile achieved.

- 9.2 Table 2 below lists a number of the performance measures that local authorities are measured against in respect of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. This information is available by local authority and can be accessed using the following link
http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/hb_ctb/performance/Performance_0607.xls.

Table 2 – Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit quarterly security performance statistics

Performance Measurement
PM1 – average time for processing new claims
PM2 - % of new claims outstanding over 50 days
PM3 - % of new claims decided within 14 days of receipt of the local authority receiving all necessary information
PM4 - % of new rent allowance claims paid where the first payment is made on time
PM5 – average time for processing changes of circumstances
PM6 - % of cases calculated correctly

- 9.3 The full range of available data concerning LA performance is captured on the Housing Benefit Operational Database (HoBOD). HoBOD can be accessed via the following link:
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hobod/index.php>
- 9.4 Ultimately, Joint Board members will want to agree the level of MI that is right for them and as such, will likely want to review Jobcentre Plus and LA performance data at a lower level. For example, in considering LA fraud related performance, boards may want to look at the number of sanctions, cautions offered, admin penalties and successful prosecutions against the number of referrals. Customised reports can be generated, but this will normally need to be undertaken with the support of Regional and District Performance Teams or other MI specialists in Jobcentre Plus or relevant counterparts in the LAs.
- 9.5 An example of how MI might be used to analyse performance is set out at appendix 4 – using Jobcentre Plus average claim clearance times.

10.0 SHARING INFORMATION AND GOOD PRACTICE

- 10.1 The Governmental Partnerships Team is working with colleagues in DWP e-comms to explore the feasibility of putting in place an IT facility that will enable Jobcentre Plus and LAs to share and access information and good practice. This work is expected to continue well into 2007.
- 10.2 As an interim solution, the Government Partnerships Team will circulate information/good practice that Joint Boards would like to share with each other. In order for this to work effectively, Joint Boards will need to e-mail the information to shirley.jones4@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk.
- 10.3 Shirley will circulate the information to Board secretariat colleagues (Jobcentre Plus) for them to forward the information on to their respective Board members. It will be important for Shirley to be told about any changes to the names/contacts of board secretariat colleagues.

11.0 FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS TO SUPPORT JOINT WORKING

- 11.1 **Joint Board conference** - The Jobcentre Plus Government Partnerships Team is planning on holding a conference, bringing together all the chairs, LA and Jobcentre Plus, of the new Jobcentre Plus/LA Joint Boards. This event, which is likely to take place in early 2008, will be used to inform participants of the direction of future policy and to take stock of the effectiveness of the new Boards and if necessary, identify improvements. We will also consider whether there is a need to hold similar conferences on an annual basis.
- 11.2 **Cross Department/Government Strategic Forum** – in addition to agreeing the future liaison arrangements between Jobcentre Plus and LAs the DWP/LAA Housing Benefit Steering Group also agreed that some work should take place to consider whether there is a need for any additional wider strategic forums. This work is being led by the Department and supported by its businesses.
- 11.3 We will keep you informed of the progress made in developing these pieces of work.

12.0 FURTHER INFORMATION

- 12.1 If you have any queries about this guidance please contact the Jobcentre Plus Governmental Partnerships Team.

Contacts:

chris.bullen@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk;
ian.gibbins@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Liaison arrangements between Jobcentre Plus and Local Authorities

Jobcentre Plus/LA Joint Boards (Benefit Admin and Fraud and Error) Outline Terms of Reference

Aim

The aim in convening Jobcentre Plus/LA Joint Boards is to provide a forum for nominated Jobcentre Plus and Local Authority (LA) officials to discuss issues and performance, explore best practices and implement a programme of activities that will support joint working and produce improvements in administration and a reduction in fraud and error.

Standing Membership

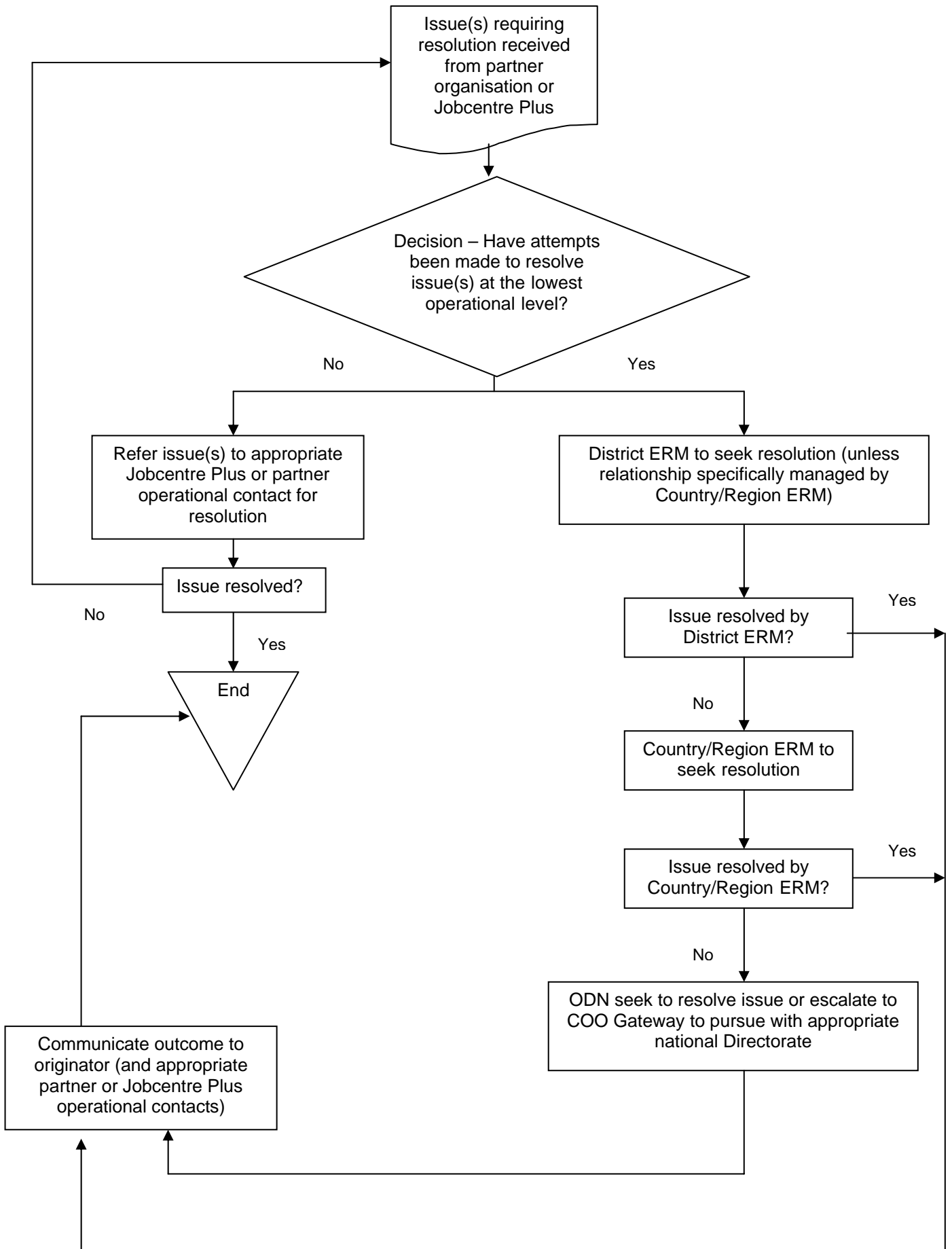
Meetings will normally be held at Jobcentre Plus District level, though cross-district meetings may be arranged through agreement with LA partners.

- All parties to agree who chairs meetings.
- Jobcentre Plus District External Relations Manager (ERM).
- Contact Centre Directorate (CCD), Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC) and Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) colleagues (District ERM to cover agenda items that relate to areas of Jobcentre Plus business that are not represented).
- Relevant counterparts in Local Authorities.

Key Responsibilities

- reviewing local business arrangements covered by the Administration Service Level Agreement (SLA) and the Fraud Partnerships Agreement (FPA) and agreeing any necessary changes;
- performance monitoring – consideration/discussion of management Information (MI) that looks at the customer experience and covers a balanced view of performance across each organisation;
- provide a platform for the identification and sharing of good practice with a view to improving, processes and performance;
- share information on new developments within policy and processes that impact on each organisation; and
- progressing issues that are not able to be resolved at a local level through the agreed escalation routes.

Escalation route for the resolution of issues



**INDEX OF JOBCENTRE PLUS/LOCAL AUTHORITY JOINT BOARD(S)
DISTRICT ERM TO COMPLETE AND RETURN BY E-MAIL TO
shirley.jones4@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk by 15 June 2007.**

*(please note: if separate fraud and admin joint boards are to be held
please complete one stencil for each joint board – question 6 refers)*

<p>Board Title.....</p> <p>1. Name of Jobcentre Plus District Office</p> <p>.....</p> <p>2. Name(s) of local authority joint board members</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p> <p>3. Names of Joint Board Chairs</p> <p>Jobcentre Plus Chair</p> <p>Local Authority Chair.....</p> <p>4. Name and contact details of Jobcentre Plus District ERM</p> <p>name.....</p> <p>tel no.....</p> <p>e-mail address.....</p> <p>5. Date of 1st JCP/LA Joint Board Meeting.....</p> <p>6. Scope of Joint Board meeting(s) <i>(please specify)</i></p> <p>Fraud Admin Joint (Fraud and Admin)</p> <p>7. Name and contact details of Joint Board secretariat colleagues</p> <p>JCP name.....e-mail address.....</p> <p>LA name.....e-mail address.....</p> <p>8. Any other comments.....</p>
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Appendix 4

Using management information - example

Clearance - Claims

District	IS Claims (average = 11 days)				JSA Claims (average = 12 days)				IB Claims (average = 18 days)			
	Latest	Cumulative YTD			Latest	Cumulative YTD			Latest	Cumulative YTD		
	Total Cases	AACT	Total Cases	AACT	Total Cases	AACT	Total Cases	AACT	Total Cases	AACT	Total Cases	AACT
BDC A	1,558	6.8	14,662	8.0	4,109	12.7	37,430	12.7	1,163	18.5	11,529	16.3
BDC B	1,687	6.7	15,663	7.8	4,901	14.7	37,912	15.7	1,708	13.1	14,507	14.4
BDC C	1,196	8.4	11,829	12.2	3,790	13.0	30,545	15.4	1,138	13.7	8,774	15.1
Benefit Delivery x region	4,441	7.2	42,154	9.1	12,800	13.6	105,887	14.5	4,009	14.8	34,810	15.2
Benefit and Fraud Directorate	75,346	9.7	725,917	11.6	211,884	13.1	1,827,317	14.6	65,259	17.1	571,152	16.3
National Total	75,359	9.7	726,092	11.6	211,909	13.1	1,827,636	14.6	65,259	17.1	571,260	16.3

Using the above management information you could ask:

Example A - IS Claims

BDC A – number of cases (YTD) is 14,662 and the average clearance time is 8 days

BDC C – number of cases (YTD) is 11,829 and the average clearance time is 12.2 days

Why BDC C took, on average, 4.2 days more to clear claims given the number of claims processed is less.

Example B – IB claims

BDC A – number of cases (in month) is 1,163 and the average clearance time is 18.5 days

BDC B – number of cases (in month) is 1,708 and the average clearance time is 13.1 days

Why BDC B took, on average, 5.2 days less to clear claims given the number of claims processed that month was greater.