

Jobcentre Plus

&

Local Authorities

**Service Level Agreement
for
Benefit Administration**

FINAL VERSION 1.0

Glossary of Terms

BDC	Benefit Delivery Centre
CCU	Central Control Unit
CIS	Customer Information System
COO	Chief Operating Officer
CTB	Council Tax Benefit
DCI	Departmental Central Index
DM	Debt Management
ERM	External Relations Manager
ETD	Electronic Transfer of Data
HB	Housing Benefit
HBRO	Housing Benefit Run-On
IS	Income Support
JSA	Jobseekers Allowance
MIRO	Mortgage Interest Run-On
NINO	National Insurance Number
LA	Local Authority
ODN	Operational Delivery Network
POG	Practitioners Operational Group
SLA	Service Level Agreement

PLEASE NOTE: The target days referred to in this document are working days not calendar days.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This agreement sets out the principles for effective partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and Local Authorities (LAs), most of which will be dealt with at a local level. It sets out the reasons *why* we should work together and *what* we are jointly trying to achieve in doing so.
- 1.2 The agreement should be communicated to and understood by all relevant staff to help reinforce the benefits to be gained and the importance placed upon effective partnership working.

2.0 Aims and Objectives

- 2.1 Partnership working is a commitment from both organisations to the Department for Work and Pensions that they will share information where legislation allows and procedural guidance dictates. The main aims of an effective partnership are:
 - Improving the end-to-end customer experience;
 - The efficient and timely exchange of accurate information in support of administering Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Jobcentre Plus benefits;
 - Commitment to maintain regular effective communication on operational and performance matters that impact on the administration of Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and Jobcentre Plus benefits;
 - Enabling each organisation to follow procedures and comply with legislation; and
 - Using the service level agreement as a starting point to further improve relationships between the two organisations.

3.0 Headline Principles & Standards for Effective Partnership Working

3.1 New Claims/ Claims Maintenance

The timely gather and sharing of accurate information for new claims and claims maintenance is essential as it has a significant impact on the respective performance targets and official error for each organisation. To facilitate this process the following standards should be adhered to:

- LA input documents to be forwarded to LA following customer Work Focused Interview at Jobcentre Plus (or decision to waiver/deferral if appropriate) – 90% within 2 days and 100% within 5 days.

- When there is any additional information and evidence verification to be gathered at the Benefit Delivery Centre (BDC) to support the customer's claim, on receipt it shall be copied and forwarded to the relevant LA – 90% within 2 days and 100% within 5 days.
- When customer changes of circumstances are reported to the LA and Jobcentre Plus benefits are in payment, they will *notify* Jobcentre Plus by copying and forwarding the relevant documents to the relevant BDC (aside from tenancy, landlord and rent matters) – 100% within 5 days.
- The majority of customer changes in circumstances notified to Jobcentre Plus should be automatically notified to LA via the Electronic Transfer of Data (ETD). However, for clerical and suspended cases with a HB/CTB interest, Jobcentre Plus will copy and forward the change of circumstance to the relevant LA – 100% within 5 days.

3.2 Liaison & Communications

Liaison and communications between Jobcentre Plus and LAs is fundamental to effective partnership working. To help facilitate this process, each organisation must put the following arrangements in place -

- A nominated contact (manager of supervisory level) in each of the organisations who has the knowledge and will take responsibility to deal with the relevant operational issues (normally in BDC's for Jobcentre Plus);
- Aside from the regular day-to-day communications, nominated contacts should meet formally at least twice a year to review progress against the agreement, discuss issues and opportunities for improvement;
- Agree logistical arrangements for managing the partnership – arrangements for contact lists, telephone access, fax numbers, escalation processes etc. and keep the information up to date;
- Agree arrangements for requests for information from LA to Jobcentre Plus and vice versa, to minimise the impact on operational performance. For example, which type of LA queries to Jobcentre Plus should be requested in writing and which urgent queries can be requested by telephone? *or* agree procedures to follow when LA is requesting customer statement. Existing guidelines for this can be used;
- Ensure security guidance is adhered to, particularly when dealing with the exchange of personal and sensitive customer information;
- Jobcentre Plus District level Jobcentre Plus and LA Joint Boards, which will support day-to-day liaison between Jobcentre Plus and LAs. (If you would like a copy of the Jobcentre Plus/LA Joint Board guidance, please e-mail [Shirley Jones](mailto:Shirley.Jones@jcp.nhs.uk))

To help further improve the partnership, each organisation should also consider putting the following in place:

- Exchange visits between LA and Jobcentre Plus staff to gain a better understanding of each others business and the impact they have on one another;
- Investigate the potential for local joint projects. For example, joint training courses, publicising each others benefits, take-up campaigns etc.

3.3 **Extended payments**

When a customer's benefit ceases, some may be eligible for a HB/CTB extended payment (HBRO) or Mortgage Interest Run-On (MIRO). In all of these cases Jobcentre Plus staff should record details in dialogue(s) IS110/ JSA110 and take the appropriate action in accordance with procedural guidance.

3.4 **Deductions/ Overpayments**

Recovery of Housing Benefit Overpayments by deduction from Social Security benefits is managed by Debt Management (DM), in compliance with the LA/DM Partnership Agreement.

Jobcentre Plus will carry out any necessary benefit entitlement re-assessment and decision-making action on LA fraud cases – 100% within 10 days.

In all cases where there is a linked HB overpayment to a DWP benefit overpayment, Jobcentre Plus should annotate in the notes box of the overpayment referral made to Debt Management: "LA INTEREST CASE".

3.5 **National Insurance Numbers (NINOs)**

Nominated officers must be appointed to deal with tracing and allocating NINOs. When LAs cannot trace a NINO via CIS they will request a trace using DC11LA form, which are dealt with at the Jobcentre Plus Central Control Unit (CCU) – Jobcentre Plus to clear 86% of requests within 33 days of first contact.

3.6 **Local Agreements**

Local procedures can be agreed where these meet specific local requirements and comply with the aims and objectives of effective partnership working (see section 2.0). Agreements should be negotiated at the lowest operational level and, where appropriate, should be agreed through Joint Board arrangements.

3.7 **Contingency Arrangements**

Jobcentre plus and LAs should discuss and agree any necessary contingency arrangements. Particularly around some provisions for situations where LAs are unable to access information from CIS or receive ETDs for a period of time. They should consider when contingency

arrangements should be invoked and what arrangements should be put in place. For example clerical copies of records or access to Jobcentre Plus systems in local jobcentres/ BDCs following loss of service after *x working days*. This should be agreed in accordance with any national guidance or steer for contingency arrangements.

4.0 Escalation Procedures

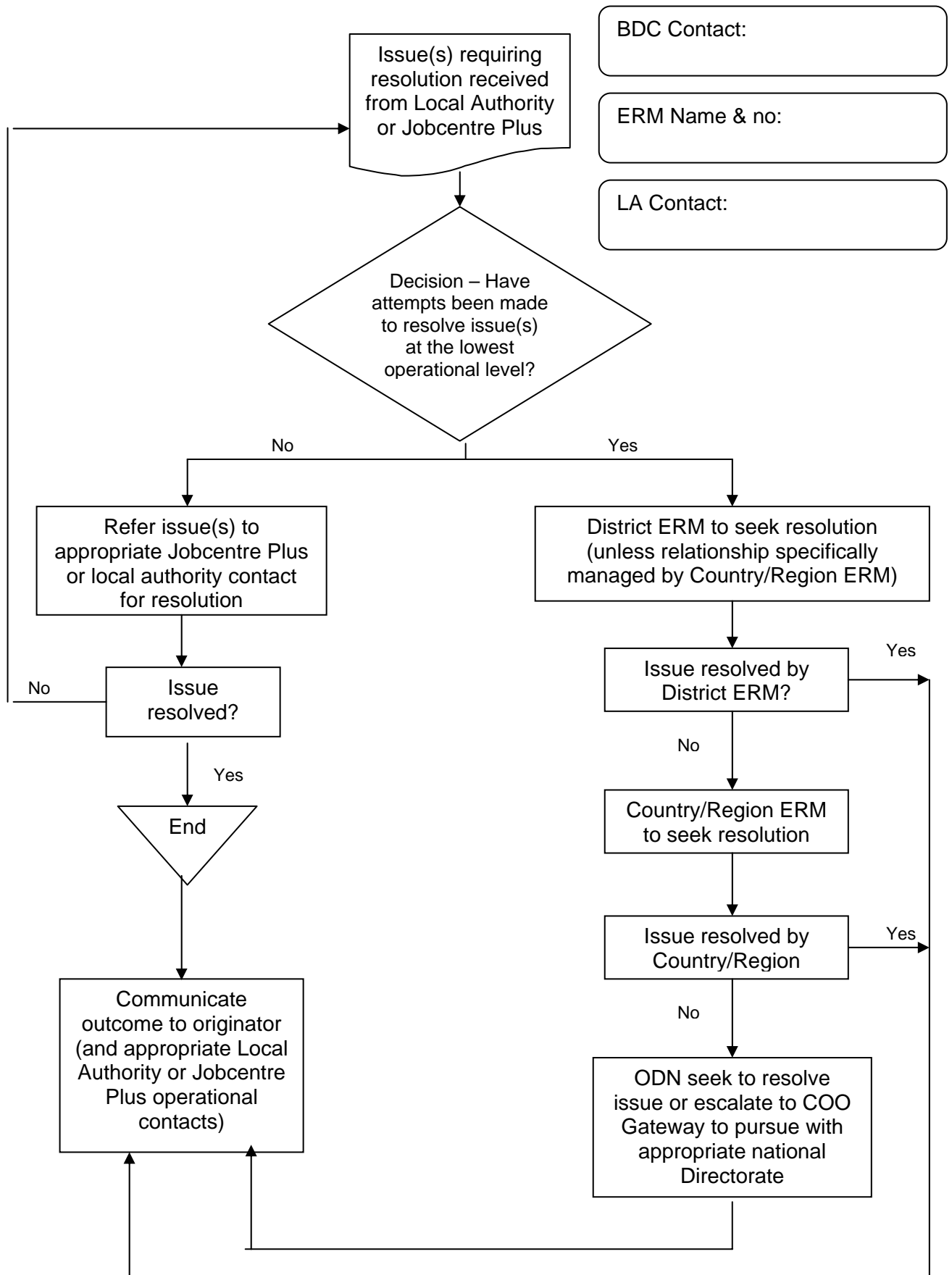
- 4.1 As an overarching principle, day-to-day business management and any issues arising will be dealt with and resolved at the most appropriate and lowest level, through normal management routes and nominated contacts if appropriate.
- 4.2 If LAs have exhausted all normal management routes and nominated contacts without success, they should escalate the issue to the Jobcentre Plus District External Relations Manager (ERM), in the first instance (see annex 1). ERMs are responsible for managing the local relationship between Jobcentre Plus and its partners including representing other areas of Jobcentre Plus business. ERMs are supported by a comprehensive group of operational colleagues in Jobcentre Plus throughout the management chain up to national level, who will provide appropriate briefing to aid issue resolution.
- 4.3 If Jobcentre Plus have exhausted all normal management routes and nominated contacts without success, they should escalate issues to the LA Benefits Manager. The LA Benefits Manager will then take responsibility to ensure appropriate information is provided to aid issue resolution.

5.0 Agreement, Monitoring and Evaluation of the agreement

- 5.1 This agreement has been endorsed by the Local Authority Associations (LAA) and Jobcentre Plus. The contents will be communicated to all relevant management and staff within Jobcentre Plus and LAs. Where deemed necessary, they may choose to put additional local arrangements in place (see para 3.6).
- 5.2 The agreement will be jointly signed by the Jobcentre Plus Joint Board chair and the LA Benefits Manager (see annexes 2 & 3).
- 5.3 Monitoring of the agreement should be carried out on joint Jobcentre Plus & HB/CTB interest cases at least every 6 months. Joint Boards will identify the most appropriate person/s to carry out the monitoring using statistically valid samples to check whether the standards set out in *section 3.0 Headline Principles & Standards for Effective Partnership Working* of the agreement are being met and contributing towards an effective partnership (see annex 4). The results will be fed back to Joint Boards for analysis and discussion.

- 5.4 The SLA is intended to be a long-term standing agreement, which will be reviewed and evaluated every 12 months (or sooner if required), led by Jobcentre Plus Partnerships Division and including the Practitioners Operational Group (POG) and other key stakeholders such as Jobcentre Plus & LA nominated contacts, Jobcentre Plus ERMs, BDC Managers and LA Benefit Managers. As part of the review, Jobcentre Plus Partnerships Division will also lead on evaluating the effectiveness of the SLA and the relationship as a whole, involving relevant stakeholders.

Roles & Responsibilities within the Escalation Procedures



BDC Contact: _____

ERM Name & no: _____

LA Contact: _____

*using existing guidance and procedures

**Effective Partnership Statement of Intent for
Service Level Agreement for Benefit Administration between
Jobcentre Plus and the Local Authority**

Name of Local Authority:

**Name of Benefit Delivery Centre
and/or District:**

To cover period: **April..... to March.....**

Effective Partnership Statement of Intent

“We have read the service level agreement and we agree to put all the necessary resources, processes and monitoring arrangements in place to help Jobcentre Plus and Local Authorities achieve the aims and objectives in effective partnership working.”

Signed on behalf of Jobcentre Plus:

..... (signature of Joint Board Chair)

..... (PRINTED NAME)

Signed on behalf of the Local Authority:

..... (signature of LA Benefits Manager)

..... (PRINTED NAME)

**End of Year Sign-off Statement for
Service Level Agreement for Benefit Administration between
Jobcentre Plus and the Local Authority**

Name of Local Authority:

**Name of Benefit Delivery Centre
or District:**

To cover period: **April..... to March.....**

Effective Partnership End of Year Sign-off Statement

“We have reviewed partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and the Local Authority over the last 12 months, against the aims and objectives and standards within the service level agreement.

- *We agree that aims, objectives and standards of the SLA have been met.”*
- *We agree that aims, objectives and standards of the SLA have been met to the best of each organisations ability and operational viability.”*
- *We agree that the aims, objectives and standards of the SLA have **not** been met satisfactorily and we will work together to review our effective partnership arrangements, with an aim to improving them”**

**please delete the appropriate statements*

Signed on behalf of Jobcentre Plus

..... (signature of Joint Board Chair)

..... (PRINTED NAME)

Signed on behalf of the Local Authority

..... (signature of LA Benefits Manager)

..... (PRINTED NAME)

Monitoring Arrangements

Monitoring against the SLA standards will be carried out **at least twice yearly**, though some may choose to do it more frequently particularly during times of process change being introduced. If a problem is identified following the monitoring exercise, then each organisation will monitor more closely until improvements have been put in place and are working effectively.

The table below sets out the standards, which you should monitor against, and the size of the sample you should check:

Standard/ Arrangement to be checked	HB/CTB or IS Caseload	JSA Caseload	Sample Size Required	HB/CTB or IS cases checked	JSA cases checked	Cases achieved standard
<i>Example of how to calculate sample size to be checked</i>	6,000	4,000	x 2.5%	150	100	92%
LA input documents to be forwarded to LA following customer Work Focused Interview at Jobcentre Plus – 90% within 2 days and 100% within 5 days.			x 2.5%			
Additional information gathered at the BDC to support the claim, is copied and forwarded to the relevant LA – 90% within 2 days and 100% within 5 days.			x 2.5%			
For clerical and suspended cases with a HB/CTB interest, Jobcentre Plus copy and forward the change of circumstances to the relevant LA – 100% within 5 days.	<i>Adjust Caseload</i>	<i>Adjust Caseload</i>	x 2.5%			
Nominated contacts are in place, they meet at least twice yearly formally, contact lists are up to date and liaison arrangements are effective.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	YES/ NO
When Jobcentre Plus benefits cease consider HB/CTB extended payment or MIRO and if appropriate record details in IS110/ JSA110			x 2.5%			
Jobcentre Plus will carry out any necessary benefit entitlement re-assessment and decision-making action on LA fraud cases – 100% within 10 days.			x 2.5%			
When LAs cannot trace a NINO via CIS they will request a trace using DC11LA form – Jobcentre Plus to clear 86% of requests within 33 days			x 2.5%			