

DWP
Corporate Customer Affairs

**DWP North and
Midlands Forum**

The Hippodrome, Birmingham

6 May 2009

Executive summary

The inaugural DWP North and Midlands Forum for organisations that work with DWP customers took place at the Birmingham Hippodrome on Wednesday 6th May 2009.

The introduction of this event follows the restructuring of the DWP Customer Representative Forum programme, as part of which the former client group-specific Forums on Disability, Ethnic Minorities and Pensions were discontinued, and replaced with a programme of four regional events in London, Wales, Scotland and North/Midlands.

The event attracted an attendance of 97 representatives of organisations who work with, advise and represent our customers, mainly from the adviser world, disability lobby, and other intermediary organisations.

The format of the day included:

- an address from the HMRC Director for Child and Tax Credit Operations
- a plenary session that included short presentations from senior representatives of Jobcentre Plus and PDCS, table discussion, and a question and answer session
- workshops on a variety of topical subjects
- exhibition stands

Delegates were asked for their evaluation and 86% rated the event as either excellent or good. The majority of workshops were well received but some delegates said they would prefer more opportunity to have their own say. Suggestions for future events include more focus on disability issues, more workshop time and consideration of a free-range “Issues of the Day” session with senior managers.

Roger Pugh
DWP Communications

Email DWPCorporateCustomerAffairs@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

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1 Plenary Sessions

1.1 Keynote Speech

1.1.1 Paul Gerrard, HM Revenue and Customs, Tax Credit Transformation Programme Director

Paul Gerrard set out what has been done through the Tax Credit Transformation programme having acknowledged that the tax credit got off to a difficult start.

The programme has begun to recognise that different customers have different needs, are in different circumstances and that a business model is needed that is not 'one size fits all' but that it should provide tailored services and tailored communications.

Crucially, the programme has focused on customer outcomes, not business processes, and on giving more help earlier and more proactively. The Transformation Programme proper started in March 2007, since when 14 different pilots have been started and six major services have been rolled out.

These include:

- Household breakdown telephone claims
- Reach Out Renewals
- Proactive Questioning
- Health Checks
- Assisted Claims
- Outreach through Children's Centres

Question and Answer

We have experienced difficulties when dealing with HMRC when we are acting on a customer's behalf because of their insistence on security checks.

We have a responsibility to maintain the security of our customer's information but we also need to balance that against helping people to get information – through their representatives if necessary. We are trying to improve the situation but if it does not work, please let us know. Paul's email address is paul.gerrard@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk.

We are trying to set up local liaison but are experiencing difficulties.

We are structured as a national organisation which does not lend itself to local interaction. However as director of all the benefits and credits, I also have our field force so my national span of offices now covers more of the country. We are working

with our DWP colleagues who do have that regional/local network to see how best we can support them and are looking at options we may have ourselves. We do not have the answers yet but I recognise the urgency.

When it comes to asking about how long things are likely to take, there are no timescales.

The reality is that tax credits and child benefits have peak times, particularly with regard to renewals. This means that there will be times when waiting times are higher. There are also some cases that take longer, for example customers who do not have a UK birth certificate. One of the things we want to change is being more transparent, and giving people a better indication of how long things will take.

When we fill in the authority to act for a customer and fax it, it is accepted by the tax credit office, but they will not accept photocopied authorities on child benefit. Staff often ask random security questions that we do not necessarily know the answers to. I would like you to talk to our staff on the stand here today so that we can follow this up.

Call backs are offered but the staff do not ring back as promised.

This clearly is unacceptable. Just on a common courtesy level if you say you will call back, then this promise should be kept.

The claim form is too complicated - the notes are 32 pages long and the jargon needs to be simplified.

Tax Credits is a complex product and it is our job to try to make it as accessible as we can. The 32 pages of notes is a reduction from the previous 64 - a 50% improvement. But we still have a way to go and the services I previously described are aimed at making it as accessible as possible.

You should consider engaging more with voluntary/statutory organisations and use their expertise and skills in their community to work with the customers.

I absolutely agree, we need to use this expertise and evidence. Also, our front line staff have a rich understanding of our customers and we have not always accessed their expertise. The reason the six new services have worked is because they were ideas from our operational staff on the ground.

1.1.2 Kim Archer, Head of Partnerships & Relationship Development, Pension, Disability and Carers Service

Kim spoke about The Pension, Disability and Carers Service, which was formed in April 2008 and is a merger between what was The Pension Service and the Disability and Carers Service. The joining up of the two agencies offers real opportunities to provide a much better joined up holistic service. The organisations have come together to form a new and much bigger organisation.

Kim explained the vision for the new organisation is '*working together to make lives better*'.

A three-year programme will be based on *shaping up* to deliver the basics, *joining up* to add value to the customer and *moving up* to create an exemplar service.

1.1.3 Angus Gray, Customers & Stakeholders Director, Jobcentre Plus

Angus spoke about what the recession has meant for Jobcentre Plus and how the organisation is responding. Angus illustrated the massive increases in volumes of contacts and new claims. This has created a huge challenge for Jobcentre Plus, which is responding by increasing capacity, increasing the range and support available to people immediately they lose their jobs, and strengthening the support that is available to those who are still out work after 6 months.

Please contact Linda Francis at <mailto:linda.francis@dwp.gsi.gov.uk> if you would like to see the full content of the speeches from Paul Gerrard, Kim Archer and Angus Gray.

1.1.4 Table Discussion

Considering our priorities, what are the three key issues that you would like to see us focus on in the coming year?

Communications – Telephony

- Take HMRC example of Household breakdown telephone claims to make telephone reclaims for transitions of benefits.
- Make telephone number free for mobile phones as most vulnerable customers do not have land lines.

Communications – Written

- Jobcentre Plus needs to improve quality of letters issued.
- ESA seems to be 'one letter fits all', that is difficult for customers to understand.
- Applications forms are too lengthy. DWP should make an appointment to phone and then deal with applications by phone. To ensure information required is available, DWP should send the applicant a list of the type of information documents needed for the call.
- Written statements of reasons for appeals are no longer individualised and need to be more personal instead of a selection of set phrases.

Training/Expertise

- The priority should be highly trained front line staff who can advise on all eligible benefits.
- Call centre staff are not familiar with regulations and processes and too often can give no useful guidance.
- Better training is needed for staff dealing with disability related claims, with some level of insight into disability needed.
- Benefits staff should make a trial claim to see how the system works.
- DLA helpline staff are very polite and easy to access but lack full information when asked specific questions.
- Have real channels of communication with representatives to resolve complex issues without having to go through the front line who are not knowledgeable enough to answer the questions.
- We need to speak to Decision-Makers rather than having to speak to front line staff who do not know the regulations.
- Local liaison worked well before all the changes, now there is no one officer we can call to intervene and help with out claims.

Liaison with and information for advisers and intermediaries

- Make it easier to liaise with welfare advisers on individual claims; security questions are not appropriate to representative's enquiries but staff often do not understand the 'implicit consent' principle.
- More communication and liaison with outside organisations; consider job shadowing; more focus on joint solutions rather than just looking at internal processes – partners can work with you to offer a seamless service.
- Have a dedicated telephone line(s) for organisations as utility suppliers now do; appoint a local liaison officer in Jobcentre Plus offices to talk to representatives about customer issues with benefits - there is no-one we can call on to intervene and help out with claims.

Customer Service

- Telephone and email service is not always appropriate for those in secure units; DWP staff refuse to go to psychiatric hospitals due to attacks and risk assessments. The only option left is written claims and patients are often not able to complete these. Consider offering the visiting service to all.
- When claiming DLA for child, information should be passed to Tax Credit to avoid missing the deadline on claiming for the disabled element.
- Jobcentre staff could print out claim forms for signing at the time, rather than posting out, if people do not have a permanent address.

- Start to process claims even if waiting for other information linked to other claims.
- Take ownership of the customers claim from the first point of contact, with a named contact person responsible for individual claims.
- The switch between JSA and ESA causes problems for customers – there is a need for better processes, better sharing of claim information, on claims when switching between benefits, etc, rather than requiring a totally new claim and the need to reclaim Housing Benefit; need to address the limbo situation of customers refused JSA as not fit for work and refused ESA as they don't meet the conditions.

Accessibility

- Access to foreign language interpretation is usually good, but there is nothing for deaf people like interpreting into BSL.
- More face-to-face advisors needed on the front line for vulnerable customers.
- Avoid grouping people together - people with mental illness may need to be dealt with differently depending on the degree of capability and awareness.
- Special phone lines for vulnerable customers rather than the normal helpline.
- Better access for people with special needs, especially people who do not have English as their first language.
- Services are not accessible for people who are deafblind.
- Allow more accessible forms of communication, not just telephone, and have ability to record information about a person's circumstance so that the information does not need to be repeated each year.
- Increase face-to-face interviews for vulnerable customers, for example, those with learning difficulties, ex-offenders and homeless people.

Miscellaneous

- To incentivise people to get back into work do not take their benefits from them, instead for every day that they work per week they could lose 20% of benefit.
- DWP databases need to be cleaned up as resources are wasted with out of date data. People tell DWP about changes of address but it is not acted upon.
- People losing employment need to know where to access information about things like mortgage payments.
- Need to work on take-up of tax credits and DLA for children and give more information about additional tax credits for disabled children.
- Some carers feel threatened and bullied into going into the Jobcentre to seek employment when they do not have time to consider employment. The carers' strategy should enable support in additional care support for this group.

- DEA role should be expanded - often DEAs refer customers to other organisations rather than providing support.
- There is a lack of consistency across DWP, especially around special rules on DLA and ESA that needs to be addressed urgently.
- Lack of case ownership is a problem.
- Sharing information between Government Departments and local authorities.
- Explore the idea of a checklist for anomalies when submitting applications for benefit.
- Interim payments are not being made correctly – this would reduce crisis loan applications
- Introduce Jobcentre Plus surgeries in places like CABx or Sure Start.
- Disability benefits are largely under claimed, especially with BME groups. Improve take-up.
- The ‘one contact’ agenda should begin at registration of births, marriages and deaths; this could help identify changes of circumstances and prevent overpayments.
- Carers over pension age cannot usually receive Carers Allowance; this should be an automatic entitlement given their vulnerable status.
- Disability premium is not being stopped after 52 weeks for hospital long stay patients. Also not being implemented for customers going into hospital as DLA being suspended.
- Need to address low morale amongst Jobcentre Plus staff.
- Need for direct access to people who will be assessing the claim. At renewal time there is evidence of multiple information points.

1.1.5 Questions Raised

How are Jobcentre Plus progressing their actions from the National Carer’s Strategy and when will the Care Partnership Managers be in place?

Each component of the strategy is on track for delivery across the remainder of 2009. There will be a Care Partnership Manager in each of the 48 Jobcentre Plus Districts and all will be in post by the end of September 2009.

From December 2009, voluntary access to training programmes will be extended to carers who are not in paid employment or who are employed for less than 16 hours a week and do not already have access through one of the New Deal programmes.

We will help carers to attend training programmes by providing funding for replacement care. Jobcentre Plus Advisers will be able to arrange Local Authority registered replacement care to enable carers to participate in approved training or attend interviews. This will be available from December 2009.

Jobcentre Plus will introduce a new vacancy-taking system from October 2009. To help carers identify suitable vacancies, details of any possible flexibility in hours and working patterns will be displayed in vacancies as part of the job description.

Training currently provided to Jobcentre Plus advisers covers the following areas:

- Identifying carers
- Recognising their caring commitments
- Issues faced by carers
- Help available through Jobcentre Plus and partners
- Identifying employment goals
- Dealing with local support organisations

The training package for advisers will be significantly strengthened during 2009.

How is ESA working and what proportion of claims are being assessed within the 13 week period?

Figures on ESA performance were published – for the first time - on Wednesday 12 August, as part of the Department's quarterly release of benefit statistics. This can be found at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/stats-summary-aug2009.pdf>

16,000 new and inexperienced staff will make numerous mistakes in awards and advice. What plans do you have in place to manage this and limit error in claims?

A number of measures have been put in place to mitigate the **possible** risk of increased official error:

- Quality Checking Framework – which ensures that any errors found are passed back to the processor via their team leader. This kind of direct feedback ensures the processor is aware of the errors they make, enables the individual to take responsibility for their work, helps line managers to identify any support required and helps inform learning and development needs within the organisation.
- a small National Error Team set up to help drive the Error Reduction Strategy.
- Buddies and Mentors are in place.
- Desk-aids have been produced for staff

Both HMRC and PDCS spoke of looking to increase numbers of home visits. How can this be done with more centralised offices?

For PDCS, whilst there has been centralisation of certain administrative functions in some areas, the visiting service remains available throughout the whole of England, Scotland and Wales. Local Service has over the last year also widened its visiting provision to support Disability Benefit Centres where vulnerable working age customers in receipt of disability benefits require a visit as well as the service for pension age vulnerable customers.

For HMRC the intention is to offer the service to a small number of customers with the greatest need or most complex circumstances, in order to help them get their tax credits claim right. The service will be carried out by HMRC staff, and we are currently monitoring take-up in two pilot areas.

Given the economic situation and the possible increase in home possession, will there be any specialised help for the homeless with the benefits systems e.g. increased access to employability training?

Jobcentre Plus provides guidance to all its advisers about the problems homeless customers face. Jobcentre Plus also has a number of other initiatives which help the homeless, such as progress2work – LinkUP which has contracted provision in almost half of Jobcentre Plus Districts and which offers individual support to help those with accommodation needs on their journey towards employment. In London, where there is obviously a significant need for homelessness support, Jobcentre Plus provides enhanced assistance with the dedicated homelessness team which addresses the need of homeless people across London providing outreach services, benefit advocacy and raising homelessness awareness. There are currently no plans for any new/increased access to employability training for homeless customers. These disadvantaged customers currently are subject to the same conditionality requirements as all other customers. Nationally we have advised organisations to seek advice on how to design placements so as not to jeopardise customer benefit entitlements.

Will there be changes to benefit regulations to reflect the periods for which mortgage interest can be paid?

Regulations came into force on 5th January. The Social Security Advisory Committee decided to consult on these, and their report is currently being considered.

What is in place to avoid paying long term hospital patients Winter Fuel Allowance?

On notification of admittance to hospital a marker is placed on a persons computer records. Once the marker has been in place for 52 weeks the customer's record will be automatically excluded from the scan done each year that identifies who may be eligible for Winter Fuel Payments.

How will all the issues we have raised be acknowledged and or feedback given? We want this back to all delegates here to ensure issues are addressed and that this forum is effective.

All the issues and questions raised will be followed up after the Forum. Those that are cleared immediately will be included in the Forum Report. Those that are longer term will be reported in a progress report (published on the internet) as they are updated and feedback will be given at the next Forum.

2 Workshops

2.1 Workshop 1 – In and Out of Work Project

The 'In and Out of Work' project is part of the Government's wider modernisation and transformation agenda. Focussed on improving customer service, it aims to help JSA and IS (lone parents) customers with an immediate work focussed interview going into and out of work.

The In and Out of Work processes were tested in 6 pilot sites. Evaluation of the pilots has confirmed improvements to the customer experience with speedier resolution to their entitlements (average 15% improvement) and a reduction in contact with Government. In addition, turning benefits 'on' and 'off' quickly and more effectively has been a key enabler to encouraging customers to take the step into the labour market, particularly to take up short-term work.

This process is now being rolled out nationally and just over 30 areas are currently live. Full national roll out is expected to be completed by early 2010.

A short DVD was played, at the workshop, setting out some of the customers and staff views from one of the pilots, followed by an overview of the process and group discussion.

The key issues raised included:

Are there plans to extend this to ESA customers?

No. The out of work process relies on an early interview with the customer and this does not currently happen with ESA customers. However, the view that it would be good to extend this service to ESA customers is noted and feedback will be given to the project.

Are there plans to extend this to joint agency customer service delivery? If not, customers will still have to contact the other organisations for information such as when they will be paid, how often, what they might be entitled to.

There are no plans at present as Jobcentre Plus plays the role of gathering information. However increased joint working between the organisations has increased awareness of each others working practices that has resulted in improved experiences for customers going in and out of work.

How will Local Authorities know what information is missing or has been provided?

Jobcentre Plus staff will complete a Housing Benefit Evidence Checklist for the Local Authority to show what information has been collected and/or requested.

2.2 Workshop 2 – Specialist Disability Employment Programme

This workshop provided an overview of the new Specialist Disability Programme which will replace existing WORKSTEP, Work Preparation programmes and Job Introduction Scheme, with a new programme combining support into a single integrated programme.

It is a single streamlined and flexible programme, reflecting the differing needs between those needing little in-work support, through to those needing long term support that may never progress into unsupported employment.

The first stage of the procurement exercise is currently underway. The contracts are due to be awarded April 2010 and go-live October 2010.

The main focus of discussion in the workshops was around the referral procedure to the new programme. Participants did agree and recognise that the Disability Employment Advisers (DEA) within Jobcentre Plus were the right appropriate skilled individuals to ensure access to the programme was effectively managed and appropriate.

However, there were concerns raised about the availability and number of DEA's to be able to effectively deliver this service and other services.

Some participants commented that it can sometimes take a week to get in touch with a DEA.

DWP accepts these concerns and recognises the DEA is pivotal to the success of the new programme and in providing support to our client groups; a number of measures will ensure the DEA can continue to fulfil this role effectively.

Along with the introduction of the new programme, a year earlier, the DWP brings online its Provider Payment and Referrals System which will reduce the burden of paper work of the DEA freeing up more time to work with our customers.

The project is also opening the door to allow Specialist Approved Organisations to make direct referrals to the new programme.

2.3 Workshop 3 – Making Partnerships Work Better

This workshop explored what is important in making partnership working effective in Pension, Disability and Carers Service. Delegates were asked for their views on the key factors which enable effective joint working for the benefit of customers.

The key issues raised included:

Partners are advised by some centres to phone between 10am and 4pm. These are peak times and partners are unable to get through. - Partners will be advised of telephone opening hours via Touchbase magazine and key messages will be issued to staff.

Face to face problems occur at Jobcentre plus offices particularly when first seen by security guards who turn partners away. Partners would like a facility to collect forms or drop off completed forms. - This will be escalated for consideration by the Partnership and Relationship Group.

Good communications exist through DLA Advisors Line and Local Service. PDCS should build on this practice. - We will promote the DLA Advisors Line and Local Service in all geographical areas.

Local liaison has worked effectively but cutbacks mean some of these practices are disappearing and causing deterioration in service.

Partners requesting a copy of a decision only receive this in 50% of claims due to lost authority forms.

DCS Appeals – unable to speak to decision makers and decision letter does not contain adequate information.

No mechanism to deal with customers in crisis (representatives not being able to pursue on customer's behalf).

All partners expressed a desire for DWP staff to receive soft skills training particularly in relation to disability issues and awareness that conditions can be 'individual' to a customer.

There are problems with staff accepting information from partners over the phone.

Secondment opportunities/job shadowing would help – both ways.

Partners would like more information from DWP Forum to take back to local subgroups. A lot is said by DWP but partners would like to hear how DWP has considered any subsequent impact on them, the partners.

2.4 Workshop 4 – State Pension Reform

From 6 April 2010, the State Pension age for women will increase gradually to 65 to bring it into line with the State Pension age for men. This workshop outlined how the Department plans to communicate changes to customers and third parties.

The key issues raised included:

Will the qualifying age for working age benefits increase? Yes, in line with the increase in State Pension age.

Is the DLA upper age changing? It remains 65 as it is now.

Is the pensioner premium age for HB/CTB changing? Yes, it is increasing gradually with the increase in State Pension age.

Pension Credit - can women and men still get Pension Credit; does the 60-65 equalisation affect? Yes, the Pension Credit age will rise in line with the increase in women's State Pension age. There is a table of this in the Briefing Pack that is on the DWP internet site at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/pensionsreform/pdfs/third-party-briefing-pack.pdf>

Additional voluntary NI contributions – does this only apply to people with less than 30 years? Yes, but only if they reach State Pension age in April 2010 or after that.

Will the communications strategy include issuing pension forecasts? We will issue pension forecasts if they are requested. Experience shows a low level of interest and sending out pension forecasts to those who haven't asked for one would not be an effective use of resources.

If only 30 qualifying years are needed and someone has paid 36 is a refund given? Unfortunately not, contributions also pay for other benefits, not only State Pension.

Carers credit - why the 20 hours qualification instead of the 35 hours needed for carers allowance. A lot of carers cannot get carers allowance, but may be caring for 20 or more hours, which affects their availability for work.

Contribution conditions change (referring to HRP) – is this retrospective? Full years of HRP will be converted to the new Carer's Credit – up to a maximum of 22 years.

Equalisation of State Pension age – does this affect HB/CTB? Yes – in line with the gradual age increase in State Pension age.

Credit for Carers Allowance is automatic so DWP should identify these customers? DWP is unable to identify those caring for 20 or more hours per week who may be entitled to the new carer's credit (but who do not qualify for Carer's Allowance). However, we are currently developing plans for communicating Pensions Reform changes, including communications about the new credit and will be working with relevant partner organisations to publicise the credit.

What is the situation if you contribute 30 years and don't carry on until pension age? You can finish work before State Pension age and would still be eligible later but not paying contributions would affect other benefits.

2.5 Workshop 5 – DWP Customer Charter

This workshop provided an update on the development of a DWP wide Customer Service Charter.

DWP is currently:

- looking at the delivery of joint claims and exploring better signposting to benefits & services
- planning to ask customers at first point of contact about access and communications needs so that we can tailor services appropriately to individual customers
- looking at how to make the Charter a reality – for example, staff induction and training
- developing ‘quick wins’ and longer term solutions to address National Audit Office report recommendations about handling complaints
- measuring delivery of services against agreed minimum standards

The key issues raised included:

Access

More customer-tailored access, especially for:

- new age of benefit customers who want to deal with DWP on-line, have joint claims process and be seen on same day
- vulnerable non-mobile customers – home visiting arrangements patchy across DWP businesses
- vulnerable customers unable to access services themselves need to be enabled to access through an intermediary
- loss of local offices an issue, especially for some Pension customers

Presentation

- presentation to customers is important – vision won’t fit all
- good news stories – important to capture & publish

Delivery

- Looks good on paper – reality must match
- Important to develop solutions from the customers’ perspective
- Call centre approach lacks case ownership
- Important to take complaints seriously and action them

2.6 Workshop 6 – Housing Benefit Review

This workshop discussed the Housing Benefit review and the main emerging themes - fairness and work incentives.

The key issues raised included:

- Consult the LA Housing Benefit staff themselves as they are the best people to know what would work.
- On transparency, it is possible to be too transparent - there has been abuse of the LHA rates by landlords increasing their rents to the highest level.
- Rapid Reclaim like JSA claims, could be an incentive to work. Fixed period awards were advocated by some, but the opposite view was that it could lead to HB overpayments and debt
- Change of Circumstances – a longer ‘run on’ period (three months?) would enable pay to be stabilised and would conform to other benefit run on periods.
- Income levels are set too low before penalties kick in.
- Capital - it is discretionary for LAs to look at evidence for under £6,000; make it a direction that evidence of savings is unnecessary under £6,000.
- Non-dependant deductions can be a disincentive to work, the system could be made fairer.
- Tariff income needs changing - it is still £1 for every £250
- The disregards for work are too low if they were increased they would be more of an incentive to work.
- Change the criteria for room sharing to allow under 25s to have a single bedroom.
- Fairness to working peers: if customers in a large property experience family break-up and are left on their own they should be given a fair period of time (52 weeks?) to move to smaller accommodation.
- Change the structure of the benefit and look at limiting the number of children in a household.
- Remove marginal deduction rates for moving into work.
- The low disregard of £25 for single mothers moving back to work is too low as combined with the taper it was no incentive. Increase the disregard and give a run on when they come off benefit.
- Delegates were generally against the idea of centralisation because LAs have the local knowledge.
- Place people where there is work, for example, if there is work in the towns, there is a case for people living there even though rents are high.

2.7 Workshop 7 – Working with Representatives

This workshop discussed how the Department can work better with advisers and representatives, including information provision.

The sessions were around the Working with Representative Guide and implicit consent. Work has already taken place within the department regarding security training for staff which includes implicit consent and highlighting the Working with Representative Guidance.

The key issues raised included:

- DWP staff do not know about, or are just not following, the Working With Representative Guidance - the guidance is good but the application of it is not
- Attitudinal problem with DWP staff not taking responsibility for responding to calls from representatives
- Issues are compounded by inexperience of DWP staff and lack of staff training
- Call centre staff who are dependent on using scripts are unable to deal with anything out of the ordinary
- Can Jobcentre Plus and The Pension Service provide the equivalent of the DCS Representatives Helpline, which works well
- There would be significant improvement if there was better liaison and dialogue between DWP and representative organisations at local level
- It is very difficult to get through on some call centre lines, in particular Social Fund, which makes the job more difficult – call backs have to be made when the customer is no longer present

2.8 Workshop 8 – Improving Access to Services

This workshop presented an overview of the DWP Change Programme.

The key issues raised included:

*The Benefits Adviser Service (BAS) starts with what the customer is not entitled to, it should first show what they **are** entitled to. BAS shows only what people may be entitled to.*

Find your way back to work – will BAS help young mothers with no qualifications? Will it signpost/direct them to finding information re obtaining the right skills? - The BAS will show possible entitlement to benefits. It is not a service designed to identify skills gaps and to sign-post to places to obtain these skills.

The Identity and Verification passwords on Government Gateway are currently very long; will this be the same? Yes.

Have the services been tested for accessibility? All Self Service tools will be fully compliant with accessibility standards through Directgov.

More groups need to be included in the customer testing process, specifically those who are visually impaired. RNIB will not have the same perspective as more localised groups. This suggestion has been passed to the design teams for consideration when planning future testing.

Some customers who do not have internet or telephones are told to go to the Jobcentre but when they get there they are told that the Jobcentre cannot help. Online services should help to alleviate the pressure on Jobcentres enabling them to provide a better service to the customer.

Change environment for vulnerable customers – currently needs are not being met for this group of customers, what are the Change Programme doing to rectify this?

- Working age to pension age – this strand has focused on re-using information when customers move from working age benefits so that we only have to ask for any new or missing information
- Bereavement service – from September 2009 we will be rolling out nationally a once and done approach to reporting the death of a pension age customer. Further work is now taking place to develop a DWP Bereavement Service that allows bereaved families to not only report the death of a customer once to DWP but also gives them access to other DWP bereavement products such as Funeral Payments and bereavement benefits.
- Well Enough to Work Feasibility Study – this will test how well we support people when they become well enough to work.

TextBox should be manned as normal phones are. We will provide equal telephone services for speech and hearing impaired customers and for hearing customers.

Deaf/Signing people use abbreviated English will TextBox do so? TextBox agents will be trained to understand and use language commonly used by Textphone callers.

3 Summary of evaluation

48 evaluation sheets returned

<i>Content Of The Forum</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Adequate</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Agenda	8	30	4	1
Keynote speech – Paul Gerrard	11	27	8	-
Plenary session	1	35	9	-
<i>Workshop Sessions</i>				
In and Out of Work Project	1	11	3	-
Disability Employment Programmes	1	9	2	4
Making Partnerships Work Better	5	15	-	-
State Pension Reform	5	8	1	-
DWP Customer Charter	1	4	1	1
Housing Benefit Review	-	3	13	1
Working with Representatives	5	8	3	-
DWP Change Programme	-	5	5	4
<i>Logistics</i>				
Location	23	21	3	1
Facilities	26	21	1	-
Interactive tablets	15	22	8	2
Catering	19	25	2	1
Exhibitions	5	28	9	-
Overall Rating of the Forum	4	34	6	-

4 Delegates

<i>Name</i>	<i>Organisation</i>
Tabbie Abdi	Milton Keynes Council
Stephen Adams-Corbett	Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Anthonia Anyanwu	London Borough of Barnet Council
Janice Armstrong	Places for People
Alison Ash	Nottinghamshire Deaf Society
Elouise Attride	Places for People
Jane Baillie	Dial Peterborough
Angela Barham	Age UK
Alan Barton	Citizens Advice
Roy Beeson	Disability Solutions
Som Bhalla	Derby Seniors Forum
Clare Bishop	Rugeley & District Citizens Advice Bureau
Dawn Black	Flintshire County Council
Julia Bolus	Nottinghamshire Welfare Rights
Gill Bottomley	Bath Citizens Advice Bureau
Gill Bowskill	Arthritis Care
Alastair Bragg	The Brandon Trust
Helen Braithwaite	BSL Interpreter
Delia Cattell	Help the Aged
Raj Chande	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Anthony Chappell	Northamptonshire Teaching Primary Care Trust
Dave Clark	Parkinson's Disease Society
Graham Clark	Independent Living North Lincolnshire
Joanne Crookes	City of Lincoln Council
Edward Dixon	The Salvation Army
Mike Downes	BLESMA
Julie Doyle	DIAL
Christine Dyson	The Brandon Trust
Debbie Elliman	BSL Interpreter
Sharon Fairhurst	Making Space
Neil Flanigan	National Pensioners Convention
Jim Fletcher	Kirklees Metropolitan Borough Council
Mohamed Ginwalla	Gloucester City Council
Christine Goodall	Disability Law Service
Brian Green	Co-operative Group Pension Fund
Rachel Hadwen	Working Families
Christine Hardy	Deafblind UK

Sally Hartle	Independent Living North Lincolnshire
Ann Hawker	Jesus Fellowship Church
Roy Haycock	North West Pensioners Association
Moira Hemson	Slough Refugee Support
Rita Hipkiss	Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
Steve Hodgson	Hull Community Legal Advice Centre
Catherine Holliday	Nottinghamshire Welfare Rights
Angela Honeywood	Queen Elizabeth's Foundation Training College
Irene Hornig	Dial Peterborough
Frederick Hottinger	Milton Keynes Neighbourhood Services
Petronella Hutchinson	North West Kent College
Laurah Hutchinson-Strain	Coventry City Council
John Imeson	Housing Pendle
Caroline Jackson	Leicester City Council
G Kalkit	Age Concern Wolverhampton
Margaret Kempster	Bracknell & District Citizens Advice Bureau
Hamid Khan	Pakistan Overseas Welfare Association
Angela Lansley	Association for Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus
Liz Larkin	National Housing Federation
Maureen Leonard	City of Lincoln Council
Rev Dr Peter Long	National Rail Industry
Jim McKenny	Kirklees Council
Harvey McKenzie	National Pensioners Convention
David Madeley	Stoke-On-Trent City Council
Nigel Maggs-Oosterhagen	RNIB
Lynn Marks	Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
Beryl Marshall	National Pensioners Convention
Gordon Mason	Scottish Government
Firuj Miah	Birmingham City Council
Carol Moir	Civil Service Benevolent Fund
Darren Moore	Leicester City Council
Melonie Orme	Royal Mail Group
Nikki Oxford	Rugeley & District Citizens Advice Bureau
Margaret Parker	Work Link
Carol Parsons	Northamptonshire Teaching Primary Care Trust
Lennore Preston	Bury Social Services
Bob Prew	Welfare Rights Training
Sarah Roche	Action for Blind People
Tony Rogers	Motability
Margaret Scanlon	Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council
Sharon Sinclair	WRVS

Christopher Smith	National Pensioners Convention
Kate Smith	Citizens Advice
Sanjay Solanki	Leicester City Council
Keith Spencer	RNID
Charley Streater	BLESMA
Linda Stokes	Veterans Agency
Keith Thompson	Northumberland Care Trust
Jo Trask	Work Link
Ninder Singh Virk	Coventry Benefits Advice Line
Helen Waddington	Perennial
Mick Warner	Arthritis Care
Karen Wenlock	Leicester City Council
Margaret White	Multiple Sclerosis Society
Ruth White	Luton Borough Council
Nigel Wicks	The Regard Partnership
Stuart Williams	Action for Blind People
Susan Wood	Family Fund
Julie Woollaston	Staffordshire County Council
Maggie Wright	Age Concern Leicestershire & Rutland

Officials

Christine Appleby	DWP Delivery Directorate
Kim Archer	Pension, Disability & Carers Service
David Bateman	Jobcentre Plus
Judith Bates	Pension, Disability & Carers Service
Kathy Brooks	Pension, Disability & Carers Service
Jacqueline Brown	Pension, Disability & Carers Service
Cath Bullen	DWP Change Programme
Suzanne Burke	Jobcentre Plus
Sue Dexter	Jobcentre Plus
Steve Dunn	Jobcentre Plus
Linda Francis	DWP Corporate Customer Affairs
Paul Gerrard	HM Revenue & Customs
Angus Gray	Jobcentre Plus
Jimmy Hayes	Jobcentre Plus
Mike Hodge	DWP Corporate Customer Affairs
Graham Jeynes	Child Support Agency
Melanie Johnson	DWP Change Programme
Mark Jones	DWP Transforming Customer Contact
Wendy Jones	Pension, Disability & Carers Service
Gina Jordan	HM Revenue & Customs

Saiqua Karim	Jobcentre Plus
Janet Lambe	DWP Corporate Customer Affairs
Andy Levitt	DWP Customer Insight
Anne McNee	Pension, Disability & Carers Service
Kate Marsden	HM Revenue & Customs
Steve Mornington	Jobcentre Plus
Roger Pugh	DWP Corporate Customer Affairs
Kim Raha	DWP Housing Benefits Strategy Division
Savi Robinson	Jobcentre Plus
Elizabeth Ruffley	Pension, Disability & Carers Service
Ian Rowley	Child Support Agency
Jenny Sandham	Pension, Disability & Carers Service
Matthew Sayer	DWP Delivery Directorate
Kirsty Scholefield	Jobcentre Plus
Sam Shelley	HM Revenue & Customs
Pauline Wardman	DWP Older People & Ageing Society
Sue Williams	Pension, Disability & Carers Service
Jennifer Witchell	DWP Housing Benefits Strategy Division
Debbie Wordsworth	DWP Change Programme
Eryl Wyn-Jones	DWP Work, Welfare & Equality Group
Paula Young	DWP Corporate Customer Affairs