

Touchbase

March 2011

Welcome to your monthly e-zine!

The Welfare Reform Bill was introduced in Parliament towards the end of last month – details are on page 2. In the ‘Other news in brief’ section are details of a series of DWP events to provide information about our welfare reform programme. The events are aimed at frontline workers in organisations that work with and advise our customers. Products and feedback from the events will be available on the DWP Adviser and Intermediaries website.

On page 3, we have included an update on the Incapacity Benefits reassessment and on page 5 we have a message from the Minister for Disabled People regarding Disability Living Allowance reform. The 30 March 2011 deadline for claiming Winter Fuel Payment is quickly approaching – see page 6 for further information.

Touchbase is available on the [DWP Adviser and Intermediaries website](#). From here you can register to receive an RSS feed to alert you when each edition is published. We hope you find this e-zine useful. Email me if you have any suggestions for future editions.



 To provide feedback on the e-zine email paula.young@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

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Launched on February 17



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Welfare reform steps up a gear




In February, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, and DWP's Secretary of State, Iain Duncan Smith, outlined their plans to reform the welfare system in speeches at Toynbee Hall, London, to mark the introduction of the Welfare Reform Bill in Parliament.

The Bill will enable a number of changes to the benefit system when it becomes law. The key change will be the introduction of a single Universal Credit.

The main aims of the Bill are to simplify the benefits system and ensure that work pays.

Iain Duncan Smith said, 'The welfare system was created to meet the demand for a fairer society ... this Bill will seek to restore the welfare system to those founding principles.'

 Visit the [DWP website](#) for the full bill, content summary and supporting text

Support for Mortgage Interest – Two Year Limit

From 5 January 2009, a two year time limit was introduced for payment of Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI), to those on income-based Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). This started affecting customers from January 2011. Mortgage lenders are aware of this.

Customers are automatically notified in advance, around 8 weeks before SMI stops, that their benefit will be reassessed. From February 2011, an additional clerical letter is sent to customers three months before their entitlement ends, to give them more notice of the change.

- Advisers are likely to receive queries from customers about their SMI ending.
- Anyone having difficulty with their loan should contact their lender immediately.
- Lenders are required to treat customers fairly (see Pre-Action Protocol on the Ministry of Justice's website [Pre-Action Protocol](#))
- The Directgov website has information for customers who are in mortgage

arrears or having payment difficulties
[Getting help with your mortgage interest payments](#)

- The National Homelessness Advice Service has produced a leaflet, 'Are you worried about your mortgage?' available in a number of places, including Jobcentres, and online at www.nhas.org.uk.
- The Scottish Government has put in place various measures designed to help homeowners having difficulty meeting their mortgage. Details can be found on their website at [Homeowners with mortgage difficulties](#).

“Anyone having difficulty with their loan should contact their lender immediately.”

Incapacity Benefits reassessment update



Reassessment of customers claiming incapacity benefits commenced on the 11 October 2010, with a trial in Aberdeen and Burnley. On 25 January, the Minister for Employment announced details of the next steps in the Government's plans for reassessment.

At the end of February, Jobcentre Plus began a limited introductory phase. Full national reassessments start in April.

From the end of February, we started sending letters to 1,000 customers a week nationally. In April, we will

increase the number of cases to around 7,000 a week and from May, we will be processing around 11,000 cases per week. This steady increase in activity will ensure that Jobcentre Plus and its partners are ready for and can deal with customers effectively, as the volumes

“Full national reassessments start in April.”

build. Importantly, this will enable many of the findings in the recent Professor Harrington review of the Work Capability Assessment to be put into practice.

People who are assessed as having limited capability for work will be moved to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and will be placed either in the Support Group or the Work Related Activity Group. Those in the Support Group will be paid a higher rate of benefit, as they are assessed as having the most severe health conditions or disabilities. Those in the Work Related Activity Group will be expected to undertake activity to return them to the labour market. Those who are assessed as capable of work will be given the option of claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) where eligible.

To support reassessment, access to old style incapacity benefits was ended on the 31 January. This change means that all claims for the old-style incapacity benefits made on or after 31 January, or for a period commencing on or after this date, will be treated as claims for ESA. This applies even where the claim would otherwise have linked back to a previous award of the incapacity benefit.

Jobcentre Plus will also stop ongoing

Personal Capability Assessment examinations for the old-style incapacity benefits in March 2011. Customers' existing benefits will continue in payment as normal until they complete the separate reassessment process, which is expected to be complete for all customers by Spring 2014.

“People who are assessed as having limited capability for work will be moved to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and will be placed either in the Support Group or the Work Related Activity Group.”

Visit the [DWP Adviser and Intermediary website](#) for more info

Telephony and processing implementation



Jobcentre Plus is 16 months into an 18 month telephony and processing transformation programme. Upon completion of the transformation we will have created a single 'virtual' network across 37 sites operating with standardised processes, and a benefit processing network that is able to focus on processing of claims to benefit.

We have successfully transformed five benefit processing centres into contact centres; Newport, Sheffield, Norwich, Springburn and Chorlton (which transformed during December 2010), and

are on track to complete transformation of the final two sites, Bristol and Makerfield, by the end of April 2011. The processing work from these sites has been moved to our network of sites that now focus wholly on processing.

There have been many positive changes to both telephony and processing performance and processes as a result of the transformation so far:

- Jobcentre Plus answered, on average, 50 million calls last year – changes to telephony have enabled us to do this.

- All telephony is now live in the Contact Centre Directorate (CCD) virtual network, with the exception of Social Fund 0845 enquiries, which will move to the virtual network over the coming months. This means calls go to the next available agent regardless of the customer's geographic location, enabling us to answer more calls more quickly.
- We have extended our opening times to better meet customer expectations and help us cope at peak time by spreading demand.
- By separating telephony and processing functions, and allowing processing staff to concentrate on processing work we have realised improvements in processing clearance times across all benefits, we have also seen real improvements to telephony performance.
- Our focus is on making sure queries are resolved first time with optimal levels of call backs, and to help us achieve this, we have introduced standard operating processes across the organisation. A handoff or call back will only be arranged where absolutely necessary.

The changes we are making across Jobcentre Plus, along with our reputation for delivering excellent customer service and managing calls have led to us being recognised as an exemplar telephony organisation across government.

Changes to Jobcentre Plus telephone Numbers

Jobcentre Plus is making changes to the

telephone numbers our customers use to access our benefit enquiry lines. This change is one element of the telephony transformation we have introduced across Jobcentre Plus, over the last year or so. These changes are being made to support customer service, enabling us to provide a consistently high level of quality service to customers, regardless of why or where they are calling from.

These changes will deliver improvements in a number of ways including improving access by providing customers with a more simple approach to contacting us. We are reducing the number of telephone numbers currently in use for our Maternity Allowance, Crisis Loan, Social Fund 0845 enquiries and Primary Benefit 0845 service lines (Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support and Jobseekers' Allowance). In future, for each enquiry line, there will be a single number for the majority of our customers to use, in addition to a Welsh speaking number, and a text number.

These changes build on the improvements we have already made by extending opening hours to better meet customer expectations and bringing calls into our virtual network, which has enabled us to answer more calls, more quickly.

Changes will start to take place from 1 March 2011 in a phased approach over the coming months. More information is available on the Directgov website. Alternatively, please speak to your local Jobcentre Plus contact who will provide further information.

Crisis Loan changes

From 4 April 2011, changes to the Crisis Loan rules are being introduced, to ensure funds are used for those in genuine need. The three planned changes to the Crisis Loan system will mean that the Department will:

- No longer pay Crisis Loans for household items, such as cookers and beds, unless the application is as a result of a disaster such as flooding. Rent In Advance, charges for board and lodging accommodation and hostels are exceptions to this and can be considered in situations other than a disaster. There will be continuing support from the Community Care Grant scheme for people who meet the qualifying conditions
- Reduce the daily rate paid for living expenses from 75 per cent down to 60 per cent of the Income Support personal allowance rate. This will align with Jobseekers Allowance cases paid at the hardship rate
- Restrict Crisis Loan awards for living expenses in a rolling twelve month period, to a maximum of three. This policy was tested by Jobcentre Plus in 2009/10

Since 2006, the number of Crisis Loan awards has tripled, and continues to grow, largely independent of the recession. These changes to the Crisis Loan scheme will manage demand back towards pre-2006 levels. This will ensure funding for Community Care Grants is protected and DWP is able to pay Budgeting Loans



throughout the year. Without these measures Budgeting Loans would need to be withdrawn before Christmas 2011. This would leave significant numbers of people on low incomes with little alternative but to turn to high-cost or illegal lending.

Please note, the following websites will be updated with effect from 4 April 2011
[Crisis Loans \(Directgov website\)](#)
[SB16 – A guide to The Social Fund \(DWP website\)](#)

“Since 2006, the number of Crisis Loan awards has tripled, and continues to grow.”

Disability Living Allowance reform

Message from the Minister for Disabled People Maria Miller

Our commitment to help support disabled people live independent lives runs at the heart of our welfare reforms. We are protecting Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for the future and ensuring that the £12 billion spent on it every year goes where it is needed most.

I understand that DLA gives essential support to many people. But I've also found through talks with disabled people and their representative organisations, that the claim form is too long, too complex and unclear, leading to widespread inconsistencies in the way DLA supports disabled people with similar needs in different parts of the country. There is also no straightforward way of reviewing DLA. People with short-term conditions can be treated in the same way as those with life-long conditions – with no in-built system of periodic review.

Whilst we support the principles of DLA, the current system is long overdue for reform, which is why we are proposing to replace it with the Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

Shifting the focus to independence for disabled people will help challenge outdated attitudes that prevent them from doing the things everyone else takes for granted. Such outdated

attitudes were highlighted with a recent survey showing that four in ten people thought disabled people could not be as productive as non-disabled people and three quarters of those surveyed thought disabled people needed care for all or some of the time.

Our proposals also include an objective assessment of need, which we are developing with the help of disability organisations and disabled people. The new system will also allow us to reassess those on DLA over time – something that is lacking under the current system – to ensure everyone receives the correct amount as their needs change.

But we don't want to stop there. As part of PIP, disabled people will also have access to a range of additional support that they could find useful in their day to day lives. For example, if someone wants to find a job they will be told about Access to Work or Work Choice, programmes which support disabled people into employment.

This additional support is designed to help disabled people lead full, active and independent lives and ensure we deliver a fairer and more consistent benefit that's fit for the 21st Century.



For more information on DLA reform visit the [DWP website](#)

Active at 60 Community Agents

Money available for local community groups or organisations



Last year, the Minister for State Pensions announced £1million to help those people who are most at risk of social isolation in their later lives become more active, independent and positively engaged. Through Active at 60, volunteers will help people within their communities:

- take the first step in trying something new
- understand the benefits they can get from being more active, engaged and contributing to their communities
- build social contacts to help make being active part of their routine

This money is available for local community groups or organisations within 30 selected areas to bid for small

“Check out the handy guide for more information”

grants of between £250 and £3,000

Further information and details of selected areas are available on the Community Development Foundation website. If you know any local groups who may be interested in applying, individuals who are interested in either becoming a Community Agent or being supported by the initiative please direct them to the website.



Visit the [Active at 60 website](#) for more information

Hurry... Winter Fuel Payment deadline is 30 March



Did you know that anyone born on or before 5 July 1950 may qualify for a Winter Fuel Payment for winter 2010/11?

That's up to £400 for each household to help pay energy bills depending on age and circumstances.

People may be eligible even if they're still working.

Many people, who were born on or before 5 July 1950 and have not yet retired, might not realise they can get a Winter Fuel Payment each winter.

If people think they could be eligible they should claim now.

Call the Winter Fuel Payment helpline now on 0845 9 15 15 15 or print a form from [Winter Fuel Payment](#) (Directgov website). Completed claim forms must be received on or before 30 March 2011.

Winter Fuel Payments and Cold Weather Payments

They are different payments with different eligibility criteria. You can now watch and share a short video with your customers to help understand this. The link is available on the [DWP Adviser and Intermediaries website page 'Money towards winter fuel bills'](#).

Pensions: abolition of contracting out on a defined contribution basis



In the [December 2010 edition of Touchbase](#), we explained that the planned changes to contracting out means that, from 6 April 2012, people will not be able to use a stakeholder, personal or some occupational pensions (normally money purchase schemes) in place of the additional State Pension (also known as State Second Pension).

Pension scheme providers and employers have responsibility for notifying relevant scheme members about this change and for providing information about

individual schemes. This is because pension scheme rules vary, and employers and schemes will implement the changes in different ways.

Schemes are likely to start contacting members from April. Individuals may contact you for advice. A fact sheet giving more information for employees is available [Contracted Out Pensions](#) (Directgov website).

Additionally, a [factsheet](#) for employers is available from the [Business Link website](#).

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council



On Thursday 23 June 2011, the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council will be holding its 10th Public Meeting in Westminster, London, between 1:00pm and 4.45pm.

The Industrial Injuries Advisory Council (IIAC) is a scientific advisory body that provides independent advice to the Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Social Development in Northern Ireland, on the prescription of industrial diseases, administration of industrial injuries benefits and on matters relating to the Industrial injuries disablement benefit scheme.

Who should attend:

Members of the public and people with a professional interest in occupational diseases who would like the opportunity to learn more about the work of the Council.

This meeting will:

- Describe the process of prescribing occupational diseases for the purposes of industrial injuries disablement benefit
- Seek public opinion about new issues of concern in occupational health
- Provide an opportunity to contribute views and ideas about issues that IIAC should look at and on IIAC's future programme.

A meeting agenda will be finalised nearer the date.

If you would like to attend, please contact: Zarina Hajee, IIAC Secretariat, on 020 7449 5619 or by email at iiac@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Please note - individual cases or claims cannot be discussed at the meeting.

The Council's work can be found on the IIAC website www.iiac.org.uk

New Equality Duty from 6 April



The new public sector Equality Duty comes into force on 6 April 2011. The Equality Duty is a duty on public bodies and others carrying out public functions. The aim of the Equality Duty is to embed equality considerations into the day to day work of public authorities, so that they tackle discrimination and inequality and contribute to making society fairer.

Compliance with the Equality Duty is a legal obligation. It also makes good business sense and will result in better informed decision making and policy development. It can lead to services that are more appropriate to the customer, and more effective.

The Equality Duty consists of a general duty with three main aims, and a specific

duty which outlines measures designed to help public bodies meet the general duty. The three main aims of the general duty are, in summary: to eliminate discrimination; to advance equality of opportunity; and to foster good relations.

More information is available on the Government Equalities Office website, [What do I need to know? A quick start guide for public sector organisations \(PDF\)](#) – to help public bodies understand and prepare for the duty.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has produced non-statutory practical guidance on their website – [New public sector equality duty guidance](#). The statutory Code of Practice on the Equality Duty will be published later in 2011.

Other news in brief...

DWP Welfare Reform events

DWP has organised a series of events to provide information about our welfare reform programme. The events are aimed at frontline workers in organisations that work with and advise our customers. The main areas that we intend to cover at these events are:

- Universal Credit
- Housing Benefit changes
- DLA reform
- Social Fund
- Work Programme & Getting Britain Working initiatives

The programme is now largely fully subscribed but there are still spaces at the event in Bristol on April 1 and in London in May. The programme of events are now fully subscribed. We will make available any products from the events on the DWP Adviser and Intermediaries website.

State Pension Adult Dependency Increases (ADI)

From April 2011 a full Category B pension is £61.20 per week and a full ADI is £58.80 per week. If an adult dependant is State Pension age or over, couples should check if they could be better off overall if the dependant claimed

their own State Pension instead. Visit [Directgov for Pensions and retirement planning](#) information.

New Deal for Disabled People

New Deal for Disabled People and Phase 1 of Pathways to Work provision will end on 31 March 2011, with the Phase 2 ending on 27 April 2011. When the Pathways to Work contracts finish, customers will be able to volunteer for support from the new Jobcentre Plus Offer and will be referred to the Work Programme where appropriate, once established in summer 2011. Those customers who do not go on to access the Work Programme will receive ongoing support from the Jobcentre Plus offer. A fuller article will be in April edition of Touchbase e-zine.

Changes to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) Claim Packs

Further to our previous article in the [February edition of Touchbase](#) on changes to DLA claim packs. If you haven't received February 2011 DLA claim packs yet, this is because we are using up the old stock. Remember to order on or after 17 March 2011 to receive the February 2011 versions.

Thank you for reading. If you have any questions or comments about this publication, or would like to suggest content for future issues, please click on the email icon below. If you have comments on any particular feature, click on the email icon below that feature.

