



<b>Title of meeting:</b>	DWP Serious Case Panel
<b>Date:</b>	12 October 2022, 13:30 to 15:00
<b>Location:</b>	Virtual
<b>Attendees:</b>	David Bennett, Non-Executive Director (Chair); Joanna Wallace, Independent Case Examiner; Peter Schofield, Permanent Secretary; Amanda Reynolds, Director General for Service Excellence; Simon Mckinnon, Director General for Digital, Neil Couling, Director General for Change and Resilience; Elizabeth Fairburn, Director for Customer Experience; Sheer Khan, Director for Business Strategy; Henry Ripley, Director for Legal; Barbara Bradley, Director General for Work & Health Services; Jill Harvey, Deputy Director Advanced Customer Support; Emily Hobbs, Director for Capability, Learning and Talent (obo Debbie Alder), James Wolfe, Director for Disability & Health Support (obo Kate Davies and Katie Farrington).
<b>Presenters:</b>	Redacted, Customer Analysis Team; Redacted, Serious Case Panel Team; Redacted, Head of Quality Assurance; John Carter, Deputy Director for Service Planning and Delivery.
<b>Secretariat &amp; Observers:</b>	Redacted, Serious Case Panel Team
<b>Apologies:</b>	Debbie Alder, Director General for People, Capability and Place; Mel Nebhrajani, Director General for Legal; Kate Davies, Director General for Labour Market Policy and Implementation, Katie Farrington, Director General for Disability, Health and Pensions

## **1. Welcome and introductions**

1.1 David Bennett opened the meeting and welcomed new members Barbara Bradley, Director General for Work & Health Services and Henry Ripley, Director for Legal.

## **2. Supporting customers with additional needs**

2.1 The Panel discussed an area of emerging concern in relation to the impact of cost of living on vulnerable customers and the pressure this may cause for both our customers and colleagues.

2.2 The discussion then moved on to the application of sanctions as part of efforts to help customers into work. The Panel heard that there is no evidence so far that appropriate use of sanctions is having a detrimental impact on vulnerable customers. However, the Panel agreed there should be further collaborative work undertaken through the appropriate governance routes to explore strengthening the mechanisms which protect our most vulnerable customers in respect of sanctions.

## **3. Strengthening internal governance links to the Serious Case Panel**

3.1 Elizabeth Fairburn discussed the Customer Experience Directorate's improved governance approach to enable learning from serious cases. She outlined how insight and learning will be explored in detail through internal forums to engage operational expertise, secure agreement on, and ownership of, improvement actions, and manage those robustly through to implementation. The Serious Case Panel will retain oversight of, and accountability for, all issues and improvements relating to vulnerable customers. The panel members endorsed this approach.

#### **4. The impact of errors on vulnerable customers**

4.1 redacted, from the Serious Case Panel Team presented a paper detailing the impact of errors on vulnerable customers, with two key areas of concern being our failure to call customers back and delays or errors in respect of changes of address. As this theme had been channeled through the relevant governance forum (as outlined above) the senior leaders accountable for the improvement activity provided the Panel with verbal updates on agreed actions for discussion and endorsement.

4.2 John Carter, from Service Planning and Delivery outlined the intended approach to improve our performance on call backs; by utilising existing Management Information and performance discussions, reviewing consistency of approach and service ambitions, and considering how our structures and process design may be improved. Having considered the impact of this issue in serious cases the Panel endorsed the planned improvements and stated a desire to work towards eliminating instances of not calling customers back within agreed timeframes.

4.3 Redacted, from the Quality Assurance Team, provided further detail of the planned approach to deliver improvements in relation to change of address. The Panel heard tactical plans to focus leadership and assurance activity on improving performance against existing processes, as well as the outline of a strategic solution in development which will utilise digital capability to reduce the risk of error in this area.

#### **5. Action updates**

5.1 Redacted, from the Serious Case Panel Team, confirmed that discovery work to inform improvement activity in respect of the 'Mishandling Customer Correspondence' theme from the May 22 Panel has been completed, with an improvement plan being developed for discussion at the Panel in December 22.

5.2 Redacted, from the Quality Assurance Team, gave an update on the Enhanced Quality Assurance Framework, developed in response to the findings from the December 21 Panel. The panel members were informed that assurance controls relating to aspects of our service for vulnerable customers has now been implemented across DWP and findings will be used to drive continuous improvement through quality governance channels.

5. Redacted, from the Serious Case Panel Team stated that the pilot considering delivery options for mandatory Mental Health Awareness Training is underway and results will be brought back to the Panel in December 22.

#### **6. AOB & Close**

4.1 David Bennett and members of the Serious Case Panel thanked the presenters and their teams for their work.

**Next meeting:** 6th December 2022, 09:30 to 11:00.

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