

Benefits and Credits Consultation Group meeting 28 May 2014

Attendees

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC)

Lesley Almond	Sophie Shore (chair)
Karen Austwick	Karen Specos
Martin Cunliffe	Cheryl Stevens
Kevin O'Hanlon	Derek Tilstone
Gita Patel	

Representatives

Krista Everington	Gingerbread
Will Hadwen	Working Families
Jennie Hammond	Advice NI
Fiona Monroe	Citizens Advice
David Samson	Turn2Us
Victoria Todd	Low Incomes Tax Reform Group

Apologies

John Andrews	Social Security Advisory Committee
Maureen Arthur	National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers
Fran Bennett	Oxford University
Matthew Cooper	Citizens Advice
Richard Exell	TUC
Jane Hayball	Local Government Association
Imran Hussain	Child Poverty Action Group
Julie Kemmy	Equal Lives
Bernie O'Gorman	Local Government Association
Kelly Smith	Child Poverty Action Group
Robin Williamson	Low Incomes Tax Reform Group
Mark Willis	Child Poverty Action Group

1. Welcome and introductions

Sophie Shore welcomed everyone to the meeting. She said she was chairing the meeting for Tom Smith who was unavailable.

2. Representatives' issues

Information omitted from COP26

The sentence 'Where a dispute is found in your favour we will refund the amount already recovered' has been omitted from COP26. HMRC confirmed it had been omitted in error and would be reinstated when COP26 is reviewed in October 2014.

3 month time limit for disputing overpayments

- Information about the 3 month time limit had been removed from the auto renewal notes. HMRC said the information is included in the renewal notices
- customers are referred to information which is now on GOV.UK. They said this information could mislead customers.

HMRC agreed to arrange a meeting to consider this topic further.

3. Appeals & disputed overpayments

Mandatory reconsideration

HMRC said

- the new process began in April
- requests for reconsideration are being handled within target, although only low numbers have been received so far
- there will be a time lag before any tribunal submissions are forwarded from Her Majesty's Court and Tribunal Service

Representatives said

- information on the Tribunal website is inaccurate as it tells customers to use the new process after 1 April, which is not what legislation says
- information on mandatory reconsideration is not published on GOV.UK yet. HMRC said they would provide details of the process and they would be published on the internet in due course

Appeals

HMRC said

- additional staff have been deployed to clear outstanding stocks of work by the end of September
- appeals received prior to April 2014 are currently taking 90 days for a submission to be sent to the Tribunal

Representatives asked if

- HMRC are learning lessons from appeals. HMRC said they are considering lessons learnt
- HMRC was willing to share data on the number of Undeclared Partner appeals which are overturned at the Tribunal.

Disputed overpayments

HMRC said

- they aim for an average turnaround time of 12 weeks or under by the end of May
- the decision not to suspend recovery of overpayments remains
- HMRC will consider stopping recovery on a case by case basis where the customer says recovery will cause hardship

Representatives asked

- if HMRC keeps records of the number of customers exempt from the 3 month time limit. HMRC said they will include details in the next operational update
- which date HMRC consider a dispute is made. HMRC said they look at the date the decision was notified, not the date on the letter submitted.

4. Needs Enhanced Support pilot

HMRC provided an update to representatives on the Needs Enhanced Support pilot.

- The new service will go live across the United Kingdom on 29 May following the successful pilot
- HMRC Enquiry Centres will close by 30 June
- there will be 359 venues where customers can be seen by HMRC staff and there will be more home visits than in the past for those that need it
- HMRC have written to 4000 regular customers of enquiry centres who might need extra help in future telling them how to access the new service
- HMRC will continue to support customers who need to prove their identity for tax credit purposes
- HMRC will evaluate the new service against the pilot
- HMRC will continue to involve the voluntary sector as the service beds in and as part of that will continue to operate the Voluntary Sector working group

Representatives asked

- if the criteria for accessing the new service can be made public on their websites. HMRC said the criteria would not be published on public web-sites including GOV.UK and at this time will be confined to voluntary sector organisations who HMRC has agreed will be able to refer customers in to the new service.
- whether customers who have hearing difficulties will be able to access the service. HMRC said these customers will be able to access the Face to Face

service on-line, as well as through the contact centres or through voluntary sector partners. They will send representatives a link to this information

- how the service will work. HMRC said there will be a triage process to identify customers who need enhanced support. These customers will be referred to a tier 2 telephony service, where specially trained staff can spend longer dealing with the customer. Staff will have training and tools to help them support customers needing extra help. There will also be a mobile face to face service for those who need it, available across the whole of the United Kingdom.

5. GOV.UK

HMRC

- said the decision to redirect customers from the HMRC website to GOV.UK on 7 May was made to minimise disruption during the renewals period
- said there had been no increase in customers having to call due to the transition
- provided details of feedback received on the information available on GOV.UK
- said work will be done to look at customer needs for leaflets
- said they aimed to redirect Child Benefit content to GOV.UK on 11 June 2014
- said they would send the presentation used at the meeting to representatives.

Representatives

- said the information on GOV.UK kept changing and asked if information is archived. HMRC confirmed information is archived and customers and staff could access archived information. HMRC said they would provide additional details.
- said information on GOV.UK was over-simplified. HMRC said information on GOV.UK is driven by real customer need and should be factually accurate. They asked representatives to inform the Consultation Group Secretariat and GOV.UK of any factual inaccuracies. HMRC also asked representatives to let them know of missing needs which are not addressed by the GOV.UK content so they could ask GDS to address
- said they thought there would be a 3 tier system of information, but the middle tier of more detailed information is missing which hinders their work with customers. HMRC again said that they would take forward any missing needs
- asked what work had been done on the content on GOV.UK with intermediaries. HMRC said there had been research done by Government Digital Service (GDS) with nominated representatives. HMRC said they will consider the best way to meet intermediaries information needs.

6. Operational Update

An operational update was issued prior to the meeting. Representatives

- asked for a detailed breakdown of renewals groups. HMRC said they will provide this information
- said they were concerned that some renewals calls will not be recorded. HMRC said they expected approximately 7,000 calls will not be recorded. Guidance will tell staff to make decisions on the balance of probabilities where a call is not recorded. Representatives requested that guidance to staff includes information on entitlement
- asked if auto renewal customers will receive a renewal notice. HMRC said the Auto renewal acts as the award notice; customers will only receive an award notice if they subsequently report a change of circumstances
- asked if it takes longer to clear claims and changes of circumstance during the renewals period. HMRC said they try to balance resources to ensure targets are maintained. Details of turnaround times are published on GOV.UK

7. Topical updates

The action point log, assurance update and Charter update were issued prior to the meeting. There were no questions or comments on these.

HMRC said there had been a meeting of the Stopping Tax Credits sub-group on 9 April. A record of what was discussed has been sent to representatives who attended the meeting. The date for the next meeting has not yet been arranged.

8. Any other business

Representatives asked

- for an update on the leaflet 'How HMRC handles overpayments'. HMRC said it is GDS' decision whether this leaflet is retained based on customer need. Representatives said this leaflet helps them to negotiate overpayments with Debt Management. They were aware that this leaflet was intended solely for the use of advisers and they are disappointed it is not available.
- if Tax Free Childcare will be dealt with through the Benefits & Credits Consultation Group.
- how customers will be able to decide whether it is better to claim tax credits or Tax Free Childcare when claiming childcare costs. HMRC said they will ask the Tax Free childcare team for information and respond to representatives

HMRC said they are undertaking a review of the Consultation Group and some representatives will be invited to take part in a telephone interview about the Group. This will be discussed at the next meeting