

# DWP Bereavement Service

Equality Impact Assessment

February 2011

# 1. Introduction

1.1 The Department for Work and Pensions has carried out an equality impact assessment on the proposed Bereavement Service policy, assessing the proposal in line with the current public sector equality duties:.

The process will help to ensure that:

- the Department’s strategies, policies and services are free from discrimination;
- the Department complies with current equality legislation;
- due regard is given to equality in decision making and subsequent processes; and
- opportunities for promoting equality are identified.

1.2 The existing public sector equality policies require the Department to show due regard when developing new policies and processes to the impact of the proposals on race, disability and gender (including gender reassignment). In addition this equality impact assessment will look at the impact of the policy on age, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

This assessment looks at the available evidence to determine the extent to which the effect of the proposed change differs between persons sharing a protected characteristic and persons who do not.

# 2. Purpose and aims of the proposal or change.

2.1 In April 2008 a project team within the Department for Work and Pensions received a mandate to develop a business process that ensures customers only have to make one contact to report a change of address, change of method of payment and to notify bereavement. This document concentrates on the bereavement aspect and focuses on the 550,000 families that go on to make over 5 million contacts to report a bereavement to the Department for Work and Pensions every year. The Bereavement Service will, in addition, contribute significantly to the Department’s drive towards reducing avoidable contact.

2.2 During 2009 the Department for Work and Pensions has developed and tested a new process that enables customers reporting a death to Pension, Disability and Carers Service, to do so in one contact. The rollout into Pension, Disability and Carers Service was completed September 2009 and by then had taken up to 282,000 pieces of paper out of the system and reduced the number of contacts to and from customers by up to 225,000 per year. As 83% of all deaths happen to pension age customers and of these 53% are also in receipt of Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance this is a significant step forward.

2.3 However it is clear from the work done so far that this will address only part of the problem. Families reporting the death of a customer under pension age (about 100,000 per year) and those in need of wider bereavement services are still subject to a very difficult customer experience. For example, after reporting a death a customer could go on to claim a Social Fund Funeral Payment from Jobcentre Plus and Pension Credit in their own right from Pension, Disability and Carers Service. This could potentially mean that:

- At least 2 contacts are made
- 162 questions are answered
- 110 pages of information/notes are sent out to the surviving spouse/civil partner/customer (80 page bereavement booklet, 20 pages in the BB1 with 8 pages of notes, 18 pages of notes on the Pension Credit claim and 12 pages on the funeral payment claim).

2.4 The most common example happens in 60% of cases. Over the course of a typical customer experience different staff will have to repeat many of the same questions to:

- terminate a State Pension award
- terminate a Pension Credit award
- terminate a Disability Living Allowance/Attendance Allowance award
- take a new Pension Credit claim
- reassess State Pension award
- make a claim for a Social Fund Funeral Payment
- make a claim to Bereavement Allowance
- make a claim to Bereavement Payment
- make a claim to Widowed Parent Allowance.

And potentially:

- Visit the bereaved spouse/civil partner.

*(The lists above are not exhaustive.)*

2.5 The analysis done to date demonstrates that there is clearly scope for improvements in both the customer experience and for bringing the processes we deploy, at a very difficult time for the bereaved families, closer together, potentially into something more akin to a Department for Work and Pensions Bereavement Service. This is consistent with the current mandate for us to deliver a Department for Work and Pensions Bereavement Service by March 2011.

## 2.6 Bereavement Information Capture Tool

The bereavement information capture tool enables agents to capture the Date of Death details for non pension customers and for all callers perform a potential benefit(s) eligibility check for the surviving spouse/civil partner/Next of Kin. If eligible and if the customer agrees, the agent can then take a claim for a Social Fund Funeral Payment or Bereavement Benefits over the telephone. This will reduce nugatory claims, the amount of information the customer has to complete and claim processing times. The new bereavement service will also be available for customers who notify a death through the postal route. If a customer uses a BD8 form, issued by the registrar, then posts it to the Department they will be able to read about the eligibility check or by reading the appropriate leaflets/forms that are readily available.

### 2.7 We aim to:

- design and implement a process that will allow bereavement agents to deal with a bereavement over the phone in a single call;
- design a process to deal with clerical notifications and any associated ongoing actions e.g. new claims for the bereaved;
- design and implement a process for taking, re-using and sharing information which means that customers will only have to contact the Department for Work and Pensions once to report a bereavement;
- deliver efficiencies in the internal handling of a bereavement by implementing a system that will update associated benefit areas; and
- deliver improvements to the bereavement information and signposting that is both internal and external to the Department for Work and Pensions.

## 3. Who will benefit mainly from this proposal or change?

- 3.1 All customers will be offered the new Bereavement Service. Customers will benefit as there will be a single point of contact to report a bereavement by phone and wherever possible this will be done in one contact. If the telephony channel is chosen, the changes will remove the need for the customer to contact any other part of the Department with a benefit interest and provide an end to end holistic view for the bereaved customer. The Bereavement Service Agents will all be trained in handling bereavement calls enabling them to deliver a more sensitive service and where appropriate refer the more vulnerable customers to our Local Services, for a home visit.
- 3.2 The Information Technology changes will deliver a process that will enable information to be shared within the Department, a potential eligibility check to be performed for the survivor, a claim to be taken over the phone and pre-populating

Social Fund Funeral Payment and Bereavement Benefit claim forms. This removes the need to ask the customer again for information we already hold, thus saving customer time and making the form filling process easier. Any forms that are issued to customers will be issued through the postal method and meet appropriate equality and diversity legislation requirements. Any associated ongoing action, conversion or new claims will also be dealt with which is business as usual.

- 3.3 Organisations providing advice such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, CRUSE (a national charity to help the bereaved), hospitals, registrars etc will also benefit from a single point of contact to refer bereaved Department for Work and Pensions customers to.
- 3.4 The introduction of these changes will provide significant customer efficiencies by reducing duplication and removing multiple calls reporting the same change whilst dealing with any ongoing action or new claims for surviving relatives, keeping calls to a minimum.

## 4. Consultation and Involvement

- 4.1 Customer Transitions have been working closely with stakeholders within the Department, including the Pension, Disability and Carers Service, Jobcentre Plus, Customer Insight, Local Service and Tell Us Once Programme. The project has also engaged with external parties e.g. local authorities, funeral directors and CRUSE to understand and meet the needs of our customers and staff.
- 4.2 By interviewing more than 3,000 customers, 800 customer-facing staff and 400 intermediaries, the Department for Work and Pensions Customer Insight Team have developed a clear understanding of how the Department for Work and Pensions services are viewed, which aspects are most important, and highlighted opportunities for improvement. This work highlighted four key drivers of customer satisfaction which are included in the aims of the bereavement service:
  - Being treated well
  - Getting the right result
  - Delivering on time
  - Services that are easy to access.

## 5. Equality impact of the proposed change.

- 5.1 This equality impact assessment looks at the equality impact that our service will deliver from March 2011. Work is well underway developing and testing the Bereavement Information Capture Tool with supporting processes.

5.2 Negative/ potentially negative impact identified to date:

5.2.1 From the information within this document and from evaluation of the business tests/pilots of the service offered to customers, there is no direct or indirect adverse impact upon equality strands as all customers will be offered a bereavement service that meets their needs. Skilled agents will offer a consistent service to anyone who contacts the Department no matter what their race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation and/or religion or belief.

5.2.2 There has been no direct or indirect adverse impact upon the Department for Work and Pensions staff identified at this stage. The information is already being collected by the Department; the Bereavement Service will bring these processes efficiently together.

5.2.3 It is a legal requirement that customers inform the Department of a change of circumstance either through the cross-government service offered through some Registrars or by calling the DWP Bereavement Service. The eligibility check for the survivor of a bereavement is voluntary, should a customer not want to take advantage of it, then existing business as usual processes will continue to be in place. A customer can also choose to contact the Bereavement Service at a later date if that suits their needs and this is fully explained when reporting the death.

## 6. Assessing for impact

6.1 To assess the impact of the proposed changes due consideration has been given to all equality strands. Customer Insight were commissioned to gather information about customers reporting a bereavement, this fed into the design, analysis and evaluation of the new service before roll out across the Department was agreed.

6.2 The more vulnerable customers within each equality strand will be dealt with using business as usual processes and will be given the same opportunity to go through the Bereavement Service process.

### Customer Age

6.3 People of all ages will be offered a number of different routes into the service that meets their individual needs through a single point of contact within the Bereavement Service.

### Disabled Customers

6.4 DWP offer a range of services to cater for individual disabled customers. To ensure that all customers are treated fairly, Braille, large print, text phone, big word and audio services will be offered to make sure that customers receive the same level of service through the different routes into the Bereavement Service.

## Gender

- 6.5 There would be no difference in approach between men or women as they will receive the same level of service.
- 6.6 Gender reassignment customers are treated sensitively, which means that access to their records is strictly regulated to protect the individuals privacy. As such there are different internal processes that staff go through but customers will still receive the same **level** of service.

## Race

- 6.7 There will be no adverse impact on people from a different race as they will receive the same level of service. A translation service will be available using existing Department for Work and Pensions interpreting services to deal with any language barriers if needed including the Welsh Language Line and Big Word.

## Religion or belief

- 6.8 There will be no adverse impact on people from different faiths or religious beliefs as they will receive the same level of service.

## Sexual orientation

- 6.9 There will be no adverse impact on people because of their sexual orientation. The same level of service will be offered to customers of different sexual orientation.

## Staff

- 6.10 This change will not have any adverse impact on the Department for Work and Pensions staff as bereavements and any ongoing action are already dealt with by the Department. There will be significant cultural change and a process change for some staff who currently gather minimum information during the telephone call; the new service will encourage the staff to keep the caller on the phone for a longer period to gather all the relevant information. However, appropriate learning will be delivered before implementation. There will be no change to current staff conditions which includes the equality legislation under which staff themselves are protected with support for staff operating the service is provided in existing learning packages.

## General

- 6.11 Anyone can report a death to the Bereavement Service as long as they can pass the identity verification questions about the deceased customer and then go onto an eligibility check for themselves as a result of the death.

## 7. Findings

- 7.1 In view of the information available it is not thought that either customers or staff will be unduly or adversely affected by this change, or that the proposed change could discriminate unlawfully (either directly or indirectly) on the grounds of race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation and/or religious belief. The change will benefit all customers who use the Bereavement Service as well as providing benefits for the Department for Work and Pensions staff.
- 7.2 This equality impact assessment will be reviewed at each business stage to reflect the ongoing design and impacts. Review stages are documented in the Bereavement Service project plans. We will continue to monitor making sure that the proposed Information Technology solutions and any process changes are meeting equality legislative requirements and review the equality impact assessment at the appropriate stages.

## 8. Monitoring and Evaluation

- 8.1 Until the Bereavement Service is officially handed over to Pension, Disability and Carers Service, the Equality Impact Assessment will be monitored by the project team and updated for direct and indirect adverse impact on any group, regardless of race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation and/or religious belief as we progress through the change lifecycle changes.
- 8.2 An evaluation report has been completed using an agreed number of critical success factors including feedback from the business test sites and survey results from a sample size of customers issued by Customer Insight.
- 8.3 Once implementation into the business has been completed there are no ongoing monitoring or evaluation processes planned unless the IT changes then this will be subject to all the appropriate processes.

## 9. Conclusion

- 9.1 At each stage of the review process a reassessment of this document will be carried out to ensure that no group is adversely impacted. Customer Insight information will be monitored to ensure customer communications are clear and that the processes under development are consistent with the key drivers of customer satisfaction across all equality strands.



## 10. Contact Details

10.1 You can contact the Bereavement Service on:

Telephone: 0845 606 0265

Telephone: 0845 606 0275 (Welsh)