

Minutes

Title of meeting: DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) Serious Case Panel

Date: Tuesday 29 April 2025

Location: Virtual

Attendees: David Bennett, Non-Executive Director (Chair), Cheryl Holgate, Director for Customer Experience, Peter Schofield, Permanent Secretary, Neil Couling, Director General, DWP Services and Fraud Group, Barbara Bennett, Chief Executive and Director General, Jobs and Careers Service, Nagesh Reddy, Director General for Strategy and Transformation, Katie Farrington, Director General for Social Security, Disability and Pensions, Sophie Dean, Director General for Labour Market and Poverty (also obo Katherine Green), Henry Ripley, Legal Director, Joanna Wallace, Independent Case Examiner, Dr Gail Allsopp, Chief Medical Advisor, Robert Currens, Deputy Director Advanced Customer Support, Martin Hill (obo Catherine Vaughan), Emily Hobbs (obo Julie Blomley), Jeremy Edwards (obo Helen Wylie).

Presenters: Redacted, Advanced Customer Support, Redacted Clinical Policy Group, Redacted, DWP Operations, Redacted, DWP National Quality Team, Redacted, Advanced Customer Support.

Apologies: Debbie Alder, Director General for Corporate Transformation, Julie Blomley, Director General for People and Capability, Helen Wylie, Chief Digital and Information Officer, Catherine Vaughan, Director General for Finance, Katherine Green, Director General for Labour Market and Poverty.

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees.

He provided panel members with an update on his recent meetings with the Minister for Social Security and Disability and the Minister for Lords, including discussing progress around increasing transparency around the Serious Case Panel and the published minutes.

2. Emerging Issues

Cheryl Holgate provided an update on work to improve the Customer Experience governance channels, with particular focus on strengthening the process for reviewing the learning from our most serious cases, at director level and on a quarterly basis.

Cheryl explained that future meetings will provide an opportunity to discuss serious cases, identify potential improvements, share best practices, review previous actions and if required, identify and address any challenges.

Neil Couling advised panel members that he was sponsoring this increased senior oversight of serious cases in each director's service line to complement the Serious Case Panel's remit, by focussing on individual cases in addition to wider themes.

3. Safeguarding Approach update

Robert Currens, redacted and redacted provided an update to the panel on progress being made with exploring a safeguarding approach for the department. This work will link in with both the Pathways to Work Green Paper, which is currently open for public consultation, and the outcome of the Work and Pensions Select Committee's 'Safeguarding Vulnerable Claimants Inquiry'.

This work is currently examining the existing safeguarding position within the department, including both clinical and non-clinical areas that refer safeguarding concerns to statutory partners.

Panel members discussed how we already identify and support vulnerable customers who are at risk from harm, abuse or neglect. There was discussion on the need to have a clear definition of safeguarding for DWP to provide consistency and align the department's safeguarding approach with other organisations. It was also acknowledged any change is likely to involve and impact service delivery activities and colleagues, who may require additional support and training.

4. Universal Credit Reviews

Redacted and redacted provided the panel with an overview of Universal Credit Reviews and shared customer insight in relation to these, focusing on interaction with vulnerable customers.

Findings from Internal Process Reviews identified learning opportunities to consider where additional support is needed such as when a suspension of claim is being considered as part of the process.

The panel acknowledged the improvements already made to support vulnerable customers. This included upskilling colleagues to enhance their ability to identify customer vulnerabilities and the development of enhanced methods to engage with these customers such as warm-up calls.

The Chair confirmed this theme should be brought back to a future meeting to review progress.

5. Customer Support Standards

Redacted from DWP's National Quality Team provided an update on the Customer Support Standards work to highlight the importance of teams understanding the purpose and aims of the standards, working across DWP service lines to raise awareness of the standards, build capability and reduce reoccurrence of errors to improve the quality of service.

Panel members discussed the development of the standards to support continuous improvement and enhance coaching and development activity for colleagues. The panel were assured by the work underway.

6. Identifying Vulnerability: Recording Customer Needs

Redacted updated panel members on progress being made with the work underway to develop a DWP single digital solution to capture the customer's individual needs and adjustments required.

The goal is to create a 'tell us once' service for colleagues to complete and customers to self-declare. This solution will help colleagues support customer engagement with DWP, ensuring their needs are recorded, met and shared effectively across the Department, so they only need to provide information once.

The panel recognised the intent but requested more detailed information and visualisations of the proposed solution, future iterations, and reassurance of cross-DWP application of needs being captured.

7. AOB and Close

There was no AOB raised. The Chair and members of the Serious Case Panel thanked the presenters and their teams for their updates.

Next meeting: Tuesday 1 July 2025