

Minutes

DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) Serious Case Panel

Date: Tuesday 1 July 2025

Location: Virtual

Attendees: Neil Couling, Director General, DWP Services and Fraud Group (Acting Chair), Peter Schofield, Permanent Secretary, Barbara Bennett, Chief Executive and Director General, Jobs and Careers Service, Nagesh Reddy, Director General for Strategy and Transformation

Catherine Vaughan, Director General for Finance, Julie Blomley, Director General for People and Capability, Henry Ripley, Legal Director, Joanna Wallace, Independent Case Examiner, Jeremy Edwards (obo Helen Wylie), Robert Currens, Deputy Director Advanced Customer Support (also obo Cheryl Holgate)

Presenters: Katy Harding, Deputy Director, Banking & Shared Services Group, Redacted, Advanced Customer Support, Redacted, Advanced Customer Support

Apologies: David Bennett, Non-Executive Director, Cheryl Holgate, Director for Customer Experience, Katherine Green, Director General for Policy, Sophie Dean, Director General for Policy, Helen Wylie, Chief Digital and Information Officer, Dr Gail Allsopp, Chief Medical Advisor, Debbie Alder, Director General for Corporate Transformation

1. Welcome and introductions

The Acting Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees explaining that they were acting chair for this meeting in the appointed Chair's absence.

The Acting Chair provided an update on the Serious Case Panel minutes from April saying that they have been published and contain more detail. This met the ministerial request for more transparent notes of the meetings.

2. Emerging Issues

Robert Currens provided a verbal update on activity within Customer Experience aiming to strengthen senior oversight of serious cases. Directors are reviewing Internal Process Reviews each quarter and the learning themes identified from them.

Robert updated the panel on progress being made on the future publication of Internal Process Reviews which brings additional transparency to this area. The planning assumption is that this material will be published before the end of July.

Robert then referred to the theme of Making Large Payments which featured at the January 2025 meeting. He shared recent insight which will feed into work already underway to strengthen guidance and increase colleague awareness of the potential issues for vulnerable customers. The Chair asked for an update to be provided at the next meeting.

Robert also confirmed that work is underway to develop a module on 'learning from serious cases' including awareness of Internal Process Reviews for DWP new entrants. Additionally, Internal Process Review awareness sessions will continue to be delivered across all teams for existing colleagues.

3. Payment Exception Service Procurement

Katy Harding provided an update on the progress of the Payment Exception Service contract re-procurement in respect of the requirement to maintain an alternative method of payment for exceptional cases.

Panel members noted that payment by exception is often seen as helpful for those in need, but it may also lead to added vulnerabilities. Understanding the barriers to transitioning these customers to more secure payment methods and working together under a broader financial inclusion strategy is essential.

The panel agreed to develop a strategy to support financial inclusion and lower the reliance on payment by exception because, in many circumstances, payment into a bank account can lower the risks faced by vulnerable customers.

4. Visiting Update

Redacted provided the panel with an update on a review of appointees put in place during the Covid period. Home visits were not undertaken due to restrictions at the time and the purpose of reviewing these cases was to ensure the customer and appointee relationships remain effective. Overall, the reviews found there were no issues to address.

Redacted then provided a verbal update about an upcoming review of the visiting service to clarify roles, accountabilities and governance. Stakeholders have been identified, and the review will commence this month.

5. Sharing Customer Information

Redacted and Jeremy Edwards provided the panel with an overview of the impact on vulnerable customers when our systems and processes do not have the capability to share important information about customers who claim multiple benefits. This theme highlights the importance of

effectively sharing customer information about their circumstances and vulnerabilities across DWP.

The panel were updated by Jeremy Edwards about the ongoing digital developments that will enable customer information to be visible for all colleagues on one digital platform.

Panel members emphasised the importance of colleagues recording critical customer information when it is provided; noting that technical solutions are only effective if recording of information is robust. It was agreed that DWP's Customer Support Standards will continue to monitor this aspect.

Panel members agreed to support continued digital development and the supporting activities including development of supporting guidance, strengthening existing networks for colleagues in roles which focus on additional customer support and enabling colleagues to have a more holistic view of documentary evidence stored on DWP systems. An update will be provided at the next meeting.

6. AOB and Close

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

Next meeting: 6 October 2025