

Annex

The Independent Case Examiner (ICE) Service

Our Purpose

We provide an independent review service for customers of the Department for Communities (DfC) and organisations delivering contracted DfC services (for example those providing work programmes or health assessments). Our main objectives are:

- to deliver a tailored service to people bringing complaints to us and make fair evidence-based decisions; and
- to influence DfC service improvements by providing valuable insight from what we see.

Our Mission

To investigate complaints thoroughly ensuring rules, guidance, and standards have been applied correctly and fairly, based on evidence from both sides. We explain things clearly, so people understand our decisions.

Our Vision

To continue delivering a high-quality complaint handling service which adapts and improves and which shapes DfC services improvements by helping them learn from complaints.

Our approach to Casework

When we receive a complaint, we first establish if we can accept it for examination; the complaint must be about maladministration (service failure) and the customer must have had a final response to their complaint from the relevant DWP business within the last six months.

Withdrawn Cases

Complaints can be withdrawn for several reasons. For example, some customers decide to withdraw their complaint when we explain the appeal route for legislative decisions. Occasionally people also withdraw their complaint because the business addresses their concerns after they came to us.

Resolved Cases

Once we accept a complaint, we may initially attempt to broker an agreement (resolution) between the customer and the business that satisfies the customer, without having to request evidence to inform an investigation.

Investigations

If we are unable to resolve a complaint, the complaint is allocated to an investigator who examines the facts of the case and establishes if the business complained

about fairly and consistently applied its published standards. During their examination the investigator will contact customers to ask for information.

If a complaint can be settled:

After reviewing the evidence, the Investigator may be able to agree actions between the customer and the business that satisfy the customer that their complaint has been settled. We will only settle a complaint with a customer's full agreement. Once they've given that, the Investigator will confirm the agreed action in writing and explain when that will be complete.

If a complaint cannot be settled:

If the Investigator is unable to settle the complaint, they will conduct an investigation and then reach a decision on the complaint. There are a number of possible outcomes from an investigation. Where we find that the complaint has merit which wasn't properly recognised before it was escalated to the Independent Case Examiner's Office, we'll recommend appropriate redress (for example an apology, corrective actions and/or a consolatory payment).

If we find there were service failures or errors by the Business which were put right before the complaint was brought to us, we'll explain what went wrong and how we have seen things were put right.

Where we find that the Business handled a case as we would expect to see, we'll explain why no fault or error was found.

We will send the customer a report which tells them the outcome, timescales for any recommended actions, and what to do next.

2. Northern Ireland Social Security Benefits

Context

The DfC administers and provides guidance on a range of social security benefits and pensions to the people of Northern Ireland and has contracts with private organisations to deliver some services on their behalf, most notably health assessments. In the event that the customer is dissatisfied, the DfC will provide a final response, and then the customer can bring their complaint to my office.

Statistical Information 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Complaints Received

The number of complaints received and accepted for examination, during the reporting period are detailed below:

Received	10
Accepted	3

Case Clearances

We have not investigated or cleared any cases this reporting period:

Live caseload

As at 31 March 2025 there were 3 cases outstanding.

3. Child Maintenance Service

Context

The CMS (formerly known as the Child Support Agency and latterly the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division) operates within the same legislative framework as the Child Maintenance Group in other parts of the United Kingdom. It also administers Child Support applications originating from some parts of England.

The 2012 Child Maintenance scheme was introduced in November 2013 – there are differences in the administration of this scheme to earlier versions, most notably the introduction of charges for both parties if the collection service is used – paying parents pay an amount in addition to their maintenance liability and receiving parents receive a reduced amount of maintenance.

This financial year, we investigated 3 cases of varying nature, which included failing to investigate Direct Payments and correspondence / complaint handling.

Statistical Information 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Complaints Received

Complaints received and accepted during the period are given in the table below:

Received	8
Accepted	5

Case Clearances

The table below details the number of cases cleared during the reporting period.

Resolution	0
Settlement	0
Investigation Report from the ICE	3
Total	3

Outcomes

ICE investigation report findings are detailed below.

Fully upheld	0
Partially upheld	1
Not upheld	2
Total	3

Live caseload:

As at 31 March 2025, there were 3 cases outstanding which were all awaiting investigation. (1 awaiting gateway decision, 1 awaiting investigation, 1 in investigation)