

Minutes

DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) Serious Case Panel

Date: 7 October 2025

Location: Virtual

Attendees: David Bennett, Non-Executive Director (Chair), Peter Schofield, Permanent Secretary, Neil Couling, Director General, DWP Services and Fraud Group, Catherine Vaughan, Director General for Finance, Helen Wylie, Chief Digital and Information Officer, Beverley Warmington, Director London and Eastern England (obo Barbara Bennett), Emily Hobbs, Director Capability Learning and Talent (obo Julie Blomley), Emily Shaw (obo John Ward), Cheryl Holgate, Director for Customer Experience, Joanna Wallace, Independent Case Examiner, Dr Gail Allsopp, Chief Medical Advisor, Robert Currens, Deputy Director Advanced Customer Support.

Guest: Arabel Bailey, Non-Executive Director

Presenters: Redacted, Advanced Customer Support, Redacted, DWP National Quality Team, Jeremy Edwards, Digital Group.

Apologies: Barbara Bennett, Chief Executive and Director General, Jobs and Careers Service, Debbie Alder, Director General for Corporate Transformation, Julie Blomley, Director General for People and Capability, Katherine Green, Director General, Labour Market and Skills, Sophie Dean, Director General, Welfare and Pensions, Debbie Alder, Director General Corporate for Corporate Transformation, John Ward, Legal Director.

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed attendees including Arabel Bailey who was observing the meeting as a Non-Executive Director and Chair of DWP's Transformation Advisory Committee.

The Chair led discussions on the review of the Terms of Reference for the panel. The updates were ratified and will be published following ministerial approval.

2. Emerging Issues

Cheryl Holgate delivered a verbal update on the theme of Making Large Payments which was previously discussed at the January 2025 meeting. A communication campaign to raise

awareness of the issues with operational colleagues is underway and the ongoing review to strengthen guidance for colleagues is due for completion in early 2026.

Robert Currens provided a verbal update on continuing oversight of serious cases by senior leaders. This included a focus on professional curiosity, aimed at supporting earlier identification of customer vulnerabilities in order to provide support that is tailored to meet customers' needs.

Robert also updated the panel on the request from the Minister for Social Security and Disability to consider sharing Internal Process Review (IPR) information with customers' families. The panel gave approval to proceed with the proposed approach to the review and will consider proposals at the next meeting.

3. Progress on Serious Case Panel sponsored activity

Robert Currens gave an update on improvement activities sponsored by the Serious Case Panel, highlighting that three of the agenda items relate to the wide range of work underway in the department. The panel were advised of activity that has been completed including the rollout of mental health awareness for all colleagues. Robert confirmed that there would be updates about sanctions and callbacks improvement activity at the next meeting in January and panel members confirmed they were content with the overall position of work underway

4. Personal and Corporate Appointee End to End Review

Redacted gave an update on the progress being made to address known areas for improvement in the appointee processes. These include missed opportunities to put appointees in place, failure to review appointees, failure to recognise financial abuse and not providing an efficient service when putting an appointee place.

Redacted explained the current customer journey to put an appointee in place can often be lengthy and involve multiple interactions to complete.

Redacted shared proposals for digitising the appointee process where possible to address these issues, make it more robust and speed up the delivery of service for vulnerable customers and their representatives.

Redacted also advised the panel on emerging issues associated with Corporate Acting Bodies which require further analysis. Panel members agreed to the continued development of the improvement activities described.

5. Customer Support Standards

Redacted from DWP's National Quality Team provided an update on progress made with Customer Support Standards since it was last discussed in April 2025. In the absence of statistically valid performance data being available for this area, the panel discussed quality assurance insight in respect of the Customer Support Standards including appointees.

Redacted also gave an overview of ongoing work developing a strategy for cultural change. This strategy focuses on integrating data and insights to inform targeted actions across DWP, ensuring the standards are understood, embedded and met by all colleagues.

Redacted is working with operational teams to assess if current products and resources can further support process compliance.

The Chair requested Redacted to provide a future update to the panel on this activity.

6. Sharing Customer Information

Jeremy Edwards provided the panel with an update, building on the discussion from the July 2025 meeting where the issue of customer information not being shared across service lines and the impact on vulnerable customers was considered. He advised the panel that ahead of a strategic digital solution, planned for delivery in late summer 2026, his team are also working on an interim tactical solution scheduled for implementation in early 2026.

Panel members discussed the development of other new digital tools for identifying customer vulnerability. Panel members agreed to support the continued digital development through a discovery-based and scalable approach.

7. AOB and Close

Under AOB, Arabel shared her observations on the meeting and reflected on the importance of seeking opportunities to simplify complex processes.

David Bennett and members of the Serious Case Panel thanked the presenters and their teams for their updates.

Next meeting: 27 January 2026

