

## **Plymouth Welfare Rights Forum**

**Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> March 2008**

**1 – 4 p.m.**

**Warspite Room**

**Council House**

**Armada Way**

### Agenda:

- Welcome by Chair and apologies

#### Attending:

Steve Guy	<i>MAP (Chair)</i>
Karen Sharpe	<i>Plymouth CAB (note taker)</i>
Pat Mockler	<i>Progress GB</i>
Tessa Merrett	<i>MAP</i>
Bruce Abbott	<i>DAN</i>
Lloyd Hills	<i>JCP</i>
Chris Johnson	<i>JCP</i>
Denise Crawford	<i>JCP</i>
David Hay	<i>MIND</i>
Stuart Charles	<i>Benefits Angels</i>
Mo Rafferty	<i>William Sutton Housing</i>
Anne Elliott	<i>HMRC</i>
Gill Joyce	<i>DWP</i>
Scott Robertson	<i>PATH</i>
Sarah Yardley	<i>PCC (LHA)</i>
Russ King	<i>Ocean Quay</i>
Carol Griffin	<i>Ocean Quay</i>
Les Cole	<i>FIS (Devonport JCP)</i>
Jane Robinson	<i>Refugee Action</i>
Carys Evans	<i>START</i>
Tom Jeffery	<i>Independent (note taker)</i>

#### Apologies:

Brenda Gibbs (*DCHA West Hoe Project*)

Dave Shaw (*HMRC*)

Patrick Healey (*DIAC*)  
Ann Holdsworth (*Shelter*)  
Paula Pick (*Glenbourne*)  
Mark Poole (*MAP*)  
Lou Beachgood (*A4E*)

- Accuracy of minutes from 31<sup>st</sup> January 2008

Correction bottom p.5:

Under JCP report, Incapacity Benefit processing should read half a day (not 112 days!)

Bottom p.12:

Clarification Jane R to get back on this

- Matters Arising

Following response from HMRC on fast-tracking claimants under “legacy”, Denise says all JCP staff know about the pro forma, so not sure why HMRC are saying they’ve received none from Plymouth. She would need specific names to follow this up and advises details are sent to Tony Barratt to resolve.

Sarah reports that HB processors are working more closely with customer services now and are phoning tenants for information rather than sending letters out and awaiting responses.

DBC – no contact from rep. Chris J will inform committee of customer service manager’s address

Statutory Sector Reports to include:

- HMRC

Anne reports that there are fewer problems in HMRC and that things are running more smoothly now. The Forum’s recent query was answered by email (previously distributed).

Rationalisation of staff at HMRC may affect this area.

Gill J: Where should we send people with tax or tax credit queries?

Anne: There is an appointment system. If people telephone the contact centre, they will be made an appointment at the enquiry centre in Brest Road

Tessa: recently had a problem where TCO will accept the intermediary form, but Child Benefit Centre won't. This is frustrating as both are now the same agency.

Anne: will take this back. Child Benefit has only recently come under HMRC, so will query security clearance.

- **Housing Benefits**

The agency is doing all they can to encourage landlords to go and see tenants, to give help to those how are venerable to help them from being homeless. The agency also made it clear that they are eight week in arrears of rent as this is due how the housing benefits are paid.

To help both landlords and tenants the agency has produced booklets on (Information for Landlord and Agents), (Information for Tenants), (Safeguard Policy Local Guidance Notes), (Application for Landlord, Direct Payments and Authorization to Discuss) and (Local Housing Allowance- Plymouth Rates – Apr 08).

## **Housing Benefit and Ctax Performance Indicators**

### **Statistics produced Feb 08**

Percentage of claims processed within 14 days for **private claims – 73%**  
(Previous month was 55% + 18% increase)

Percentage of claims processed within 14 days for **council tenants – 83%**  
(Previous month was 60% + 23% increase)

Percentage of claims processed within 14 days for **CTB – 80%**  
(Previous month was 65% + 15% increase)

### **Average Processing Times – NEW CLAIMS**

<b>Private</b>	<b>29.79</b> days (Previous month 38.15 = 8% increase)
<b>Council</b>	<b>24.52</b> days (previous month 32.22 = 8% increase)
<b>CTB</b>	<b>27.56</b> days (previous month 34.39 = 7% increase)

### **Average Processing Times – Change of Circs**

13.35 days (Previous month 19.63 = 6% increase)

### Quarterly report for total no of claims processed and defective claims

Period 1.10.07 – 31.12.07	New claims decided	Defective claims	% defective
Working Age	2544	415	16%
Pension Age	345	19	5.5%

- **Jobcentre Plus**

Jobcentre Plus produced a presentation on the work they do at the Jobcentre Plus, and found that there were a lot of customers still not coming to them to understand what their entitlements are and to take up further advice. There were other questions asked by the member of the committee, which was very encouraging to know.

From 31 March new claims will be gone through at interview with customer. Next day if convenient. Not posting out unless Incap and deferred. Staff having awareness sessions on Pathways and ESA. Local employer partnerships – Tesco in development (Spar and NHS are being looking at) plus others. (Vacancies for disadvantaged customers , plus support for people)

Also lone parents: From October new claims children aged 12+ will go onto JSA (not IS) rolling programme over next 3 years. Will reduce down to children aged 7+. Jan 09 transfer for existing LP with child aged 12+.

Dave request for advice please – client with record of violence. JCP say can't offer anything due to liability. Now he's on IS (previously as LP now because of mental health problems). Qualified butcher. Will relapse if not employed.

Denise suggested Advice Service Manager should help. Could be Pathways candidate.

Bruce: Local employment partnership – are high level industries being engaged? (rather than low level?).

Denise said she would ask which firms were being approached.

Chris said it was most likely to be the bigger employers because they would be best placed to absorb the impact of supported people.

Dave : Concerns re NHS and staff stress (UNISON involvement)

Steve: Smaller firms often have strong community ethos – is there any way of engaging with those employers?

Chris: should be able to provide criteria as a guide (lots of local employers use JCP for recruitment.)

Dave: Tesco and Mind working well especially re stress.

Chris: stats – will send.

At previous meeting, Dean brought up JCP, HMRC and PCC working more closely. Chris has been told to leave development here alone as it's being done at higher level.

DBC and JCP work close? Chris trying to get DBC letters altered – official response awaited and will keep forum posted.

Chris: If TC O/P and recovered JCP previously counted as income so penalised twice. Now stopped because of Commission decision. Chris to send decision.

New process for JCP to inform HMRC of new claim so may be teething problems.

Appeals work – no set target to deal with but it's taking a long time ( on average 35 working days eg October JSA took till February 14<sup>th</sup>) There is now a new structure so it's taking less time. IB appeals are taking longer because they are more complex. This will be reported on next time.

Dave: We're likely to see an increase in IB appeals once ESA comes in.

Tessa: IS appeals – sent screen prints and stated 'appeal lapsed because customer should have known...' queried this.

Chris: Staff wouldn't necessarily send screen print, would probably write explaining the notes. This is unusual

Dave: Problem with delays in Glenbourne informing BDC JCP of inpatient. Can we have photocopies of Change in Circumstances form so can fill it out for patients?

Chris :Easier for you to set something up and send it yourself as long as all the necessary details are on it. Previous address/national insurance number/name/contact details and as much information as possible especially if the client can't sign.

Dave: At the moment is causing IS to be stopped.

Ocean Quay: problem with claims and appeals being lost. Problem with proof unless we have photocopied.

Chris: sometimes don't get claims. TNT don't deliver next day, post is delivered elsewhere. This is being looked at. Otherwise we have to accept client's word. No appeal paperwork has been lost.

- **Pension service**

There was a long discussion, about the confusion between not knowing how much money was in their bank accounts and how much they were allowed to have in their account as the government has changed the benchmark

showing how much they are allowed to have. The agency has done all they can to make the customers aware of these changes by producing documents for their customers to see.

PC – 6 weeks

SRP – 60 days. On target.

Issue re lost paperwork ( Gill says she has a response for Mitch on his query from last forum re a client.)

Tried to get more local as opposed to regional figures but they can't be broken down in this way.

Bruce: Problem with client turned 60, received SDA but this stopped and PC reducing amount as if in receipt. JCP plus PS not corresponding. Been put back on client who can't resolve.

Chris: PS can look on JCP screens. Should be clear.

Bruce: but JCP got it wrong in the first place hence the problem.

Gill: will look into on Monday if details given.

Lloyd: SDA cases are on pension systems, when PS kick in and create case JCP have to close case and manage clerically which causes a problem.

Gill – new claims taking 6 weeks. Is long time and people aren't complaining enough. Peculiar filing system in Swansea is causing problems.

Bruce: knock on effect on ability to pay care bill.

Chris: Would be good to know details- could be staff member not following procedures.

Steve: are you seeing increase in PC claims where amounts are small?

Gill: no lots are reluctant to claim eg savings over £3k so think not eligible.

Steve: because my role is around fuel poverty, identify people eligible for £15 – £20 a week who are not claiming and therefore not getting CTB etc.

Gill: keen for all claims even if only £1.

- **Social Inclusion (PCC)**

Benefits took up a discussion about the government's procedures and safe guards, on the population of refugees going down and also for Polish workers, which has come in to force as we speak. The (ESA) are looking for a way forward and will be happy to go other meetings to give a more info to clients, there will only be one claim and a work capacity assessment will be done for all first time claimers.

- **Disability Benefits Centre**

Noone in attendance KS to contact DBC

*A CAB adviser was recently informed that there is no longer a Customer Services Manager at DBC – KS to follow up*

- Local Housing Allowance

Sarah: delivered LHA presentations – to landlords, Housing Associations, PATH etc. Lots of booklets and info on website.

Safeguard policy re paying tenants and not landlords. Bring all LAs into same line and pay tenant. Also encourages landlords to visit tenant/property. In best interest of tenant, not landlord.

Re Direct Payments: Will accept written info from various agencies, not landlords. Need evidence on case and will constantly review and monitor. Key is to avoid putting people at risk of eviction. Need to liaise closely with external agencies.

8 week arrears will still stand? Some landlords will try to make rent payable 8 weeks in advance in order to take advantage of the scheme and this is not acceptable.

People can ask for break in HB claim for a week (especially those with more bedroom needs – amounts are more generous) to go onto LHA.

Concern re access to bank a/c – may be LAs will need to challenge banks.

Steve: financial inclusion teams in banks – if LA put pressure on...

- Employment Support Allowance

Regulations not completed – are still testing (details to be refined)

Q: if no signature how is it legal?

Bruce: what support is available?

A: A4e would be able to explain.

Dave: PCT have dictated GPs and consultants can't support people in any other benefit other than DLA.

Medical service: ATOS Healthcare

Local MPs – political issues re above

Concerns re awareness of disability issues amongs JCP staff –  
need for increased awareness and numbers of DGA's

- Pathways to work

Lou Beechgood did not attend

- Conference

The Welfare Rights Conference: “Change – What are the  
Benefits?” will now be held 23<sup>rd</sup> October at the Theatre Royal.  
Details to follow

- Any Other Business