

Appendix 1. Briefing - In and Out of Work Project

Background

Building on an initial trial within North Tyneside in 2006, the In and Out of Work Pilots were implemented across six Local Authority areas from September 2007. The six pilots covered a total of 38 sites – including 6 Local Authorities, 2 Contact Centres, 24 Jobcentres, 5 Benefit Delivery Centres, and the HMRC Tax Credit Office.

The In and Out of Work Project is at the forefront of the Transformational Government agenda breaking new ground by focusing on improving service to the customer through streamlining cross-government services. The pilots key aim is to offer more effective access to in and out of work benefits and services to customers who move frequently in and out of work. In short, removing the barriers to work, driving out potential significant social and labour market improvements with the focus on the customer.

In 2006 Customer Insight told us that customers moving into and out of work have to make multiple contacts to three organisations (Jobcentre Plus, Local Authorities and Tax Credit Office) for their respective claims – adding delays to processing times. The process was onerous for the customer with often the same information and evidence required by the different agencies for in and out of work benefits.

The IOW pilots adopt a ‘tell us once’ philosophy by gathering customer information and evidence through Jobcentre Plus and sharing it with Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs Tax Credit Office and Local Authorities.

The strategic benefit from this initiative is achieved through a combination of two main factors - transformed customer service through a one contact approach and improved speed of processing. Turning benefits on and off more quickly and effectively is a key enabler to encouraging the customers to take the first step into the labour market, particularly to take up short term work. The Project demonstrates joined-up Government whilst providing an improved service to the customer.

There is now a substantial weight of validated performance data and customer research to support a range of process and service improvements, speeding up the end to end processing times, reducing potential overpayments, and significantly improving the completeness and processability of customer claims.

Key Points

- Overall, this is achievable without increasing the cost to the taxpayer.
- The pilot processes were developed with the full support of operational staff across the three departments.

- The new processes were supported by development of simple IT using electronic forms, secure e mail and Government Connect Secure Xtranet (GCSX).
- The scope of the pilots covers all JSA and IS Lone Parent cases with an immediate Work Focussed Interview.
- To thoroughly evaluate the pilots the project worked closely with a range of key stakeholders across the analytical community.
- The formal evaluation, completed in March 2008, confirmed very encouraging results with improved performance compared to the baseline. This is evident across a range of performance measures:
 - Improved end to end processing times for JCP to Housing Benefit by 15%
 - Improved clearance of Tax Credit new claims
 - Improved Average Actual Clearance Times
 - Reduction in the number of customers failing to attend Jobcentres for interviews
 - Increased completeness of information collected and exchanged between the three departments.
- Key findings from customer and staff research was positive:
 - Two independent surveys support the view that customers prefer the pilot processes
 - Increased customer confidence to take up short-term work
 - Customers have experienced speedier resolution of their entitlements
 - Staff were positive and encouraged by the new process.
- Some key performance measures will take longer to evidence (eg Labour Market impact). The full range of pilot processes continue to operate, so that further monitoring can be conducted.
- The benefits have been clearly identified and continue to be subject to further testing.
- Key driver is customer service improvements. The processes save time for customers and present a joined up government approach to customers moving in and out of work across the three departments.

Next Steps

- Secure full ministerial approval, building on existing briefing and meetings
- Establish fully resourced project team

- Develop detailed proposal for first stage of implementation involving a phased approach across JCP; HMRC and LAs, starting in the existing Pilot Districts/Regions.
- At the same time, identify districts in the remaining 6 JCP regions which could easily adopt the new working practices quickly.
- Begin rollout of the pilots by summer 2008 and to complete roll out by Dec 2009.
- Pursue development and implementation of IT Solution working closely with EDS and ASPIRE.

