

Minutes of Jobcentreplus Liaison Meeting. 20 December 2006

Present:

Linda Barnes, JCP Benefit Delivery Manager
Dominic Whowell, JCP Local Partnership Manager
Sue Sorozcan, JCP Senior Operations Manager, Eastbrook Court
Karen Dawson, JCP West Yorkshire Operations Manager
Alison Rooks, Bradford Cancer Support
Julie Robinson-Joyce, Commissioning Officer, Bradford Council
Laurence Robinson, Bradford CAB
Liz Reveley, Bradford CAB
Anne Corden, Bradford CAB

Apologies:

Janet Healey, Dean Clough Contact Centre.

1. Minutes and Matters Arising. Alison reported problems where terminally ill clients in receipt of DLA higher rate care under the special rules are being asked to attend a Work Focussed Interview. One client had received two letters asking him to attend. Terminally ill clients are also being asked to provide sick notes. Alison wondered if JCP could flag these cases so this doesn't happen as it is causing much distress and worry. Karen said that she thought the letters were sent out as part of a standard process. Sue will check the process that is being followed and will report back.

2. Update from JCP. Some significant changes will be made in the next few months:

- From 24/1/07, clients will have all their claim details taken during one outbound call to the CC. We need to stress the importance of having all the required information and evidence to hand when making this call. A 0800 number will be introduced from March 2007 so there will be no cost to clients.
- When the 0800 number is introduced, clients who ring to report a change of circumstances will be directed by answer phone message to report this to the BDC. Changes should be reported in writing.
- Clients whose WFI is waived/deferred will have their claim sent to the BDC on the day they make it. Clients who need to attend a WFI will have their claim details sent to the BDC on the day of the interview. The BDC will take responsibility for collecting any outstanding evidence and a claim preparation team, staffed by very experienced officers, has been set up to deal with this. BDC staff will ring customers to tell them where their claim is in the process and will tell them what evidence, if any, they need to provide. If the claim is ready to process it will be done straight away. They will be asked to provide this in 48 hours as the intention of this change is to speed up the claim process and to issue payments more quickly. If they cannot provide the evidence in this time, they will be asked to say how long they think that it will take to provide. The claim will then be given a b/f date. This change has already taken place for IS/IB claimants but will not be introduced for JSA until April. It has been introduced at short

notice and there has been little time to train staff so there may be some teething problems. All documents required must be sent in by post as personal callers are not allowed at the BDC. Original documents such as passports may be taken to the Jobcentre to be copied. A PO Box number will be introduced for correspondence.

- BDC staff have been instructed to check with the Jobcentre if they receive evidence that is not accompanied by a claim. This should end the problem of evidence being returned to clients and then having to be sent again.
- The CC will be working to a procedure whereby WFIs are arranged three days after the date of initial contact to allow the client time to collect all the required evidence.
- From 26/3/07, Leeds Road will be one of 77 BDCs in the country. It will also be one of two centres in the region to administer the Social Fund. It will operate the Standard Operating Model. The telephone team will be expanded to 48 dedicated staff and a 0845 number will be provided for customers. There will be a 0800 number for Crisis Loan applications and a 0845 number for enquiries. These changes will be publicised in March and each benefit recipient will be informed about them. Appeal work will be dealt with locally instead of at the regional centre in Leeds as at present. Compliance and Fraud teams will be based at the Jobcentres. Appointments may be booked for clients with complex enquiries. The office will be open 9-5 on every weekday except Wednesday when it will be open from 10-5.

The JCP will look into arranging a walk around of the CC, Jobcentre and BDC to take place some time in April. Alison will ask members of the ACSG at the next meeting on 19 January to see how many people are interested in this. Names then to be sent to Dominic.

The Enquiry Line currently deals with 4,000 calls per week. JCP recognises the difficulties faced when trying to get through. We should advise clients not to press 'redial' when the line is engaged. They should dial the number again instead (there is a technical reason for this).

There are approximately 50,000 people in the Bradford area who are in receipt of the three primary benefits. Despite a recent recruitment exercise, neither the Jobcentres nor the BDC are at their correct staffing levels.

Alison and Anne said that the above report answers many of the points that they were going to raise. It was agreed that the changes are a very positive step towards improving the service for clients and will hopefully reduce delays and improve communications.

3. Information about operational changes. Anne referred to the lack of information provided when the CC was changed from Halifax to Grimsby earlier in the year. Karen said that they were not aware of this so could not inform us earlier. It was agreed that, in future, Dominic will email details of any changes that are implemented between meetings to Zahida Butt or Sandra Grice.

4. Paper claims. A procedure for how these are to be dealt with was requested at the last meeting in April. A procedure has been introduced and Alison reported that it seems to be working. The CC should issue the paper claim form and provide an addressed envelope for the return of the form.

5. Interpreters. Concerns were raised at the last meeting that JCP staff who act as interpreters may not be sufficiently fluent to conduct a proper interview with a client. Karen reported that internal staff can volunteer to interpret and that they are paid for this but they have to spend 20% of their time on this work. They don't test the language capacity of the member of staff. They need specific examples if they are to follow this up. These should be forwarded to Sue at Eastbrook Court or Debbie Ellison at Westfield House.

6. Difficult to resolve client issues. Email these to Dominic and he will direct them to the relevant manager. He will need the client's name and NI number. Contact Janet Healey about any problems at the CC.

7. HB/CTB claims. Alison asked about the process for HB/CTB claims made via JCP. At the moment all the evidence needed for the HB/CTB claim is collected by JCP and is then requested again by the Benefits Service. This duplication seems to be unnecessary. It was agreed that this issue would be taken up at the next HB liaison meeting.

8. Use of Warm Phones. Zahida Butt had emailed to ask why clients were being discouraged from using the Jobcentre's warm phones when making a CL application. This is causing problems for clients with no money or phone. Karen said that there are problems with confidentiality as there are usually other people waiting close by to use the phones. CL interviews can be lengthy and the phones are then blocked so that people who are looking for work cannot use them. They can reverse the charges where people cannot afford to ring. There are some appointments available at the Jobcentres.

8. Contact. There had been a problem with a member of staff not being willing to speak to a representative unless the client was present. The representative had the client's permission to contact, his name and NI number. JCP will remind staff about the procedures for working with representatives.

9. Future Meetings. It was agreed to hold quarterly meetings. The next will probably be the same day as the walk around. Date to be suggested by JCP.