

# Guidance- Helping Customers Who Require Advanced Support

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## Monitoring, auditing and reviewing this guidance

This guidance will be monitored with regard to its' effectiveness periodically through a process of audit involving DWP business units. Guidance will be updated following any reviews and learning along with any changes in legislation and / or related guidance. It is important to remember that this is a living document and will continue to be developed as our services evolve and we learn from customer experience and insight continuously. If you have any questions or comments about this guidance please contact the Advanced Customer Support Operational Team –

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 This guidance is designed to help colleagues working with DWP customers who may require advanced support whilst we administer their benefit claims.

1.2. We talk about ‘safeguarding’, as this is widely recognisable language, although DWP has no legal duty to ‘safeguard’; our primary role is to administer the payment of benefits to customers who satisfy the relevant eligibility criteria. However, as is detailed in this guidance, we will take steps, where we can, to assist in supporting vulnerable customers, ensuring we treat them with compassion, empathy and care.

1.3 When working with customers and those acting on their behalf, we will take all reasonable steps to understand their needs and seek to help them in identifying and accessing the help that they require.

1.4 This guidance recognises the importance of effective collaboration between services, agencies and professionals with different roles and expertise. Public authorities need to work together to share information to ensure that customers receive the support that they need. This is a shared responsibility, and where it is possible, we should take ownership of such cases to ensure that the right outcomes are achieved.

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## **2. The purpose of this guidance**

2.1 This guidance aligns activity across DWP, providing practical steps for assisting customers who may need support putting in place, supporting a compassionate, tailored service at all points of our customer experience.

2.2 The contents of this guidance document apply to all employees working for DWP, recognising the importance of working across organisations to reduce duplication, add value and maximise trust, providing the support that our customers require.

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## **3. Principles for supporting customers**

3.1 We work with some of the most vulnerable people in society, including customers who may be at risk now or in the future. We aim to continually learn from customer experience to design and implement policies and practices that provide an accessible, compassionate, tailored service to all customers.

3.2 Where DWP identifies someone requiring advanced support, we should help them to identify and access the support that they need through working

with external partners. We should all feel encouraged and supported to take ownership of their case as far as possible, but cannot seek to replicate services which are the responsibility of other organisations.

### **3.3 Our support for customers is underpinned by the following four principles:**

**Prevention by design:** DWP works with some of the most vulnerable people in society. We will seek to implement policies and processes that are influenced by customer experience, putting customer needs at the forefront of design and service delivery and allowing colleagues to deliver an accessible, compassionate service.

**Listening, Learning and Improving:** We will use data and customer insight to understand root causes and impacts of negative experience, to shape our service delivery. Learning from external sources such as inquests and coroner reports following serious cases will remain a key part of this approach. We are proud to be a learning organisation, and will continue developing a culture of learning, taking forward improvements to reduce the risk of negative customer experience reoccurring.

**Providing targeted support to those needing advanced help:** We will provide advanced support to customers who need it, giving colleagues the opportunity to understand and identify the support available to those customers and to ensure that they are confident in taking ownership for helping them to access the most appropriate support. Colleagues receive training to help them support our customers, and we also provide tailored support through our Visiting Officers and Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders. At the heart of our service is a tailored, empathetic approach that recognises the different needs of different customers.

**Building strong multi-agency relationships to ensure that customers get the support they need:** Through Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders and our wider partnership engagement, we will build close relationships with a range of agencies including Local Authorities, local charities, NHS services and the police, to help customers identify and access the broader support that they need. Supporting our customers is a shared mission, and DWP is a proud and active partner within this.

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## **4. Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders**

4.1 Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders (ACSSLs) form a network of support throughout England, Scotland and Wales, providing escalation routes for cases involving customers requiring advanced support, when all other business as usual channels have been exhausted. They work with teams within their geographical area, helping colleagues to deliver the tailored service that our most vulnerable customers require.

4.2 ACSSLs are instrumental in forming strong, external relationships with partner organisations, and internally across DWP. We look to ACSSLs to represent the department at forums such as Multi Agency Safeguarding Hubs (MASH or equivalent), working with other organisations to support our customers. They are integral to bringing different services together and forming a joined-up community at the heart of our offer to customers.

4.3 Internally, ACSSLs escalate any service design or delivery issues that are identified as potential triggers for negative customer experience. Where negative experience has occurred, ACSSLs are instrumental in working across DWP to understand root causes and recommend steps to avoid reoccurrence, learning all the time and using this to shape our services through wider Customer Experience Directorate activity.

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## 5. Helping customers who are deemed at risk

5.1 If we have a concern about the safety or wellbeing of a customer, we should share this information with the authorities that are best placed to provide customers with support. This includes situations where people may pose a risk of harm to themselves or others, and we will continue to develop a culture where colleagues feel empowered and supported to respond to these situations with confidence.

5.2 If these concerns cause us to believe that someone faces clear and significant risks to their welfare or safety, we should take reasonable steps to address these risks. This includes (but is not limited to) concerns about:

- risk of injury
- ill treatment
- neglect
- domestic violence
- physical abuse or sexual abuse
- psychological or emotional abuse
- exploitation of children or vulnerable adults
- modern slavery

5.3 If we identify someone at risk of harm or abuse, we should notify a Line Manager, and, if appropriate, an ACSSL to agree the most appropriate response. We must always consider the potential risk of harm to the person **themselves** or to others, which may include their family, DWP colleagues, or members of the public, and identify the most appropriate authority to contact. This may differ depending on geographical location and the specific circumstances of the individual at risk.

**If we deem that a customer is at immediate risk of harm to themselves or others, we should contact the emergency services by dialing 999. Action must be taken without undue delay, utilising the department's Six Point Plan.**

5.4 In cases involving children, we do not have to tell the parents or guardian about the disclosure of information to the relevant authorities. This is known as proactive disclosure.

5.5 Data protection laws do not prevent us from disclosing personal data to the relevant authorities when we are acting in good faith, although we must only disclose personal data that is relevant and necessary for the relevant authority to deal with the situation.

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## 6. Escalating and managing a concern

6.1 The following section is intended for use by all colleagues dealing with our customers. This work is continually evolving, and colleagues are advised to seek the support of their Line Manager if they are unsure of what action to take at any time. There are clear processes in place, and all colleagues are encouraged to engage with these, taking ownership for actions where they can, and seeking the support of others to help them do so.

6.2 It is vital that colleagues feel empowered to trust their instincts. We recognise that situations are not prescriptive, so if people encounter a scenario that they are unsure of, then they should speak to their Line Manager or a senior / experienced colleague, even if it is not immediately clear what is wrong. Discussing concerns with someone may help determine the best course of action to take. We should all feel supported to raise concerns regarding the welfare of a customer, even if these result in no action being required on the facts of the individual case. All colleagues are encouraged to seek guidance, rather than risk missing the opportunity to provide a customer with the help that they need.

6.3 If we identify concerns around **immediate** risks to the welfare of a customer, then we must take immediate action. Colleagues will be supported to do this, with trust in their instincts and experience. In cases of immediate risk where a customer declares an intent to take their own life or self-harm, colleagues are instructed to refer to the Six Point Plan for their business area. If at any time you are unsure of the action to take, you should seek the guidance of your Line Manager or a senior / experienced colleague

6.4 Our recommended response to support customers we deem at risk from abuse, harm or neglect is built around four steps;

**Listen**  
**Consider**  
**Act**  
**Review**

The following section explores these four steps in more detail.

*NB: Guidance in this space is continually evolving, and while there may be variations across business areas or localised practices in place, these steps are designed to be accessible to all DWP*

colleagues. If you are unsure about any of the processes, please seek the support of your Line Manager in the first instance.

# Step 1 - Listen

Listening carefully to customers is key to ensuring that we respond appropriately. The language a customer uses, the tone of their voice, and their non-verbal behaviour are all important indicators to consider.

## What steps should I take?

Give people the opportunity to talk about their situation and allow yourself time to gather all relevant information, listening with empathy and patience.

Establish if the customer has access to additional support such as an appointee, family member or third party.

## Who should I involve?

You should seek advice from your Line Manager if you feel uncomfortable or unable to support the customer. **Your Line Manager is the primary source of support throughout each of these four steps, but you should also consider speaking with an experienced colleague or other manager if they are unavailable.**

If we identify that the customer has support in place, we should encourage them to access it.

If they do not, we can identify appropriate local support through the District Provision Tool (DPT):

<https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/section/operational-instructions/district-provision-tool-dpt>

If a customer requires an appointee to act on their behalf, we should take the following action:

<https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/manual/core-visit-referral-guide/coronavirus-covid-19-cessation-visits>

## What is it useful to consider?

Is the customer at immediate risk of harm?

If so, consider the correct response i.e. Six Point Plan in cases of declarations of suicide or self-harm (**see Section 7 of this guidance**) or contacting the emergency services if, for example, you deem there to be an immediate risk of harm

If the customer has support in place, we should consider if we are able to disclose information to their support network that may enable them to provide support, referring to the guidance below:

<https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/policy/working-representatives-guidance>

From the outset, it is important that colleagues are supported to take ownership of cases for as long as it is reasonable for them to do so.

## Step 2 - Consider

Having listened, it is important to reflect on what you have heard so that the response you take is proportionate to the situation, supportive of the customer and within the remit and capability that you possess.

### **What steps should I take?**

Take the time to reflect on what the customer has said, in order to fully understand the situation and start to form a response.

It may be that looking back at previous case history is useful in order to understand more about the customer and their background.

Depending on the nature of the situation, you may not have much time to reflect, but it is important in all cases to consider what you have identified as thoroughly as possible so that the response provided is appropriate.

### **Who should I involve?**

You may find it useful at this stage to discuss the situation with an experienced / specialist colleague to help you identify the most appropriate response and plan, with the customer, what needs to happen.

Every Jobcentre area has a bespoke Complex Needs Toolkit. These link into the DPT, and support us to signpost customers to the most appropriate support.

Complex Needs Toolkits also provide access to guidance and local experts who may be able to help identify the correct support for the customer.

### **What is it useful to consider?**

Given what the customer has said, what is our role in the situation?

If our role is one of active support, you can start to form a response. If it is one of escalation or signposting, it is important to consider the most appropriate support to refer the customer to.

This can be identified through the DPT or discussion with your Line Manager / experienced colleague.

## Step 3 – Act

We must address the risk(s) faced by the customer. Engaging the right people and ensuring that the customer understands what is being done are all important factors in this step.

### What steps should I take?

**If a customer declares intent to self-harm or take their life, the Six Point Plan must be implemented without delay. See Section 7 of this guidance for further support.**

Involve specialist colleagues in your actions and decision making, engaging with your ACSSL if all other available support has been exhausted. You should consider if it is appropriate for us to engage with organisations already supporting the customer, and your ACSSL can support you with this.

Signpost the customer to an external organisation if they are best placed to provide the support required, clearly explaining this to the customer.

### Who should I involve?

Immediate support should be requested from your Line Manager or a senior / experienced colleague. The exact response will be determined by the nature of the incident.

Having listened, and sought the support of a colleague / Line Manager, you will be able to determine the appropriate response.

Consult your ACSSL to get their support with resolving the case. They can be contacted through the advanced customer support referral form:

### Insert Link

DWP's Visiting Service and other experts (identified through the DPT) may also be able to assist.

ACSSLs are best placed to signpost to support if you are unable to identify this through the DPT.

In cases of suspected Modern Slavery, colleagues should follow this guidance:

<https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/manual/modern-slavery/06-report-cases>

### What is it useful to consider?



Ensure that you have a copy of your local Six Point Plan on your desktop. If you do not, speak to your Line Manager. **This is a requirement for all staff.**

You are encouraged to take part in case conferencing with colleagues including your Line Manager, ACSSL or other experts to discuss complex cases, utilising expert knowledge to ensure that the action we take is informed and appropriate.

Recognise where other agencies are best placed to support customers; referring to the right support is vital. The DPT can be used to identify the most appropriate support.

## Step 4 - Review

It is important to review what has happened, and take opportunities to learn from situations and ensure those involved are supported.

### **What steps should I take?**

In cases where we have used the Six Point Plan, we should follow the steps detailed in Section 7 of this guidance to fully review the situation.

Where it is appropriate, cases can be referred for an Internal Process Review (IPR) to investigate the circumstances of a case (see Section 8 of this guidance). This helps us to continue learning about our services and their impact on customer experience.

ACSSLs will work with the Advanced Customer Support Operational Central Team within Customer Experience Directorate to investigate the root cause of negative customer experience where appropriate.

### **Who should I involve?**

Colleagues are expected to review these incidents with their Line Manager as per the Six Point Plan guidance.

IPR referrals are sent to the IPR team via an IPR Referral Template (see Section 8 of this guidance for full details). If you are concerned about whether a case should be referred, you can contact the IPR Team for advice.

ACSSLs, having worked with colleagues throughout this process, will take any further action forward with the Advanced Customer Support Operational Central Team. Information about this team can be found here:

**Insert Link**

### **What is it useful to consider?**

It is important that colleagues have access to the support they need, having dealt with a case of this nature. Further information can be found in Section 9 of this guidance.

Support for colleagues is important in all cases, not just those which involve invoking the Six Point Plan.

The eligibility criteria for referring cases to the IPR team can be found in Section 8 of this guidance.

ACSSLs will work with the Central Team on a case-by-case basis.

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## 7. Six Point Plan

7.1 All colleagues, including those working on behalf of DWP who come into contact with customers or handle customer correspondence, should know what to do in the event of a customer making a declaration of intention to attempt suicide or self-harm.

7.2 The department has a Six Point Plan setting out how to respond to managing suicide and self-harm declarations from customers:

<https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/manual/suicide-or-self-harm/01-guidance-managing-customer-declarations-intention-attempt-suicide-or-self-harm>

7.3 For colleagues working at home there is a tailored Six Point Plan. You should refer to your local Six Point Plan and Line Manager advice for further information.

7.4 There is a plan supporting the response to declarations received via Social Media.

<https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/section/working-dwp/office-and-equipment/social-media/6-point-plan-social-media>

7.5 Line Managers should use the generic plan to develop a bespoke plan for their site. This must be developed in consultation with local trade union representatives, reviewed regularly and communicated to all colleagues who work with customers.

7.6 Management information will be collected periodically, at a national level, to facilitate the review process. All colleagues must make themselves aware of the local Six Point Plan and to seek advice and support from local management. This includes the escalation routes for colleagues who are working from home.

7.7 It is possible that customers might show intent to harm themselves or take their own life, but have no plans to act on them (although we must always act on the assumption that they will). This can be distressing for those concerned, but there are some important points that colleagues should know that can help resolution. Being prepared and having well managed processes in place helps

us to reduce distress wherever possible. Colleagues should be alert to customers who may directly declare, or whose behaviour indicates, an intention to attempt suicide or self-harm.

7.8 Whilst some customers may say they intend to take their own life or harm themselves as a tactic to “persuade” us to take action; others will mean it. Our procedures must be organised around the assumption that it is a real possibility that the customer will take action on their declaration. DWP employees are not counsellors - but it is important that systems, procedures and responses are in place and that colleagues know what to do if a customer says they intend to harm themselves. DWP will continue to engage with other organisations to learn more about how to deal with these types of case.

7.9 When responding to this type of incident, the safety of colleagues must come first. DWP employees have a responsibility for their own safety and that of colleagues and they must ensure that they do not put themselves, or others, at risk when attempting to help customers.

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## **8. Internal Process Reviews**

8.1 Internal Process Reviews (IPRs) help us to investigate and learn from customer experiences where serious issues occur. Although a case may have been resolved in terms of providing customers with the support that they need, IPRs allow us to look back at what has happened, and learn from this to inform future decision-making and service delivery. We want to deliver the best possible service to our customers, and IPRs are an invaluable opportunity to learn from and shape our customer experience.

8.2 More information about IPRs, including referral criteria and process can be found here:

<https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/section/organisation/service-excellence-group/customer-experience/customer-insight/internal-process-reviews-iprs>

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## **9. Support for colleagues**

9.1 We regularly encounter sensitive and complex issues, and recognise that situations impact people in different ways. We want a culture where all colleagues feel supported, and Line Managers will help colleagues to identify the appropriate support. In some cases, colleagues may need extra support, including services provided by the Employee Assistance Programme through PAM Assist.

9.2 They can be contacted through the following channels:  
Telephone: 0808 169 1111 or website: [login.pamassist.co.uk/](http://login.pamassist.co.uk/)

9.3 Support is also available to all DWP colleagues through our Mental Health First Aiders:

<https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/page/mental-health-first-aid-dwp>

9.4 All colleagues are encouraged to access the Mental Wellbeing Toolkit for access to a range of advice and support related to personal wellbeing:

<https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/page/mental-wellbeing-toolkit>

9.5 The support outlined above is available to colleagues employed directly by DWP. Individuals working for third party organisations on behalf of DWP should familiarise themselves with the support available to them.

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## 10. Maintaining roles and personal boundaries

10.1 When dealing with customers, we must remain mindful of our behaviour at all times, fostering a culture that provides a professional, supportive service.

10.2 All colleagues must observe DWP's values and comply with the Civil Service Code and DWP policies laid out within DWP intranet pages. If you are unsure of what is expected of you then you should seek the advice of your Line Manager.

10.3 It is important to maintain boundaries by not putting either the customer or ourselves at risk by taking actions that, while well-intentioned, introduce additional risks.

10.4 Customers might misinterpret our actions, no matter how well-intentioned. We must always be mindful of this in relation to the activities or actions being undertaken. Taking notes and keeping accurate records of any incidents are a useful way of recording anything that has happened.

**10.5 In all cases, we must never:**

- Tolerate inappropriate or discriminatory language without challenging it;
- Enter into a personal or intimate relationship with an individual, even if the individual gives their consent;
- Give an individual our personal phone number, e-mail or home address, make contact via unofficial social media channels or provide information that enables an individual to contact us outside of the working environment;
- Do personal things for an individual which they can do independently;
- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate physical contact.

**10.6 In all cases, we must:**

- Act as an appropriate role model for others to follow;
- Not permit unacceptable behaviour by others, and challenge as appropriate, including the use of discriminatory or derogatory language;
- Ensure that any feedback given is constructive rather than negative;

- Take care not to use language or behaviour which could be interpreted as having a sexual, abusive or discriminatory connotation;
- Take particular care when discussing sensitive issues;
- Report concerns, suspicions or allegations regarding the welfare of an individual immediately to the appropriate person.

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## 11. Learning and Development

11.1 Any employee with direct access to the public through any channel is required to complete the Civil Service e-learning module on Safeguarding Children and Adults, which can be accessed through:

<https://identity.learn.civilservice.gov.uk/login>

11.2 Safeguarding Children and Adults e-learning is included in the Fundamental Learning Journey (Operations Fundamentals) that is available to all frontline colleagues. The Fundamental Learning Journey contains learning products which, among other things, help to equip colleagues with skills required to understand the needs of our customers:

<https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/page/operational-fundamentals>

11.3 The Fundamental Learning Journey contains a 'License to Operate' routeway incorporating some of DWPs mandatory learning requirements. It contains the 'must haves' we are required to complete before accessing DWP systems: <https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/page/licence-operate-fundamentals>

11.4 To help colleagues identify their learning needs within the Fundamental Learning Journey, they should complete an Individual Learning Needs Analysis with their Line Manager, ensuring all recommended learning requirements are undertaken: <https://intranet.dwp.gov.uk/page/individual-learning-needs-analysis-tool>

11.5 A suite of e-learning tools has been designed to support colleagues respond to a variety of complex needs and provide vulnerable customers with the assistance that they require. Topics that are covered in this learning include;

- Homelessness
- Domestic Abuse and Violence
- Refugees
- Bereavement
- Debt problems

This learning is not current mandatory, but all colleagues are encouraged to access it and familiarise themselves with its contents:

**Insert Link**

11.6 ACSSLs have a bespoke learning journey designed by the Customer Experience Directorate, incorporating the Fundamental Learning Journey and supplementary learning around topics including Drug and Alcohol awareness and Complex Needs. This equips them with the skills required to support customers and work with other agencies, and enables them to coach colleagues, increasing capability across the department.

11.7 ACSSLs engage with external agencies, learning from them and utilising these links to upskill DWP colleagues and raise awareness about local services and various forms of support for our customers. This activity is driven by local needs, and if you would like to learn more about this, contact your ACSSL.

### **Feedback**

If you have any questions or comments about this guidance please contact the Advanced Customer Support Operational Team -

@DWP.GOV.UK

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