Dear Colleague

Improving the Delivery of Benefits

I am writing to share with you our plans for improving the delivery of benefits.

Traditionally, our benefit processing work has been organised in small teams in over 600 sites. We are moving to a more efficient network of 77 Benefit Delivery Centres which will allow us to develop expertise and to improve our service to customers.

We have learned from our early experience of operating a contact centre service and are confident that we will be able to offer customers an effective telephone based service. This will allow us to focus our resource and expertise on those who need additional help and on the more complex cases.

We will have 5000 people available to discuss benefit claims over the telephone. This means that most customers - around 80% - have their enquiries dealt with by one call. The remaining calls will be passed to the most relevant person or the appropriate part of the organisation to resolve the enquiry. We plan to call those customers back in 3 hours with the answer.

Each centre will have a 0845 number for main benefits and a PO Box address. There will be a separate 0845 number for Social Fund applications and enquiries. Offering 0845 numbers means that calls from a landline anywhere in the UK are charged at a local rate, irrespective of the location of the Benefit Delivery Centre customers are calling. We will offer to call customers back if they wish, in order to keep the cost of the call as low as possible. A 0800 number will also be available to customers for Crisis Loan applications. Complex cases will be dealt with by a team of benefits experts. Office interviews and home visits will remain an option for those who are not able to use the telephone or internet route.

In the past few months, we have started to improve the time taken to process benefit claims and are determined to make further improvements. Centralising our benefit processing work will help. Eventually, it will give us the flexibility to move workloads around the network and ensure that when claim volumes rise, we are able to respond quickly and effectively. The programme represents a significant investment – around £80 million in the infrastructure, technology and systems.

We have made some progress towards establishing the new network already. In April this year our first Benefit Delivery Centre went live in Wellingborough and we used this as a testing ground for the roll out of the national network which continued with the opening of Peterborough in August. We opened two new centres at the end of September (Sheffield and Makerfield in Lancashire), Luton at the beginning of October and Norwich will open later this week. Over half will be rolled out by the end of the financial year.

I have included a copy of the timetable for introducing the new Benefit Delivery Centres for your information, although some timings may change. Our District Managers will be contacting local stakeholders at the appropriate time, to ensure they are fully aware of the details of local timings and how change will affect customers and local welfare advisers. We listened to what welfare advisors had told us and have asked our people to ensure your advisers have dedicated telephone lines for urgent customer enquiries.
We will also be running local awareness campaigns for customers. This will include a direct mail explanatory leaflet with contact details and posters in our offices. We are updating information on the Jobcentre Plus website and changing all our current advertisements in telephone directories, although this will take time due to different publishing times.

We will very much welcome your suggestions for how we can ensure we reach all our customers. Please let me know if you have any ideas on how we might work together to ensure that the transition runs as smoothly as possible for all concerned.

I hope this is helpful. I will keep you up to date with progress.

Matthew Nicholas
Director of External Relations & Communication