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The Inaugural Work Programme Partnership Meeting

I attended the first meeting of the Work Programme Partnership Forum on Monday 26 September 2011. The meeting was extremely positive and very productive.

I wanted to take this opportunity to explain the purpose of the Forum even though it is early days. However, we are really keen to develop an overall approach that adds real value to the success of the Work Programme and work is underway to realise this ambition.

The Forum provides senior management from both DWP and Providers with an opportunity to address a broad and wide range of strategic issues that surround the delivery of the Work Programme. The issues are complex encompassing political, social, behavioral and technical matters which have no simple solutions. However, through open debate and sharing of opinions, ways forward are identified which can shape and inform future policy.

In the wider context of overall citizen services, Work Programme providers are part of a network of local and national government provision, other contracted services, along with private and voluntary sector contributions. The Forum will allow us to identify how well the Work Programme works in its own right and how it interacts with these services to improve the overall effectiveness of the entire system. As new policy is rolled out, for example in respect of health or housing, the Forum will also be able to provide rapid and informed insights into front line impact.

In addition to this strategic role the Forum will allow early experiences of delivery to be shared and for emerging policy that may impact directly on delivery to be discussed. The Forum will not address the performance of individual contracts or providers but will consider the performance of the Programme as a whole and in relation to different customer groups.

It will be a forum for the exchange of good practice in Welfare to Work provision and for reviewing the operation of the Work Programme - identifying aspects which merit common consideration or which are matters of common concern.

The next Partnership Forum will take place in December with a more detailed communication on what has taken place during October and November being published.