

# Tell Us Once

Equality impact assessment

October 2011

# Equality impact assessment for the Tell Us Once Service

## Brief outline of the service

1. For many people, dealing with Government, especially when reporting changes in their lives, can require them to repeat and verify the same information to numerous central government departments and agencies, and parts of local authorities. The report by Sir David Varney – Service Transformation: a better service for citizens and businesses, a better deal for the taxpayer published in December 2006 found that people often had to provide the same information to different Government Departments. It recommended that citizens, taxpayers and Government could benefit from the provision of a joined-up notification service provided through a single point of contact, particularly if those changes were to do with reporting a death, a birth or a change of address. As a result the Tell Us Once (TUU) cross-Government programme, led by Department for Work and Pensions, was set up to look at developing such a service.
2. The feasibility of, and design for, a single point of contact notification service was investigated and developed in collaboration and consultation with staff and potential and actual users of the service, as well as the General Register Office and Local Government. This service is sometimes referred to as the Tell Us Once service.
3. The Tell Us Once service provides an alternative method for notifying Government of a birth or a death. Its use is voluntary. Citizens can use the service to notify a birth or death to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions by attending in person at an office of any participating Local Authority (LA) or, for deaths only, by telephoning a dedicated telephone line operated by the Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCCS). The longer term aspiration is for citizens to also be able to report changes online.
4. The coalition Government has approved the national implementation of the Tell Us Once Service, and national roll out of the service will take place during 2011.

## Consultation and involvement

5. In late 2007 the TUO programme commissioned customer research to find out whether people would value a service which (1) advised them who to notify of changes and (2) whether they would welcome a service that notified Government Departments on their behalf. The findings from almost two thousand interviews with citizens were very positive and indicated a clear demand to have such a service delivered in person, through a telephone service and over the internet.

6. The Programme worked with colleagues from across Local and Central Government including representatives from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Identity and Passport Service (IPS), Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), Local Authorities (LAs) and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). The services for reporting a birth or death were developed and tested in a series of pilots. Pathfinders were then launched in November 2008. Since then the death notification service has been running in 44 LA areas, in England, Scotland and Wales, and providing contact for up to 24 core services (including UK passport services and LA Council Housing services). The birth notification service was initially tested by HMRC in 11 LAs but following review within HMRC, DWP was asked to take responsibility for the birth notification service. The birth notification service is currently running in 14 LAs.
7. Customer surveys undertaken in March/April 2009 showed that 98% of citizens who had used the TUO service reported that they trusted the service, with 99.5% indicating that they trusted the person who delivered it.
8. A survey of staff who had been providing the service during the same period showed that they felt they were making a positive difference to the lives of customers using the service; 97% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that they were making a difference.
9. Data gathered up to 31 July 2011 shows that around 12,800 people have used the service to report a birth, and more than 35,900 have used it to report a death.

## Impact of the Tell Us Once Service

10. This Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) looks at the equality impact of the overall Programme aims set out in section 1 of this document.
11. Using the Tell Us Once service citizens are voluntarily able to inform Government of a birth or a death. For death, citizens can access the service by making a telephone call or face-to-face visit at a Local Authority site where the service is offered. For reporting a birth the Tell Us Once service is only offered face-to-face at a Local Authority site delivering the Tell Us Once service. The aspiration is to extend the death service to also include online reporting via Directgov.
12. Should a customer not want to take advantage of the TUO service, the existing processes for notifying a change of circumstances will remain. Registration of the death or birth will be carried out as normal, as prescribed under the current registration regulations.
13. Memoranda of Understanding between DWP (as the lead department for the Tell Us Once Programme) and LAs make clear the duty under equality legislation to promote equality, and that both parties should continue to ensure that staff working on the Programme are aware of, and complying with, these responsibilities.
14. Within the pilot/pathfinder period there has been no evidence to suggest that any group has been adversely treated as a result of the TUO service. This has largely

been due to service partners providing the elements of the TUO service that they are responsible for (i.e. face-to-face service delivery, telephone service delivery or processing of notification received from TUO) within their existing duties to comply with diversity and equality legislation.

15. To assess the impact of the proposed changes due consideration has been given to all equality strands identified in the Equality Act 2010. The programme has worked closely with all other areas of the Department for Work and Pensions, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, Identity and Passport Service, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and Local Authorities, and has also worked in partnership with organisations such as Cruse Bereavement Care, to develop the service and ensure that it will meet the needs of customers. Customer insight and evaluation has been carried out throughout the planning and piloting/pathfinder stages.
16. The Tell Us Once service provides an opportunity to signpost customers to additional sources of information and help. For customers who do not wish to report a change of circumstances to Government using the TUO service, existing methods to notify partners will continue to be available. The frontline services provided by each of the service providers are already considered accessible services, as determined when looking at their own compliance with existing legislation – for example wheelchair access to their office buildings, or availability of interpreting services where English is not spoken as a first language etc.

## **Age**

17. Customers will be offered the same level of core service regardless of age. The service is offered through a variety of channels, giving a customer a choice of the channel they feel most comfortable using. So, for example, where we know that internet usage is lower in the older population those customers will still have equal opportunities to access TUO by opting to use the telephony or face-to-face services to report a death or the face-to-face service to report a birth.

## **Disability**

18. The outcome of the customer experience will be the same for anyone using the Tell Us Once service, regardless of disability. To ensure that all customers are treated fairly, all existing accessible formats offered by our service providers, including Braille, large print, text phone, British Sign Language interpreting services and audio services, will also be offered as part of the TUO service.
19. In addition, where the service is offered face-to-face at a LA premises the building should already be accessible to disabled people, enabling customers with mobility issues to use the service.

## **Gender**

20. People will not be treated differently because of their gender.

21. The TUO service may appear to discriminate on the grounds of gender where parents are living apart. For example, a parent uses TUO to report a birth (this is the mother in 99% of cases) but an ex partner, who does not live in the same household, wants to use TUO to inform Library Services about the child's birth so that they can take advantage of the services offered by the library in their own residential LA area. In this instance the fact that the service can only be used once appears to discriminate against the second informant (usually the father) because they can not subsequently use the TUO service if it has already been used to report the birth of that child.
22. The primary purpose of TUO is to report a change of circumstances to those departments and agencies that need to be made aware of such changes. The likelihood is that the person whose benefit may be affected by a birth, and who therefore needs to inform Government of this change of circumstance, is the parent (or partner of the parent) who the child resides with most of the time. If there is a second informant who wishes to notify Library Services or Family Information Services they will still be able to do so in the usual way, as prescribed by their LA. If there are any disputes about who should claim Child Benefit or Child Tax Credit for a child these are dealt with under normal business processes by HMRC.
23. Having reviewed the process, along with the principles of the TUO service as a whole, it is deemed that the service does not discriminate on the grounds of gender in the case of parents living apart.

## **Gender reassignment**

24. The Programme is aware that there can be potential issues with the sharing of information of transgender customers. However, the purpose of TUO is to provide verification of an event, for example a death, which we share with other bodies with the customer's consent and as the law allows. The fact that a customer or informant is transgender is irrelevant for the purposes of using the service and we do not ask for this information. When a department or LA receives notification of the event they will deal with the customer's record as per their usual processes.

## **Race**

25. The TUO service providers already offer services which customers are able to access regardless of race, and cultural differences are respected. The quality of TUO service offered to a customer will be the same regardless of race, although the approach may be slightly different depending on individual need. Existing interpreting services offered by our service providers are available to deal with language barriers - staff have or can call upon people with language skills to provide interpretation services. Many Local Authorities are already dealing effectively with major language variants in their areas, for example in Southwark there are 120 languages spoken yet the council is able to offer services using a variety of translation and interpreting services. In addition, the service provided in LAs across Wales is compliant with the Welsh Language Act 1993.

## **Religion or belief impact**

26. The same high level of service will be offered to people regardless of their religion or belief. While there is no intention to approach people with different religions in a different way, the service design aims to take into account any special requirements that certain religious groups may have; for example, grieving periods and burial requirements following a death.

## **Sexual Orientation**

27. People will not be treated differently because of their sexual orientation. There will be no difference in approach for customers of different sexual orientation, and this group will not suffer any adverse impact as a result of the TUO service being introduced.

## **Marriage and Civil Partnership**

28. There will be no difference in approach for customers who are married or in a Civil Partnership, and this group will not suffer any adverse impact as a result of the TUO service being introduced.

## **Pregnancy and maternity**

29. There will be no difference in approach for women in the pregnancy and maternity group, and they will not suffer any adverse impact as a result of the TUO service being introduced.

## **Staff**

30. There will be no change to current staff conditions; including the equality legislation under which staff themselves are protected. Support for staff operating the service is provided already by learning packages and by having specialist advisors and translation and interpretation services available.

31. In view of the information available at this stage of the Programme it is not thought that either customers or staff will be unduly or adversely affected by the introduction of the TUO service, or that the proposed service could discriminate unlawfully (either directly or indirectly) against any group identified in the Equality Act 2010. The change will benefit all customers who use the service, as well as providing benefits for central and local government.

## **Monitoring and evaluation**

32. The Tell Us Once Programme is committed to monitoring the impacts of its policies and will use evidence from a number of sources to assess the experiences of people who use the TUO service. This will include looking at whether these experiences are unintended consequences of how the service impacts on particular groups.

33. Customer surveys will be carried out as part of the national roll out of the TUO service. These surveys will include questions related to the equality strands

34. The complaints procedure will also be monitored to determine whether negative customer experiences are related to the fact that they fall into one or more of the groups identified in the Equality Act 2010.
35. Staff experiences will be monitored. Employee networks and internal management information from both within the TUO Programme and service partners can be used to assess the broader impact of the service.
36. As change is made to the service design, the TUO service and processes will be monitored for direct or indirect adverse impact on any group identified in this Equality Impact Assessment, through the standard Change Control Procedures. The Equality Impact Assessment will be revisited regularly to reflect any issues identified in future.

## Next steps

37. This EIA will be reviewed as the service changes and develops further to reflect the ongoing design and impact this may have on people. Monitoring will continue to ensure that the proposed IT solution and any process changes are meeting equality legislative requirements, and the EIA will be reviewed at the appropriate stages.

## Contact details

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