

Impact of virtualisation of telephony in Pension Service

August 2011

Equality impact assessment
Version 2.0

Equality impact assessment for virtualisation of telephony in Pension Service

Introduction

The Department for Work and Pensions has carried out an equality impact assessment on the proposal to introduce virtualisation of telephony in the Pension Service, assessing the proposal in line with the current public sector equality duties.

This process will help to ensure that:

- the Department's strategies, policies and services are free from discrimination;
- the Department complies with current equality legislation;
- due regard is given to equality in decision making and subsequent processes; and
- opportunities for promoting equality are identified.

Scope of this assessment

The equality impact assessment will show how the Department has demonstrated it has paid due regard when developing new services or processes on the grounds of the protected characteristics. These are; race, disability, gender, age, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief and marriage and civil partnerships (in terms of eliminating unlawful discrimination only).

Brief outline of the policy or service

Currently, all telephone calls to The Pension Service are routed to a pension centre according to pre-defined rules. For the nine Regional Pension Centres, calls are routed geographically. The purpose of this project is to remove the geographical limitations and deliver calls into a virtual network.

The driver for virtuality is to provide a better service to our customers. Rather, than the customer's telephone call being delivered and queuing in a regional pension centre, the call can now be delivered to any skilled agent in any of the nine sites. This reduces the customer waiting time and increases agent productivity. This is possible because the sites are uniform in their Operating Model and agents are skilled to the same level. Another benefit of; moving to virtual telephony is that fewer agents are required to manage the telephony as agent utilisation increases, especially during the more quiet periods 4pm – 8pm. Moving to 8-8 virtualisation of Bereavement service

now provides an opportunity to improve both the balance of our resources across the day to meet peak in-bound call demand, Should we also mention and is provides to increase the consistency and robustness of our service during any future business continuity incident.?

There are three phases to be delivered in this project:

Phase 1: DWP Bereavement Service 4pm – 8pm

This phase went live week commencing 27 June 2011. This will allow us to test the new process during the quiet periods of the day, reducing any customer impact. It will be fully evaluated and if appropriate, the project will move to Phase 2, with any required changes to processes developed from lessons learned.

Phase 2: DWP Bereavement Service 8am – 8pm

These calls will be delivered virtually across the nine pension centres. Roll out will be subject to Phase 1 but is expected to take place 26 September 2011.

Phase 3: State Pension New Claims, Pension Credit New Claims, State Pension Changes and Pension Credit Changes

The success and benefits of virtualising Bereavement Calls will allow The Pension Service to continue virtualising the remaining pension services. This phase will be broken into stages beginning with State Pension New Claims January / February 2012. Remaining work areas will go live between June – October 2012.

Consultation and involvement

This project has worked closely with Senior Management within Pensions. However, there are many other key stakeholders who include:

- Human Resources for change of job roles
- CIT to deliver the Telephony Infrastructure
- Resource and Performance Directorate to deliver changes in historical telephony MI.
- Pension Hub who manage telephony forecasting and real-time.
- DWP Legal Group, Information & Governance Team .

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The impact of this project has been considered across our customers and staff and are shown below:

Disability

There is no disability impact. The service provided to our disabled customers will continue as now (e.g. Local Service, Texbox etc). There is no impact on our disabled staff as there is no change to IT or processes.

Gender

There is no gender impact as there is no change to current processes.

Transgender

There is no transgender impact as there is no change to current processes.

Religion and belief

There is no religion and belief impact as this information is not required from customers and will not impact processes.

Pregnancy and maternity

There is no impact on pregnancy and maternity as there is no change to current processes.

Marriage and civil partnerships

There is no impact on marriage and Civil Partnerships as there is no change to current processes.

Race

Our telephone services are available in both the English and Welsh language. In addition, all correspondence and leaflets are available in Welsh. The Welsh language telephone numbers are widely publicised.

Customers who call the Welsh language telephone numbers will continue to be directed to Welsh-speaking agents in the first instance. These agents are based in Swansea pension centre. If there are no Welsh-speaking agents available (i.e. all agents are already taking a call) rather than queuing, the call is delivered to an English-speaking agent within Swansea Pension Centre. The customer can either continue the call in English or a call back can be arranged. This process will continue under virtuality of the pension service as only Welsh-speaking agents in Swansea can deliver this service.

Customers who live in Wales but call the English Pension Service number receive a bi-lingual welcome message, though the conversation will continue in English. For the agent to identify the call originates from Wales, there is additional Telephony Infrastructure in place (Swansea also take calls from England). During contingency (e.g. Swansea pension centre is closed due to an emergency), these calls are routed to the other 8 pension centres and no bi-lingual greeting is given.

This service will no longer apply 8am – 4pm from Phase 2 onwards.

From 8am, all customers from Wales, requiring the Bereavement Service, who call the English Pension Service number will be routed virtually. They may be routed to any of the 9 pension centres based in the England, Scotland or Wales. Therefore the bi-lingual greeting will not be given to these customers. (Note: Apart from Swansea, no other pension centre has the infrastructure to identify customers calling from Wales). This will apply in Swansea pension centre between the hours 8am – 8pm. DWP Legal Group, Information and Governance Team have confirmed that this continues to meet the requirement of the DWP Welsh Language Scheme as we will continue to provide a dedicated Welsh line which is promoted within Wales.

There is no impact on any other customer group. For our customers who wish to speak in a language other than English or Welsh, we will continue to use The Big Word translation services.

Impact on our staff

Bereavement Team staff in Swansea will not offer the bi-lingual welcome message 8am – 8pm. They will use the English only welcome message in line with their colleagues in the other 8 pension centres. This ensures the same service is applied across the network. Staff will be advised what to say if a customer asks why a bi-lingual greeting was not used.

Staff in our other 8 pension centres need to be aware that a customer may have mis-dialled and wants to speak in Welsh. In such cases staff will advise them of the correct number to dial.

Our staff will continue to use The Big Word translation services if the customer wishes to speak a language other than English to Welsh.

Monitoring and evaluation

Phase 1 is our pilot (proof of concept) and this will be carefully monitored throughout against our Critical Success Factors. We have the ability to return to our normal processes at any time (i.e. route calls geographically rather than virtually). This may be required, for example if the level of customer service is not met or our revised processes are not robust.

Throughout Phase 1 we will be monitoring any impacts on equality act protected characteristics. If any such impact should be identified (e.g. complaints from a particular protected group), it will be looked at as a matter of urgency.

The proof of concept will be evaluated before proceeding to Phase 2. This evaluation will include the service provided to all customers including those calling from Wales. We will also monitor the number of Welsh-speaking customers who had to re-dial to identify if this is an issue to customer service and to consider alternative solutions.

Next steps

This is the second EIA and it will be reviewed throughout the projects lifespan. This will be updated at each phase of the project. The next review is expected December 2011.

Contact details

If you have any questions, require alternative format, please contact the Project Manager, Lisa Dover, 0191 228 3407.