

## Business Up-date December 2009



Welcome to the December 2009 Social Security Advisory Committee's business update. This up-date provides a summary of the Committee's activities, including the formal referral of regulations, publications and an update on the November Stakeholder Seminar. The next up-date will be published in early in 2010.

### **The SSAC Stakeholder Seminar 2009**

The fourth annual SSAC Stakeholder Seminar was held at Sadler's Wells in London on November 4th. The Seminar coincided with the publication of the 22<sup>nd</sup> SSAC annual report which covers the Committee's activities between August 2008 and July 2009. Richard Tilt (SSAC Chair) opened the morning session with an up-date on the Committee's work. Professor Paul Gregg (University of Bristol) then gave a presentation on 'Personalised support in welfare and Social services'. Following his presentation, Prof. Gregg joined a panel of two SSAC members to consider issues raised by attendees, including suggestions of issues that the Committee might want to include in its independent work programme.

The afternoon session was opened with a presentation from Jeremy Groombridge (Jobcentre Plus) on the 'Current challenges for Service delivery'. Following the presentation, attendees broke into small groups to consider the issue of service delivery for vulnerable customers in DWP and HMRC. The discussions centred on the usefulness of the available definitions of vulnerable customers, whether the existing Jobcentre Plus/HMRC processes to support 'vulnerable customers' are working effectively and suggestions for policies/procedures to improve access to services for 'vulnerable customers'. The results of the discussion will be fed into a SSAC occasional paper on vulnerable customers to be published in spring 2010.

*For further information please contact Anna Bee [anna.bee@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:anna.bee@dpw.gsi.gov.uk) or Nicola Moss [nicola.moss@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:nicola.moss@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)*

### **Telephony in DWP and HMRC: Call costs and equality of customer access – SSAC's 2007 recommendations revisited**

In September, the Committee published an occasional paper that considered the issue of telephony in DWP and HMRC. The paper explored the progress made by DWP on a number of SSAC recommendations made in an earlier occasional paper published in 2007. It also briefly considered some of the key issues around HMRC telephony and customer access to Tax Credit services. The paper set out a number of recommendations for both DWP and HMRC.

- Call-backs should be offered by DWP and HMRC contact centre staff when a customer is calling from a mobile phone (and will be charged for that call). Call-backs should be offered systematically and proactively at the beginning of any customer phone call made from a mobile phone.
- DWP Benefit Delivery Centres and HMRC helpline numbers should be transferred from 0845 to 0800 numbers. While 0800 numbers are not currently low cost to mobile users, when combined with a coherent call-back policy, they still currently represent the best value for money for the majority of customers.
- The information about the cost of calling HRMC should be improved significantly so that customers are able to make some judgment about the likely cost of calling HMRC using different types of phones. HMRC should aim for a standard statement about

*For further information please contact Anna Bee [anna.bee@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:anna.bee@dpw.gsi.gov.uk)*

## **Formal Scrutiny into proposed regulations to allow the voluntary payment of debts owed to HMRC by recovery from DWP benefits**

On the 24<sup>th</sup> November the Committee launched a formal consultation on the draft *Social Security (Claims and Payments) Amendments Regulations 2010*. The regulations will provide for the voluntary payment of tax credit overpayment debts and self-assessment tax debts owed to HMRC by recovery from certain DWP benefits.

The maximum rate of recovery will be three times five percent of the Income Support rate for a single person aged 25 and over (currently 3 x £3.25 = £9.75), and that the HMRC debt will be placed at the bottom of the current priority list of deductions.

Before the Committee considers and reports on these proposals, it would like to hear from organisations and individuals who have views on these proposed regulations. The consultation will close on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2009. For more information and a copy of the draft regulations and the DWP Explanatory Memorandum please visit the Current Consultations section of the SSAC website. <http://www.ssac.org.uk/press/press17.asp>

For further information please contact Anna Bee [anna.bee@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:anna.bee@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

## **Committee Membership – Changes in 2009**

There have been a number of changes in the composition of the Committee during 2009. Laurie Naumann and Anthony Ogus left the committee towards the end of 2008 and Richard Exell left the Committee in June 2009.

Maureen Reith joined the Committee in January 2009 as its Scotland representative. She is a social worker who and also serves as a General Member of the Mental Health Tribunal Service for Scotland. Carolyn George joined the Committee in April 2009. She is a freelance writer and trainer. She has worked in the Citizens' Rights Office at Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), with Citizen's Advice and with other advice organisations, giving advice both to members of the public and to

other advisors. John Andrews also joined the Committee in April 2009. He is Chairman and founder of the Low Incomes Tax Reform Group (LITRG), a charitable initiative by the Chartered Institute of Taxation to give a voice to the unrepresented in the tax/tax credits systems.

Nicola Smith has recently been appointed under provisions in statute for a Member to be appointed in consultation with organisations representing workers. Nicola is a senior policy officer at the TUC and her first SSAC meeting will be in January 2010.

*Further information on membership of the Committee can be found in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Report*

<http://www.ssac.org.uk/pdf/reports/22streport.pdf>

**Disclaimer** - This up-date contains links to websites that are not owned by SSAC. These websites are not under our control and we are not responsible in any way for any of their contents.