



House of Commons  
Work and Pensions Committee

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**Valuing and  
Supporting Carers:  
Government Response  
to the Committee's  
Fourth Report of  
Session 2007–08**

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**First Special Report of Session 2008–  
09**

*Ordered by The House of Commons  
to be printed 17 December 2008*

**HC 105**  
Published on 19 December 2008  
by authority of the House of Commons  
London: The Stationery Office Limited  
£0.00

## The Work and Pensions Committee

The Work and Pensions Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Work and Pensions and its associated public bodies.

### Current membership

Terry Rooney MP (*Labour, Bradford North*) (Chairman)  
Anne Begg MP (*Labour, Aberdeen South*)  
Harry Cohen MP (*Labour, Leyton and Wanstead*)  
Michael Jabez Foster MP (*Labour, Hastings and Rye*)  
Oliver Heald MP (*Conservative, Hertfordshire North East*)  
John Howell MP (*Conservative, Henley*)  
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John Penrose MP (*Conservative, Weston-Super-Mare*)  
Jenny Willott MP (*Liberal Democrat, Cardiff Central*)

### Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at [www.parliament.uk/parliamentary\\_committees/work\\_and\\_pensions\\_committee.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/work_and_pensions_committee.cfm). A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are James Rhys (Clerk), Emma Graham (Second Clerk), Amy Sweeney and Hanna Haas (Committee Specialists), Laura Humble (Committee Media Adviser), John-Paul Flaherty (Senior Committee Assistant), Hannah van Schijndel (Committee Assistant) and John Kittle (Committee Support Assistant).

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# First Special Report

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1. The Work and Pensions Committee agreed its Fourth Report of Session 2007-08, Valuing and Supporting Carers, on 21 July 2008. The Report was published on 29 August 2008 as House of Commons Paper No. 485. We have now received the Government's Response to this report in the form of a memorandum from the Minister of State for Disabled People, Jonathan Shaw MP. This memorandum is printed as an Appendix to this Special Report.

## Appendix: Government response

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### Introduction

1. The Government welcomes the Fourth Report of the Work and Pensions Select Committee on valuing and supporting carers. The Committee has identified a number of issues which it believes need to be addressed. The Government fully recognises the valuable contribution made by carers and believes that carers must be universally recognised and valued as being fundamental to strong families and stable communities.

2. The Government's 10 year carers' strategy - *Carers at the heart of 21st-century families and communities*<sup>1</sup> acknowledges that the current system of support for carers does not recognise or adapt to the wide variation in both carers' responsibilities and needs. Accordingly, the Government intends to examine the role of carers' benefits within the context of its plans for reform of the benefit system. On 10 December 2008 the Department for Work and Pensions published *Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future*.<sup>2</sup> This paper outlines the next steps for carers' benefits reform.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

**1. We call on DWP to take a stronger and more proactive lead in Government policy on carers. As well as identifying and implementing specific policies to improve the lives of carers, DWP needs to take specific account of carers in all its work, including its role in reducing child poverty and pensioner poverty, its efforts to see 80% of working age people in employment, and its vision of giving people equality of opportunity. (Paragraph 41)**

3. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP or 'the Department') is taking a strong and proactive approach in Government policy on carers and does take account of carers in its work. Carers are one of the key groups of people the Department is focusing on in its welfare reform strategy and drive to reduce both child and pensioner poverty. The Department was a key player in development of *Carers at the heart of 21st-century families and communities*, leading two taskforces.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_085345](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_085345).

<sup>2</sup> *Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future*, December 2008, (Cm 7506)

4. The Department has demonstrated its commitment to delivering services that have carers' needs at their centre in the provision of up to £38 million to enable carers to be better able to combine paid employment with their caring role through enhanced flexible working opportunities and increased skills training opportunities.

5. The National Insurance Carer's Credit which will be introduced in 2010 to protect the State Pension rights of people under pension age, who care for a severely disabled person for at least 20 hours a week, will make an important stride towards ensuring that carers are not disadvantaged in later life, because of their caring role.

**2. Access to immediate and continuing information, advice and guidance is a major concern for carers, who often go for years without receiving adequate support. We welcome the Government's commitment to "Providing every carer with the opportunity to access comprehensive information when they need to" and to make this information "easily accessible for all groups of carers, and specific to their locality." (Paragraph 51)**

6. The Government is pleased the Committee welcomes its commitment to help carers access information easily both when, and where it is needed. The Information Service/ Helpline for carers is a mainstay of the Department of Health's strategy for informing and supporting carers. The Service will provide an up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive resource supporting carers across the many areas of importance to them – whether these are in respect of themselves or those they care for. The service will achieve this through a content rich website and a helpline available by telephone and email seven days a week, as well as by post. It will be available to all carers irrespective of their eligibility to statutory services.

7. Carers, and other customers, can also now obtain information and advice on a wide range of Department for Work and Pensions' benefits, pensions and credits via the recently-introduced online Benefits Adviser Service on the Directgov website.<sup>3</sup>

**3. The Department's information, advice and guidance services are not reaching significant numbers of carers. We recommend that the Department addresses problems of access to its Benefit Enquiry Line and explores ways to convey the information that carers need in a more accessible way. (Paragraph 57)**

8. The Government recognises that access to the Benefit Enquiry Line's (BEL) service has been below the acceptable level over recent months. The Department for Work and Pensions has been working to rectify this situation and new staff have recently joined BEL which should have a positive impact on people's ability to access the service. Additionally, steps are being taken to enable routine requests for claim forms to be handled by Disability Living Allowance/Attendance Allowance Helpline staff which will leave BEL staff more time to deal with the more complex enquiries. It is expected that these measures will restore BEL's service to previous levels.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/index.htm)

**4. Evidence suggests that Jobcentre Plus personal advisers' knowledge of carers' issues in general, and the complexities surrounding benefits for carers and care recipients in particular, is low. We welcome the Government's commitment to funding for the third sector and training for professionals in local authorities to support carers more effectively. We welcome the Government's commitments: to training for DWP frontline staff to improve information provision; to advice services for carers; and to placing a carer expert in every Jobcentre Plus district. (Paragraph 63)**

9. Jobcentre Plus learning programmes for customer facing staff focus on raising awareness of caring responsibilities within Foundation Learning and Adviser Skills events. The 'Adviser Skills' event is underpinned by a number of health and personal circumstance information stencils or guides known as SKIPPS (Specialist Knowledge, Interview Planning and Preparation Stencil).

10. The "Caring Responsibilities" information stencil provides staff with an awareness of barriers that many carers experience and the effects that they might have on an individual's ability to find and retain employment. This provides the adviser with better insight into the possible types of support an individual might need in employment.

11. To broaden adviser knowledge of carers, Jobcentre Plus has created a Carers Portal on the Jobcentre Plus Intranet, engaging with key stakeholders (including The Princess Royal Trust for Carers) to quality assure the product. The portal provides information about the needs of carers as well as links to useful guidance and external sites. This draws together in a single point of reference all that the Department for Work and Pensions does to help carers. It has recently been enhanced with the carers 'Ten Must Knows', a reference tool for all staff working with carers.

**5. The merger of the Pension Service and the Disability and Carers Service has the potential to reduce some of the bureaucracy in the system. However, it is still too early to tell what impact it will have and we are particularly cautious about the impact the merger might have on those customers who do not overlap between the two services. We recommend that the Department commission an independent customer survey to assess the potential impact of the merger on carers. (Paragraph 68)**

12. The merger of the Pension Service and the Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) has already reduced some bureaucracy, for example having the Carer's Credit office situated alongside the Carers Allowance Unit is a step towards delivering a joined up service to carers.

13. The annual Disability and Carers Service Customer Satisfaction Survey included a large sample of carers (5,000) from all age groups. It is carried out by MORI, an independent contractor. The Department for Work and Pensions will be including a similar number of carers in this year's survey of Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Carer's Allowance customers which is being carried out now on behalf of PDCS. This will provide information about the current level of customer satisfaction and provide information about whether the merger or other changes made to the handling of carers claims has made an impact on the service.

14. The Pension Service Operating Model has recently been reviewed and a core consideration for this has been the future proofing of the model in order to enhance the customer experience to all of the PDCS customer base in the future.

15. From April 2009 the intention is to move to a quarterly satisfaction monitor across the entirety of PDCS so this would give the opportunity to monitor any changes in customer satisfaction on a more regular basis.

**6. To raise awareness of the appointeeship scheme, we recommend that automated telephone scripts used by Jobcentre Plus are reviewed and amended to ensure that there is a prompt to discuss appointeeship as an option. Jobcentre Plus literature on appointeeship should also be amended to state that, in cases of mental illness, it may be possible to apply for appointeeship without a face to face interview with the beneficiary. (Paragraph 72)**

16. It is quite common for customers, for a variety of reasons, to act through a third party on the 'phone, (e.g. Citizens Advice or a translator), even when they are able to manage their own affairs. Jobcentre Plus does not consider that the right approach would be to include information about appointeeship in an automated message as there might be a variety of situations where a customer might want help from a third party. However, it will continue to ensure its agents are aware that this help is available.

17. Internal guidance for Jobcentre Plus staff already sets out clearly the decision making process for appointees, including whether an interview with the customer is appropriate. Within external literature, the majority of detail about appointeeship is in claim forms and secondary forms. Jobcentre Plus will review the current text about the appointeeship scheme as part of the ongoing forms review schedule.

**7. We believe that health and social care professionals are an appropriate initial source of information regarding access to welfare benefits and other support. We recommend that DWP participates in the planned pilots looking at ways in which Primary Care Trusts can support carers to ascertain how it can work better with healthcare professionals, local authorities and third sector organisations which have regular contact with carers, often in the early stages of their caring role. The Government should develop a national strategy for giving carers advice on benefits in healthcare settings. (Paragraph 81)**

18. The Government recognises that carers need ready access to accurate information on the range of benefits and other help that is available to them and the people they care for. This information is currently available from a variety of outlets including Jobcentre Plus offices, Citizens Advice Bureaux, public libraries, carers' organisations and GP surgeries. As stated above carers and other customers can now get information and advice on a wide range of Department for Work and Pensions' benefits, pensions and credits via the online Benefits Adviser Service on the Directgov website.<sup>4</sup> Customers simply answer questions tailored to their circumstances and are then told which benefits, pensions or credits they may be entitled to. They are also given contact details to help them make a claim. Customers do not need prior knowledge of which agency to deal with, as the facility enables them to get through to the right agency on their first attempt.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/index.htm)















































