

Rushmoor Citizens Advice Bureaux

Social Policy Report on Jobcentre Plus Services

Based on experiences in Farnborough CAB during 2009

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this project is to investigate the current process of handling benefit claims at the Farnborough Jobcentre Plus centre located at Princeton House, 1-5 Victoria Road, Farnborough, Hampshire GU14 7NP.
- 1.2. The current Jobcentre process in place to deal with claims in relation to income support; social fund loans; Jobseeker's allowance; incapacity benefits and employment support allowance is detailed on the Jobcentre website (www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) and is shown in paragraph 2 of this document.
- 1.3. CAB have met over 21 clients during 2009 who have highlighted social policy issues in relation to Job Centre Plus ("JCP").
- 1.4. In numerous cases CAB have resolved clients' issues by offering food parcels and small charity payments to clients who have not had money from their benefits paid on the dates agreed by the JCP. The case studies detailed in paragraph 3 of this document specify such examples.

2. Job Centre/ Job Centre Plus Flowchart

Client makes claim for benefit over telephone (claim number: 0800 0 55 66 88):

- Income support
- Social Fund Loans (Crisis and Budgeting)
- Social Fund Grants
- Job Seekers Allowance
- Incapacity benefits
- Employment support allowance



Client goes to initial interview with JCP staff and awaits decision on claim



Notification of claim decision

Within 14 days from date of telephone claim	Not within 14 days from date of telephone claim
	JCP advise: If not receive decision contact local office and if not receive satisfactory response contact CS manager at office



When expect payment

Weekly (backdated to date of original claim)	Not weekly (backdated to date of original claim)
	JCP advise: If not receive decision contact local office and if not receive satisfactory response contact CS manager at office

3. Case Studies

3.1. JSA (Jobseekers Allowance)

3.1.1 Mr R

- Background: 47, British, unemployed and married with one disabled child who is under 14. Client visited CAB on 10 July 2009.
- Issues: Client had an appointment at the JCP. JCP stated:
 - there was a backlog of four weeks for processing JSA claims and,
 - JCP staff could not tell him how much he would get under any claim.
- *Social Policy concern: Re-training for JCP staff (the information on how much client will get (maximum figures) is detailed on JCP website) and possible staff shortages/cuts leading to backlog of work for JCP staff.*

3.1.2 Mr F

- Background: 56, unemployed, married with two children (one over 14 and one under 14 years of age) and not of British origin. Client visited CAB on 25th November 2009.
- Issues:
 - Client made JSA claim in October. Client has signed on for benefit four times and asked the JCP when he would receive any money.
 - JCP advised the client to make a claim for an emergency giro and gave the client the JCP phone number to phone and request this. Client has no money so came to CAB and asked for help.
 - When CAB queried delay JCP stated they have backlog as there are many new claims.
 - CAB inquired about an emergency giro. JCP stated they have been advised to refuse these requests because of extra work involved delaying claims in process.
 - CAB gave client a food parcel and advised the client to go to the 'Vine Drop-In centre' for further assistance.
- *Social Policy concern: Re-training for JCP staff (incorrectly gave advice on GIRO and pointed client to CAB when asked for money)*

3.1.3 Mr M

- Background: 34, British, unemployed and single. Client visited CAB on 23 November 2009.
- Issues:
 - Client telephoned CAB to ask for assistance with his claim for JSA which he made 8 weeks ago.
 - No money has yet been paid to the client during these 8 weeks.
- *Social Policy concern: Delays in receiving payment of benefit.*

3.2. ESA (Employment support allowance)

3.2.1 Mr D

- Background: 50, British, unemployed and divorced. Client visited the CAB on 27 May 2009.
- Issue: Client applied for ESA - Employment and support allowance. Client says he was not paid for 13 days. ESA is a daily allowance.
- *Social Policy concern: Delays in receiving payment of benefit.*

3.3 JCP administrative errors

3.3.1 Miss W

- Background: 27, British, unemployed and single mother with children. Client visited the CAB on 8 April 2009.
- Issues:
 - Client visited CAB to use phone to make crisis loan.
 - Client stated she went to the JCP to use their phone to call the JCP advice line but was warned that she may not get through. She tried and dialled the number but was immediately cut off.
 - Client was directed to come to CAB to use telephone and was on the CAB telephone for 45 minutes awaiting a reply.
- *Social Policy concern: Systemic errors in getting through to JCP via Customer Management System.*

3.4 Income Support

3.4.1 Mr O

- Background: 53, single and ex-Army British citizen. Came to us on 18 February 2009.
- Issues:
 - Went to JCP to inquire into non-payment of Income Support claim and stated to JCP staff that he has no landline and only a mobile and has no money to call JCP advice line to check on claim.
 - JCP allegedly replied “that’s not my problem” and sent the client to CAB.
 - The client is on income support, incapacity benefit and DLA (disability living allowance).
 - Client has not received any money for two weeks from 18 February 2009 leaving him with no money. CAB sent the client to ‘The Vine’ for food.
- *Social Policy concern: delays in receiving payment of benefit.*

4. **Conclusion**

4.1 The above case studies highlight the following deficiencies in the current process of handling benefit claims at JCP:

- Not following JCP website guidance (as detailed in paragraph 2) by referring clients to CAB/ JCP free phone number to deal with complaints on JCP/ not receiving benefits. The correct process is to allow citizens to enter JCP to discuss query with manager.
- Denying clients access to JCP free phones (located in reception area on ground floor) and referring the clients to CAB to use CAB telephones.
- Delaying clients’ claims to benefit and,
- Giving clients incorrect/ unhelpful guidance in situations where the client has no money or accommodation due to not receiving benefit claims.

The above deficiencies indicate a lack of resources and training at the JCP.

4.2 Furthermore, as previously stated in the introduction to this project, these deficiencies have led to CAB staff handing clients food parcels and emergency charity payments from local charities. Local charities distribute food parcels to citizens in the local area who cannot afford food and the JCP deficiencies have led to the using up of these charities’ valuable resources.

5. **References**

- 5.1 Job Centre Plus website www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk
- 5.2 The Vine (charity) <http://www.rushmoor.gov.uk/index.cfm?Articleid=9358>
- 5.3 The Larder (charity)