

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team

e-mail: freedom-of-information-request@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Our Ref: FOI2019/07793

20 March 2019

Dear Vanessa Bowen,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (Fol) request received on 21 February. You asked:

For a disabled and vulnerable claimant. Stop notice is sent to HMRC when a Universal Credit claim is made. Tax Credit or Child tax Credit award is terminated. Claimant attends a benefits advisor who contacts DWP and requests "the Escalation Route" is followed as claimant/family is in financial hardship. What action should DWP take ?

Please provide the full "safeguarding policy" applied by DWP before any "stop notice" is issued to HMRC for disabled and vulnerable tax credit claimants.

What measures are DWP taking to identify disabled and Vulnerable persons before the "stop notice " is sent activating the termination of any legacy benefit ?

What measures are DWP taking to identify claimants with mental health issues or cognitive impairment before sending "stop notices" to terminate legacy benefits ?

DWP Response:

It may be helpful if I explain the role of the Freedom of Information Act. The Act provides a right of access to recorded information held by a public authority like DWP (subject to certain exemptions). The Act does not provide that a public authority must create new information to answer questions; nor does it provide that a public authority give advice, opinion or explanation in relation to issues/policies under question.

In cases where a customer does ask a question, rather than request recorded information, we do our utmost to provide the recorded information that best answers the question. Once the public authority has provided the recorded information, it has met its obligations under the Act; interpretation of the information provided is left to the requestor.

The information we hold that best explains / answers your questions in the order you asked them is as follows:

The stop notice is automatically sent to HMRC once the claimant has declared and submitted their claim for Universal Credit (UC), had their identity verified and their National Insurance number has been traced successfully.

There is no 'safe-guarding' instruction as the claimant is no longer entitled to legacy benefits, as they have made a claim for UC. The claimant is able to apply for an advance for 100% of

their UC award to meet their financial needs until the first payment of UC is received. This can be done as soon as the claimant has submitted their UC claim and had their identity verified.

For those people who might have difficulty in making a claim, the Department is continuously reviewing and improving the service for vulnerable people to ensure that it is accessible and responsive to their needs. This includes how they are identified and supported, either from our own staff or via referrals from local services. If claimants can't make or manage their claim on-line, a Freephone telephone helpline and face to face support is available with staff also able to refer to specialist provision.

Under our Universal Support (US) service claimants can receive assistance from Jobcentre Plus or local partners with budgeting and digital skills to enable them to access online services.

Every customer is offered Personal Budgeting support at the beginning of their claim which is made of two elements:

- Money Advice - to help claimants cope with managing their money on a monthly basis and paying their bills on time. It is offered online, by phone, or face to face and is delivered by external organisations with the relevant expertise to do this.
- Alternative Payment Arrangements for those claimants who can't manage the single monthly payment and there is a risk of financial harm to the claimant and/or their family.

Those claimants receiving Housing Benefit (HB) can qualify for a two-week run-on of HB, further protecting claimants in the first assessment period.

If a claimant discloses that they have a health condition or are vulnerable, we will consider what additional support they need.

Section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act allows us to direct you to information which is already reasonably accessible to you.

Universal Credit guidance is published in the House of Commons library and can be accessed through the link below: Deposit ref. DEP2018-0759, in the Deposit ref. column click "Show all files". In relation to safeguarding vulnerable customers, see: Deposit papers: '*Universal Support overview – V1.0*', '*Complex Needs Overview – v8.0*', '*Assisted Digital overview –V5.0*' and '*Home visit – v3.0*':

https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/business-papers/commons/deposited-papers/?search_term=Department+for+Work+and+Pensions&itemId=119004#toggle-759

For information, Universal Credit guidance is periodically added to the House of Commons library.

In addition, the attached annex contains information about safeguarding.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact us quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central FoI Team

Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing freedom-of-information-request@dwpgsi.gov.uk or by writing to DWP, Central FoI Team, Caxton House, Tothill Street, SW1H 9NA. Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF https://ico.org.uk/Global/contact_us or telephone 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745