Handling Complaints & Correspondence – DWP CRM Guide

Establish issues to be resolved

1. An initial contact call must be made, to clarify the issues raised by the customer. It may be possible to resolve the complaint during this initial call.

2. If the complaint cannot be resolved during the call, agree a Resolution Plan with the customer by:
   - Agreeing the actions, you will take to resolve the complaint
   - the length of time your investigations will take
   - the date / time of your next contact, and
   - realistically managing customer expectations

Additionally, it is an opportunity to agree a resolution plan from the outset of the investigation.

Note: DWP has a commitment to respond to the complaint (to fully resolve or agree a resolution plan) within 15 working days.

However, there will be cases that will need more time. Agreeing a resolution plan with the customer prior to the 15 working days, allows you manage the customers' expectations.

3. Managing customer expectations will prevent unnecessary contact. As complaints may take some time, staff must include update calls to keep the customer informed. This helps build a relationship which can help when explaining the outcome after your investigation is complete.

4. All attempted contact must be noted on eCase as there will be instances when it has not been possible to contact the customer by telephone.

5. For complaints about staff, acknowledge the complaint by letter and inform the customer that an investigation will take place.

6. In some cases, for example vulnerable customers, a phone call may not be the most appropriate method. Staff must look into this before making contact to make sure the customer's needs are met. See: Customer Accessibility.

7. For Unreasonable Persistent Customer Contact (UPCC) restrict your contact to written communication only. The Complaints Resolution Managers are not a single point of contact for anything other than the issues raised in the complaint for the duration of the investigation.

Note: Where possible, establish a phone-based relationship with the customer because it prevents unnecessary contact elsewhere in DWP and the potential for complaint double-handling. Judge on a case by case basis to determine if it is appropriate to offer your direct contact details.

Investigate Issues
1. After the first call when you have established what needs to be looked at, begin to investigate using the systems and colleagues in Service Delivery to establish the facts.

2. The investigation will usually consist of two elements:
   - system access of the relevant customer records, and
   - responses to questions you ask colleagues, which will be informed by the evidence you uncover from the systems and the customer.

3. It is important to obtain assurance for the information given and accept any information that has not been validated.

4. Once all of the facts and evidence are in your possession, your investigation must follow a logical path by establishing:
   - what happened
   - what should have happened
   - where we have made mistakes
   - the root cause of those mistakes

5. As a complaints manager handling complaints about staff, your role is to obtain assurance that the Guidance on staff complaints has been followed. Do not investigate the member of staff. That investigation must be undertaken from within the line management chain or most appropriate office manager.

6. The process that must be followed for staff complaints may take longer than 15 working days to complete. If it is clear it will take longer than that, agree a Resolution Plan with the complainant to meet the response target and manage the customer’s expectations.

7. On concluding your investigation there are three possible outcomes:
   - **Upheld** – We agree that the service provided in each of the issues the customer raised was below the standard expected and redress is appropriate such as an apology.
   - **Not Upheld** – It is decided that upon investigation we did not provide a service below the standards we expect.
   - **Partially Upheld** - In cases where the customer raises more than one issue, the case manager agrees that a poor service was provided in some, but not all, of the issues the customer raised and applies redress to the issues upheld.
   - **Justified** – Tier 1 complaints received / closed prior to 9 July 2020 will continue to follow the two tier process. Justified to be used in complaints where we agree the customer was right to complain, but the action we have already taken at Tier 1 to resolve is sufficient.

8. Where the complaint is either **Upheld** or **Partially Upheld**, determine the level of redress. This will usually be a formal apology for the level of service and/or errors that happened and assurance that remedial action has been taken and it will not happen again.
9. As part of the redress question, consider whether the errors are sufficient enough for a Special Payment. At this level, your Delegated Financial Authority (DFA) is £250 for Actual Financial Loss and £200 Consolatory. See Special Payment guidance for how to make an award. Payments for consideration above these levels need to be sent to the Special Payment Team.

10. If there is insufficient evidence for a Special Payment give the customer the opportunity to provide additional supporting evidence before making a decision. This gives the customer and DWP every opportunity to resolve the complaint at the first attempt and reduce the risk of an escalated complaint because the customer felt the redress was inadequate or not addressed.

11. For Upheld or Partially Upheld cases which have been awarded a Special Payment, call the customer to explain how much has been awarded and how and when that will be paid.

Case Conference

1. For cases where the customer remains dissatisfied and it may be possible to resolve, consider a case conference with colleagues, manager or both, to determine whether you can take the additional steps to resolve the complaint.

2. Manage customer expectations to reduce the risk of a follow-up case, avoidable contact and escalation. Allow sufficient time for us to take the action we need to.

Providing Feedback

1. When giving feedback to a team or site that involves a recommendation to take remedial action, discuss a reasonable amount of time to take the action and inform when completed. The deadline for response will depend on how complex the issue is.

2. Consider whether the issue raised is a one-off or a possible trend. If you consider this to be a trend inform your manager.

Important note: Systemic issues can be local to a team or site, or be a risk nationally. This won’t be known unless the evidence is captured.

Case Closure

1. Take the appropriate action to close the case, including feedback where relevant. Provide the customer with the outcome of the investigation and their escalation rights and signpost to Independent Case Examiner (ICE).

2. If the case has been logged at the start under a category and following investigation this changes, change it before closing the case and update any interested parties.

3. When drafting a formal reply, adhere to DWP standards. Use the pre-designed templates, standard paragraphs and lines to take available from eCase, to help build your reply.

Note: If using standard paragraphs, ensure you personalise the response for the customer.