

LOCAL EXPERIENCE OF PERSONAL INDEPENDENCE PAYMENT CLAIMS

A report prepared for Stoke-on-Trent City Council's Wider Welfare Reform Group based on a survey of members of North Staffs Advice Partnership (NSAP)

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Introduction

The survey of NSAP organisation / members was sent out on 6th December 2016. This interim report was compiled using the responses received by 13th December 2016.

We had received 32 responses; some of these were from organisations not working in Stoke-on-Trent (eg Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council), others work only in Stoke-on-Trent, and many worked across North Staffordshire. A list of the organisations / members is attached at the end of the report.

In some instances the respondents were responding for their whole organisation, in some they were responding from their individual experience. From some organisations we received multiple responses

1. Summary

- Local agencies working with disabled people have experienced a very significant increase in demand for assistance with PIP claims early Autumn 2016.
- The biggest increase is in DLA to PIP applications but new claims and renewal claims are also still requiring help.
- There is a significant demand for help with Mandatory Reconsiderations and appeals.
- A lot of people with mental health issues seem to be experiencing refusals of PIP

Overall claimants are experiencing a lot of stress and anxiety. Agencies are experiencing massive increases in demand (up by over 150%)



2. Findings

Question 1: Has your organisation experienced a recent demand for help with PIP applications?

- 94% responded yes
- 3% responded no
- 3% responded don't know

It is reasonable to presume that the vast majority of organisations involved in NSAP have experienced an increase in demand for help with PIP applications.

Question 2: The survey asked people to try and quantify this increase. It is difficult to conclude anything numerical from the responses, as explained above some responses were from individuals who may have dealt with 3 people, as opposed to Disability Solutions, for example, who dealt with hundreds. **However, there is a clear agreement that the increase, is significant the lowest estimate being around a 10% increase, with Disability Solutions increase being 151% and SNSCAB increase being 172%**

Question 3: When did the increase begin?

It would appear that most organisations began to experience an increase in demand in the Spring of 2016, and then a much bigger increase (mostly DLA transitions) from August/September 2016 and continuing through to the present day.

Question 4: The survey attempted to identify what type of assistance people were requiring. Again, because of the mix of organisations and individuals who responded, and the different functions organisations undertake (eg some help with appeals and some don't) the response is very mixed and the numbers are not necessarily helpful. Below is a summary of the broad picture given by respondents to the questionnaires:

4.1 New PIP applications

Some organisations had experienced a high proportion of new PIP applications, as high as 70-90% of all the PIP work they have done. However, overall, new PIP applications seems to be of a lower order than transitions from DLA to PIP. This is affected by the kind of clients that organisations are working with. Those who are working with people who are newly disabled, or only newly aware of entitlements to the benefit (eg Voices of Stoke-on-Trent) are likely to have a higher proportion of new PIP applicants. Organisations who have been working with people with disabilities over a long period of time, are more likely to pick up DLA transitions and PIP renewals.

4.2 Transitions from DLA to PIP

Overall, the responses clearly indicate that this is where the very high proportion of claimants' requirement for assistance lies. 25% of respondents stated that 100% of the work they have been undertaking is transitions, whereas others put the figure at between 66 and 80% and most at 50% or more

4.3 PIP Renewals

Most organisations put these numbers fairly low – 40% or less, one respondent reported that all their work had been with renewals (10 cases). Generally the figures were below 33%.

4.4 Mandatory Reconsiderations and Appeals

Over half the organisations have been asked for assistance with Mandatory Reconsiderations / appeals but the numbers of these were lower than people needing assistance with applicants – except in the case of one respondent (70% of their work had been MRs/appeals). However, in most cases the number was 33% or less.

5. COMMENTARY:

At Appendix 2 is a complete list of the comments which respondents put on the questionnaires. Only one respondent believed the new system was better than the old one. Others stated a range of concerns. In summary these seem to cover the following areas:

5.1 lack of capacity of the organisations

- To meet general level of demand
- To help with appeals
- To undertake home visits that may be needed
- To be able to assist people in time
- Concern that DWP visiting service is not responding when asked.

5.2 Very high rate of refusals

- This is particularly raised around people with mental health issues

5.3 Mental Health issues

- Organisations experiencing a lot of refusals.
- Most clients are having to go to Mandatory Reconsiderations / appeals

5.4 Stress and anxiety for claimants

- Completing forms
- Attending medicals
- Attending tribunals

5.5 Other

- Concern that very vulnerable, marginalised claimants cannot access the help that is available
- Concern about cancellation of medicals



Appendix 1

Respondents: voluntary sector

- Staffordshire North & Stoke-on-Trent Citizens Advice Bureau
- Cheadle Citizens Advice
- North Staffs Carers Association
- SHINE
- Staffordshire Buddies (2)
- Carers Hub
- Ciswo (2)
- Age UK, North Staffs (2)
- Saltbox
- North Staffs Users Group
- Gingerbread Centre
- ASIST Advocacy
- VOICES of Stoke-on-Trent
- North Staffs Voice of Mental Health
- Brighter Futures
- Disability Solutions West Midlands
- ASIST (Advocacy Services Staffordshire)

RSLs

- Aspire Housing
- Staffordshire Housing Association (2)

Statutory Organisations

- Stoke-on-Trent City Council (2)
- Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council (2)
- Staffordshire County Council



Appendix 2

COMMENTARY: full comments from organisations in NSDAP responding to survey

- We are a small rural bureau and do not have any benefit case workers. We have asked for help from the DWP Home Visiting Service in November but have yet to receive a response as to whether we will be able to refer housebound vulnerable people to the service as we do not have resources for home visiting.
- I am spending more time completing mandatory reconsiderations/ appeals than before.
- I am concerned that many of our clients are often unsupported in interviews/assessments and above all for example several of our clients in East Staffordshire are having to travel over 45 miles for appointments in Birmingham when Derby was only a few miles away. These are often clients who are the most vulnerable and with less options for transport.
- We have had a number of people requesting help with forms or experiencing anxiety surrounding appeals.
- PIP renewals (new AR1 form) is main difference. Quicker to complete than a PIP2 but difficult to advise on likely outcome as no guidance re how they make decisions on whether a medical assessment is required (eg if a client's condition is more or less the same/slightly worse, which answer is more likely to result in a new medical assessment - and the risks associated with this).
- High turn down on the transfer... being removed off mobility.
- Seems to be an increase in mandatory reconsiderations from end of November 2016 due to PIP turned down.
- We are a mental health group and a number of our members are on PIP and have recently had their renewal form. At least 50% of them have had their PIP reduced and on applying for a reconsideration have had their PIP reduced further. One member lost his mobility car because of this. He has also lost the appeal and found the experience at the tribunal horrendous which hasn't helped his mental health
- I think the system is actually a lot better. Some people who were receiving the old payments didn't really qualify for PIP payments from our experience, some of the young people were getting payments because of behaviour and the support they received for this behaviour where as being supported semi independently now I feel the money is better spent in supported accommodation.
- I work with vulnerable service users, these people need more support and there is no help out there or places to sign post onto. Some mental health service users are unable to access cab due to poor health and others cannot get to cab due to mobility.



- It seems to go in peaks and troughs. We will have some months where we hardly have any and others when we have too many to handle. Its as if the DWP are targeting areas to do DLA to PIP transfers.
- Home visits are requested and ignored medicals are very inaccurate but only a small percentage end up at appeal stage.
- It feels like most people on PIPs are being brought in for medicals then having them cancelled. New applicants are also getting turned down.
- We have a very small client base all of whom experience complex needs. These needs stem primarily significantly poor mental health which has led in many cases to years of homelessness, offending, alcohol and substance misuse, and serious physical conditions. Since the specialist benefits adviser from CAB has been working in partnership with us, most customers have been assisted in making new claims for PIP. CAB worker represents the customer in all mandatory reconsideration requests and appeals.
- Demand is higher than manageable. Will only extend 2 weeks which does not give time. Is taking 2 weeks from posting to receipt giving 2 weeks to complete.
- From the people we deal with - who have mental health problems, very few are being awarded PIP, most have to go to reconsideration/ appeal. Many are then successful.
- The impacts are exceptionally concerning - for individuals, families, the community and the local economy. People with disabilities and LTC's are losing essential income daily and are unable to meet their everyday needs and additional needs.
- Expecting some more every day.
- I cannot understand why people with a diagnosis of dementia or Parkinson's disease have to complete these forms. Their diseases are not going to improve in any way shape or form, in fact their health will deteriorate. It just seems cruel to expect them to complete these forms and also to have a face to face assessment as well.
- It appears that the learning disability team has seen a sharp increase in number of transitions. 4 have been completed with 3 of those having to go to appeal stage. All 3 won their appeal. Now completing forms and awaiting decisions regarding the rest.
- We have been referring excess clients to Pension Service home visiting team, I was making 2 to 3 referrals a week, I have been making up to 24 a month.
- It takes a lot of extra hours to sort out and a lot of stress to customers resulting in poor mental health.

- Recently we have had a significant increase in the number of people asking us to support them to complete PIP applications and in particular to attend appeals/tribunals. We feel that there is a strong case for advocacy in these situations as many of the people we work with, or who phone for support, will have difficulties getting their views heard in meetings and will struggle to speak up due to their health needs or anxieties. Some of the people also struggle to understand information that is given to them and an Advocate can support the person to help them to understand what is being asked of them so that they are able to give the correct response, sometimes preventing the case from going to an appeal. We have occasionally supported people at assessments if we are already working with the person but generally we are unable to take referrals as we are not currently funded for this work
- I am hoping to be able to attend some training days with the CAB regarding benefits
- It has been a very busy and difficult time for many impaired people

