

Department for Work and Pensions Support for Carers : Working in Partnership

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The National Audit Office (NAO) commissioned Inclusion to assist them with their value for money review of the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) support for carers. One aspect of the review is to investigate whether the DWP is working effectively with other government departments, public bodies and local authorities to provide joined-up support to carers, and also to assess whether DWP is working effectively with the voluntary and community sector to support carers. This is the focus of this report.

1.2 The structure of the report is as follows:

- Background and methodology (Section 2);
- Working in partnership (Section 3);
- The effectiveness of the DWP-led partnerships (Section 4);
- Progress and outcomes of these partnerships (Section 5); and
- An assessment of the effectiveness of DWPs partnership working based on this evidence (Section 6).

2 BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Fifteen qualitative interviews

- 2.1 Fifteen interviews with stakeholders were undertaken. Eleven by telephone and four face-to-face. The interviews were with a range of representatives from organisations, including national government departments, and voluntary and community sector organisations. The names of the organisations interviewed and the DWP partnerships they were part of are listed in the Annex.
- 2.2 All but one of the government departments interviewed for this study had been involved in developing the recent Carers' Strategy¹. This government department (the Department for Communities and Local Government) had worked with the DWP on the development of the Independent Living Review. Other interviewees, all from the voluntary and community sector bar one (the Local Government Association), were part of other partnerships and forums, such as the Disability and Carers Service Advisory Forum (DCS), or the DWP Strategic Forum.

Document review

- 2.3 Interviewees were asked to supply documentation from the partnerships they were involved with to evidence partnership working. These included, for example, terms of reference for the partnerships, meeting agendas, and meeting minutes. These were then reviewed to provide evidence of the effectiveness of DWP partnership working.
- 2.4 A full list of the documents reviewed for this report is in the Annex.

¹ HM Government (2008) *Carers at the Heart of 21st Century Families and Communities*

3 WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

- 3.1 This section outlines evidence to support good attendance at DWP partnership meetings that generally met with a clear sense of purpose. First though it looks at why DWP needs to liaise with other Government departments and work in partnership to support carers.

Why work in partnership to support Carers?

- 3.2 The policy of a number of government departments affects carers and could contribute to the DWPs remit, aims and objectives. The DWPs objectives include helping more people into work and supporting people who can't work, and ending child poverty by 2020.
- 3.3 DWPs work to support carers will be affected, for example, by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) policy on funding for skills and the work and learning information, advice and guidance services they provide, as well as, for example, the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) policy on flexible working. Hence there is a need for DWP to work with other government departments to achieve their departmental aims and support carers.
- 3.4 In addition, a range of voluntary and community sector organisations work with and support carers and it is also essential for DWP to effectively engage these organisations in order to best support carers and to work towards their departmental aims.
- 3.5 The DWPs executive agencies include the Pension, Disability and Carers Service which provides financial support for carers through the administration of benefits, such as Carers Allowance and Attendance Allowance, and Jobcentre Plus which is a government agency to support people from welfare into work.
- 3.6 The Business Plan (2008/9) of the Pension, Disability and Carers Service notes that one of the main aims of the department is to provide a better, more joined-up and efficient service for their customers. The DCS Advisory Forum has a key role in this regard as will be discussed later.
- 3.7 While the focus of this report is the effectiveness of DWPs partnership working, the development of the recent Carers' Strategy in which many of the interviewees had been involved was led by the Department for Health (DH). Indeed, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) commented that in the taskforce they were involved in for the strategy *"the multi-lateral links were stronger than the bi-lateral links"*. This quote highlights that on many occasions

the effectiveness and value of partnerships is brought about via the work and involvement of more than just one partner.

Setting up joint-working

It is necessary to have a common purpose to get voluntary and community sector partners involved

- 3.8 Jobcentre Plus (JCP) reported trying to formalise working relationships with a carers organisation unsuccessfully. JCP asked Carers UK to be part of a forum that represents JCPs customer groups, however they declined. JCP felt that this was because *"they [Carers UK] didn't identify Jobcentre Plus as particularly representing their customer base"*. This illustrates that in setting up a partnership joint-working needs to be of value to both parties.
- 3.9 Where partnerships had successfully been set-up, particularly for ongoing partnerships, respondents discussed the shared purpose and vision and desire to work together. For example, Contact a Family reported that they wanted to become involved in the DCS Advisory Forum because they *"thought it was really important to be in and sort of influencing the kind of service delivery they [families with disabled children] get via those agencies"*.
- 3.10 Nationally JCP do not specify the partners that local and regional levels of the organisation should be working with on the carer's agenda. At a local level JCP reported that there were some partnerships involving JCP, where a need had been identified. For example, in Yorkshire and Humberside, the North Doncaster Development Trust included an organisation called Carefree Carers, and was part of the local partnership board which also involved Jobcentre Plus. However, it was reported by JCP that it was common for local partnerships to be on a *"keep in touch"* basis rather than formalised.

Informal working between government departments prior to Carers' Strategy

- 3.11 All interviewees noted that either they or their organisations had worked with DWP on an ad-hoc basis prior to their involvement in a formalised partnership.
- 3.12 Outside of formal meetings all interviewees said they had informal contacts with DWP. These were via telephone and email to resolve specific queries and took place on an ad-hoc basis.
- 3.13 For example, the DCSF reported that outside of the taskforce meetings they had discussed Carers Allowance with colleagues from the DWP, and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) reported that they worked with the DWP on Disability Living Allowance.

3.14 Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) reported that they worked with the DWP on Employment policy and spending and agreed these budgets prior to the Carers' Strategy. They also worked together on requests for funding or changes to policy. However, HMT said this informal relationship was more active after the Carers' Strategy partnership.

3.15 These informal contacts happened before partners became involved in the Carers' Strategy, and they had continued since the partnership had ended.

Ongoing and time-limited partnerships created, depending on purpose

3.16 Five interviewees (four organisations from the voluntary and community sector, and one from local government) had been invited to join forums operating indefinitely, such as the Disability and Carers Forum, and the DWP Strategic Forum.

3.17 Eight organisations were approached to work in partnership with DWP for a specific purpose, and therefore their involvement with DWP support for carers was time limited. This included the government departments participating in taskforces for the development of the Carers' Strategy, and one Government department who had been involved in the development of the Independent Living Review (details of which are in the annex).

3.18 All government departments were keen to be involved in the Carers' Strategy to ensure that their department's policies and priorities were adequately reflected and included.

3.19 Notably the ongoing partnerships discussed in this document do not include government departments.

Implementing partnership working

DWPs role in the Carers' Strategy process

3.20 The DWP had a central role in the Carers' Strategy process. The DWP initiated contact with partners for the Income and Employment Taskforces of the Carers' Strategy.

3.21 The DH said that DWP was instrumental in bringing representation from other government departments for the Employment and Income Taskforces of the Carers' strategy. They said that DWP "*brought in two government departments that had not previously been in touch with carers and carer's issues*".

3.22 The DWP chaired the Employment and Income taskforces with an external appointment (this was a representative from BT on the Employment Taskforce) and also provided the taskforce's secretariat. Each taskforce made representations to the inter-departmental group that also had representation from the DWP.

All partnerships meet regularly and are well-attended

3.23 All interviewees had started working with the DWP on the carers agenda in the last three years.

3.24 Partnerships and taskforces were reported to meet regularly (typically between every month and every three months) depending on their purpose and workload (see Table 3.1). Time-limited partnerships were likely to meet more regularly than partnerships that were ongoing.

Table 3-1 : Frequency of partnership meetings

Lead org.	Partnership	Ongoing/ time-limited	Freq of meetings
DCS	DCS Advisory Forum	Ongoing	Quarterly
DCS	DSC Advisory Forum, Family Carers Group	Ongoing	Quarterly
DWP	Employment taskforce	Time-limited	Monthly
DWP	Income taskforce	Time-limited	Monthly
DWP	Health and Social Care Taskforce	Time-limited	Monthly
DWP	Independent Living Review	Time-limited	Monthly (and more freq. as required)
DWP	DWP Strategic forum	Ongoing	No information
JCP	JCP customer representatives forum	Ongoing	No information

3.25 The meeting minutes reviewed for this report show that the size of partnerships ranged from fifteen to twenty-five partners. The February meeting minutes of the Employment taskforce show there were 25 members. The January meeting minutes of the DCS forum show there were 15 organisations invited.

3.26 Interviewees reported that formal meetings were generally well-attended. The meeting minutes show that attendance at meetings varied between half and four-fifths of partners, and that those partners that were absent varied from one meeting to the next.

All forums and partnerships have a sense of purpose

3.27 All interviewees said there was a clear sense of purpose to joint-working with DWP. For members of the DWP taskforces the purpose was to contribute to the development of recommendations for the Carers' Strategy. For partners involved

in on-going partnerships, particularly voluntary and community organisations, the purpose was to influence operations such as how individuals apply for benefits.

- 3.28 The minutes from the first Employment Taskforce meeting state that: *“The purpose of these groups is to review what has been achieved and develop proposals that can be taken forward in the short, medium and long term.”*
- 3.29 The DCS Advisory Forum had terms of reference and also a business plan that they shared with member agencies as well as action plans for specific issues. These documents outlined the purpose of the forum.
- 3.30 The terms of reference for the DCS Family Carers Group stated that all members should: *“actively and honestly represent their organisation and their customers, contribute topics for agendas, attend meetings and provide input to items under discussion, respond to items issued for review/ discussion outside the meetings within stated timescales”*.
- 3.31 Two partners that were interviewed also mentioned that they had a more specific role. The Treasury reported that part of their role on the Employment Taskforce was to *“apply a reality check”* in terms of what was, and what would not be affordable, and to get the proposals put forward by the group costed. HMRC reported that their role was to look at how the options discussed at the Income Taskforce might interact with the tax credit system.
- 3.32 Jobcentre Plus reported that they used the customer representative forum as one way to communication information to the voluntary and community sector. For example, office opening hours over Christmas and alternative arrangements when the offices were closed.

Ongoing informal contact (after Carers’ Strategy)

- 3.33 Contacts between DWP and voluntary and community sector organisations also took place between meetings, for example with regards to solving individual member’s benefits issues (see 5.12 for more detail). In addition, Contact a Family reported that the DCS circulated leaflets and sought comments from partners on its content outside of partnership meetings. This was supported by the National Children’s Bureau who also reported being asked for comments on benefits documentation outside of partnership meetings.
- 3.34 Partners on the Carers’ Strategy communicated on an ad-hoc basis outside of the monthly partnership meetings, as they had done prior to the Taskforces being brought together. Once the Carers’ Strategy had been developed relationships returned to ad-hoc discussions and partners intended to continue liaising in this way.

3.35 It should be considered whether returning to informal communications is a lost opportunity to continue work more formally on a shared agenda. However, as discussed earlier, partnerships need to have a clear sense of purpose for partners to be willing to contribute their time.

4 EFFECTIVENESS OF PARTNERSHIPS

- 4.1 Overall respondents felt that a range of relevant organisations were involved in DWP partnerships and that a range of issues were discussed at meetings. Some general issues applying to the effectiveness of all partnerships are outlined first in this section, followed by evidence on the effectiveness of DWP working with the voluntary and community sector, and then evidence on their partnership working with government departments.

A range of organisations are represented

- 4.2 Overall all respondents felt that there was a good balance of organisations represented on all the partnerships they were involved with. If they suggested any further additions it was generally as an after thought rather than because they felt a key partner was missing.
- 4.3 The published list of Employment Taskforce members included voluntary and community sector organisations, and government departments, including DWP, DIUS, Trade Union Congress, Confederation of British Industry and voluntary groups such as the Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads.
- 4.4 Nevertheless, HMT reported that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) should have also been represented on the Employment Taskforce. They reported that the taskforce was discussing possible requirements on Local Authorities and input from the DCLG on this issue would have been useful. HMT stated that there was a belated attempt to engage DCLG however it is not clear from the evidence collected for this study whether this approach resulted in their participation. None of the monthly Employment Taskforce meeting minutes from September 2007 through to February 2008 (inclusive) show that a representative from the DCLG was present.
- 4.5 Crossroads reported that they suggested a Professor from the University of Leeds was included in the Employment Taskforce for the Carers' Strategy. Meeting minutes of later sessions of the partnership show that a representative from the University of Leeds had joined the taskforce.
- 4.6 The Local Government Association (LGA) said that it was discussed in the DCS Advisory Forum that there was a lack of time for discussion of children's issues. This led to the creation of a separate forum, the DCS Family Carers Group. Contact a Family reported that there had been discussion of finding an organisation to represent Black and Minority Ethnic Groups on the DCS Advisory Forum. However, the forum had had difficulty finding a suitable organisation to

represent the interests of this diverse group, and this addition was left unresolved at the time of the interview.

Partners can shape the debate

- 4.7 All partners reported that they felt able to voice their opinions during partnership meetings and shape the debate. They could do this, for example, by contributing items to agendas. Members of the DCS were invited to do this in their terms of reference which note a key role for partners as contributing topics for meeting agendas.
- 4.8 During the interviews government departments were less vocal than voluntary and community sector organisations about being able to shape the agenda of the partnership in practice. The extent to which partners are able to shape the content of discussions may depend on the nature of the partnership, and perhaps within time-limited partnerships formed for a specific task, there is less scope to debate the purpose and remit of the partnership and to shape the debate.

Effectiveness helped by sub-committees

- 4.9 The DCS Forum had developed a series of sub-committees to focus more attention on specific issues as and when a need was identified. For example, one group had been created to look at children's issues (the DCS Family Carers' Group). These sub-groups drew in specialists in the area and were reported by the members of the DCS Forum to add value and increase the effectiveness of the partnership.
- 4.10 HMRC also reported that the effectiveness of the Income taskforce of the Carers' Strategy, which set strategic objectives, was increased by a series of sub-groups which discussed the finer details of policy and then reported back to the Taskforce. HMRC noted that the size of the sub-groups, around 10 organisations, was particularly important to their effective working.

Effectiveness of DWP partnerships with the voluntary and community sector

- 4.11 This section details the findings relating to the effectiveness of partnership working specifically with the voluntary and community sector.

Effectiveness limited by the time for consultation

- 4.12 Two voluntary and community sector organisations that represented the views and experiences of a client group, both who were part of the DCS Advisory Forum, spontaneously mentioned that the timescales DWP required for

comments and feedback on proposals were not always sufficient to allow them to adequately consult their membership bases.

- 4.13 The meeting minutes of the DCS Forum in January 2007 note discussion around the production of a forward programme of work to give advanced notice of the initiatives that the DCS would like to consult on, but it is not clear from the evidence we have whether or not this was actioned.

Other partners could be sent meeting minutes

- 4.14 A member of the DCS Forum suggested that non-partners could be sent minutes to alert them to the work of the partnership. For example on the DCS Advisory Forum there was only one organisation per interest area. In the case of older people this was Age Concern, for example, but Help the Aged for example were not kept up-to-date about the forum's work. The interviewee felt this would increase the reach of DWP into the voluntary and community sector.

Consultation should lead to change

- 4.15 In most instances interviewees from the voluntary and community sector who were part of on-going partnerships gave several examples where they felt they had influenced outcomes and progress. These are outlined in Section 5.9-5.14 in detail and include staff training on working with families, inputting to the design of benefits forms and resolving specific benefit queries.
- 4.16 However, the interviewee representing the LGA was part of the DWP strategic forum, and also the DCS Forum. They described the DWP strategic forum as a "*presentational forum*" that was used by DWP to inform agencies about changes in policies and strategic issues. It was reported that there was less opportunity to feedback at this forum and when feedback was given there was a lack of evidence of how this was taken into consideration. This was of concern to the respondent because in publicity DWP had previously said that policy had been developed in partnership with certain agencies, even though the agencies concerned had raised concerns that were not taken into account. No other interviewees were part of the DWP Strategic Forum, so it is not possible to corroborate this view.

Effectiveness of DWP partnerships with government departments

- 4.17 This section details the findings regarding the effectiveness of partnership working that relate most specifically to government departments, public bodies and local authorities.

Challenging discussion and debate

- 4.18 Discussions within the partnerships involving government departments were reported to be challenging and members of the Employment Taskforce in particular struggled to gain consensus.
- 4.19 This is documented in the meeting minutes of December 2007 that note: *“Discussion centred on the right or perhaps the ability to request care leave from day one of employment. It was clear that consensus would not be possible on this topic. BERR and CBI felt that this would place unfair burdens on employers. Others felt that this ability to request would simplify matters for all concerned”*.
- 4.20 This lack of consensus is also illustrated by the Employment Taskforce report, which had still not been published at the time the interviews took place, as it was yet to be agreed by all partners. The version of the Taskforce report dated June 2008 reports that: *“A very diverse group, the Taskforce represents a wide range of opinion. It has not therefore, always been possible to reach consensus on all these propositions”*.
- 4.21 From this evidence it is clear that some discussions and disagreements on issues were resolved by agreeing to disagree rather than reaching a consensus.
- 4.22 Interviewees from partnerships primarily involving the voluntary and community sector did not report difficulties gaining agreement and consensus.

Effectiveness influenced by make-up of the partnership

- 4.23 The structure of the Employment Taskforce limited its effectiveness in the view of one partner. Although the DWP convened the taskforces for the Employment and Income taskforces, it is not clear the extent to which their structure and representativeness was guided by the DH who had overall responsibility for leading the strategy.
- 4.24 BERR reported that the make-up of the Employment Taskforce, with voluntary and community sector representation and government departments, negatively affected the effectiveness of the partnership. This was because they felt that open debate about departmental policy could not take place in front of other organisations. From the meeting minutes it is clear that BERR were central to unresolved policy disagreements between the partners, as noted in 4.19.
- 4.25 However, DIUS and HMT who were also on this taskforce mentioned that a key strength of the partnership was representation from the voluntary and community sector, although HMT also noted that it was difficult to reconcile the views of government departments, business organisations and voluntary and community organisations representing carers.

- 4.26 HMRC felt that the make-up of the Income taskforce and sub-groups worked well, and that involving government departments and voluntary and community organisations in the same forum was not an issue. The sub-groups operated under Chatham House rules and HMRC reported that a range of partners added value to the discussions: *“The government officials were trying to put themselves in the place of carers and understand how they would feel, and the lobby groups had a better understanding of budget constraints”*.
- 4.27 In contrast the DCLG had worked in partnership with the DWP for the Independent Living Review on a one-to-one basis. It was reported that the DWP also had similar partnerships with other government departments for the review. The DCLG interviewee felt that working in partnership on a department-to-department basis had several advantages, including focusing the discussion on issues of relevance to both parties, and enabling meetings to be held more or less frequently as the project demanded.

Effectiveness dependent on the resources and skill of the facilitator

- 4.28 Where there were considerable differences of opinion it was noted that the skill of the chair was important in gaining consensus and enabling the debate to move on constructively. This was only raised as an issue by the Employment Taskforce members and is likely to be because of the extent of challenge and debate in this partnership.
- 4.29 The Employment taskforce seems to have proved more problematic than other partnerships. The DH said that *“they did not really engage the secretariat and they were slightly behind the other taskforces as they hadn’t produced proposals in time and this affected the inter-departmental delivery, but that was soon resolved when a new secretariat came in”*.
- 4.30 Crossroads also noted that the DWP team had changed part way through the process, and that the second team were more effective than the first. The Employment Taskforce did not meet within the same timescales of the other taskforces, and Crossroads felt that *“this put us at a significant disadvantage in terms of the time that our taskforce had to deliver on that agenda”*. In addition, the meetings in their view were not well chaired, so that the discussion returned to issues over successive meetings without moving the agenda forward.
- 4.31 From the meeting minutes of the Employment Taskforce it is not clear how long was spent discussing each issue, but the right to request flexible working is noted as having been discussed in every month between October and February (inclusive).

- 4.32 This is supported by the HMT who commented that a disproportionate amount of time was devoted to issues that did not make it into the recommendations from the taskforce, which therefore meant that there was less time to discuss those that did. *"It went round the houses on some issues"* and the taskforce spent a disproportionate amount of time discussing things that *"were not going to go anywhere...it was crowded out by detailed discussion of things that were not going to go ahead"*.
- 4.33 The DH explained this by a lack of resources for the secretariat and lack of involvement at senior levels. Once this was resolved though, the DH said that the Employment Taskforce's proposals were a vital part of the strategy. It does highlight, however, that where there is likely to be debate and challenge within partnerships senior staff are required to manage this process.
- 4.34 We have not interviewed any DWP staff for this part of the study, so we do not have their input and feedback into how the Employment Taskforce was structured and the resources and guidance that they had available to them.

Effectiveness limited by internal communication of wider policy agenda

- 4.35 The interviewee from the DIUS had been working with another part of DWP on integrating the employment and skills systems. This is a high-profile strategic direction for both departments, as outlined in the recent joint DWP and DIUS paper *"Opportunity, Employment, Progression: making skills work"*.²
- 4.36 The DIUS interviewee felt that the strategy and support for carers should be in this context, and felt that the representatives from DWP were unaware of the changing context and agenda in other relevant policy areas. This was reported to limit the agenda of the taskforce, which was *"set in the way things had been and not where the high profile agenda is moving to"*.
- 4.37 This highlights that internal communication within DWP is also vital to ensure that partnerships are working to support and build on other DWP policy, particularly within strategic partnerships.

² DIUS/ DWP (2007) *Opportunity, Employment, Progression: making skills work*
<http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm72/7288/7288.asp>

5 PROGRESS AND OUTCOMES

Progress from partnerships involving government departments

Inputs into the Carers' Strategy

- 5.1 The taskforces set up to feed into the Carers' strategy all developed taskforce reports and a series of recommendations. The taskforces had responsibility for reviewing the text and responding to queries raised in the editing and drafting. The DH reported that there are a *"firm set of measures around employment in the strategy which have come directly from the taskforces"*.
- 5.2 The strategy details, for example short-term commitments to produce a good practice guide for employers around supporting carers and integrating them into the workforce, and ensuring that skills training is provided in a flexible manner so that it is accessible to carers.

A body of evidence on carers

- 5.3 Four taskforce reports (one from each taskforce) will also be published. This will provide a body of evidence on a wide range of issues discussed during the development of the Carers' Strategy.

Suggestions of future policy influence on other government departments

- 5.4 Three interviewees from government departments reported that the information and policy knowledge they had gained from working in partnership with the DWP could have an influence on future departmental policy. For example, the DIUS reported that, although only intentions at this stage, the department had become increasingly aware of the needs of carers in the development of the Adult Advancement and Careers Service. The DIUS do not have carers as a target group as policy tends to focus on groups of people by their skill levels.
- 5.5 In DCSF learning from the partnership was reported to have been fed back to the DCSF Disabled Children's section, in relation to disabled parents and caring for disabled children, and also into child poverty work. They also reported that it had laid the foundations for future possible partnership working around the likely increase in age of participation in compulsory learning and what that may mean for young carers.
- 5.6 HMT discussed how they found the discussions on the tax and benefits system and how they function for carers useful. The interviewee reported that this feedback may be used to inform future funding decisions and HMT work.

- 5.7 It should be noted that all three of these examples are of potential future change. There were no examples shared with us of policy influence that had already happened as a result of the information sharing from the Carers' Strategy partnerships, although at the time of the interviews the partnership had not long since dissolved.
- 5.8 These formal partnerships for the Carers' Strategy have now finished and learning about joint agendas will not continue in a formal way.

Outcomes from partnerships with voluntary organisations

Staff training on working with families

- 5.9 A member of the DCS Forum (the National Children's Bureau) reported that as a result of the forum the DWP had worked to address training and advice needs of DWP staff that have contact with families. She reported that there had been improvements in the awareness of front line staff who deal with callers and their knowledge of and sensitivity to parents concerns around childhood disability.

Inputting into the design of benefits forms

- 5.10 The DCS Advisory Forum also inputted into the design of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) form, and it was reported that customer feedback illustrated that parents are now more satisfied with their contact with DWP around DLA.
- 5.11 The minutes of the DCS Forum from January 2008 give details of the comments from partners about the DLA form. The DWP took these as action points to amend the document: *"reword the very first sentence so it reads "...and reasonably expected to die....", "when referring to help with communication, include examples such as hearing sight and speech"*.

Resolving individual's queries

- 5.12 Contact a Family reported that the added value of working in partnership with DWP was that they could use other members of the group to resolve or move forward queries or issues with claims arising from callers to their helpline. They reported that: *"let's say for example we get a parent coming in on the helpline who's just at the end of her tether and can't seem to figure out what's going on with her claim, I can phone up X who's the secretariat for the group and he will find out what's happening with the claim and sort it out for us...He was very good he got one of our parents an emergency giro when she hadn't had any money for about 6 weeks."*

5.13 The meeting minutes from the DCS Forum meeting in April 2008 detail one example of partners escalating concerns about how the DWP was supporting their members. In this instance two different decision notifications had been issued for the same decision.

Keeping partners informed about changes to DWP

5.14 Some ongoing forums were also a way for DWP to inform organisations representing and working with carers of any changes to policies, procedures and programmes that might affect them. For example, a presentation was given the DCS Forum about the “My DWP” project.

Some work still ongoing

5.15 Time-limited partnerships on the carers’ agenda had been dissolved and therefore these interviewees reported that there was no further work for the partnership to undertake.

5.16 Whereas ongoing partnerships reported that there were areas they were aiming to deliver in the future. Some of these were new to the agenda, so had not been discussed previously.

5.17 The LGA said the DCS Forum had not yet been able to improve data sharing between partner agencies, largely due to data protection issues and the concerns of government departments about data control.

5.18 The LGA felt that it would be useful to develop contacts at an operational level to help deal with queries from members. At present the partnership was limited to strategy level individuals. They felt this could be done simply by producing an organisational chart for DWP.

5.19 The National Children’s Bureau suggested that more work should be done to encourage families to apply for the benefits they are entitled to.

6 HOW WELL IS THE DWP WORKING WITH PARTNERS TO SUPPORT CARERS?

- 6.1 Based on the experiences of the fifteen organisations interviewed for this study the DWP is working with a range of partners to design and deliver its services and support for carers. Generally there was felt to be clarity of purpose about the forums, and there was evidence of change as a result, for example, to the forms people use to apply for benefits.
- 6.2 The DCS has an ongoing partnership to work, primarily, with the voluntary and community sector. JCP has an ongoing customer representative forum, but there was not representation from a carers organisation. DWP's partnerships, particularly with government departments, had primarily been time-limited and been dissolved. Contact between DWP and other government departments on the carer's agenda had reverted to the informal arrangements that were in place prior to the Carers' Strategy.

Is DWP working effectively with other departments, public bodies and local authorities to provide joined-up support to carers?

- 6.3 Prior to the time-limited partnership created to support the Carers' Strategy DWP worked with a number of government departments on specific issues. This was undertaken on an ad-hoc and unstructured way. Following the completion of the Carers' Strategy this is what relationships between DWP and national government departments had largely returned to.
- 6.4 Although DWP engaged efficiently with government departments for the Carers' strategy we did not find evidence of on-going formalised partnership working between DWP and national government departments on the carer's agenda. This is a lost opportunity to maintain joint working on shared agendas. Section 5.4-5.7 indicated that there was potential for future DWP influence on shared policies, such as the Adult Advancement and Careers Service being developed by DIUS, and the services to support any increase in the age of participation in compulsory education and training.
- 6.5 In partnership with government organisations DWP had large inputs into the Carers' Strategy and there were some examples of learning from the partnership potentially informing other government policies, although this was only potential at this stage.
- 6.6 DWP joint working would be facilitated by a better understanding of other departments, and their own, joint agenda, to ensure that discussions are informed by the latest policy developments.

6.7 There is some evidence that conflicts between departmental positions on specific issues, such as a carer's right to request flexible working, were left unresolved. Taskforce documents detail that partners have agreed to disagree on some issues and a consensus has not been reached.

Is DWP working effectively with the voluntary and community sector to support to carers?

6.8 Partnerships with the voluntary and community sector from DCS appear to be working well, with partners keen to feed into and influence DWP support for carers. There are a range of outcomes noted in this report around changes in the benefits system.

6.9 An important part of the contribution of voluntary and community organisations to DWP partnerships was consultation with their members on specific issues. Partnership working could be more effective if there was more time for consultation with membership bases. Although meeting minutes of the DCS Advisory Forum show that it has been proposed that details are forthcoming consultations circulated further in advance, it is not clear whether or not this was actioned.

6.10 One interviewee suggested that "*presentational forums*" are less effective from the perspective of partners. Consultation via partnerships needs to be seen to lead to change, or for it to be explained why particular feedback wasn't taken into consideration. This is vitally important where DWP wants to state that policy was developed in partnership with specific organisations.

6.11 It was suggested that the influence of the partnerships could be widened if meeting minutes were circulated to other voluntary and community sector organisations with an interest in carers.

6.12 Carers UK had refused JCP's invitation to join their customer forum and it remains that there is no representation specifically for carers on this partnership. For organisations to give up their time to work in partnership there needs to be a clear shared agenda, and something to be gained for both partners. For example, the meeting minutes of the Employment Taskforce show there were five members from the voluntary and community sector.

7 ANNEX

List of organisations interviewed

Organisation name	Sector	Partnerships
Centre 404	Voluntary and community	DCS Advisory Forum
Contact a Family	Voluntary and community	DCS Advisory Forum
Crossroads	Voluntary and community	Employment taskforce
Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR)	National government department	Employment taskforce
Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)	National government department	Health and Social Care Taskforce and Inter-departmental taskforce
Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)	National government department	Independent Living review
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)	National government department	Employment taskforce
Department of Health (DH)	National government department	Health and Social Care Taskforce
Disability and Carers Service (DCS)	DWP Executive agency	DCS Advisory Forum
Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)	National government department	Income Taskforce and sub-group
Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT)	National government department	Employment taskforce
Jobcentre Plus	DWP Executive agency	JCP customer representative group
Jobcentre Plus (Wales)	DWP Executive agency	JCP customer representative group
Local Government Association (Lambeth Council)	Local government	DCS Advisory Forum and DWP Strategic Forum
National Children's Bureau	Voluntary and community	DCS Advisory Forum

List of documents reviewed

DCS Family Carers Group

- Terms of Reference
- Meeting agendas 22.01.07, 16.07.07, 22.01.08
- Meeting minutes 22.01.07, 16.07.07, 22.01.08.

Disability and Carers Service Advisory Forum

- Terms of Reference
- Meeting agendas 5.11.07, 15.01.08, 15.4.08
- Meeting minutes 5.11.07, 15.01.08, 15.04.08
- DWP Customer Information Product – Disability Living Allowance Leaflet for Children – Ref DLACA5DCS
- Disability and Carers Service Diversity Equality Scheme Customer Survey

JCP Wales Customer Representative Groups Forum

- Notes and Action Points 05.12.07
- Meeting agenda 5.12.07
- Terms of Reference
- Letter of invitation to representatives

Review of the Prime Minister's 1999 National Strategy for Carers, Employment Task Force

- Terms of Reference
- Meeting agenda 08.02.08
- Meeting minutes 29.11.07, 19.12.07, 15.01.08, 08.02.08
- DIUS/DWP New Deal for Carers Employment Task Force Report, June 2008
- HM Government 'Carers at the heart of 21st Century Families and Communities' – Carers' Strategy