

**MINUTES OF THE JOINT STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING HELD IN
CONFERENCE ROOM 3, CASTLECOURT ON 18th JUNE 2026 AT 10.30AM**

Marie Cavanagh		Chairperson
Matt Cole		Independent Member
Owen McCloskey		Independent Member
Linsey Farrell		Deputy Secretary Operational Delivery Group
Julie Nelson		Acting Director Debt Management, Benefit Security, Child Maintenance Service NI and Make the Call
Mark Morrison		Acting Deputy Director Debt Management and Benefit Security
Leonora McLaughlin		Director Pensions, Disability and Carers
Gary McGouran		Standards Assurance Unit
David Kinnin		Universal Credit Operations
Ann Meeke		Working Age Services
Bernie McCafferty		Central Services
Peter Murchan		Internal Audit
Fionnuala Weir	Minutes	Benefit Security Support

1. Welcome and Apologies

Marie Cavanagh welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance. Apologies were registered for Rosheen McCrory and John Mcilwaine. David Kinnin attended on behalf of Rosheen and Gary McGouran attended on behalf of John. Marie welcomed Deputy Secretary Linsey Farrell who was attending the meeting as an observer. Owen attended the meeting remotely via Teams video link.

2. Conflict of Interest

Marie asked the Committee to look at the current agenda and declare any conflict of interest. None were declared.

3. Minutes of the last meeting 04.03.2026

The updated minutes of the last meeting 04.03.2026 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. Action points from Standards Committee meeting 04.03.2026

Action point 12/21 (ongoing) : The Committee will check if any improvements can be made to PIP once the Green and White papers are available.

Leo advised that the Timms Review is still ongoing and NI stakeholders continue to have meetings with the Review team. Communications teams will provide updates via feedback sessions. Watching brief.

Action point 8/25 : Owen noted that there is no data for UC in the clearance times figures. The Committee requested if UC clearance times can be included in the clearance times data.

Marie noted that the clearance times information which was requested has now been provided to the Committee. Agreed to close. **Action point closed.**

Action point 11/25 (ongoing) : Owen asked if there is any way the UC system could be improved so that it would recognise potential errors in the RTI feed used to calculate the UC award; for example if it could identify when a customer has received two wages in one month when they normally only receive one wage per month.

Bernie advised that her staff have checked with DWP if there is an improvement pending in relation to the UC RTI feed however there has been nothing identified which would address the issue raised. Owen advised that he is receiving feedback that the RTI feed continues to be a problem. Bernie confirmed she will monitor the issue for any updates or improvements that are identified.

Action point 12/25 (ongoing) : Waivers: Owen raised a concern that vulnerable UC customers may not have the capacity to request a waiver. Julie advised she will check the guidance on mental capacity has gone out to decision makers.

Julie advised that guidance in relation to vulnerable customers has been updated and issued out to staff. Julie explained that in certain overpayment cases where a customer is vulnerable, Make the Call staff will visit the customer and, based on vulnerability, decide if the overpayment letter can be given to them. Owen asked if the customer meets the criteria for the Department not to issue the overpayment, this would also mean the customer meets the criteria for a waiver and so should a waiver therefore be applied in this circumstance? Julie advised she will look into this.

Action point 13/25 : Waivers: Marie asked if it would be possible to include a reference to waivers in the Annual Report on Decision Making and Financial Accuracy? Julie advised she will seek advice from the relevant teams to find out if waivers can be referred to in the Annual Report.

Julie advised that waivers are counted in the Report as overall losses but they are not singled out. They form part of the total losses figure in the Report. Agreed to close. **Action point closed.**

Action point 1/26 : Overpayments and Appeals results in DfC Report: Matt asked for a breakdown of the types of benefits which made up the overpayment cases and appeals cases which are examined.

Mark advised this information will be provided from the Q1 Report (next quarterly Report) onwards. Agreed to close. **Action point closed.**

Action points from meeting with the Voluntary Sector

Action point 11 (ongoing) : Owen raised the issue regarding the use of algorithms in decision making within DfC. They should be disclosed as it may have an impact on decision making and have in built bias.

Gary provided an update regarding the use of automation in CMS decisions; He advised that the customer is notified if a decision which has been made is an automated one and the customer can request for this decision to be looked at again by a case worker. Marie noted John had advised that he had sent an email querying the legislation regarding the use of automation in CMS – Marie asked if John would be able to forward this email to the Committee. Gary advised he will ask John if this email can be forwarded to the Committee.

5. Managing Migration

Marie explained that the Committee are looking at the impact of the operational issues of the migration of legacy claims onto Universal Credit.

Ann advised that there are 63 people on legacy benefit who have been sent their UC migration notification letter, but whose cases have not yet migrated to UC. 50 of these are appointee cases; 25 are personal appointee cases and 25 are corporate appointee cases. The deadline for these cases to migrate onto UC is 30th September however this deadline is extended for appointee cases if required. Ann advised there are also 29 people who are due to receive their UC migration notification letter; They will have the full 3 month period to complete the migration process. If any of these cases are also found to have an appointee the deadline for the case to migrate to UC can also be extended if required. Any case which is

in the process of updating an appointee would not be terminated. A case conference is held for any case which is being considered for closure.

Matt advised it would be useful for communication to be issued by the Department to make customers in receipt of legacy benefits aware of the migration process and the requirement for their claims to move onto UC for benefit to remain in payment. Bernie advised that there is information being published online about migration.

Owen asked if the Department can provide information on the number of people on the Enhanced Support Journey who did not make a claim for UC? David Kinnin will check if there are figures in respect of this which he can obtain and supply to the Committee.

New Action point 2/26: David Kinnin/Rosheen McCrory will check with the relevant team if there is a record of the number of people on the Enhanced Support Journey who did not make a claim for UC and if so, provide this information to the Committee.

6. CMS Quarter 4 Report: 1 January 2026 – 31 March 2026

Gary introduced the CMS report for the period 1 January 2026 – 31 March 2026. The target for 2025/26 is to achieve a Monetary Value of Error (MVE) of less than 3%; At the end of Quarter 4 the MVE was 3.7% and so the target has been missed. A key reason for this has been staffing challenges with staff needed at EO1 and SO grades. New staff in these posts are expected imminently and an increased amount of coaching and mentoring has begun to seek to improve knowledge and skills and improve accuracy. A checking strategy has also been updated with additional training being given in 'check backdated adjustment' decisions.

Marie noted that 719 cases were checked this year. Given that the error rate has increased does this mean that more cases will be checked next year? Gary confirmed that the number of cases checked will increase next year to 755.

Julie advised that the Case Monitoring Team is now under Gary McGouran as it is thought this will be beneficial given that Gary is over the Standards Assurance Unit.

Owen asked if a customer accrues arrears as a result of a back dated adjustment, Is the customer provided just an arrears figure, or do they receive a letter to explain how the arrears are calculated? Gary advised he will look into this and provide a response to the Committee.

Action point 3/26: When a customer accrues arrears as a result of a back dated adjustment, Gary will check if the customer is provided with just an arrears figure, or do they receive a letter to explain how the arrears are calculated?

7. DfC Quarter End of Year report: 1 January 2025 – 31 December 2025

Mark presented the DfC End of Year report for the period 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025 to the Committee.

Decision Making

4 out of the 6 benefits monitored achieved the benchmark set, with each of these 4 exceeding the benchmark.

2 errors were found with Pension Credit. The area of error was finding of fact with 2 errors (100%) with both relating to income taken into account incorrectly.

4 errors were found with PIP. The areas of error were: evidence with 2 errors (50%) both relating to incorrect outcome decision, findings of fact with 1 error (25%) relating to incorrect decision to award benefit and interpretation and application of the law with 1 error (25%) relating to incorrect outcome decision.

2 errors were found with State Pension. The area of error was evidence with 2 errors (100%) both relating to incorrect awards/rate of benefit.

13 errors were found with Universal Credit. The areas of error were: findings of fact with 9 errors (69%); The main types of finding of fact errors related to incorrect rent amount and incorrect disabled child addition, evidence with 3 errors (23%) and interpretation and application of the law with 1 error (8%).

Financial Accuracy

For financial accuracy all 6 benefits monitored exceeded the benchmark set.

Overpayments / Appeals

Overpayments : A total of 131 cases were examined and 6 errors were raised resulting in an overall standard of 95%. The areas of error were:

Evidence with 3 errors (50%) relating to the amount of the recoverable overpayment being incorrect (2 errors) and decision to recover being incorrect (1 error).

Findings of fact with 2 errors (33%) both relating to the amount of the recoverable overpayment being incorrect.

Interpretation and application of the law with 1 error (17%) relating to the period of the recoverable overpayment being incorrect.

Appeals: A total of 73 cases were examined and 1 error was raised resulting in an overall standard of 99%. The area of error (100%) related to the failure to summarise all facts of the case including disputed facts.

Owen asked if the number of State Pension errors was a typical amount? Leo advised that the figures are not unusual. She advised the Department does hold forums to seek to identify if there are any trends or issues which need to be addressed. Julie also noted that in the case of State Pension there are a small number of claims and so any number of errors has a big impact on the accuracy rate.

Owen asked if more information could be provided on how State Pension errors occur? He noted that there are few changes of circumstances in a State Pension claim once it is up and running and so does this indicate there is an error which had been there from the beginning of the claim?

New Action Point 4/26: Mark will seek to gather information on the reasons for the State Pension errors and provide this to the Committee.

8. Clearance times

Marie noted that PIP is not within clearance times targets. Leo advised that PIP have staffing challenges at present with attrition of staff and difficulty in recruiting

new staff. These issues, in addition to PIP's transfer onto a new system, have impacted on this performance. Leo advised that there is now a recovery plan in place to address the issues which are affecting clearance times.

Marie asked if Capita are overstretched as this would mean appointments are not carried out as soon as they should be? Matt noted that Capita have recently taken on WCA work which would have an effect on their resources and appointment availability. Leo advised that a lot of Capita assessors are GB based and so the Department are working on increasing NI based staff so that more appointments, including face to face appointments, can be carried out.

Marie thanked Rosheen for providing the UC clearance times figures to the Committee. Owen queried what the clearance time figures are for UC WCAs? Ann advised that the recovery plan for PIP assessments is also in place for WCAs. The recovery plan involves the recruitment of additional health care professionals so that an increased number of assessments can be completed, however it will take time for the health care professionals to be trained up and in post. Owen asked if clearance times information could be provided which showed the length of time customers are waiting on a WCA for their UC claim?

New Action point 5/26: Ann advised she will check with Commercial Services to ascertain if UC WCA waiting times information is available and can be shared with the Committee.

David advised that UC have provided both the End of Year clearance time figures and the clearance times for April. David explained that the clearance times for April were slightly below those for the year. The reason for this is because April is when the annual rent increase for the social sector is applied. This creates an activity for customers to update on their UC claims and so this reduces clearance times. Matt advised that this process is not as responsive as it could be. He advised that vulnerable customers do not find it easy to update their UC claims with the required information and that perhaps there should be an easier way for this annual rental update to be applied to claims. Matt advised it may be useful to gather further information and feedback in relation to this.

New Action point 6/26: Bernie advised she will enquire with the team what feedback has been received from staff in relation to housing costs to-do's. Matt

advised he will find out if there is any feedback from the Housing Association in relation to this issue.

9. Standards Committee Meetings/Visits

CMS	26.01.2026
ESA	19.02.2026

The minutes of the Committee's meetings with CMS and ESA were agreed.

10. Any other Business

None.

Marie thanked everyone for their attendance.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 17th September 2026.