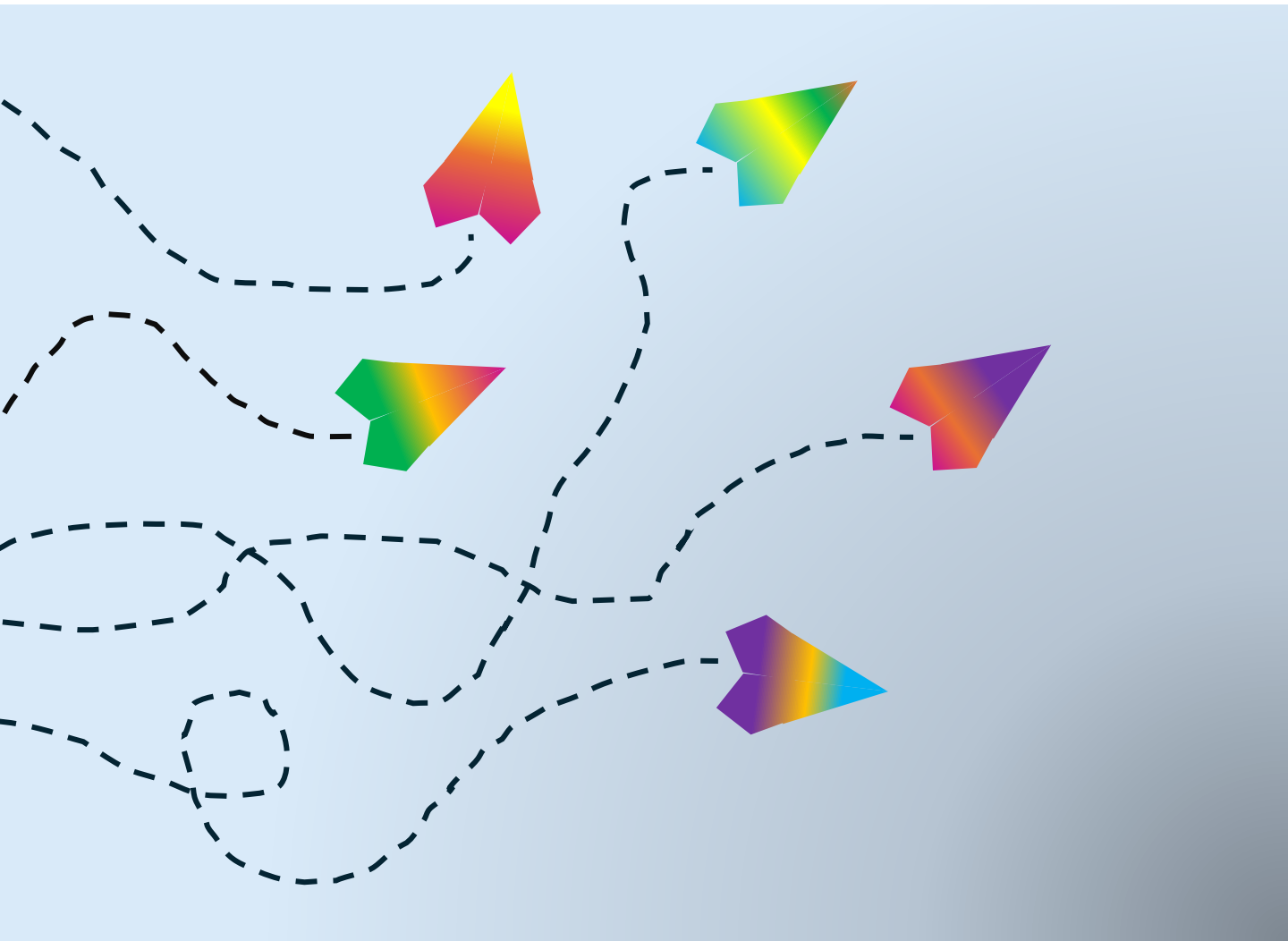




Department  
for Work &  
Pensions



# Advanced Customer Support

Delivering support and transformation to help DWP customers with additional support needs

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# Foreword

Welcome to the first Advanced Customer Support (ACS) publication. This annual publication aims to explain how the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), through its Customer Experience ACS Teams, is helping customers who need additional support, how it learns from customer's experiences and then explores ways to improve its services for all.

We will do this by sharing some of the things we have already delivered in the 2023 to 2024 operational year, things we are doing now, and things we are aiming to do in the future for these four areas:

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## Delivering support for customers

We provide an additional layer of support for vulnerable customers, supplying specialist help and joining up with external agencies to make sure customers get the additional support they require.

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## Identifying when someone needs additional support

Our customers do not always tell us, or may not be aware, that they need additional support, meaning we need to find new ways to identify customers so they can receive the help they need.

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## Strengthening the capability of our people

We are investing in the learning and development that our colleagues receive, to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to provide effective support to our vulnerable customers.

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## Being a learning organisation

We want to learn from things that have not gone as well as they should, and the key to making things better for our vulnerable customers is to continually improve our services and support.

I hope that this publication helps build understanding and provides transparency of the work that ACS strives to deliver to improve the lives of our vulnerable customers.



**Robert Currens – Deputy Director  
Advanced Customer Support**

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# What is Advanced Customer Support

Because DWP understands and recognises that vulnerable customers require additional support at different times in their lives, we created the Advanced Customer Support (ACS) team within our Customer Experience Directorate, to focus on ensuring we help our most vulnerable customers, across all our services.

Since its introduction, ACS has evolved with customers and DWP's needs using the data, evidence and insight from its activities to effectively learn and act, to provide better support and outcomes for its most vulnerable customers. ACS is made up of four teams that provide support in different ways:

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## Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders and Operational Delivery Team



We have a network of Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders (ACSSLs) across Great Britain, who coach and mentor DWP colleagues, across our services, to support customers who are experiencing, or are at risk of, vulnerability. By supporting colleagues to take the right action at the right time, they help prevent cases escalating to a point of risk. ACSSLs also work with organisations outside of DWP (e.g. Local Authorities) to enable a multi-agency approach when appropriate for customers.

Our central ACS Operational Delivery Team support ACSSLs by triaging referrals, made by DWP colleagues, to ensure all existing support and processes have been considered, escalating those customer cases where ACSSL support is needed.

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## ACS Visiting Gateway Team



The team support the national DWP Visiting Service to provide face-to-face support to customers who cannot access the department's services in any other way. These visits may be required because the customer has complex needs, are disabled, are a vulnerable young person making a claim for the first time, have nobody else to support them, or cannot claim benefits in any other way.

Visiting referrals can be made by frontline DWP colleagues and external organisations, for example Citizens Advice, Age UK and Local Authorities. The ACS Visiting Gateway Team receive and triage all referrals, ensuring that the Visiting Officer has all the required information to support an effective visit. The team are also testing options to further support the Visiting Service, seeing them taking forward certain visit types through telephone calls, such as Benefit Entitlement Checks.

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# What is Advanced Customer Support

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## Serious Case Team



The Serious Case Team help reduce risk and prevent further serious cases by reviewing DWP's most serious cases through Internal Process Reviews (IPRs), which are in-depth, internal reviews, that look at where and why, the customer experience has fallen short of expected standards and set clear actions for improvement.

The team also support external reviews taken forward through Safeguarding Adult Boards (Adult Protection Committees in Scotland) and Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews, providing our ACSSLs with the information they need when representing DWP at these reviews. Additionally, the team is also responsible for understanding and identifying evidence-based risks and share this insight with colleagues across DWP through regular stakeholder meetings, including DWP's Serious Case Panel, to ensure prioritisation of activities to improve vulnerable customers experiences.

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## ACS Transformation



As a department we strive to be a learning organisation, and we are committed to improving the service and support we deliver to customers. The ACS Transformation Team was created to focus on the changes that look to improve how we can identify and support our most vulnerable customers. The team does this by taking all the things that we have learnt across ACS and then working with different teams across DWP to make improvements to what we do and how we do it, examples of which are included in this publication.

The team is also responsible for looking at how we increase transparency of the work taken forward across the ACS teams, whilst protecting the personal, and sometimes sensitive, information of those customers that we support and the serious cases we learn from.

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# Supporting customers and identifying learning opportunities

## Evidence-based continuous improvement

The data and evidence we gather is important and helps us to understand where we can make improvements to the customer experience. We use what we gather from the work ACS does, to tell the story of what we have learned so that DWP teams and colleagues can work together to make improvements and prevent the same things happening again.

This could be a key finding identified from an IPR, evidence of issues or circumstances identified through the support our ACSSLs and visiting officers provide, or situations identified through proactive work to identify and support vulnerable customers.

Once we have identified a potential area for improvement, the team looks at what improvements could potentially be made, and who it could join up with across the department to make this happen.

Some of these improvements are referred to the Serious Case Panel (The Panel) for discussion and its support in delivering change in the department. More information on the Serious Case Panel is available on GOV.UK at: [DWP Serious Case Panel - GOV.UK](#).

Over the following pages, we share some examples with you, so that we can show how we are learning from customer experiences and circumstances, and how we are using this to improve our services for our customers.



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# Working to increase transparency of Advanced Customer Support

We know that understanding the support we can offer, and what we are doing to improve the service we provide to vulnerable people, is important. Increasing transparency of this is something the Serious Case Panel has strongly supported. It is for this reason that ACS have been working hard, in a number of areas, to show you both what we have done and will be doing, as well as helping you to find support when you need it.

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## The DWP Annual Report and Accounts (ARA)

We first started to share ACS information in the [2022-2023 ARA](#), sharing key data which highlighted the valuable work we undertook that year. This was built on in the [2023-2024 ARA](#), which provided some insight into the DWP Visiting Service for the first time, and we intend to continue to publish important information in future years' reports.

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## The ACS Publication

Following the success of what we have shared so far, we have written this publication to give you more details of the work we do and the results we have achieved. This is to show you more than just numbers, we want you to see how this dedicated team is delivering change to make things better for our most vulnerable customers.

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## Publishing IPR Information

We've started work on ways we can publish some IPR information to help increase transparency on what we've learnt from reviewing our ways of working, as well as the action we're taking as a result of this. Alongside publishing information on more recent IPRs, we also plan to publish some historical information so we can demonstrate publicly, the improvements we have made to our services following what we have learnt from our serious cases.

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## GOV.UK

We have already introduced our '[Get extra help and support to manage your benefits or pension](#)' GOV.UK page, to assist Citizens' navigation and understanding of the support DWP can provide. It is also planned to be able to use these pages to provide more information and support in the future so that our customers can easily find the information and help that they need.

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# Delivering support for customers

## Testing a more flexible and accessible Visiting Service



Visiting colleague:

The advantage of the site being co-located with the local authority allowed Visiting colleagues to support customers in a more holistic way.



We have a network of over 600 visiting officers and our Visiting Service helps those that cannot access DWP services in any other way, maybe because they have complex needs, or possibly have no one to support them. This could include supporting their first or ongoing benefit claim or delivering a decision letter and making sure they understand the content and what this means for them.

Previously, these visits primarily happened at someone's home, but we have learnt that this might not be what works for everyone, and some people need more choice with how they engage with us. What is most important to us is that there are options, and that people feel as comfortable as possible when we see them.

We are testing different ways to offer a more flexible Visiting Service, that better meets people's needs. This includes a face-to-face service located within DWP partner premises.

This will mean that those needing the visiting service, or those supporting them, can see us in a DWP building or maybe another organisation's premises, like the Local Authority office, if more convenient, where they can access multiple services in one location. We are also looking at offering telephone appointments or virtual appointments through online, secure video calls.

A more flexible visiting service, of this kind, will mean we can see people more quickly, give them the choice they need, the support they want, in a way that suits them.

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# Delivering support for customers

ACS working with external organisations and partners, helping DWP customers who require additional support

The development of relationships with external partners is another key part of the ACSSL role. These partners are those who work with our mutual customers, all of whom provide specialist help and support where needed.

These relationships are a critical link for DWP, as they improve the way we work together to support customers. They are very much a two-way process, and our external partners will bring us in when they think our help is needed to support a customer they are working with.

Below are just a few examples of how ACSSLs have joined up with external agencies to get our vulnerable customers the help and support they needed. They show how ACS are there for the here and now, making a real difference to customer's lives.

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## Customer 1

A DWP customer suffering with their mental health, and who was at risk of domestic abuse and homelessness, was due a large back payment of benefit. Because of their complex situation, an ACSSL worked with colleagues and social services to split the payment into smaller amounts over an 18-month period. By receiving smaller payments over time, we reduced the risk of the customer being taken advantage of by other people and helped to ensure their safety and stability.

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## Customer 2

A customer asked for a food voucher at their jobcentre, saying their family was keeping their benefit payments, not feeding them properly, and locking them in their flat. They were scared of their family and did not know what to do. The team made a safeguarding referral, and an urgent multi-agency meeting was held. The customer got emergency housing and a social worker. With help from the NHS and council, they were found to have health problems and a learning disability. They got financial support, moved into social housing, and learned to budget. The multi-agency support helped them escape their situation and receive the support they needed.

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# Delivering support for customers

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## Customer 3

A customer living with severe mental health, no ID, no bank account, and living in sheltered housing was due a large payment. The ACS team worked with their social worker and found that the customer might be eligible for more benefits. We arranged for a visiting officer to meet the customer, help with a Personal Independence Payment claim, and set up a corporate appointee to assist with benefits. By working with other organisations, we jointly focused on supporting the customer's needs and ensured that they got the benefits they were entitled to.

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## Customer 4

An elderly customer called Retirement Services to find out when they were next going to be paid. They had no money left and were being threatened by a local gang, which they said was making them feel like taking their own life. After taking immediate action to ensure that the customer was safe, the local ACSSL was brought in for support and they found that this customer had been a victim of cuckooing. Cuckooing is where someone's house is taken over and used as a base for criminal activity. After making sure that the customer's benefit payments were safe, the ACSSL worked with the Local Authority Housing Team to make their home secure, allowing the customer to lead a normal life again.



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# Identifying when someone needs additional support

## Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify and support vulnerable customers

We have learnt from our internal reviews that, where customers write to us by letter, it is important that we are able to quickly identify if they need urgent help. This was an issue that was presented at DWP's Serious Case Panel and received The Panel's backing for work to be taken forward to find a solution that allows the early identification of these customers.

A system has been developed that uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) to allow us to digitally identify if a customer needs urgent support. The AI reads the text from scanned images of their letters\* (known as Whitemail), which have all personal information removed, and can understand what the letter is saying, to identify if the customer may be vulnerable or at risk - all on the day the mail is received.

Every letter the AI identifies is then assessed by one of our experienced colleagues, who can determine the support needed by that customer to keep them safe and ensure they have the support they need. This is something that could previously take a lot longer to do due to the volume of post we receive, but the use of AI allows us to identify these customers much quicker.

This is an example of how technology can complement our existing processes and ways of working, to help identify people who may be at risk or require extra support to access DWP's services. The ACS Transformation Team were central to the rollout of the proof-of-concept, testing the AI and ensuring that it was picking up the right cases and working with the separate DWP services to ensure that it met their needs and providing support for colleagues that review the letters identified by the AI.

The department is looking at how this technology can be adapted and used across other areas, to further support those customers that need it.



ESA scanning colleague:

It's a good system... a safety net in place for those who otherwise would have been missed.



\* Currently only available for English language written correspondence

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# Identifying when someone needs additional support

Using technology to remove barriers and enhance customer support



We know that some customers struggle to engage with us and may not feel comfortable in telling us the problems they are facing. This creates a barrier to the support we can offer, and we are exploring how technology can help us remove this barrier to make it easier to identify customers who need help and to provide opportunities for customers themselves to tell us what they need.

We tested a system which turns calls\* into text and identifies conversations that indicate the customer may be at risk, which are then reviewed by a dedicated team within ACS to ensure the customer received the support they needed. The Serious Case Panel has decided this functionality should be included within the requirements for DWP's future telephony platform. Until the new telephony system is in place we continue to run the test system which allows us to monitor around 40% of the calls DWP receives.

Our ACS Transformation Team is working with our Digital teams to see how the information we already hold on our systems, could potentially be used to help us predict if a customer may need extra help. By understanding what we know about those customer cases our ACSSLs have helped, we may be able to see similarities with other cases which could allow us to proactively identify customer support needs earlier. This work is in very early days of development, but we are working hard to learn what does (and does not) work, so that we can test it further and understand how successful this would be.

Another area of work we are looking at is minimising the number of times our customers need to tell us what support they need, for example, a quiet space for a conversation. Having to repeat themselves is not only frustrating for the customer but could also cause them significant distress. We are exploring ways in which we can provide one DWP system for capturing these support needs in a consistent and accessible way, across all DWP services. Our ambition is that customers would also be able to self-record their needs within this system, where they are able to do so, making it as simple as possible to tell us what they want us to know.

\* Currently only available for English language calls

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# Strengthening the capability of our people

## Supporting customers at risk of harm: The Six Point Plan

Across DWP's services we often support customers facing challenges linked to their mental health. We have established processes and guidance for DWP colleagues to follow when they identify a customer who may be at risk of harming themselves, whether that be face-to-face (such as in a Jobcentre) or during a telephone call.

The Six Point Plan (which is often referred to as the 6PP) is the DWP's response to instances where customers either declare the intention to take their own life or harm themselves. The six parts of the plan are;

1. Take the statement seriously
2. Summon a colleague (support partner)
3. Gather information
4. Provide referral advice
5. Summon emergency help if needed
6. Review Incident

The Six Point Plan forms part of the toolkit developed to provide our colleagues with what they need to help ensure the customer is given the appropriate support, including signposting to other organisations, but it may also involve notifying emergency services in the event where they are at immediate risk. It is continuously reviewed to ensure that we are providing the best support to those customers who are most at risk. Recent improvements have included:

- improved navigation and accessibility of the information available, to make it quicker for colleagues to find and access the right support for customers
- development of two new training packages for colleagues who may be called upon to act as a support partner
- creation of an interactive package, including a bespoke video, for Team Leaders to help deliver the training to their teams
- improved the content of the Six Point Plan element of the two-day mental health training course that is mandatory for all customer facing colleagues.



### Colleague feedback:

Great way to keep the 6PP and the whole process fresh in people's awareness and boost confidence and capability using it.



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# Strengthening the capability of our people

## Enhancing workforce capability through improved training and support

One of any organisation's best assets is its people, so it is vital we give our colleagues the tools they need to be able to do their jobs effectively. We understand it can be challenging for our colleagues to deal with issues and situations that the customer may be facing, so that they can provide support effectively, and with confidence.

To ensure that they have the right guidance and training available, we have been working with industry experts and our own internal teams (including our Occupational Psychology Team and Clinical Policy Team) to develop an effective learning package, which uses latest thinking and shows our colleagues how best to support our vulnerable customers.

This will streamline the learning across DWP, making it easier to follow and will provide a consistent approach to additional support needs across the department. This approach will ensure that customers receive consistent help regardless of what part of DWP they are interacting with or in which part of the country they live.

The new training programme, once finalised, will use diverse learning methods and products designed to provide the best possible learning experience. It will be completed by all new colleagues joining the DWP and will be available as refresher training for existing staff – ensuring that all DWP colleagues have access to information that helps them support and understand our customers.



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# Strengthening the capability of our people

## Empowering through learning and coaching: The impact of ACSSLs

We have 37 Advanced Customer Support Senior Leaders (ACSSLs) based across Great Britain, supported by a specialist ACS Delivery Team. A key part of their role is to deliver learning and coaching to build capability across the teams that work with our customers, which will help them to support our most vulnerable customers and those at risk, in the best way.

Sometimes this learning is around national issues such as domestic abuse and homelessness, but because our ACSSLs are embedded in their local areas they also understand the needs of their local communities and what support is available to DWP customers and colleagues in those areas.

Between April 2023 and March 2024, ACSSLs and their delivery teams delivered over 400 learning sessions impacting around 34,000 people to support frontline colleagues on issues including:



**800** colleagues attended learning sessions during Sexual Assault Awareness Month, to provide information on the impact to victims and their families.



**652** colleagues across London and Essex attended a Q&A session to build capability around corporate appointee processes.



**152** UC colleagues in Wales were given an upskilling session on what information they are able to share when a customer is at risk.



**730** colleagues attended sessions raising awareness of suicide and the support mechanisms available.



**400** Attendance Allowance colleagues took part in a session to build their confidence in effectively supporting customers who require additional support.



**259** Counter Fraud and Compliance Directorate (CFCD) colleagues attended a session 'how to identify and support customers needing additional support'.



**98** colleagues from Dundee, Angus and Perthshire attended an upskilling session on Advanced Customer Support and how to help and support those customers who need it.

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# Being a learning organisation

## Improving customer notifications for better customer support



We know that even small changes that we make can have a big impact on our customers, especially those with additional needs that are trying to navigate the complexity of our systems or processes. We have learnt from several of our Internal Process Reviews that some of our notifications used where customers have been overpaid are not easy to understand and consequently customers may not be fully aware of all their options. To resolve this, we have worked with teams across DWP to improve them.

ACS identified one Universal Credit notification, which did not clearly explain all the options available to repay the money or where customers could access support. The notifications were issued to customers with no prior conversation to discuss the overpayment or allow the customer a chance to ask questions. We took steps to look at the language used in the notifications to make them clearer for customers to understand and ensure that they set out the different options that customers have available, as well as information on where they can access support.

Another notification, sent out by Carers Allowance, used outdated terms such as “Yellow Pages” that were no longer relevant in today’s world. This notification has been updated and has had additional clarity included on how customers could pay and repeated the messaging around the options available to support repayment.

In addition to changing the notifications themselves, we have looked at how we deliver them to the customers who we believe may need some additional support due to vulnerabilities or because of the amount of the overpayment. We have now added the additional step for colleagues to be able to arrange for one of our visiting officers to visit the customer to give a face-to-face explanation and offer that further support, as we appreciate that some customers will be very anxious about owing the department money.

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# Being a learning organisation

## Improving policies and practices to support prison leavers

From our work in ACS, along with wider work taken forward with Customer Experience Directorate on mapping customer journeys, we have identified that some of our processes could be improved to better support different groups of vulnerable customers. One of the areas that we have been working on is to improve how we work with prison leavers.

Working closely with The Ministry of Justice, we found that prisoners face a number of difficulties upon their release from prison, specifically in being able to contact DWP. Reasons for this include low digital skills, no access to a phone, homelessness and mental health and addiction problems.

To improve this situation, we have been testing a number of ways in which our service can be improved and how the necessary support systems can be put in place to help them transition into employment. This has included reviewing policies across different benefits to identify if there are inconsistencies and evaluating the prison work coach's role. We are also testing basing a work coach at a probation office to see if that helps keep them engaged and reduce the risk of things going wrong.

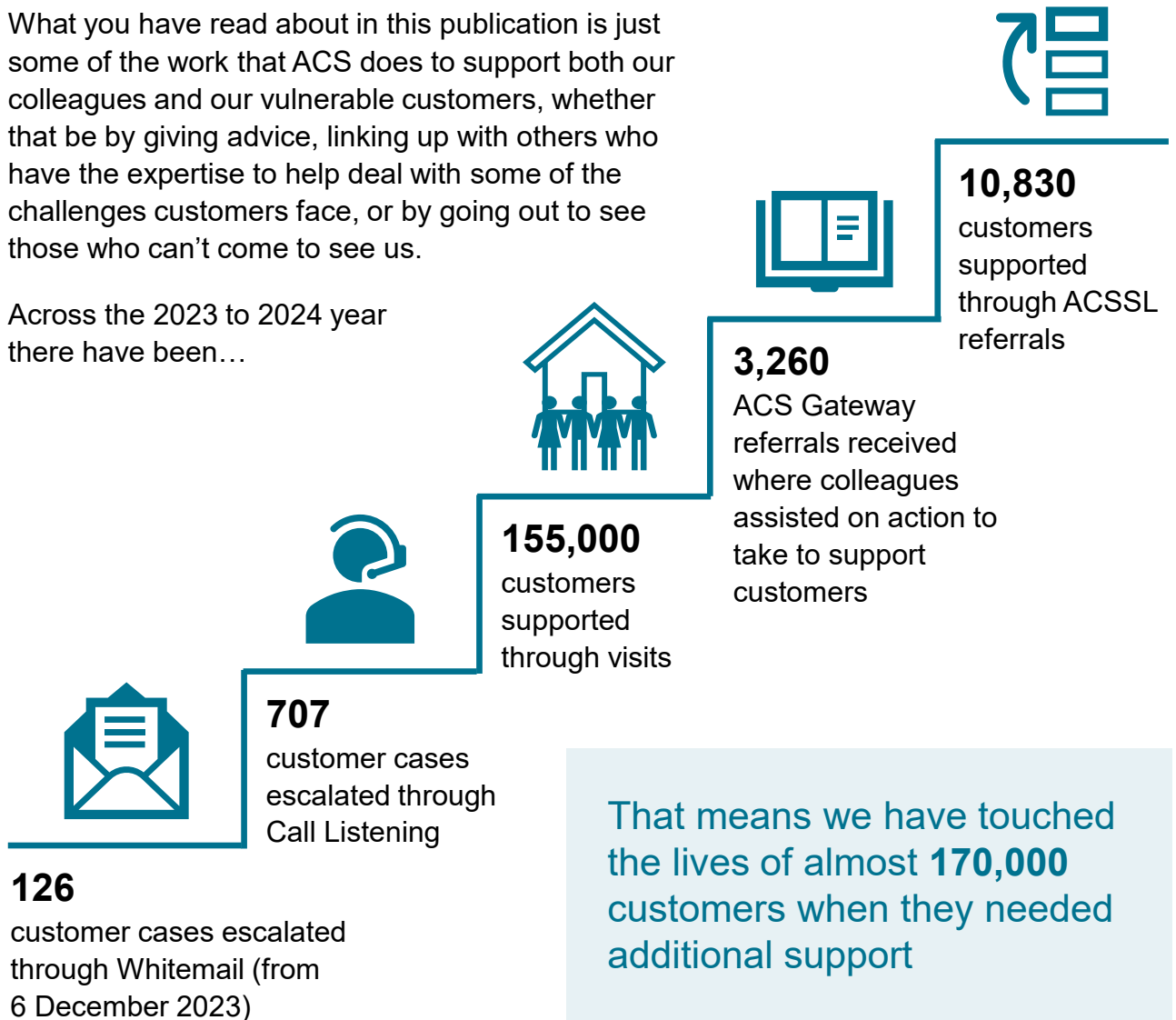
We have also taken steps to resolve delays in putting Personal Independence Payment (PIP) back into payment quickly where on release a prisoner is still entitled to it. By clarifying the instructions our colleagues follow and reminding them of the correct thing to do, means that a potential barrier to them moving forward, following their release, has been removed.



# ACS's commitment to supporting vulnerable customers

What you have read about in this publication is just some of the work that ACS does to support both our colleagues and our vulnerable customers, whether that be by giving advice, linking up with others who have the expertise to help deal with some of the challenges customers face, or by going out to see those who can't come to see us.

Across the 2023 to 2024 year there have been...



It is not just this direct support that is important though. We have also shown that what we learn from the customers we support is just as important. Being able to see where things have not gone as well as we would want and to make improvements is at the centre of all the work we do. We always want to learn and do better to help those customers we are here to support.

The customers we provide that additional support to however, is just a small percentage of those who are looked after and helped every day by our colleagues across DWP. Whether that be on the phone, in an office, or working with partner organisations, we are all here to support our customers when they need it.

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# How to get help if you need additional support

## Get extra help and support to manage your benefits or pension

We know that being able to access support when it is needed is very important and if you, or someone you are supporting, are having difficulty managing a benefit claim or your State Pension, there is extra help available from DWP.

Information on the help and support we can offer is available on GOV.UK and can be found at: [Get extra help and support to manage your benefits or pension - GOV.UK](#).

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Party Organisations who work with DWP

If you do not already have a relationship with your local ACSSL, and you think this would be beneficial, enquiries can be made via our national partnership teams. Information on how to contact them is available on GOV.UK and can be found at: [National partnership team contacts for England, Scotland and Wales](#)

## Support on the topics covered within this publication

If you have been affected by any of the topics covered within this publication, there is information and support available online:

**Homelessness** – [Help if you're homeless or about to become homeless - GOV.UK](#)

**Domestic Abuse** – [Domestic abuse: how to get help - GOV.UK](#)

## Mental Health

England – [Mental health – NHS](#)

Scotland – [Mental health | NHS inform](#)

Wales – [NHS 111 Wales - HealthA-Z : Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)

## Suicidal thoughts

England – [Help for suicidal thoughts - NHS](#)

Scotland – [Getting help with your suicidal thoughts | Suicide | NHS inform](#)

Wales – [NHS 111 Wales - HealthA-Z : Suicidal thoughts](#)

## Disclaimer

Please note this document does not set out the totality of the services and products DWP deliver, and more information can be found in [The DWP Annual Report and Accounts](#). Due to the differing devolution settlements in Scotland and Wales, some services referenced may not operate Great Britain wide.