

Performance Digest

Benefits service: April to December 2009/10

Purpose: pay the right person the right benefit at the right time

This digest supplements the strategic performance indicators reported through the SPAR process. It aims to monitor the impact of the redesigned service following the systems-thinking review and give Members information to understand and challenge what is happening within the service.

The benefits service went live with new processes in January 2009, the key features being:-

- Use of telephone preferred over correspondence to collect missing information
- The offer of a home visit to customers making benefit claims
- The completion of claims by phone where possible, for signature and return by the customer
- More claim processing to be done at reception with customer present

Leading measures

Indicator	2008/09 to 1 December 2008	2009/10 to 1 December 2009	Comment
Capability at first point of contact – measured by the %age of benefit claims and changes processed with 48 hours. This is the most cost-effective way of handling customer demand – and gives the best service to customers. We use 48 hours as a claim collected on a home visit is normally	19%	50%	In practice, there is so much information needed to support a benefit claim and evidence often needed from 3 rd parties that it is difficult to achieve a high percentage. Our challenge remains

Indicator	2008/09 to 1 December 2008	2009/10 to 1 December 2009	Comment
<p>processed the next day. If a home visit take place in the afternoon and the claim is processed the next morning our system will record this as taking 2 days.</p>			<p>to increase this figure to see what is achievable. The payoff is increased customer satisfaction and more efficient administration.</p>
<p>Preventable demand</p> <p><i>Measured by sampling demand to assess what %age of demand is preventable through service design.</i></p>	<p>Pre-system thinking analysis ("Check" showed 87 calls per day of preventable demand representing 58% of demand.</p>	<p>May 2009: 37 phone calls per day in sampling period – 53% of calls</p> <p>October 2009: 25 calls per day in sampling period – 48% of calls</p>	<p>The level of preventable demand has fallen from 87 to 25 calls per day – despite a large increase in the workload of the benefits teams.</p> <p>However there is still further scope to reduce preventable demand.</p> <p>5 top preventable demands: _</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “When will my claim be processed?” • “When are my payments due?” • Understanding an overpayment • Understanding the information we need to process a claim • Understanding why a claim has been suspended <p>Key to this is a drive to rewrite outgoing system letters to customers. This has been successful</p>

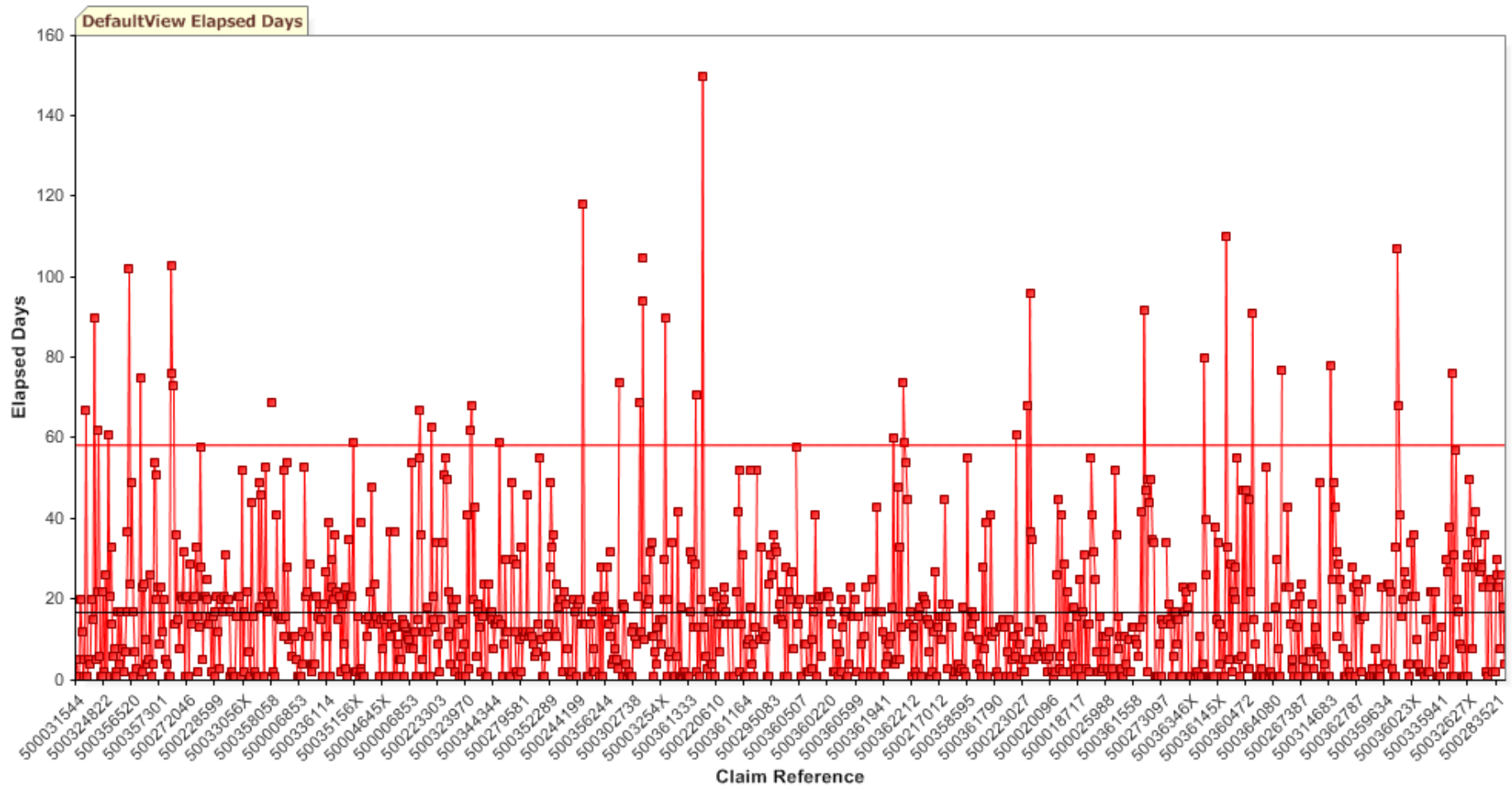
Indicator	2008/09 to 1 December 2008	2009/10 to 1 December 2009	Comment
			<p>so far with bespoke letters written to tell customers about the council rent decrease, changes in how child benefit is treated for housing benefit and changes to how pensioners' capital is treated.</p> <p>We are also developing a customer service promise across revenues & benefits so we can be specific with customers about what we will do and when to reduce the level of "when will x happen?" calls.</p>
<p>Customer demand – new claims <i>A key driver in service performance</i></p>	<p>4,273 claims in the year to 1 Dec</p>	<p>4,668 claims in the year to 1 Dec</p>	<p>9.2% increase on 2008/09. 30% higher than pre-recession figure at same time in 2007/08.</p>
<p>Customer demand – changes of circumstance <i>The complexity of the benefits system means that so many factors result in changes to benefit levels – who is in the household, changes to earnings, changes to other benefits and tax credits and short-time and temporary working.</i></p>	<p>12,913 changes in the year to 1 Dec</p>	<p>22,077 changes in the year to 1 Dec</p>	<p>5,045 extra "mass" changes this year due to rule changes (eg child benefit) and council rent decrease. But routine work still 32% higher than last year.</p>

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Customer demand - caseload <i>Claims in payment at any one time.</i>	9,420 households	9,995 households	Pre-recession figure at same time in 2007/08 is 8,681 . 15% higher but new claims are the most complex – from private tenants and working age customers.

Capacity charts

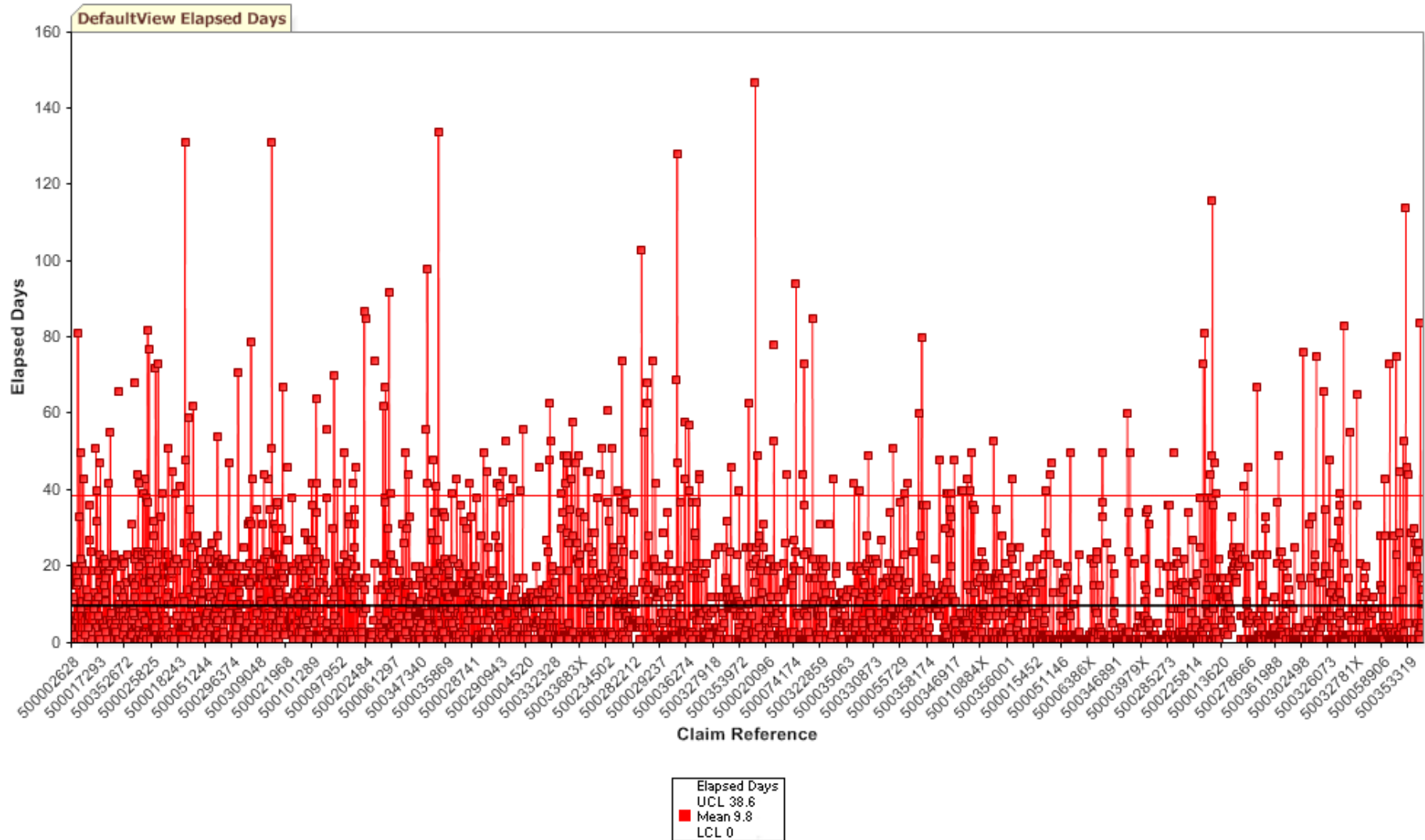
Prior to the systems thinking review the average new claim would take 50 days to process within a system that would predictably take up to 141 days. For the second quarter of 2009/10 the average new claim has taken 17 days (1st quarter 27 days) to process within a system that predictably takes up to 58 days (1st quarter 86 days).

The following chart shows each individual claim assessed in the quarter:-



Elapsed Days
 UCL 58.3
 Mean 16.9
 LCL 0

Similarly, for changes of circumstance, prior to the review these took an average of 21 days, now reduced to 9.8 days. The following chart shows the individual changes of circumstances processed in the 2nd Quarter.



The average change of circumstances would take 14 days to process in the 1st quarter of 2009/10 which has improved to 10 days as at the end of quarter 2. Within a system that would predictably take up to 61 days in the first quarter to what took 39 days in the 2nd quarter.

These charts are used as a management tool to identify exceptional cases and investigate what has happened and suggest process improvements.

Lagging measures

Indicator	2008/09 to 1 December 2008	2009/10 to 1 December 2009	Comment
<p>Customer satisfaction: measured by monthly telephone survey</p>	<p>Not available at this stage last year but:-</p> <p>8.9 out of 10 in Q4 after new processes live</p>	<p>9.05 out of 10</p>	<p>Customers like:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial calculation over the phone to see if worth claiming • “best service she has ever had” • “Much quicker than expected” • “Staff very helpful” • Claim sorted quickly...given us peace of mind in difficult times” • Visit quick & painless. I was very impressed” • “having someone complete form over the phone was excellent” • “felt respected and treated well”

Indicator	2008/09 to 1 December 2008	2009/10 to 1 December 2009	Comment
			Customers don't like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long letters • Would have liked a bit more help • Confusion over information we needed • Job Centre delays
<p>NI 180, the Right Benefit national indicator <i>This is a measure of the number of adjustments to customers benefit entitlement we make during the year. Department of Work & Pensions (DWP) research suggests how many changes should be expected for different claim types and this indicator measures how well councils identify changes in circumstances that result in adjustments to benefit.</i></p>	<p>32.4 changes per 1,000 cases per week (8th out of 27 LAs in our DWP benchmarking group)</p>	<p>34.2 changes per 1,000 cases per week</p>	<p>A small improvement in 2009/10 so far as the measure is caseload related it represents an increase in workload.</p>
<p>NI 181, the Right Time indicator <i>This replaces the previous new claim and changes of circumstance processing times with one average figure including both types of transaction.</i></p>	<p>15 days (12 days achieved for 2008/09 overall)</p>	<p>11.1 days (on track for 10 day target for 2009/10) Above average/top quartile</p>	<p>The DWP have been unable to publish comparative data for other LAs. However, they have predicted an average performance of 15.7 days.</p>

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Overpayments recovered as a %age of overpayments identified during the year	<p style="text-align: center;">77%</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Above average</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">79%</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Above average</p>	<p>No comparative data available yet but represents an above average performance against 2007/08 data.</p> <p>A significant improvement on 60% achieved in 2007/08. Average LA achieved 73.6% in 2007/08 with the top quartile starting at 82.4%.</p>
Overpayments recovered as a %age of total overpayment debt	<p style="text-align: center;">48%</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Top quartile</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">54%</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Top quartile</p>	<p>No comparative data available from the DWP yet.</p> <p>Top quartile was 36.8% in last published figures in 2007/08.</p>
Overpayment debt written off as a %age of total overpayment debt	<p style="text-align: center;">10.7%</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">7.3%</p>	<p>No comparative data available from the DWP yet.</p> <p>Write-offs happen in the case of bankruptcies, debt relief orders, 6-year statute-barred debt, untraceable debtors and a small number of cases where the debtor's circumstances make debt irrecoverable.</p>

Indicator	2008/09 to 1 December 2008	2009/10 to 1 December 2009	Comment
Fraud: number of prosecutions and sanctions per 1,000 caseload	<p>3.4 per 1,000 caseload</p> <p>Bottom quartile performance</p>	<p>7 per 1,000 caseload</p> <p>Above average</p>	Awaiting 2008/09 comparative figures from DWP but current performance is above the average of 6.2 in 2007/08.