

Vulnerable Person Policy - CA & JCP Taunton

Background to the policy

Although Universal Credit (UC) is an online benefit, the identification and verification checks for entitlement are usually dealt with via appointments at the claimant's local Jobcentre Plus (JCP) office. In Taunton Deane and parts of Chard this is Taunton JCP.

Taunton JCP is concerned that staff are now seeing many clients with significant vulnerabilities that they would not previously have seen e.g. terminal clients, those undergoing chemotherapy treatment, fleeing domestic violence etc. and they wish to ensure that these people are not adversely affected by the process for claiming UC.

Local staff may not be aware of vulnerabilities or additional needs until the appointment is held. Sometimes staff are never made aware, perhaps because the claimant is not aware of their prognosis, does not feel comfortable sharing it (or indeed the relevance of this information), or the claimant has difficulty advocating effectively for themselves.

Often Citizens Advice is aware of client vulnerabilities and as such we are in a position to provide - with the signed consent of the client/claimant - this information to Taunton JCP so it can be taken into account appropriately.

Who is vulnerable?

It must be remembered that it is important not to 'label' someone as vulnerable purely because they have a particular disability or are in a particular situation. It is often a combination of circumstances and personal factors, combined with an individual's capacity, that may lead them to be vulnerable in terms of ability to access the help they need.

In which case, it may be the state of being vulnerable is a temporary one based on circumstances at the time, due to acute difficulties that are likely to change. It should not be assumed that one to one help would always be needed by the same person with every contact with Jobcentre Plus.

Vulnerable customers are those that have difficulty in coping with the demands of DWP systems and processes.

The Vulnerable Person Policy (VPP)

The objective of the Vulnerable Person Policy (VPP) is to set out a strategy that would increase the likelihood of a successful benefit claim without unreasonable distress to the claimant.

A person, who by characteristics and/or circumstances need additional assistance to help them access the Department for Work and Pensions systems and processes and/or to help them deal with their affairs.

The types of characteristics or circumstances that may lead to a person being identified as vulnerable are outlined below. The combination or severity of these factors would contribute to a person being identified as vulnerable. This list of factors is not definitive and all the circumstances must be taken into account.

A	Addiction (i.e. substance misuse, gambling)	MH	Mental Health (including personality disorders / medication / self-harm)
C	Carers	PAR	People from abroad/refugees
CI	Cognitive Impairment (including dyslexia)	PBS	Personal Budgeting Support (needed)
CT	Chemotherapy Treatment	PH	Physical Health (including frailty due to advance years)
D	Disability	PP	Possession Proceedings
DS	Digital Support (needed)	PS	Probation Service Involvement
EO	Ex-Offenders	RB	Recent Bereavement
ES	Ex-Servicemen/women	SA	Substance Abuse
FI	Financial Impoverishment	SMI	Severely Mentally Impaired (as defined by the Mental Health Act)
GI	Gender Identity	SR	Special Rules
H	Homelessness	SS	Social Services Involvement
LD	Learning Difficulty (including literacy difficulties)	M	Medication
LGD	Language Difficulty	TI	Terminal Illness
LP	Lone Parents	VOA	Victim of Abuse
LTP	Late Term Pregnancy	VW	Victim of War
M	Medication	Y	Young People Under 18's

The Department for Work and Pensions legal team have approved the VPP.

When is the VPP not appropriate?

1. The VPP is not appropriate if the client has some difficulties making or managing their UC claim for example:

- The client has difficulty accessing the internet to make a UC claim
- The client has access to the internet but needs support to make the claim because they are not computer literate
- The client needs budgeting support

These cases should be signposted to the UC benefit support staff at Taunton Deane Borough Council. They are available Monday to Friday at The Deane House, or Monday, Wednesday and Friday at Taunton JCP.

2. The VPP is not appropriate if the client has advice needs in relation to:

- General entitlement
- Calculations of entitlement (how much they are entitled to)
- Challenging decisions
- Conditionality or sanctions
- UC50 forms (work capability assessment forms)

These cases are *advice* cases and as such should be progressed by Citizens Advice Taunton.

3. The VPP is not appropriate if the client needs to make or manage a claim and:

- Is an inpatient in hospital, or
- Needs an appointee

These clients should be referred to the DWP home visiting team.

How do Citizens Advice Taunton advisers use the policy?

You will need to use your judgement and observational skills to identify clients who might need extra support. Some people will have obvious physical disabilities which may mean they need extra personal support or that adjustments need to be made to enable them to access services. Other people may have conditions or personal circumstances which are less obvious.

The needs and circumstances of each client ought to be considered on an individual basis to identify whether Taunton JCP should be made aware of the barriers/difficulties so that their staff can take them into account when progressing the clients benefit claim.

If a client needs to access the local office, JCP Taunton to progress their benefit claim/s and you believe they meet the vulnerability definition then you should:

- 1.** Discuss the case with your supervisor, to establish if the supervisor agrees that your client meets the vulnerability definition.
- 2.** If the supervisor agrees. Advise the client about the VPP and ask if they would like CA-T to complete a VPP form.
- 3.** If the client agrees. Complete the form and ask the client to sign their consent.
- 4.** The form must then be signed by your supervisor and passed to the Welfare Rights Co-ordinator.
- 5.** The Welfare Rights Co-ordinator will review the VPP form and if approved, will submit to Taunton JCP.
- 6.** The Welfare Rights Co-ordinator will scan the form to the client's Petra record and update the 'consult supervisor' section.