**For Operational Stakeholder Engagement Forum Members**

Please find attached some further information for one of the items at our next meeting on Tuesday (21 July). We would like to use this time to listen to your feedback on some of the health and disability easements that have been brought in response to Covid-19.

Issues we are interested to hear about are listed below with some of the key questions we are looking to explore. These are designed to act as a guide for discussion and we hope this overview is helpful for any preparations you may choose to do ahead of the meeting.

***Health assessments - the suspension of face to face reviews and reassessments and the introduction of telephone assessments***

* Earlier this year we suspended all face-to-face assessments for sickness and disability benefits for three months to protect vulnerable people from unnecessary risk of exposure to COVID-19. Telephone assessments were introduced for PIP and WCA claimants as an alternative for some claimants.
* On 6 July it was announced that face-to-face assessments will remain suspended, but kept under review.
* As measures are taken across the country to ease restrictions, we are now gradually resuming some review and reassessment activity for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA).
* We are grateful to those PIP Policy Forum members who responded to our informal survey on the initial reaction to telephone assessments.  These early insights have been extremely helpful.

***Key Questions to explore:***

* *How do you think telephone assessments are working?*
* *What changes can be made to enhance the system/experience?*
* *Have you had any feedback to suggest whether telephone or face to face assessments are most welcomed by claimants and why?*
* *Are there groups of claimants for whom a telephone or face-to-face assessment might be most beneficial for?*
* *Do you have any other thoughts you’d like to share?*

***Introduction of the New Style ESA online portal and the option to receive and return the PIP2 and supporting evidence electronically***

* You may be aware that we have made available a PDF version of the PIP2 form.  The numbers for this have been limited to enable us to test how this is working and to ensure we can manage the return of these operationally. We are gradually increasing the numbers and will continue to increase this while we iterate it into a more dynamic online version which will be sent to users instead of the PDF, improving the experience for claimants.

We will be monitoring take up (currently 40%) and would welcome input on barriers to take up which we can consider in our design. We also welcome feedback and would be very grateful for anything which stakeholders can do to connect us with users of the service to help us improve.

* We have also introduced a New Style ESA online portal which allows applications to be completed online. (For those claimants or appointees who still require a telephony service, this remains available).

***Key Questions:***

* *Do you have feedback on claimant’s experiences of using the electronic service for the PIP2 form or the ESA online portal?*
* *What isn’t working as it should or what could be improved?*
* *What barriers to take-up should we consider?*

***Access to Work (AtW)***

Access to Work continues to provide support whether disabled people are working in the workplace or working from home. Recognising the challenges Coronavirus has had on disabled people who have continued to work and responding to feedback from stakeholders, Access to Work has introduced a series of measures. These are:

* **Prioritising new applications from key workers** and those with jobs starting within the next 4 weeks;
* **Accepting e-mail claim forms** from customers who request this as a reasonable adjustment;
* **Extending the timeframe** customers have to submit payment claim forms to **9 months**;
* **Accepting** employer and support worker signatures **via e-mail**;
* **Extending Support Worker** awards that are coming **to an end by 6 months;**
* **Adapting existing** **awards to meet new working environments**. Such as, switching from face to face British Sign Language Interpreting to Video Remote Interpreting services where possible as well as making greater use of assistive technology and software;
* **Adapting** the way our **assessments** are undertaken to support customers who don’t know what support they need and/or where coping strategies are required as part of the Mental Health Support Service;
* **Supporting** furloughed employees who need mental health support, by flexing access to the **Mental Health Support Service**;
* **Providing** support for deaf Access to Work customers to maintain work readiness whilst on furlough; and
* **Funding** Personal Protective Equipment for Access to Work customers who employ their own support workers.

***Key Questions:***

* *What are views and experience of the new processes?*
* *Are there any other changes customers would like to see?*