[redacted]

DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

RESPONSE TO REGULATION 28 PREVENTION OF FUTURE DEATHS REPORT ON FAISA HASSAN AHMED

Introduction

This report fulfils the Department for Work and Pensions' duty to respond to a Prevention of Future Deaths report made under the Coroner's (Investigations) Regulations 2013. This request has arisen following an inquest which reported on 20 January 2016 into the death of Faisa Hassan Ahmed. Ms Hassan Ahmed was a former claimant of Jobseeker's Allowance, who took her own life on 7 November 2014.

The Department takes seriously any declarations of intention to attempt suicide or self harm that are made by its customers and has put in place a well-designed process that seeks to ensure appropriate action is taken. There is a clear, detailed six point action plan that staff must follow if a customer declares an intention to kill or harm themselves. In addition, DWP provides both guidance and training to help staff deal with these incidents. The policy, procedures and guidance are reviewed regularly to ensure that they continue to meet their objectives and to identify areas for improvement.

This report is structured in three parts. The first describes the current system for managing threats to attempt suicide and or self harm. The second provides a summary of the circumstances in Ms Hassan Ahmed's case. The final part describes what systems the Department has in place continuously to improve its processes to support those who threaten to attempt suicide and self harm, including how it deals with the consequential impact this may have on DWP staff.

The current process for managing threats to attempt suicide or self harm

The Department deals with a wide range of customers who at some point in their lives may be vulnerable because of life events or disability. Providing the right level of support to enable these customers to access DWP benefits and use DWP services is a major commitment. To this end the Department has agreed a common definition of vulnerability as being any *'individual who is identified as having complex needs and/or requires additional support to enable them to access DWP benefits and use our services'*. This ensures consistency and continuity in the delivery of our services to those who are vulnerable. The Department's staff are trained to recognise the signs of vulnerability and to respond appropriately. This policy includes

[redacted]

ensuring the Department's staff are vigilant to customers who may directly declare, or whose behaviour indicates, an intention to attempt suicide or self harm.

Extract from DWP national guidance for all staff:

'Managers, in all DWP businesses who work with customers, must use the Departmental National Six Point Plan framework to develop arrangements that suit their own local working environments to help staff deal effectively and safely with customer declarations of intention to attempt suicide and self harm.'

The Department's staff are not medically trained. Therefore it is important that there are systems, procedures and responses in place to provide support to staff in the event that a customer says they intend to harm themselves. Consequently, managers throughout DWP are expected to develop arrangements with staff that comply with the principles of the DWP Six Point Plan framework and to produce their own localised Six Point Plan. A copy of the Department's guidance which includes the Six Point Plan Framework is attached at Annex A. The locally developed version for Poplar Jobcentre where Ms Hassan Ahmed claimed JSA has also been attached at Annex B.

The Six Point Plan

In brief, the Six Point Plan framework is as follows;

1. Take the statement to self harm or suicide seriously – remain calm and listen carefully.
2. Summon a colleague – to act as a support partner.
3. Gather information - to gauge level of risk.
4. Provide referral advice – if situation is non-urgent, e.g. general distress but no immediate plans or means to attempt suicide or self harm.
5. Summon Emergency help – if customer is distressed, at serious risk or in immediate danger.
6. Review – discuss incident with line manager and record

The arrangements which are put in place will be as comprehensive as possible to reflect different interactions with our customers, whether through face to face communications, telephone calls or written correspondence from customers (including emails). These support arrangements also extend to members of staff who work away from the office, including those who visit customers in their homes.

Once the Six Point Plan is in place for the individual office, the Department's managers will ensure that staff regularly refresh their knowledge of processes and procedures and have the capability to know how to respond appropriately to situations arising. This level of awareness includes access to both detailed guidance and formalised training to help staff gain and refresh their knowledge.

[redacted]

Ms Hassan Ahmed's Case

Faisa Hassan Ahmed was due to attend Poplar Jobcentre on 4 November 2014 to make her declaration of unemployment in order to remain eligible for her benefit payment. However, she contacted the Jobcentre that day to say she was sick.

Faisa subsequently attended the Jobcentre on 7 November 2014 where she explained to the Work Coach that she had not come in on 4 November because she was ill. She was asked to complete a form to formally declare her sickness on 4 November.

Faisa completed and returned the form to the Work Coach, then immediately left. This meant that the Work Coach was also unable to discuss the detail of the statement she had made; *'I was busy trying to kill myself, drinking non-stop'*. On the form Faisa stated the period of illness had occurred between 4 and 7 November.

The Work Coach discussed his concerns with his line manager, invoked the Six Point Plan, and recorded the incident in accordance with DWP procedures. DWP policies state that its employees are empowered to take any reasonable steps, including contacting the emergency services, if they feel the customer faces clear and significant risks to their welfare or safety. In this case, based on the information he had, the Work Coach made a judgement that there was no immediate risk to her safety. The information available to the Work Coach at that point was based on the form that Faisa had completed, stating a period of illness between 4 and 7 November which was now ended, and the fact that she had attended the Jobcentre to make her declaration to receive her benefit. Sadly, Faisa died at Westferry station later that same day.

Reviewing the Processes

As with any public facing organisation, it is always possible that DWP staff may encounter customers who might say they intend to harm or kill themselves. This can also be a distressing experience for DWP staff and their other customers. So it is important that staff know how to manage such an event to reduce distress and achieve an outcome where everyone is safe.

We expect staff to be alert to customers who may directly declare, or whose behaviour indicates, an intention to attempt suicide or self harm and to be aware of the Six Point Plan and to use this as a basis to enable them to manage situations that may arise effectively.

This localised Six Point Plan must be developed then regularly reviewed in consultation with the Department's Trade Union representatives to ensure it continues to meet its objectives and for continuous improvement purposes. Staff awareness is further underpinned with bespoke learning to support them when dealing with all vulnerable customers. An example of how this learning supports

[redacted]

raising the awareness of customers threatening suicide and/ or self harm is attached at Annex C. This is drawn from one of our national learning products - Supporting Customers With A Vulnerability.

At a national level, the policy and guidance are reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to meet their objectives and for continuous improvement purposes. DWP uses a variety of internal communication channels to ensure staff remain aware of all changes to its guidance and processes as they occur.

Conclusion

The situation that has given rise to the requirement for this response is extremely sad and our condolences and sympathies go out to Ms Hassan Ahmed's family for their loss.

Nevertheless, in this case we feel that the Departmental processes around managing the threat of suicide and/ or self harm were followed both diligently and correctly. In recognition of the risk, DWP staff took the necessary steps to invoke the agreed processes that would manage the risk appropriately. Importantly this action was based on the evidence that staff were presented with. It is not our view that any opportunity to engage with any other organisations was missed.

As the information we have set out in preceding paragraphs shows, the Department's approach to managing threats to attempt suicide and self harm is under continual review and development and we do treat them seriously. Such internal mechanisms provide a valuable method of refining the processes being applied as well as helping to identify opportunities for improving supporting products like those of learning and development which help to build staff capability.

Therefore as part of this continued review, we will now be taking the opportunity to issue a reminder to all DWP staff about the guidance related to suicidal ideation that has been described in this report.