

APPENDIX E – Diary of a team adapting to new ways of working

Housing Benefit Diary

WEEK 1

- Preparations to work from home:
- **A COMPLETELY NEW WAY OF WORKING FOR BENEFIT STAFF**
- Result - very anxious and stressed staff
- Worries regarding hardware and set up of computer/phone links at home.
- Having to work from two large screens to one small screen or home laptop screen instead
- Issues of where to work in the family home - space to work, safety, noise and trying to work with children and other family members at home.
- Concerns regarding the different level of support when working from home when they are used to working with colleagues in the same office and consulting with each other about difficult claims
- Staff worried about how they are going to manage regarding their own families and personal problems during this time

WEEK 2

- **Settling in period.**
- Our busiest time of year due to end of financial year and subsequent changes to benefits and awards
- Hundreds of rent increases to action
- Staff missing work environment and support
- Lots of problems regarding stationery – forms needing to be adapted and put on line etc.
- Arranging how to deal with printing letters and who would send them out as they can only be printed in the office
- Having to learn how to utilize laptops at home for things we have never had to do in the office before e.g. skype remote meetings.
- Set up “Home working folder” for stationery, reports and procedures
- Keeping in constant contact with each other for support and information – using recently set up office WhatsApp group
- First weekly team skype meeting - much needed group contact. Future meetings set up on a weekly basis

WEEK 3

- **Workload increasing**
- Claimant calls starting to increase – at the moment grateful for help and assistance – we know that will change in the near future

- Staff settling and keeping up to date with normal work as well as increased phone enquiries and extra end of year work
- Managers also keeping in touch with staff on a regular one to one basis for personal support and concerns that they may not want to be discussed in weekly meetings.
- All staff are starting to feel the strain of the last few weeks and complaining of being extremely tired. Looking forward to the Bank Holiday break.

WEEK 4

- **People are now starting to really worry.**
- Calls continue to increase and background histories are getting harder to hear.
- Staff are sending out more and more forms and taking more enquiries from not only new claimants but also claimants that were with us prior to lockdown
- We are receiving more complex enquiries
- We are really struggling to reply to the amount of e-mails we are receiving as they all require a detailed response.

WEEK 5

- **A very distressing week**
- Phone and e-mail enquiries increase
- New claims received are increasing
- Staff have all seemed to struggle this week.
- Some in tears and all showing distress in one form or another.
- Calls they are receiving are either heart-breaking - Like for example the father who is crying because he can't get his wife's signature on an application form because she is locked down in hospital with their 5 year old son who's chances of survival are touch and go and he can't go to see him and has no money anyway.
- And many others who show their distress by being verbally abusive and shouting.
- Ongoing updates with working practises
- Trying to respond to as many e-mails as possible some by telephone if we can as on occasion it's easier/quicker to explain

WEEK 6

- **Becoming the new norm!**
- Forms continue to be sent out
- New claims continue to arrive
- Payments continue to be made
- Calls continue to be received

- E-mails continue to be responded to
- Claimants continue to be upset
- Help continues to be given
- Staff continue to be exhausted
- So proud of what everyone is achieving.