



**Child Support Agency  
Business Plan 2006/07**

**child support agency**  
Part of the Department for Work and Pensions

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## **Executive Directors of the Child Support Agency**

Stephen Geraghty	Chief Executive
Hilary Reynolds	Deputy Chief Executive, Director of Client and Stakeholder Relationships
Mark Grimshaw	Strategic Programme Director
Chris Bowman	Director of Business Design
Ron Eagle	Director of IS/IT
Susan Park	Director of Operations
Ian Pavey	Director of Human Resources
Alan Hardy	Director of Finance and Business Assurance

## **Members of the Board**

Those named above, plus the following Non-Executive Directors:

Richard Arthur

John Cross

Bryan Foss

Bill Griffiths

Peter Holden

Susan Jillings

Barney McGahan

Jonathan Portes

# The Child Support Agency and the Department for Work and Pensions

The Department for Work and Pensions (the Department) exists to deliver the Government's welfare reform agenda through a radical and far-reaching programme of change. Its principal aim is to promote opportunity and independence for all.

The Department's objectives for 2006/07 are to:

- ensure the best start for all children and end child poverty by 2020;
- promote work as the best form of welfare for people of working age, while protecting the position of those in greatest need;
- combat poverty and promote security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners;
- improve rights and opportunities for disabled people in a fair and inclusive society; and
- ensure customers receive a high quality service, including high levels of accuracy.

These objectives are underpinned by the Department's Public Service Agreements, which set out specific targets that must be met in return for the resources provided through the Government's Spending Review.

## Values

The Child Support Agency's (the Agency's) values are shared with the Department's as a whole. What the values mean to us is summarised below and illustrated in more detail throughout the Business Plan.

### *Achieving the best*

We will:

- understand and respond to the needs of our clients and listen to their concerns;
- set service standards and deliver them consistently;
- deliver an efficient, professional and sensitive service often at an emotionally difficult time in our clients' lives;
- continuously improve our performance by learning from our successes and our mistakes; and
- use our resources efficiently.

### *Making a difference*

We will:

- ensure that children whose parents do not live together are financially supported by taking action as soon as we can to get maintenance to those children; and
- support each other to work well in circumstances that are often emotionally difficult.

### *Respecting people*

We will:

- understand, respond to and invest in the needs of our staff;
- treat our clients and each other with respect;
- value the ideas of others; and
- communicate clearly.

### *Looking outwards*

We will:

- seek/welcome opportunities to work with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors; and
- benchmark ourselves against the standards achieved by others.

# The Child Support Agency

## The current position

Well-documented problems with computer systems and processes have prevented us from delivering the kind of service that clients have the right to expect. As a result we continue to operate with cases on both the old and new schemes, as well as a clerical caseload.

The cumulative effect is severe:

- Debt accumulated since 1993 stood at over £3.3 billion at April 2005. Much of this is believed to be uncollectable, either because of the limitations of the Agency's powers of enforcement or because of the circumstances of the non-resident parent.
- Over a quarter of a million applications under the new scheme have not yet been cleared.
- We have large volumes of outstanding changes of circumstances to process on new scheme cases.
- In addition, as at the end of December 2005, in just under two in five cases where maintenance was due, no payment was received from the non-resident parent via the collection service, nor was there a Maintenance Direct arrangement in place.

Having improved in many areas since April 2004, the Agency's performance is currently stable. This provides us with a solid foundation on which to deliver future improvements, which are much needed as the level of service currently provided to many of our clients continues to fall short of our targets and their reasonable expectations.

## Action being taken

It has been widely accepted that the problems facing the Agency are deep rooted and complex and go wider than purely operational issues.

On 9 February 2006, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, John Hutton, announced a programme to address the current difficulties. This consists of two elements, the first of which involves consideration of the longer-term policy and delivery arrangements for child support. This will be led by Sir David Henshaw, who will propose a re-design of child support policy and report back to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions before the summer recess. The terms of reference for the re-design are:

- how best to ensure that parents take financial responsibility for their children when they live apart;
- the best arrangements for delivering this outcome in a cost-effective way; and
- the options for moving to new structures and policies while recognising the need to protect the level of service offered to the current 1.5 million parents with care.

The second element, announced in parallel with this review, is the publication of an Operational Improvement Plan that sets out a programme to stabilise and improve the Agency's performance over a three-year period from 2006 to 2009.

## **Our role – the existing job**

**The Agency exists to ensure that, where an application for child maintenance has been made, parents who live apart contribute financially to the upkeep of their children.**

### **Responsibilities**

Our responsibilities are to:

- make timely and accurate calculations of child maintenance due;
- ensure that money is collected in and paid out on time;
- help and support clients as they complete this process; and
- support and get the best out of our people to help them deliver more for clients.

### **Main activities**

Our main activities are to:

- establish child support by:
  - contacting parents with care and non-resident parents;
  - arranging the resolution of paternity disputes;
  - calculating child maintenance;
  - discussing and explaining the amount of maintenance to be paid with non-resident parents and parents with care;
  - arranging a suitable payment method; and
  - monitoring the initial payments to ensure that a pattern of regular payment is established.
- maintain child support by:
  - monitoring payments and intervening quickly when payments are late with both non-resident parents and parents with care; and
  - keeping calculations up to date when a change is reported.

## Achieving the best – client service standards

Client service standards for the Agency have not been published for some years; however, as part of the Operational Improvement Plan, we recognise the importance of introducing realistic service standards.

Our service standards need to cover the minimum levels of service clients can expect from the Agency in our main business areas. The service standards will cover the following areas:

<b>When clients first make contact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time from first contact to a decision being made</li> </ul>
<b>Making payments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time from a payment arrangement being set up to first payment</li> <li>• Time from receiving maintenance from the non-resident parent, to paying it to the parent with care</li> </ul>
<b>When circumstances change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time to process changes of circumstance</li> </ul>
<b>When payments break down</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time to restore payments after breakdown</li> <li>• What to expect in terms of legal enforcement action where this is not possible</li> </ul>
<b>When clients contact us</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time to answer telephone calls</li> <li>• Time to reply to letters and complaints</li> </ul>
<b>Appeals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time to resolve an appeal</li> </ul>

# **Making a difference – the Operational Improvement Plan**

We are fundamentally changing the way we work to bring quicker and greater gains for clients. The Operational Improvement Plan sets out a programme for the next three years under the following headings:

- Getting it right,
- Keeping it right,
- Putting it right,
- Getting the best from the organisation.

These are explained in more detail below.

## **Getting it right – gathering information and assessing applications**

We will:

- increase our staff numbers and their productivity;
- improve the tracing of non-resident parents;
- improve accuracy; and
- improve communication with our clients and stakeholders.

## **Keeping it right – active case management**

We will:

- make collection and payment more effective;
- respond as quickly as we can to changes of circumstance;
- increase our effectiveness and productivity; and
- let clients know what is going on.

## **Putting it right – enforcing responsibilities**

We will:

- manage client debt more effectively; and
- take court action against those who won't pay.

## **Getting the best from the organisation**

We will:

- change the way we work to meet clients' needs;
- make more people and resources available to progress clients' cases;
- work towards resolving the IT problems;
- standardise our processes; and
- monitor, evaluate and manage our performance effectively.

## **Respecting people – actions and priorities in 2006/07**

The first stages of the three-year Operational Improvement Plan will be implemented in 2006/07. This involves significant change for the Agency and its people and will start to deliver improvements for clients.

### **To help us deliver the necessary change, we will:**

- bring more people into the Agency by:
  - increasing staffing levels by around 1,000 posts by June 2006; and
  - acquiring new sites to accommodate new staff from across the Department.
- ensure that a higher proportion of our people are working directly with clients by:
  - moving 1,000 people from existing roles into active case progression roles;
  - introducing new ways of working whereby any member of the team will be able to handle the required activity for a client;
  - adopting a contact centre approach, which will mean that work items and calls will be routed to teams of staff rather than a specific single caseworker;
  - outsourcing some work to free-up our people, enabling them to focus on delivering an improved service to clients; and
  - retaining a specialist caseworker approach to enforcement, complaints and complex casework to guarantee quality and to ensure that we offer a continually improving service to our clients.

### **We will support our people through this change by:**

- assessing the capability of individuals for particular roles in our new structures and, where possible, taking into account their preferences for the kind of work they wish to do;
- delivering a tailored training programme for people who are new to the Agency and for those who are changing to newly adopted roles;
- engaging with our people through annual staff surveys and other evaluation and assessment activities;
- communicating with our people regularly and in an open and honest manner; and
- incorporating the principle of continuous improvement into our planning processes and the way in which we invest in our people.

## Looking outwards – working with stakeholders and others

We aim to work with a range of individuals and organisations to develop effective relationships, learn about our clients' experiences of dealing with us and respond constructively to problems and complaints.

This helps us to identify improvements to the service we provide and ensure that parents receive the maintenance payments to which they are entitled.

Our **stakeholders** include:

- those who speak on behalf of clients;
- those who provide advice and guidance to clients;
- those who provide services for us; and
- those who scrutinise and challenge the services we provide and how we deliver them.

We also **work closely with other businesses and across Government:**

- to increase the information available to trace non-resident parents;
- to calculate and collect the maintenance liability; and
- to ensure that payments are collected and made.

These include:

- Jobcentre Plus;
- Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs;
- Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency;
- Her Majesty's Courts Service; and
- Employers.

# Secretary of State Targets for 2006/07

## Collection rate

By 31 March 2007, where maintenance is paid through the collection service the Agency will collect, on average, 90 per cent of the amount due.

## Maintenance outcome

By 31 March 2007, in 65 per cent of cases across both the new and old schemes in which a liability to pay maintenance exists, the non-resident parent has either made a payment via the collection service or a Maintenance Direct arrangement is in place. In addition, further ensuring that at least this level of performance is achieved for those new scheme cases in which the parent with care is on Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance.

## Throughput

By 31 March 2007, the Agency will clear 55 per cent of new applications within 12 weeks of receipt and 80 per cent within 26 weeks.

## New application backlogs

By 31 March 2007, the Agency will have reduced the volume of uncleared new scheme applications by 25 per cent of the amount outstanding by the end of March 2006.

## Accuracy

By 31 March 2007, accuracy on the last decision made for all new or old scheme maintenance calculations carried out and checked in the previous 12 months will be correct to the nearest penny in at least 87 per cent of cases.

## Debt

The Agency will collect arrears equivalent to 40 per cent of the amount accruing due to non-payment of regular maintenance between 1 April 2006 and 31 March 2007.

## Resources for 2006/07

### Finance

The financial resources for the Agency for 2006/07 are £439 million.

This is year two of a three-year spending review period. Under the terms of the Spending Review and in agreement with the Department, the Agency is required to balance resources over the whole three-year period. On this basis the expected surplus on financial resources for the 2005/06 period will be carried forward and is available in addition to the funds above.

An additional £120 million has been made available to fund the Agency's Operational Improvement Plan over the period 2006/09.

### People/estates

The Agency currently employs 10,700 people who operate from six main centres and are located at more than 200 sites. Main centres are located in:

- Dudley
- Hastings
- Falkirk
- Plymouth
- Birkenhead
- Belfast.

Central Directorate staff are based in Newcastle and London.

A further 1,300 people undertake some of the Agency's work within Northern Ireland, but are employees of the Department for Social Development (Northern Ireland).

## Contacts

To contact us or find out more, visit our website at [www.csa.gov.uk](http://www.csa.gov.uk) or write to:

Chief Executive  
Child Support Agency  
Room BP6201  
Department for Work and Pensions  
Benton Park Road  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE98 1YX

The **National Helpline** is open Monday to Friday between 8.00 am and 8.00 pm and Saturday between 8.30 am and 5.00 pm:

Telephone: 08457 133 133  
Minicom/textphone: 08457 138 924

The **Welsh Enquiry Line** is open Monday to Friday between 9.00 am and 5.00 pm:

Telephone: 08457 138 091

