Department for Work & Pensions

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Date: 14 March 2020

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Dear (REDACTED)

Personal Independence Payments (PIP) Assessment Service

Lot 2 - Contract Reference: UI_DWP_100430

Subject: COVID-19 Service Impact

Further to our discussion today I am writing concerning the Department's review of COVID-19, and specifically the potential impact this may have on PIP claimants, a number of whom are in groups considered at risk from the virus.

It is critically important that claimants, and indeed your employees, are not exposed to a greater risk of infection than can be avoided at this time. Those attending a face to face assessment, whether in a centre or at their home, are at the highest risk.

It has been decided by the Department that in order to address this risk, we need to cease all face to face assessments and I welcome your support in implementing this approach, as a key way of protecting claimant welfare.

In the circumstances referred to above and pursuant to clause F10 of the PIP Contract the Department has determined that it needs to take specific action in connection with your ongoing delivery of the Services because a serious risk exists to the health or safety of persons. On that basis the Department is now stepping-in and directing you to cease all further face to face assessments This cessation of face to face assessments shall take effect from the point at which we confirm to you that the Department has publicly confirmed the suspension – which we anticipate will be on Monday 16th March.

We wish to stress that the requirement for this action is not a consequence of any failure or default on your part under the terms of the Contract. Instead, and having considered the various contractual options available, this action represents a clear, efficient and proportionate step to ensure that the Services are appropriately adjusted in response to the challenging circumstances we face.

For the avoidance of doubt we are taking this step purely as a means of directing the suspension of the face to face assessment element of the Services. We do not intend to take any further direct action affecting your delivery of the Services – other than to proactively work with you over the coming days and weeks to deal with the current scenario as set out further below.

The period over which it is necessary for the Department to direct the continued suspension of face to face assessments will be kept under ongoing review and we will work closely with you to ensure you are appropriately appraised in relation to this evolving situation. Our intention is that this period is kept to the minimum necessary.

With the above in mind we ask that you use best efforts to contact all claimants that have a scheduled assessment from Tuesday 17th March to confirm it is either not going ahead or will be conducted through an alternative channel. We recognise that this might not be possible for all claimants given the urgent nature of this direction. Therefore, where a claimant attends an assessment centre you should ensure they are made aware of the position that they should be offered the choice as to whether to continue with that assessment or not and support any travel needs they have to return home.

In our discussions you have indicated the potential to re-route some face to face assessments through a telephony channel. We will work with you as a matter of urgency to implement this solution and recognise this will not be appropriate for all claimants depending on their circumstances and the nature of the assessment you will need to undertake.

In the meantime, and throughout the period that this action remains necessary, we are grateful that you will work with us and provide all reasonable assistance and cooperation in order to ensure that the delivery of the Services is adapted as necessary in order to reflect the serious health and safety risks we currently face. We recognise the impact this situation will have on your organisation and are committed to working closely with you during this challenging period, including in relation to how we manage the impact of costs in a sustainable way, how we ensure the viable delivery of functional health assessments throughout and following these challenging circumstances and how we deal most appropriately with those assessments that cannot be conducted via alternative channels.

In the circumstances we would be grateful if you could acknowledge the contents of this letter by return and confirm your agreement and commitment to work with us as requested. Once this confirmation is received the Department will proceed to publicly announce the suspension of face to face assessments. As stated above we anticipate this announcement will be made on Monday 16th March.

Please treat the content of this letter as confidential and do not act on any direction within this letter publicly until we confirm to you that the announcement referred to above has been made by the Department. For the avoidance of doubt this includes any contact with claimants.

Yours sincerely,

(REDACTED)