EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

THE SOCIAL SECURITY (WORK-FOCUSED INTERVIEWS FOR LONE PARENTS) AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2007

2007 No. 1034

1. This explanatory memorandum has been prepared by the Department for Work and Pensions and is laid before Parliament by Command of Her Majesty.

2. Description

2.1 This instrument makes a number of amendments to Regulations dealing with work-focused interviews. It applies to lone parents (LPs) whose youngest child is aged under 16. The main changes are:

- introducing 6-monthly Work-focused Interviews (WFIs) for all LPs in receipt of Income Support;
- introducing quarterly WFIs for LPs in receipt of Income Support, who live in certain parts of the country and whose youngest child is aged 11, 12 or 13; and
- revoking Regulations which require certain LPs to take part in WFIs.

3. Matters Of Special Interest To The Joint Committee On Statutory Instruments

3.1 None.

4. Legislative Background

4.1 In the Welfare Reform Green Paper, *'A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering People to Work'*, published on 24 January 2006, the government set out it's proposals for providing increased support to help LPs prepare for and move into work. This included a range of measures, including the introduction of more WFIs for LPs. Specifically, the Green Paper proposed that we will:

- "introduce six-monthly interviews (twice as frequent as now) for all lone parents who have been on benefit for at least a year and who are not required to take part in more frequent work-focused interviews"; and
- "hold mandatory interviews every three months with lone parents who have been claiming Income Support for at least a year and whose youngest child is at least 11".

4.2 The Social Security (Work-focused Interviews for Lone Parents) and Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 2000, and the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2002 are amended so as to introduce 6-monthly WFIs for LPs. LPs whose youngest child is aged 5- 13 will have a WFI every 6 months from 30 April 2007 and from 28 April 2008, all LPs will have a WFI every 6 months as a minimum.

4.3 The Social Security (Work-focused Interviews for Lone Parents) and Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 2000 are amended so as to introduce quarterly WFIs from 30 April 2007, for LPs who reside in the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents areas and whose youngest child is aged 11, 12 or 13.

4.4 The Social Security (Quarterly Work-focused Interviews for Certain Lone Parents) Regulations 2004 introduced a pilot under which some LPs had mandatory WFIs. Revocation will remove this particular mandatory WFI regime with effect from 30 April 2007 with LPs reverting to the appropriate "normal" WFI regime, in accordance with their circumstances from that date.

5. Extent

5.1 This instrument extends to Great Britain.

6. The European Convention On Human Rights

6.1 As the Instrument is subject to negative resolution procedure and does not amend primary legislation, no statement is required.

7. Policy Background

6 Monthly Work-focused Interviews

7.1 In 2000, the Government set an ambitious target of increasing the LP employment rate to 70% by 2010. This will contribute to a reduction in the number of children living in workless households and to the longer-term target of reducing child poverty (halving by 2010 and eradicating by 2020). The current LP strategy provides a comprehensive package of help and advice focusing on WFIs and New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), supported by Tax Credits and increased access to childcare.

7.2 The purpose of a WFI is to discuss the possibility of help for LPs who want to take up employment or training, or prepare for employment in the future. A personal adviser ensures that the LP is informed of the range of help available to them, including advice to LPs looking for work through the voluntary NDLP Programme.

7.3 The current WFI regime and NDLP have been very successful in helping large numbers of LPs into work and subsequently lifting them and their children out of poverty.

7.4 This proposal seeks to build on the success by extending the frequency of mandatory WFIs to LPs with a youngest child aged 13 or younger who have been on income support (IS) for at least a year.

7.5 In order to manage the impact of the increased WFI regime on Jobcentre Plus, 6-monthly WFIs will be introduced in two phases. The first commencing in April 07 for those with a youngest child aged 5-13 (about 54% of caseload) and the second from April 08 for those with a youngest child aged 0-4 (the remaining 46%).

Quarterly Work-focused Interviews in New Deal Plus for Lone Parents areas

7.6 The current proposal introduces Quarterly WFIs (QWFIs) for those LPs with a youngest child aged 11, 12 or 13 in the seven New Deal Plus for Lone Parents pilot areas from April 2007. New Deal Plus for Lone Parents is a scheme to provide increased opportunities for LPs to find work, and evaluation of these pilots will inform future policy development.

7.7 The QWFIs in New Deal Plus for Lone Parents areas aim to move LPs closer to the labour market or into work. The QWFIs will therefore support LPs to access the package of support already available in the pilot areas, by providing a regular forum through which to encourage LPs to consider preparing for and moving into work.

Extended Schools Childcare Work-focused Interviews

7.8 The introduction of The Social Security (Quarterly Work-focused Interviews for Certain Lone Parents) Regulations 2004 in the Extended Schools Childcare (ESCC) pilot areas came into effect on 30 September 2004 to test whether the increased availability of childcare, together with regular WFIs, would have an improved effect of moving LPs into work. We anticipated that this would lead to greater numbers moving onto NDLP and ultimately into work.

7.9 The ESCC pilot came to an end on 31 March 2006. DWP decided to keep the WFI regulations in force and continue to carry out the WFIs.

7.10 With the introduction of the quarterly WFIs for 11 to 13 year olds in New Deal Plus for Lone Parents areas, the WFI regime would have become overly complex, risking confusion for staff and customers alike. As a result, we are to replace the former ESCC (12+) quarterly WFIs with the new (11+) ones in the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents pilot areas, and discontinue the former ESCC WFIs in the non-New Deal Plus for Lone Parents areas. This will result in a less intensive quarterly WFI regime for LPs in three of the former ESCC areas (e.g. those LPs with a youngest child aged 12-13 in Torfaen, Fife and Aberdeenshire will receive two less interviews per year). However the numbers involved are small. In the remaining New Deal Plus for Lone Parents areas, LPs will have the same number of WFIs as now.

Consultation

7.11 The Social Security Advisory Committee agreed that these regulations should not be referred for formal consultation.

Guidance

7.12 A mailshot has been issued to all affected lone parents informing them of the changes and legal requirement to attend WFIs.

Consolidation

7.13 Informal consolidation of the instrument will be included in due course in the Department's "the Law Relating to Social Security" (the Blue Volumes) which are available on the internet at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/advisers/docs/lawvols/bluevol/pdf/c_0031.pdf at no cost to the public.

8. Regulatory Impact And Costs

8.1 A full regulatory impact assessment has not been produced for this instrument as it has no impact on the costs of business, charities and voluntary bodies.

8.2 There will be no additional impact on the public sector.

9. Contact Details

9.1 Sarah Cooke at the Department for Work and Pensions (telephone 0113 2519320, e-mail sarah.p.cooke1@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk) can answer any queries regarding the instrument.