REPORT ON BENEFIT SANCTIONS – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

In February of this year, my Department responded to the Work and Pensions Select Committee’s Report into benefit sanctions. We committed to updating the Committee regarding the progress of some of our actions.

Improving our data (para 32-34 of Govt response)

We have commenced the discovery phase of a User Research exercise investigating how claimants disclose information and how we can most effectively collect it. This involves meeting claimants and expert users (such as third parties and work coaches) to understand how people respond to being asked about their circumstances, and what support they may require. Our focus in this piece of work is to collect high quality information in a way that does not stigmatise claimants or cause distress. This work is ongoing and we will provide a further update by the end of the year.

We are also undertaking work to capture where we have supported a claimant by applying an easement. We are on track to complete this by the end of the year.

Care Leavers (para 26-29 of Govt response)

We have reviewed local protocols to ensure their robustness and are continuing to work with the Department for Education and Local Authorities to encourage the take up of these in the areas where they are not already in place.

We are reviewing our guidance and working practices to ensure that planned processes to discuss care leavers’ cases (both before a potential sanction referral, and at other times) meet the department’s standards and obligations under GDPR.
We expect to introduce these new processes in the autumn when we will also be delivering our internal awareness campaign on care leavers. We should have these in place when we next write to you.

**Informing Claimants about Easements (para 58 of Govt Response)**

We have published updates to the ‘Universal Credit and You’ information pack which is publicly available here


The pack is intended to guide claimants through their Universal Credit and now contains additional information about easements.

**KPIs for Mandatory Reconsiderations (paras 73-76 of Govt Response)**

We have developed a Key Performance Indicator to identify success (at team, site and national level) against our goal of completing as many Mandatory Reconsiderations as possible within the same Assessment Period as they are requested. This indicator has been in use since April 2019. The indicator quantifies the percentage of Mandatory Reconsiderations completed within that frame, recognising that we do not want to make all decisions within that time frame for the reasons articulated in paragraph 75 of our previous response.

We intend to publish the data of our performance against this indicator in the Department's annual report, as committed in our previous response.

**Proof of Concept – Written Warnings for First Sanctionable Failure to Attend (paras 77-80 of Govt Response)**

We have commenced a Proof of Concept in which we are gathering qualitative feedback on the effect of giving claimants a warning rather than a sanction for their first failure to attend without a good reason. We expect to have preliminary findings in the Autumn.

**Evaluation (paras 10-12 of Govt Response)**

Finally, as we have already communicated to you, our evaluation has been delayed by other priorities and we now expect to publish it when the House returns from summer recess.

We are continuing work on other areas in the report and will report back to you on these areas by the end of the year as committed in our Response.

Alok Sharma MP
Minister of State for Employment