



## Work and Pensions Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

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From the Chair

26 July 2018

Sarah Newton MP  
Minister of State for Disabled People  
Department for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House  
SW1H 9NA

Dear Sarah,

Throughout the Committee's inquiry into employment support for carers it received 64 written evidence submissions, heard from six panels of witnesses and travelled to Stoke-on-Trent to learn about the lived experiences of carers juggling their responsibilities alongside paid employment. This evidence base informed our report and subsequent recommendations, which were agreed unanimously by the Committee.

The Government's response to this report was disappointing, rejecting the mildest of recommended changes with limited argument to support those decisions. All our recommendations were agreed in the spirit of wishing to improve the lives of millions of carers, not to criticise the Department. We would therefore expect the Department to engage openly and constructively with our work and to recognise our report—with recommendations based on a wealth of evidence—as a valuable policy tool to drive progress. In turn, we would expect the Government's response to set out the reasons for rejecting any recommendations in a detailed and considered way.

This letter contains several follow up questions on issues where the Committee feels the Department's response fell short of this standard. I am sending it in the same spirit described above and hope it is received, and responded to, with this in mind.

### *Benefit system*

- 1) The Committee recommended a taper for Carer's Allowance and a link between the earnings threshold and National Living wage. The Government rejected both recommendations and said "It is our view that the CA earnings limit is generally working well for many claimants". Please could you confirm from what evidence the Department has drawn this conclusion?
- 2) While we welcome the improved information on Gov.uk regarding permissible deductions from earnings before the threshold applies, it is not obvious why this was limited to "two of the most common CA allowance deductions". Please could you explain this, or better still, update the website with the full range of expenses that can be deducted, as set out on page 4 of your response?
- 3) The Committee's recommendation to signpost carers to additional support services represents a simple step with potentially significant gains. The Government's reluctance to accept this recommendation is somewhat baffling. Furthermore, the response did not address our suggestion to make information available in places such as GP surgeries and hospitals; the Carers Employment Digital Discovery Project is assessing "the current online information provision" only. Please could you:

- a. respond to our recommendation regarding making information for carers available in GP surgeries and hospitals; and
  - b. confirm when findings from the Carers Employment Digital Discovery Project will be published?
- 4) The Committee recommended that people claiming only Carer's Allowance should be eligible for an appointment with a Work Coach, should they want one. The Government's response explained that such claimants are not subject to conditionality and therefore are not *required* to meet a Work Coach (emphasis added). It stated:

*It is already good practice in Jobcentres for carers that wish to seek advice around the support available to remain in or re-enter the labour market are able to have a conversation with a member of staff who will be able to direct them to sources of support and be quickly signposted to any available guidance.*

Please could you confirm:

- a. whether "good practice" means carers are proactively informed of their ability to ask for advice about employment; and
  - b. which "member of staff" would most commonly be available to have this discussion with a carer.
- 5) In response to our recommendation that Work Coach training and guidance be reviewed to ensure it adequately covers awareness of carers' circumstances, the Government's response pointed to "two optional training modules". Please could you provide the Committee with this material and confirm what proportion of:
- a. Jobcentre Plus staff, and
  - b. Work Coaches specifically
- have undertaken this training. If this is not possible across all jobcentres, please provide the information for a random sample.

### *Employment policy*

- 6) The Committee recommended that the Flexible Working Regulations 2014 be amended to ensure the right to flexible working exists from the first day of employment. The Government's response expressed its support for flexible working, stating:

We would like [flexible working] to be an option for employees, whatever their personal circumstances.

[...]

The first question the taskforce is tackling is how all sides can work together to make a reality of the Prime Minister's call for businesses to make flexible working a reality for all employees by advertising all jobs as flexible from day one, unless there are solid business reasons not to.

It said, however, that this "is a little different" from the Committee's recommendation because it "places the responsibility on the organisation to offer flexible working, rather than on the employee to ask".

While appreciating the need for businesses to tackle the issue through designing jobs, it was not clear from the response why enabling employees to request flexible

working from day one could not be an accompanying, complementary policy. Please could you provide more detail on why the Government has rejected this recommendation?

- 7) We welcome the commitment made in the Carers' Action Plan to consider dedicated employment rights for statutory carer's leave. Please could you confirm that this will cover *paid* statutory carer's leave, as emphasised in the Committee's report?

Best wishes and I look forward to hearing from you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Field', written in a cursive style.

**Rt Hon Frank Field MP**  
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee