10 December 2013

Dear Tanni,

Oral Questions 2 December 2013

During the Oral Question session on 2 December you asked me about consultation with other government departments when reforming Disability Living Allowance.

The Government is absolutely committed to supporting disabled people and is determined that support should be focussed on those with the greatest need. As you are aware, Personal Independence Payment (PIP) began replacing Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for people aged 16 to 64 in April this year.

In developing PIP, the Department worked closely with all Government Departments and the devolved administrations to ensure they were aware of, and understood, PIP and how it may impact on their functions, for example entitlement and delivery of “passported” benefits." A cross-Whitehall group of officials met regularly, supporting Ministers across government in identifying issues and consequences arising from the introduction of PIP.

I should point out that according to our previously published assumptions, by 2018 over half a million DLA claimants who are reassessed will actually get more under the new system. Those who will get less support or leave the benefit altogether are most likely to be people with conditions that have a low impact on their day-to-day lives, and who have a high level of participation in society without needing expensive aids and appliances or a lot of help from others.

The PIP assessment considers the impact of physical impairments, as well as those affecting mental, intellectual, developmental and cognitive function. The "Moving around" activity assesses the barriers individuals may face related to physical ability to move around. Claimants who either cannot stand, or can walk no more than 20 metres either aided or unaided, will be awarded the enhanced rate of
PIP's Mobility component. As you are aware, this would allow these individuals to access the Motability scheme.

However, consideration of the 'reliability' criteria – the principle that individuals must be able to complete the assessment activities safely, to an acceptable standard, repeatedly and in a reasonable time period – is key. These criteria ensure that decisions taken on PIP claims are based on what individuals can actually achieve on a regular, reliable basis, not on what they can do when at their best but are not able to repeat. This means that the enhanced rate of the Mobility component will also be awarded to individuals who can walk beyond 20 metres, but cannot do so reliably.

Earlier this year we made changes in the PIP Regulations to make clear that consideration must be given to the 'reliability' criteria. Furthermore, following this year's consultation on the 'Moving around' activity, we are looking to further strengthen these criteria, recognising that they are a key protection for claimants.

You will be aware of work being undertaken by other government departments, for instance, Department for Transport. They have published an Accessibility Action Plan in 2012 which sets out the Department's priorities for improving people's everyday experience of public transport, working in partnership with operators, local councils and the voluntary sector. At the heart of the plan is the importance of improving physical accessibility, but also providing better information for the traveller, and improving attitudes and behaviour, especially towards disabled passengers. The Department has committed to publishing an annual update on implementation of the Action Plan, the first of which is due in December.

The Department has also introduced a national Great Britain-wide accessible journey planning capability to the Transport Direct portal that enables users to plan a step free journey, a journey with staff assistance required (which may be of use to those with visual or hearing impairments), and a step free with staff assistance journey. The scope of the accessible journey planning data has also been expanded since the Spectator Journey Planner (used during the Olympic and Paralympic Games), and this now includes a larger number of step free rail stations, all accessible tram services, many national coach and local bus services and some accessible ferries. Furthermore, the Transport Direct team continues to add in details of additional accessible stations and services when these are identified.

I have placed a copy of this letter in the House Library.

Yours sincerely

David

Lord Freud

Minister for Welfare Reform