



Lord Agnew Kt DL

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the School System
Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Baroness Greender
House of Lords
London
SW1A 0PW

18th June 2019

Dear Lady Greender,

I promised to write to answer the questions which I was not able to address during the 16th May debate on 'The need to deliver equality of opportunity and beneficial quality of life for young people.' I would also like to offer my thanks to those who attended and made a valuable contribution to what is an important subject.

Lord Shipley raised a general question on the structures the government is putting in place to address the challenge of the needs of young people. The challenge of addressing the needs of young people and their role in society is an important aspect of all Government policies and we already have some structures in place to support them. The UK Youth Parliament and the Youth Select Committee mirror the work of the UK Parliament and in August 2014 we introduced the Family Test into the policy making process. The Family Test ensures that policy makers recognise and make explicit the potential impact on young people and their families in the process of developing and agreeing new policy. Whilst we do not have any proposals to adopt cross-departmental policy impact assessments in relation to young people, the application of the Family Test is documented in an appropriate way and implementation of the Family Test has strengthened across government since early 2018. We do not have any current plans to introduce a UK young people's strategy council at this time.

Lord Shipley's also asked whether the Intergenerational Fairness and Provision Committee report can be debated early. It is for The House of Lords Committee Office to determine the order in which select committee reports are debated.

Social Mobility

Baroness Bull asked about the Social Mobility Commission's recommendations. The Commission's State of the Nation report makes a commitment to explore the wider issue of social balance in the schools sector in more detail, so it can make detailed recommendations to both the independent and state sectors, their most influential players, and the government more generally about school admissions. The Commission has successfully awarded a research contract in May 2019 to explore the issue of social balance within the schools system and the first phase of this research is due to conclude in mid-2020. This will give the

Commission the basis to provide advice, and possibly set up a wider and deeper project on social mix within schools for the following year. In sum, therefore, the plan is for there to be a first set of findings in summer 2020, with more detail a year later when the next phase of work is complete.

The prospect of moving to a compulsory measurement and publication of social mobility data was also raised during the debate. The Equality Act 2010 already places a duty on specified public bodies to consider how their decisions might help to reduce the inequalities associated with socio-economic disadvantage, however there are no proposals to make the universal measurement and publication of social mobility data compulsory. We do recognise the importance of the voluntary Social Mobility Pledge, which represents an excellent opportunity for businesses to become Social Mobility Pledge accredited employers and adopt open employee recruitment practices to promote a level playing field. We would encourage employers to sign up to it. The Pledge fits with the aims of the government's own strategies to maximise the life chances of young people today and protect the interests of future generations.

Youth Justice

During the debate, the noble Lord Dholakia raised a number of issues relating to justice and crime:

On the subject of youth criminal records, we are committed to enabling children who have offended to move on from their previous behaviour to live rich and fulfilled lives. Indeed, in 2013 the Coalition government changed the law so that minor offences no longer need to be disclosed. It also takes significantly less time for offences committed by children to become 'spent', as opposed to those committed by adults, after which time they no longer need to be disclosed for most purposes. We recognise that children who come into contact with Youth Offending Teams/the police are some of the most vulnerable in society and such distinctions in the operation of the disclosure regime recognise this vulnerability and the importance of allowing children to move ahead positively.

The Government has noted the Supreme Court judgment in 'P and Others', notably their ruling on the multiple convictions rule and youth reprimands and warnings. We are now awaiting the Order from the Supreme Court, setting out the instructions it has made in respect of this judgment. Once we have received this, we will come forward with proposals for reform both in response to the judgment and the range of stakeholder recommendations we've received, including those made in respect of youth records by Charlie Taylor, the Justice Committee, and David Lammy MP.

This leads me on to the question about the age of criminal responsibility. The principal aim of the youth justice system is to prevent offending by children and young people and we believe that sentencing must allow children to get the support they need to address their offending behaviour and help them become law-abiding, productive members of society. Setting the age of criminal responsibility at 10 years provides flexibility in dealing with children and allows for early intervention in a child's life with the aim of preventing subsequent offending.

Betting Industry

Lord Dholakia also raised a couple of questions on the monitoring of the betting industry.

The Gambling Act 2005 provides the Gambling Commission with strong powers to regulate all forms of gambling, including online, in line with the licensing objectives of keeping gambling crime-free, fair and open, and protecting children and other vulnerable people. In addition to this, any gambling operator providing services to customers in Great Britain must be licensed by the Gambling Commission and comply with its licence conditions and codes of practice. The Commission can take regulatory action where there is evidence of a breach.

Last year, the government published its response to the Consultation on proposals for changes to Gaming Machines and Social Responsibility Measures, announcing a reduction in the maximum stake for B2 gaming machines, as well as setting out a comprehensive package of measures to strengthen protections on online gambling and gambling advertising. The Gambling Commission recently tightened requirements around age and identity verification online and introduced tougher sanctions if operators break advertising rules.

The government is aware of concerns that some entertainment products, such as some video games, could encourage gambling-like behaviour, and will continue to look closely at any evidence around this issue. The Gambling Commission has signed a declaration alongside 15 other regulators committing to work together to monitor the situation and to raise consumer and parental awareness.

We understand that some people do experience harm from gambling, and we are committed to ensuring there is support available to those who need it. As announced earlier this year, we are expanding specialist support for gambling addiction through the NHS Long Term Plan. GambleAware is opening a new Problem Gambling Clinic in Leeds to serve the north of England this summer. Public Health England are also reviewing the evidence on gambling related harm to inform action on treatment and prevention. We understand that young people will experience gambling differently and may require different support. GambleAware is working to better understand young people's attitudes to gambling and develop resources for people who work with them.

Lord Dhakolia raised the possibility of a mandatory tax to fund treatment to addiction. The government do not consider a mandatory levy necessary or appropriate at this time. However, as our understanding of funding needs and of gambling-related harm develops, we will consider what further steps might need to be taken to reduce gambling-related harm.

Shared Accommodation Rate

Baroness Suttie asked about the Shared Accommodation rate freeze which is an important issue.

In the Summer Budget 2015 the Government announced that, as part of the measures to bring the welfare bill under control and alongside the freeze to other working age benefits, Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates would be frozen for four years from April 2016. The Government does recognise however, that the impact of freezing LHA rates may have different effects across the country with rents in some areas increasing at different rates. In view of this, we are using a proportion of the savings from the freeze to LHA rates to create Targeted Affordability Funding. This funding is being used to increase those LHA rates that have diverged the most from local rents.

Following Autumn Budget 2017 further funding is available for TAF in 2018/19 and 2019/20, based on 50% of the savings from the LHA freeze (instead of 30%). This enabled us to increase 213 LHA rates by 3% in 2018/19 and 361 LHA rates by 3% in 2019/20, over a third of all LHA rates and over 80% of rates in London where rents are particularly high. In 2019/20 this includes 45% of all Shared Accommodation Rates (SARs) so 87 SARs will be increased by 3%.

The principle that young, single people in the private rented sector should have their Housing Benefit limited to the rate appropriate for shared accommodation, was introduced as early as 1996 and was known as the Shared Room Rate and applied to those under 25 years of age. The age threshold for the Shared Accommodation Rate was extended from under 25 to those under 35 from January 2012 as part of the package of reforms to the Local Housing Allowance scheme. This means that if a claimant is single, living on their own, under age 35 and renting privately, they will only be entitled to the Shared Accommodation Rate regardless of the size of property that they rent, subject to certain exemptions which are outlined below.

The important principle behind this policy is that the taxpayer should not be expected to pay rents that ordinary working people not on benefits could not afford. Housing Benefit and Universal Credit rules should reflect the housing expectations of people of a similar age not in receipt of benefits. Many young people not in receipt of benefits cannot afford to rent by themselves, therefore we think it is reasonable to expect young Housing Benefit or Universal Credit tenants to also share accommodation. We want work to be people's first choice and have limited housing support for these single, working-age individuals who have recourse to public funds.

The market cost of sharing accommodation is cheaper than renting a one bedroom flat, so this is reflected in how the LHA Shared Accommodation Rates are set, which are based on market rental values for that type of property within specific areas.

The following exemptions apply to the Shared Accommodation Rate:

- those in receipt of the severe disability premium;
- those who have an extra bedroom for a non-resident carer providing overnight care;
- care leavers up to the age of 22;
- those who have spent at least three months – which do not need to have been continuous – in a homeless hostel/hostels specialising in rehabilitating and resettling within the community (those aged 25-34 only); and
- ex-offenders who present a risk of serious harm to the public and are subject to active multi-agency risk management under the Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) to be rehabilitated back into the community (in Universal Credit this applies to anyone up to the age of 35 but in housing benefit those aged 25-34 only).

For other individuals who may require more support and whose circumstances may make it difficult for them to share accommodation, Discretionary Housing Payments are available. DHP funding (from 2011 over £1 billion to date) will enable local authorities to consider individual circumstances and provide longer-term support for more vulnerable claimants.

Early Years

Baroness Bull raised the issue of children's centres and early years teachers during the course of the debate. I would like to inform her that We have commissioned the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) to examine research and practice evidence with the aim of developing tools to help local authorities make informed choices about their children's centre provision. The EIF project is part of DfE's £8.5m local government programme, which will inform the next steps, including considering any future consultation, on children's centres. Funding for the local government programme runs until March 2020, with evidence and learning emerging by its conclusion.

Early years teacher status is awarded to those who successfully complete early years initial teacher training (EYITT) and meet all of the Teachers Standards Early Years. This award is different to the award of qualified teacher status (QTS) and is designed for those who wish to specialise in working with babies and young children from birth to five years.

Awarding QTS for EYITT courses would not resolve the pay differential between 'teachers' in maintained schools and graduates in private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings because the school teachers' pay and conditions do not apply in PVI organisations.

I hope this letter has been useful. I will send a copy to all Peers and place a copy of it in the House library.


LORD AGNEW