



Sent by email:

Baroness Lister of Burtersett

Listerr@parliament.uk

11 February 2021

Dear Ruth,

Domestic Abuse Bill: Universal Credit

I am writing to follow up the debate on your amendment 34 about the payment of Universal Credit to victims of domestic abuse (Official Report, 27 January 2021, columns 1680-1705).

You asked, in particular, if I would follow up on your point about jobcentre staff retaining this knowledge and expertise in relation to advising victims of domestic abuse due to staff turnover. Customer Service Managers (CSMs) received dedicated training co-delivered by Women's Aid and DWP to build on their existing capability and further equip them to support the needs of customers, by becoming a point of contact for domestic abuse services in each Jobcentre. A key part of their role was to cascade their learning and share the product with all staff, including all Work Coaches.

Following these events, the co-designed content was shared with all CSMs to fulfil their role as a point of contact in their Jobcentres; and is used as an upskilling product for new CSMs as staff changes occur.

The content developed in partnership with Women's Aid was also used to strengthen Universal Credit learning and guidance products by incorporating the key messages from the training.

Since September 2020 Senior Safeguarding Leads have been providing local advice and specific support to sites with individual cases at the point of need.

DWP has expanded rapidly in response to the increase in Universal Credit claims. All work coaches undergo mandatory training in how to support vulnerable claimants and those with complex needs, including victims of domestic abuse. The training is reviewed regularly to make sure that learning products are up to date and meet the needs of the business.

A multimedia training product is available, alongside robust guidance and learning, to raise awareness of and teach colleagues how to identify potential victims of domestic abuse.

At a local level, Jobcentres work closely with a network of local charities and services, their Partnership Managers allowing DWP to signpost victims of domestic abuse to the most appropriate expert advice. Each site has a Complex Needs Toolkit to enable colleagues to support claimants with complex needs.

Most recently, there was a series of events for colleagues across DWP as part of the 16 days of Action campaign in November and December, including awareness sessions, guest speakers from external organisations such as Refuge, personal stories and the introduction of the Bright Sky website within DWP – both as a support for colleagues and customers.

During the debate, Baroness Bennett also asked how the High Income Child Benefit Charge (HICBC) interacts with victims of domestic abuse.

Child Benefit is a universal benefit which individuals who are responsible for children can claim. For 2020-21, the rate is set at £21.05 per week for the first child and £13.95 for second and subsequent children.

The Government introduced the HICBC in January 2013 to ensure that support is targeted at those who need it most.

The HICBC applies to anyone with an individual income over £50,000 who claims Child Benefit, or whose partner claims it. The charge increases gradually for individuals with incomes between £50,000 and £60,000. Where income exceeds £60,000, the tax charge is equal to the amount payable in Child Benefit. Families can choose to opt out of receiving Child Benefit payments, which means they do not have to pay the charge, but still receive National Insurance Credits which count towards their State Pension entitlement and the automatic allocation of a NI number to the child. HMRC have used various methods to raise parents' awareness of this.

If a couple separates and the abusive partner was liable to HICBC, the Child Benefit claimant's ex-partner will not have to pay HICBC from when they separated. The tax charge will still apply where the Child Benefit claimant has income over £50,000.

At Spending Review 2020, the Government announced that the 2021-22 Income Tax Personal Allowance and Higher Rate Threshold will be increased in line with the September CPI figure. The Higher Rate threshold for 2021-22 will be £50,270. The income tax rates and bands payable by Scottish taxpayers are set by the Scottish Parliament.

The Government sets the HICBC thresholds at these levels to help target public expenditure in the way it considered most effective. As with all elements of tax policy, the Government keeps this under review as part of the annual Budget process.

I am copying this letter to Baroness Bennet of Manor Castle and all other those Peers who spoke in the debate, namely Baroness Meacher, the Bishop of Manchester, Baroness Primarolo, Lord Rooker, Lord McKenzie, Baroness Chakrabarti, Lord Hendy, Lord Best, Baroness Chisholm, Baroness Burt of Solihull and Baroness Sherlock. I am also placing a copy in the library of the House.

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

Baroness Williams of Trafford