



Sent by email:

Baroness Lister of Burtersett CBE

listerr@parliament.uk

24 March 2021

Dear Ruth,

Domestic Abuse Bill: Welfare

I am writing to follow up the debate in Report on 8 March on your amendments about welfare and victims of domestic abuse. (*Official Report*, column 1399.)

You suggested that equality impact assessments are very limited, and recommended an additional impact assessment should be carried out at the design stage of social security reform. The government does not believe an additional impact assessment is needed.

In addition to existing obligations, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is consistently reviewing and striving to improve services, working with key partners who are experts in their field. Any changes to welfare regulations are informed by consideration of the likely impact of those changes.

The Minister for Welfare Delivery would be happy to meet in order to discuss the Domestic Abuse Training DWP commissioned from Women's Aid, which reached the majority of Customer Service Leaders in the summer of 2019. This established the foundations to upskill the Work Coach network on the complex needs of domestic abuse survivors. Monthly Service Delivery meetings continue with Women's Aid to discuss their issues and any concerns, which are then fed back to frontline teams.

I suggest Women's Aid contact the Minister's Private Office direct to arrange this. They can do so by contacting minister.welfaredelivery@dw.gov.uk.

In relation to the work on sanctuary schemes and the removal of the spare room subsidy policy that you raised during the debate at Report Stage, DWP officials are working on developing a regulatory solution. This requires a robust definition of what constitutes a sanctuary scheme property, which does not currently exist. They are working closely with colleagues at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) whose work on the future delivery of support in accommodation-based domestic abuse services is clearly aligned.

MHCLG are also pressing ahead with a new legal duty on Tier 1 local authorities to provide support for victims of domestic abuse and their children within 'relevant' safe accommodation under the Domestic Abuse Bill. This will also mean that regulations will be brought forward that specify a description of 'relevant accommodation'. This is intended to be a broad definition which recognises the diversity of safe accommodation that domestic abuse victims and their children may need or choose to live in, including sanctuary schemes. DWP will seek to align with it in any future regulations to ensure a clear and comprehensive approach.

MHCLG will be formally consulting on the Statutory Guidance (that will accompany the new duty) and the regulations once the Domestic Abuse Bill has received Royal Assent.

Regarding yours and Baroness Sherlock's point about the repayment of advances, it is important to DWP that any claimant who needs upfront support can get it, and as you rightly note bringing forward the doubling of the advance repayment period will make requesting an advance even more affordable for any new claimant who needs that support.

It is important to note the difference between the immediate support of an advance and a loan. Claimants requesting an advance get the exact same level of entitlement as those who do not. The only difference is that with a Universal Credit Advance, claimants receive an additional Universal Credit payment, resulting in 13 payments in a year rather than 12. From April, claimants will receive 25 payments spread over 24-months.

The Government also announced a further reduction in the cap on standard deductions. This will ensure current and future Universal Credit claimants who are paying off debts, such as utilities or rent, can retain even more of their award.

DWP's policy around the recovery of historic benefit debt is flexible and claimants who are struggling to afford repayments can contact the Debt Management Service, who will work with them to agree a manageable repayment rate. Claimants in hardship can also be signposted to debt advice providers and in some cases could be eligible for a payment break, subject to review.

The Universal Credit monthly assessment period and payment structure are fundamental parts of the design. The assessment period runs for a full calendar month from the date of entitlement and the Universal Credit pay date will be seven calendar days after the end of the initial assessment period. This payment structure is to ensure that we can accurately assess a household's income over the course of the month, whilst the further seven days allows for the processing of payment to the claimant. If a claimant needs immediate financial support, they can request a new claims advance which can provide them with up to 100% of their estimated UC award upfront.

DWP strive to signpost all new claimants to any other support they may be entitled to. This includes entitlement to other benefits, the support offered by the Child Maintenance Service in establishing effective Child Maintenance arrangements as well as the funding provided by the Government to offer Discretionary Housing Payments to claimants who need more help with their housing costs.

The Bishop of Manchester asked about the collection of national statistics on domestic abuse victims. DWP information on Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) is collected from local authorities, and does not include information on application outcomes for those fleeing domestic violence. DHPs are flexible and can be paid to those entitled to Housing

Benefit or the housing element of Universal Credit who, in the local authority's opinion, require additional financial assistance with housing costs. The support DHPs provide is critical for vulnerable claimants, including those who are fleeing domestic violence. Payments are entirely at local authorities' discretion, including the amount and duration of any award. Local authorities administer the scheme as they are best placed to make informed judgements about relative priorities and needs in their area to ensure that the most vulnerable are supported and the funds are targeted effectively.

I hope I have provided you with the reassurances sought during Report stage

I am copying this letter to Lord Best, Lord Rooker, Baroness Butler-Sloss, Baroness Sanderson of Welton, Baroness Uddin, Baroness Meacher, Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle, Baroness Burt of Solihull, Baroness Sherlock and the Bishop of Manchester who all participated in the debate on these amendments. 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