House of Commons
Work and Pensions Committee


First Special Report of Session 2014-15

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Work and Pensions Committee

The Work and Pensions Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Work and Pensions and its associated bodies.

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The following Members were also members of the Committee during the Parliament:

Harriett Baldwin MP (Conservative, West Worcestershire), Andrew Bingham MP (Conservative, High Peak), Karen Bradley MP (Conservative, Staffordshire Moorlands), Ms Karen Buck MP (Labour, Westminster North), Mr Aidan Burley MP (Conservative, Cannock Chase), Alex Cunningham MP (Labour, Stockton North), Margaret Curran MP (Labour, Glasgow East), Jane Ellison MP (Conservative, Battersea), Mike Freer MP (Conservative, Finchley and Golders Green), Richard Graham MP (Conservative, Gloucester), Kate Green MP (Labour, Stretford and Urmston), Oliver Heald MP (Conservative, North East Hertfordshire), Sajid Javid MP (Conservative, Bromsgrove), Brandon Lewis MP (Conservative, Great Yarmouth), Stephen Lloyd (Liberal Democrat, Eastbourne), and Shabana Mahmood MP (Labour, Birmingham, Ladywood).

Powers
The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications
The reports of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/workpencom.

Committee staff
The current staff of the Committee are Carol Oxborough (Clerk), Joanna Welham (Second Clerk), Gary Calder (Committee Media Adviser), James Clarke, (Committee Specialist), Emma Sawyer (Senior Committee Assistant), Nathan Hug (Committee Support Assistant), and Siobhan Clifford (Web and Publications Assistant).

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In the Government Response, the Committee’s recommendations are shown in *bold italic text* and the conclusions are set out in *bold type*. The Government’s response is in plain text.

Appendix

The Government welcomes the Committee’s Third Report of Session 2013-14 which considered the performance of the Department for Work and Pensions in 2012-13. The Department is currently undertaking an extensive programme of change. Across these flagship welfare reforms, our approach is one of careful and controlled delivery, prioritising a safe and secure roll-out.

Through testing and learning as we go, we are also ensuring that implementation and delivery of the reforms is carefully measured; in turn, allowing us to evaluate each process, minimise error and optimise value for money.

We are continuing to monitor the impact of the welfare reforms on benefit claimants through consultation and impact assessments and by maintaining transparency. Claimants are kept fully informed as and when they are affected by welfare changes.

We are making real progress in transforming how the Department supports individuals and families, helping to put public spending on a more sustainable footing at the same time. This means targeting resources more effectively to ensure that the system is fair to the British taxpayer and improving the efficiency within the Department itself—all the while, ensuring we continue to help people in genuine need of support.

1. Benefits up-rating

*Studies have shown that people on low incomes spend a higher proportion of income on rent, heating and food, which are often subject to higher inflation rates than general expenditure. The average annual rate of inflation that the poorest people face may therefore be significantly higher than that incurred by wealthier people. This may mean that people on benefits are likely to be hard hit by a 1% limit on benefit up-rating. We recommend that the Government monitor the impact of this reform on benefit claimants, particularly as many of them may also be affected by other reforms, including those to housing benefit, the introduction of the benefit cap, and changes in entitlement to disability benefits.* (Paragraph 13)
The Government has monitored, and will continue to monitor, the impact of the difficult but necessary decision to increase most working age benefits and statutory payments by 1\% for 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16.

What’s more, we have protected pensioners, committing to the triple-lock guarantee for the basic State Pension, and also protected the benefits that reflect the additional costs which disabled people face by up-rating them by at least in line with inflation.

For 2013-14, the main rates of working-age benefits and the statutory payments were up-rated by 1\% in the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2013. The Welfare Benefits Up-rating Act 2013 provided for the 1\% increase to apply for 2014-15 and 2015-16. Both of these were accompanied by Impact Assessments. Even following this decision in 2013-14, most low income households reliant on out of work benefits have seen, and will continue to see, a cash increase every year.

The Office for Budget Responsibility’s latest economic assumptions and forecasts of CPI gave an economic assessment of the changes in household income, providing a breakdown of affected households by income decile and family type, as well as considering the impact on household income for “protected groups” (as defined by the Equality Act 2010).

As part of his ongoing public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010 to monitor impacts on “protected groups”, the Secretary of State continues to monitor the impacts of the Welfare Benefits Up-rating Act 2013 in light of any changes to the underlying rate of inflation. The underlying rate of inflation for increases in 2014-15 is similar to the OBR forecast used in the Impact Assessment; it is therefore likely that the impacts on affected households will be broadly similar to those set out there.

More widely, the impact of welfare reforms on households cannot be considered in isolation to the Government’s wider decisions on tax and public spending, since the latter will also affect the household incomes and living standards. The Committee will be aware that Government regularly produces analysis of the cumulative impact of all Coalition changes on households across the income distribution. The latest analysis published at Budget 2014 shows that the richest 20\% of households continue to make the greatest contribution towards reducing the deficit.

The Department for Work and Pensions also publishes annually, as a national statistic, the report on Households Below Average Income. This provides robust analysis of income poverty and living standards of the household population in the UK, focusing on the lower part of income distribution.

2. Personal Independence Payment (PIP) implementation

We agree with the Minister that the current level of service offered to PIP claimants and the length of time claimants are waiting for decisions on their PIP applications is not acceptable. People should not be forced to wait six months or more to find out whether they are entitled to financial support towards the additional costs of living with disabilities and health conditions. Urgent action is required. We recommend that DWP closely examine its own systems and that it work with the contracted providers to resolve the current dire situation. Penalty clauses (service credits) contained in the contracts with providers should be invoked where necessary. We also recommend that DWP clear the
existing backlog of claims, and reduce the average time taken to process new claims to the expected 74 days, before it extends the natural reassessment of existing DLA claims to other parts of the country. (Paragraph 48)

**Resolving the current situation**

Personal Independence Payment has been introduced in stages so that, if necessary, the Department can slow down the roll-out to enable further improvements to be made and be assured that the assessment providers are able to deliver both in terms of quality and time taken.

As Personal Independence Payment is a new benefit we are looking closely at how long the claimant process is taking against original estimates. We are working with operational colleagues and providers to ensure that all the steps in the process are as smooth as they can be. We continue to look at our processes to ensure that satisfactory arrangements are in place to assess a person’s entitlement to Personal Independence Payment.

There have been several factors contributing to the delays and backlogs: at initial claims stage for example, claimants are required to complete and return a PIP2 form, within one month, which asks them to explain how their condition affects their daily life. More claimants than expected are taking much longer to return this form.

The Department is working collaboratively with both assessment providers on a wide range of improvement measures to improve the quality of referrals to assessment providers such as checking that claimants who have not returned their claimant questionnaire still wish to proceed with a claim.

Assessment provider access to information and services has been improved, by providing increased service availability of the PIP Assessment Tool so that assessment providers can access it up to 10pm every weekday. They have been offered increased flexibility in the way they deliver the service, allowing claimants, who choose to do so, to travel further to assessments or to choose to be seen in consulting rooms not located on the ground floor.

Both assessment providers have now agreed plans with the Department for improving performance and reducing the backlog of cases. Within the Department we are continually looking at how we can improve the operational processes and the next series of improvements.

**Penalty clauses (service credits)**

The Department is managing the PIP contracts robustly. We have a full set of service level agreements, setting out our expectations for service delivery, including quality of assessments, number of days to provide advice to the Department, and evidence of claimant satisfaction. These service level agreements are being monitored and, where appropriate, Service Credits (a form of financial redress) will be applied. This means that the contracts allow us to recover any financial loss to the Department caused by poor performance. The Department also has the right to terminate the contract if there is sustained underperformance.
We agree with the National Audit Office that DWP needs to address the stress and uncertainty being faced by PIP claimants suffering delays. We support its recommendation that DWP set out a plan for informing claimants about the delays they are likely to face. We also recommend that DWP takes immediate steps to ensure that claimants are given accurate and timely information when they raise queries about progress with their claim with either DWP itself or with the contracted providers. (Paragraph 49)

We have always had a dedicated telephone enquiry service for disabled people and their carers to find out how their claim is progressing.

We have updated the PIP Toolkit to provide better information for support organisations, including realistic estimates of how long claims might take. This includes the sort of evidence claimants should submit to support their claim and what else claimants can do to help speed up the process, such as returning their form to us as quickly as possible.

From 28 April we began sending SMS text messages (where we have mobile phone numbers recorded) to keep claimants informed about the progress of their claim at key points of the journey. Texts are sent to tell them we have received their “How your disability affects you” form and they will be then contacted if they need to attend a face-to-face assessment.

It is particularly important that claims from terminally ill people are expedited and that as much of the stress as possible is removed from the process they have to go through to claim PIP. We recommend that DWP set a target of seven days for processing PIP claims from terminally ill people and that it devotes all the necessary resources to ensuring that this target is met. (Paragraph 50)

PIP, like DLA, has always had “fast track” arrangements in place to process claims for people with terminal illnesses (i.e. having a progressive condition where they are not expected to live for more than six months). At the time of the Work and Pensions Committee hearing in December 2013 we were clearing most special rules claims within 16 days. Since then we have improved clearance times for these cases even further. At the hearing the Minister of State for Disabled People stated his aspiration for special rules claims to be cleared wherever possible within seven days, but was clear that the Government was not in favour of setting targets.

We are continuing to work with Macmillan and other organisations that represent terminally ill claimants to improve the claims process and speed it up as much as possible. In addition we are ensuring appropriate resource is deployed on special rules work, for example on the dedicated special rules claims service introduced in February.

We recommend that DWP also take steps to establish a mechanism for expediting claims from people who may not have a terminal diagnosis, but who have rapidly deteriorating conditions, resulting in a similar need for immediate financial support. (Paragraph 51)

1 See https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-personal-independence-payment-toolkit-for-partners/the-personal-independence-payment-pip-toolkit-for-partners
There is no automatic entitlement to Personal Independence Payment by virtue of a health condition or impairment, other than provisions for people who are terminally ill. We do not think it right that we should judge people purely on the type of impairment they have, labelling individuals and making blanket decisions about benefit entitlement. We recognise that people lead varied and often complex lives, with differing circumstances and needs—they do not fit neatly into boxes. We have designed an assessment that will treat people as individuals, considering the impact of impairments or health conditions on their everyday lives. The assessment will take account of the fact that many people have complex support needs and more than one impairment or health condition.

The fact that claimants are taking longer to return written PIP claims forms and to provide supporting evidence suggests that the claim form, and the guidance for claimants on accompanying information, need improvement. It may also be the case that the four weeks allowed to return the form and supporting evidence is insufficient. These factors may be contributing to the higher than expected level of face-to-face assessments deemed by the providers to be required. We recommend that DWP consult stakeholders on the adequacy of the PIP claim form and the accompanying information provided to claimants and make amendments to both if these are found to be necessary. The time allowed to submit the completed form and supporting evidence should also be reassessed and extended if necessary. (Paragraph 52)

Claimants are not required to send in additional supporting/medical evidence with their PIP2 form unless they wish to do so. However, we have listened to support organisations when they told us that people may need longer than four weeks to return the PIP form itself. This is why we deliberately built into the PIP Regulations provisions to allow claimants additional time to submit their PIP2 form “How your disability affects you” and to seek help from a support organisation. We will extend the four week timescale where there is good reason, for example if claimants need to seek help from a support organisation and therefore we do not believe it is necessary to fundamentally review the current timescales at this stage. Disability organisations have helped us design the PIP2 form; the current version includes a number of changes they asked us to make. They have also reviewed the accompanying information booklet, to which we have again made changes as a result of their input.

3. Local welfare assistance

It is often the most vulnerable people who rely on being able to access hardship payments, previously available from the discretionary Social Fund, in emergency situations. Local authorities are using widely different eligibility criteria and application processes for these schemes. This change has also taken place at the same time as significant reforms to other benefits, particularly support for housing costs. (Paragraph 62)

It was the Secretary of State’s impression that local authorities may not use their full allocations for local welfare assistance schemes in this financial year, although he acknowledged that it was still too early to tell. However, if this does prove to be the case, it is likely that, at least in part, this is because this is a new responsibility and authorities may understandably have been reluctant to allocate too great a proportion early in the year when they were not in a position to accurately predict demand. This may also have
led some local authorities initially to impose very exacting criteria for accessing these funds. (Paragraph 63)

We believe that it is essential that the Government ensures that sufficient funding is available to local authorities to cover the costs of providing the localised welfare support schemes which have replaced elements of the discretionary Social Fund. We recommend that this is done in one of two ways: either DWP should continue to transfer funding to local authorities beyond April 2015, until it has a clear picture of the level of demand; or the local government settlement administered by the Department for Communities and Local Government should be increased by the full amount that would have been allocated for these elements of the discretionary Social Fund, and this sum should be ringfenced for local welfare schemes. (Paragraph 64)

Since April 2013, support has also been available through local authorities and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales. By giving them the discretionary elements (crisis loans and community care grants) of the Social Fund budget in full, which amounts to £178 million each financial year up to 2015, we have enabled local areas to provide tailored, flexible support to those in greatest need, based on detailed knowledge of the issues they are facing in their communities. Support in this way is being better targeted than the previous more remote, centralised system which, for too long, paid out money to repeat applicants without asking why they found themselves in financial difficulty in the first place.

The Government welcomes the conclusion that local authorities have developed their own criteria for accessing these funds. By giving local authorities the power to do what is right for their citizens they can place more emphasis on what the priorities are for their area based on local knowledge and local data. As local authorities can join up with their wider social care provision they may not necessarily be using all of the local welfare funding to run a separate scheme. This means local outcomes cannot simply be measured by referral to historic DWP data.

The Government supports the Committee’s recommendation that sufficient funding is available beyond April 2015. The size of the general grant to Local Government for 2015 was decided taking into account the totality of the pressures on the Department for Communities and Local Government budget and based on various objective measures of need such as adult social care and including, from 2015, local welfare provision. The more deprived areas of the country will therefore get more of the general grant. As a result, local authorities will still be able to fund and provide local welfare provision to the appropriate level, as they are best placed to understand the needs within their local communities. It is right for them to choose how much funding to allocate and how to provide such support.

4. Pension charges

We welcome the Government’s decision to bring forward regulations to ensure greater transparency in transaction costs in workplace pension schemes. The range of charges and costs which scheme members incur can make an enormous difference to the size of the individual’s pension pot when they reach retirement. (Paragraph 74)
There has also been some progress in tackling the wider issue of high pensions charges in the form of the Government’s consultation on a possible charge cap. Although we understand the reasons for the Government’s announcement that no steps to implement this important change will be taken for at least another year, it is disappointing that there will not be earlier progress. We reiterate our view that, at a time when millions of people are already being automatically enrolled into workplace pension schemes, it is vital that they are protected from excessive charges imposed by some pension companies and that the charges which are levied are transparent and comprehensible. (Paragraph 75)

On 27 March 2014 the Government published, Better Workplace Pensions—further measures for savers. The Command Paper announced proposals relating to governance in all workplace DC schemes, including creating Independent Governance Committees (IGCs) for contract based schemes; and new governance and reporting requirements for trustees; charge levels in the default funds of DC qualifying schemes (those schemes used by employers for automatic enrolment); inappropriate charging mechanisms in all DC qualifying schemes; transparency of costs and charges in all workplace DC schemes; and disclosure of these to trustees and IGCs, employers, members, and the public.

The specific proposals are listed below, along with their implementation dates.

From April 2015: new governance standards for all DC workplace pension schemes; new requirements for IGCs and trustees to report on costs and charges; 0.75% cap on charges in the default funds of qualifying schemes (schemes used for automatic enrolment). This cap will apply to all member-borne deductions, excluding transaction costs. We have set out separately how this will apply to schemes with combination charge structures. The existing ban on consultancy charging will be extended to all qualifying schemes. Giving employers a full year’s notice of the new requirements which will apply from April 2015 is consistent with the fact that we encourage firms to start getting ready for automatic enrolment 12 months ahead of the time the new employer duties apply.

From April 2016: Active Member Discount structures will be banned so that deferred members who are no longer contributing to the scheme (probably because they have moved jobs) do not experience higher charges than active members. Member-borne advisor commission will be banned in all qualifying schemes.

From April 2017: the Government will examine whether some or all transaction costs should be included in the default fund charge cap, and whether the level of the cap should be lowered.

**Annuities**

The Financial Conduct Authority’s intention to carry out a market study of retirement income products, following on from its thematic review of annuities, is welcome. However, the Government and the regulators have had clear evidence for some time that the open market in annuities is not yet working in the best interests of the majority of pension scheme members, many of whom face the risk of substantial financial loss in purchasing an annuity from their pension provider. We recommend that the Government and the FCA take urgent action to make the open market option a realistic one for all
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those who purchase annuities, not just the minority who are currently able to negotiate it successfully. We reiterate the recommendation from our 2013 report: that, if improvements in the annuity market do not occur soon, the Government might, as a last resort, have to consider taking steps to separate the function of providing pension schemes from that of providing annuities. (Paragraph 79)

The Government has recognised that there is a need to take action to deal with how individuals access their pension savings. That is why we have recently announced the radical overhaul which gives people greater choice about how to access their defined contribution pension savings. The Government is clear that, in a well-functioning marketplace, annuities can be good products. For many, they remain the best method of ensuring a secure income in retirement. However, the Financial Conduct Authority's recent review of the annuities market pointed towards the importance of stimulating competition within the annuities market, and also the need to stimulate innovation and the development of new products that better suit people's changing needs.

The Government has also recognised that in order for individuals to make informed choices about accessing their pension savings they need impartial guidance. That is why we will place a duty on schemes and providers by April 2015 to offer free and impartial face-to-face guidance to all consumers with defined contribution pension pots at the point of retirement. The details of how this guidance will operate are currently being consulted on and the Government has asked FCA to coordinate the development of robust standards. This will involve working in partnership with consumer groups, the Pensions Regulator, the Pensions Advisory Service and the Money Advice Service and will need to take account of the operation of the Open Market Option.

By increasing the choices people have at retirement, and with guaranteed free and impartial guidance to support their decision-making, consumer behaviour will change and a much more competitive and dynamic market will emerge.

The Government believes that these changes will also provide an opportunity for annuity providers, and providers of other retirement income products, to innovate. Over recent years, providers have called for an increase in the flexibility allowed by the tax rules, particularly to allow them to provide retirement income products linked to social care. These changes will therefore provide much greater scope for providers to meet the needs of customers in retirement, and attract a greater proportion of not only pension savings, but also other forms of savings.

Defined Ambition and Collective Defined Contribution pension schemes

The Government launched a consultation on its plans for Defined Ambition workplace pensions in autumn 2013. We expected to be invited to carry out pre-legislative scrutiny on the resulting proposals for broadening the range of pensions available to employers, but these final proposals have not yet been published. We are concerned that the momentum for bringing forward these proposals may have stalled. It is important, as auto-enrolment widens out to the whole of the working population, and with the continuing closure of private sector Defined Benefit schemes, that employers and employees are offered new ways to share risk and to maximise retirement income. There is additional urgency in that the new arrangements ideally need to be in place by
the time contracting-out of DB schemes ends in 2016. We look forward to seeing the Government’s legislative proposals for these changes very shortly. (Paragraph 87)

We welcome the Committee’s interest in Defined Ambition pensions, which is about encouraging greater innovation in risk sharing, responding to the current polarity in pensions arrangements between Defined Benefit pensions—where the risk lies with the sponsoring employer, and Defined Contribution pensions—where the risk is with individual scheme members. We are therefore pleased that the Committee places importance on allowing for greater risk sharing in pensions.

These proposed changes are for the long term, and it could take time for some of the innovative, new Defined Ambition scheme designs to be implemented. However, we agree with the Committee’s view that introducing proposals quickly could optimise the benefits of Defined Ambition.

We are actively progressing policy development, and this includes considering the large volume of responses to our consultation *Reshaping workplace pensions for future generations*, which closed on 19 December 2013. We intend to publish a Government response in due course.

5. Child maintenance reforms

The impact on parents of charging for using the new statutory child maintenance scheme needs to be carefully monitored, particularly given that a full evaluation will not take place until 30 months after charging begins. The behavioural impacts, including to what extent charging deters parents from having any maintenance agreement in place at all, are particularly important. We recommend that DWP publish interim updates on the impact of charging on use of the statutory system and on the level of family-based arrangements, in advance of the full evaluation. (Paragraph 104)

We made a commitment in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 to deliver a report on charging within 30 months of its introduction. The Government has also committed to evaluating the impact of the wider reforms introduced with the 2012 Scheme.

We believe the intention to publish our report within 30 months of the introduction of charging allows an appropriate time scale for the full 2012 scheme to expand and for the Government to collect and analyse a sufficient quantity of data to allow for robust findings.²

This year we intend to publish the results of survey data around the outcomes for parents who contact the Child Maintenance (CM) Options service. CM Options provides all customers with information on the maintenance arrangements available to them, as well as being a precursor to those wanting to access the statutory Child Maintenance Service. Presently, we are working on the methodology of this survey to ensure that results are robust.

We welcome the Government’s use of a pathfinder to introduce the 2012 scheme as a means of ensuring that the new Child Maintenance Service was functioning effectively before it was opened to all applicants. However, replicating and maintaining the service levels achieved in the pathfinder in the national implementation is clearly a challenge. We recommend that DWP monitor this carefully and publish regular updates on standards of service provided to parents. (Paragraph 106)

We published our strategy for the publication of information about the 2012 Scheme on 18 July 2013. We agree monitoring should be on-going and therefore regular monitoring and reporting has been, and will continue to be, put in place as appropriate.

On 26 November 2013 we released a limited set of ad hoc Experimental Official Statistics covering the months of August and September 2013 (when the scheme opened to new applicants with at least two qualifying children with the same two parents named in the application).

On 26 March 2014 we released an updated version of these statistics, which include information on telephony, accuracy and complaints, covering data to the end of February 2014. Moving forward, these statistics will be released on a quarterly basis. These statistics are still in the early stages of development and assurance and will therefore remain as Experimental.3

On 11 June 2014 we released the latest version of these statistics, which now also includes information on compliance and service type (chosen method of payment), covering data to the end of May 2014.4

The Government’s motivation in introducing the new child maintenance scheme is to encourage parents to come to voluntary arrangements. However, many parents will need effective support to enable them to come to arrangements which are workable and acceptable to both parents, and parents will need to know at an early stage where they can go to find this support. We welcome the funding of around £10 million provided for voluntary and third sector organisations as part of the Innovation Fund to test and evaluate interventions that can help parents work together in the best interests of their children. We recommend that, in response to this report, DWP sets out how these projects will be evaluated and what the process will be for extending, funding and publicising the schemes identified as the most effective. (Paragraph 109)

We expect to tender the main-stage evaluation of the Innovation Fund Round 1 and 2 projects in 2014. This will be published in the contracts finder website and will include details of how we expect the evaluation to be carried out.5 Upon selection of contractors, the methodology will be finalised taking into account the financial resource available for the evaluation. It is anticipated that the methodology would include qualitative research with clients and project staff and management information data analysis, to fully assess any changes in parental collaboration.


5 See https://online.contractsfinder.businesslink.gov.uk
Additionally, there is a range of existing support services offered for separating or separated families. Our Sorting out Separation Web App enables better co-ordination of the support available, providing information on both emotional and practical issues such as managing conflict, parenting apart, housing, money and employment.\(^6\)

Since launching in 2008, the CM Options service has also provided free, impartial information and support on the various ways to set up child maintenance arrangements, along with signposting to relevant organisations who can help with the other issues parents face during separation.

**DWP’s strategy for dealing with child maintenance arrears—both historic arrears and those in the new 2012 scheme—needs to be shown to be practicable.** It is not yet clear whether the steps introduced to prevent new arrears arising are feasible; nor what the prioritisation of historic arrears for collection means in reality for those parents with care who are owed money. DWP needs to ensure that the decisions it takes regarding the collection of arrears are transparent and communicated clearly and promptly to all parents affected by the new arrangements. (Paragraph 114)

Collecting outstanding arrears from parents whose children will no longer benefit is costly, and will not help today’s children receive the child maintenance they need to help them flourish. The priority is to do all we can today to keep money flowing to children who will benefit from regular ongoing child maintenance now. Our publication of 31 January 2013, *Preparing for the future, tackling the past: Child Maintenance–Arrears and Compliance Strategy 2012–2017*, clearly states our approach to driving compliant behaviour and collecting historic arrears—giving transparency and addressing what is practical.\(^7\)

However, we must also alleviate the burden on families of historical unpaid child maintenance by doing what we can to address previous inefficiencies and collect what’s owed.

We are committed to ensuring today’s children get a better service than their predecessors, including those whose parents are part of that small minority who do not meet their responsibilities willingly. To this end, we are taking action to ensure that the 2012 scheme enables missed payments to be chased promptly, and for enforced methods of payments such as deduction from earnings orders to be put in place quickly and efficiently. The introduction of collection and enforcement charging later this year will also provide additional incentives for parents to collaborate and be compliant, while offsetting part of the cost to the taxpayer.

### 6. Use of DWP statistics

DWP releases a great deal of statistical information about benefits. We have commented before that it needs to exercise care in the language used in accompanying press releases and ministerial comments in the media. 2013 saw heightened and quite widespread concern—including from the UK Statistics Authority and organisations

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representing disabled people—about the DWP commentary accompanying releases of benefits statistics. (Paragraph 141)

The Department for Work and Pensions is very careful about the language used when referring to benefit claimants, making clear that it is the system itself that has for too long trapped people into a life of welfare dependency. That is why this Government is making such a radical overhaul of the benefits system, to restore integrity and ensure that everyone who needs help and support receives it.

The Department for Work and Pensions’ statistical releases are produced and published separately to and independently from other Departmental comment or publications. Great care is taken by our statisticians to ensure the statistical releases are easy to read and understand, and are balanced and impartial.

So too when it comes to the content of press releases and other material, where Press Office take great care in their use of language. Training courses have also been run for Press Office staff, together with guidance having been issued on the use of statistics.

DWP has processes in place to ensure ministerial and official public statements are accompanied, whenever possible, by the released data and/or a link to the statistical release to which the press release refers. These statements are cleared with the relevant analysts for their statistical integrity.

The Government is doing a great deal to promote a positive image of disabled people, including in the principles behind its Disability Strategy and the Disability Confident campaign to help disabled people into employment. However, this positive action risks being undermined if the language used in DWP press releases and ministerial media comments accompanying releases of benefit statistics adopts a tone which feeds into negative preconceptions and prejudices about people on benefits, including disabled people. (Paragraph 142)

Whilst clearly concerning, this is not a new issue. Disabled people have been telling governments for some years that media reports tend to highlight the negative and these types of stories are used to affirm some people’s prejudices about disabled people.

A big part of our “Disability Strategy” looks at promoting positive attitudes and behaviours towards disabled people and tackling discrimination and harassment wherever they occur.

We agree with our colleagues on the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) that Government statistics should be presented in a way that is fair, accurate and “unspun” and that this is especially the case when they are being used to justify a particular policy or a particular allocation of resources. We reiterate our view that DWP should avoid feeding into negative public views about people who receive benefits, and that statistics should be used objectively to shed light on policy implementation, not to prop up established views and preconceptions. We recommend that, in response to this Report, DWP sets out the specific steps it has taken in response to the comments from PASC, the UK Statistics Authority, and this Committee, to ensure that statistics are released in a way which is accurate, and fair to benefit claimants. (Paragraph 143)
Since May 2010 the Department for Work and Pensions has led the way in openness and transparency of statistical releases by publishing over 730 releases and datasets. This includes 57 separate statistical series. In this time the UKSA has only written to DWP on a small number of occasions about certain points in a handful of statistical releases, and to Ministers on only two occasions. The Department has responded to these points and taken on board UKSA’s suggestions.

The National Statistician, Jill Matheson, when asked at the Public Administration Select Committee hearing in November 2013: “Which Departments are the most and least helpful to the open data agenda?”, praised the DWP when she said: “Some of the good examples I could point to would be DWP, with both the way that it handles the ad hoc requests […] and its means of access”.

The Department ensures that all its statistics are of high quality, impartial and issued in an open and transparent manner, free from political interference and according to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. All official statistics are pre-announced, 28 calendar days prior to publication. Ad hoc statistical releases aim to be pre-announced by seven calendar days where possible. Our statistics are produced and published separately to and independently from other departmental comment or publications.

Following a request from UKSA to improve the accessibility of figures cited in press releases and ministerial statements, the Department introduced procedures for the publication of ad hoc statistical analyses in 2010. We have also developed a dissemination tool, Stat-Xplore, which allows the wider statistical audience to interrogate our statistical data sets in much more detail than was possible previously. We intend to continue to add data to this tool to make the Department’s statistics even more accessible.

The Department also continues to call on the UKSA’s Good Practice team for advice on how we write our statistical releases, when we feel it is appropriate, and have set up a statistical commentary champion within the Department to share good practice.