

DLA Reform Team
1st Floor
Caxton House
Tothill Street
LONDON
SW1H 9NA

Rec'd
15/2/11

11 February 2011

Dear Sir/Madam

I am responding, as an individual, to your Consultation document "Disability Living Allowance Reform".

As I am also a Board member of [REDACTED] a charity operating in the Third Sector, I am a formal party to their Response. In addition, I had the opportunity to see a draft of the response to the Consultation by Disability Wales. Each have dealt with the specific questions to which you seek responses. From the copies seen, I endorse their views and do not need to add personal responses here.

This personal response draws on the experience of my husband and I as parents of an adult son with profound physical and mental disabilities who lives in a local authority care home. He has no personal financial resources other than state benefits and has never been capable of work. He cannot respond on his own behalf. In addition, I draw on my experience over a period of 43 years, assisting constituents as a Councillor and Member of Parliament.

I believe the decision in the Comprehensive Spending Review to withdraw the mobility component of DLA from those resident in care homes funded by a local authority to be wholly misguided. This is a fundamental aspect of your proposed reform of DLA yet it is a fait accompli rather than a matter for consultation. There is merely an oblique reference in your Consultation document at paragraph 21.

I am aware that already there has been considerable concern expressed by many about the withdrawal of the mobility component, including for example only, House of Commons debate 30 November 2010, Parliamentary Questions including by Lord Morris of Manchester, a former Minister for the Disabled, and the lobby of Parliament on 9 February 2011. On the occasion of the latter, the withdrawal of the mobility component was addressed on the BBC Radio 4, "You and Yours" programme. I found of particular interest the interview with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and Minister for the Disabled, Maria Miller MP. It would appear from the interview that the Minister has been inadequately briefed as to the circumstances of many people with disabilities who live in care homes. Indeed, the Minister herself noted that "what we are doing here is looking at a problem which is probably bigger than we anticipated when we started the discussion". This demonstrates

that the decision to withdraw the mobility component was not evidence based. She acknowledged that this issue concerns "some of the most vulnerable people in our communities". The Minister said that "care homes have got an obligation to provide day to day transport as part of the contracts they have with local authorities".

It is highly unlikely that the state benefits of our son meet the cost of his residential care. Of his higher level mobility benefit, 60% is paid to and used by the local authority to fund travel which is beyond "day to day transport". He is taken out in a car as an individual by Council staff (not care home staff) for leisure journeys every week. If the Council did not receive that proportion of his mobility component, he would not have leisure journeys at all during the week. At other times, at weekends and during the week, he is taken out by family members.

I did not understand the Minister's comments "what we are not talking about is a cut here" and "...what I'm looking at is how we can best make sure that disabled people have access to that sort of transport that they need in a way which is not really happening well at the moment". The withdrawal of the mobility component is a cut. No alternative is proposed.

As far as my son is concerned and, I feel sure, the other residents of his care home, he already has "a system that better reflects the realities of care home residents' lives".

The Minister claims that "we are currently consulting on how this change will work" and "I am working with disabled people, disabled people's organisations to make sure that we get good solutions". I have seen no evidence whatever that the government is "consulting" or "working with" families like ours or indeed organisations.

There is no doubt at all "how this change will work". It will prevent thousands of people with disabilities from leaving their care homes except for emergencies. They will become virtual prisoners.

I should like this analogy to be put to the Minister and her government colleagues, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer. She, and they, will recall the parliamentary expenses scandal of 2009/10. How would she have felt if the system of MPs' expenses had been withdrawn pending the establishment at some indeterminate future date of a "system that better reflects the realities of [MPs'] lives"?

I sincerely trust that the Minister will ensure that this cut is not proceeded with.

Yours faithfully

