

Freedom of Information request 2011/2013

Received 29 April

Published

Information request

I am a deputy head of a junior school in a deprived city area and I'm having a lot of problems with the effects of benefit denial/sanctions on my pupils' and their respective parents' please allow me to elucidate. Almost every day we are having to deal with the effects of so so-called welfare reform and when I had to deal with another extremely distressed parent today – who's been sanctioned for not looking for enough jobs - it was the last straw, so my questions are:

Q1. Do you realise the effect that your sanctions and refusal of benefits are having on the most vulnerable in our society?

These are some examples of the disruption caused to me and my colleagues by the DWP because you have refused benefits to parents.

a) Children A's mother came in the school and explained her husband had been sanctioned on JSA and she had no money for the electricity (she was on a pre-pay meter) to launder her two children's uniforms, nor did she have money for food.

b) Child B had to move home because of the bedroom tax, the parent couldn't move B into a school nearer to their home as they were full to capacity, so they have to travel on a bus to school, recently he couldn't come to school because of benefit sanctions, the mother said they had no money for food and the DWP said they weren't allowed any whilst her partner was on sanction.

c) Children C's father is disabled, however, he recently lost his benefits because you said he's no longer disabled, children C's mother was beside herself with stress as she explained to the head how her husband had had all his money taken off him and was denied benefits for appealing against the decision, the situation became that dire for this particular family that I had to get social services involved to help them.

d) There's dozens of cases I can relate to you, however, today was the last straw when a single parent told me her daughter had been absent because the sole fell off her only pair of shoes and she had no money because of sanctions to buy another pair.

Q2 Why have we i.e. teachers' got to be social workers because you are denying benefits? Do you realise the devastation you are causing to the most vulnerable because of sanctions, etc? Because it's a proven fact:

- Parents' can't feed their children or put clothing on their backs*
- Take them to school due to lack of money*
- We can't find school places for families constantly on the move –*

we have refused a lot of families a school place that moved because of the bedroom tax.

• Our social workers' are frazzled and overworked because we have to keep asking for their help for our pupils whose families are on sanction.

Q3 Are the DWP going to pay schools for the disruption you are causing parents' and the whole teaching profession?

Q4 I realise your motto is make work pay and the taxpayer shouldn't have to fit the bill for those that don't want to work, notwithstanding this, I and my colleagues are taxpayers and you are making our lives very stressful and our jobs much harder with your draconian measures and teaching isn't the only profession to be hit by problems caused by sanctions/denying benefit (a neighbour of mine is a paramedic who recently had to attend to a diabetic-disabled person that hadn't eaten for 3 days because he's disability had been stopped and he'd no money and this isn't an isolated case) so my question final question is why are you needlessly sanctioning people? And have you any idea what effect you're having on

(i) Children?

(ii) The teaching profession?

(iii) The medical profession?

(iv) Social Workers?

What do you think this is costing the taxpayer? And society in general?

DWP response

It may help if I explain that the Freedom of Information Act requires public authorities to provide copies of information they already hold in a recorded form, subject to certain exemptions. However, it does not require the Department to provide opinions, explanations, generate answers to questions, or create or obtain information it does not hold.

In order to claim Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) we require individuals to be actively seeking employment and be available for work. Without such basic requirements, some individuals may claim benefit for longer than they need to, and at worst simply accept a life on benefit, which would be both unfair to the individual as well as the taxpayer. JSA claimants must look for and be available for work in line with the pattern of availability agreed with their adviser. Should claimants fail to take the steps agreed with their adviser their benefit may be subject to a sanction.

The application of sanctions drives claimants' behavior, including claimants who would otherwise avoid participating in or taking up the support on offer to them. The JSA sanctions process incorporates a number of safeguards to ensure a fair and transparent regime. Each sanction is considered on a case

by case basis and claimants are given five working days to provide their reasons for failing to participate or engage with conditionality requirements.

Where sanctions are applied people can apply for hardship payments. In order to get these payments the claimant is required to prove they are at risk of hardship. Hardship payments are made if claimants can demonstrate that they cannot buy essential items, including food, clothing, heating and accommodation and so are at risk of severe suffering or privation.