



**Department
for Work &
Pensions**

Peter Schofield CB
Permanent Secretary
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9DA
psa@dwp.gov.uk
www.gov.uk

Dame Meg Hillier
Chair of Committee Public Accounts
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA
Sent electronically

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Dear Meg

DWP Treasury Minute Responses

Thank you for your letter of 19 January, which follows the discussion we had about Treasury Minute responses at the Public Accounts Committee on 12 December.

I welcome the further detail in your letter about two examples where we had accepted a recommendation, stated that it had been implemented, but where you felt we had not made clear what had changed.

The first was the Child Maintenance recommendation about a developing a plan to "assess, tackle and monitor the take-up gap". There are two elements to our plan. The first is to raise awareness of the service offered by the Child Maintenance Service, both through online channels, and by training jobcentre staff to signpost families to the service. As we have done this, we have seen a significant rise in new applications, although I am conscious there are other factors driving higher take up. In the quarter ending September 2022 applications were up 58% on the same quarter the year before. The second element of the plan is to use existing survey data to improve our understanding of why some families do not choose to use the service, building on the data set out in the NAO report, and in the light of that to consider options for further activity.

The second example was the Kickstart recommendation on clawing back funding for employment support where it was not actually used for that purpose. Our checks and controls have identified a number of employers where we have reason to doubt that the employment support was appropriately used. We have written to each of them asking for further evidence on how the funding was spent. In cases where insufficient evidence has been provided, or where these organisations have breached the terms and conditions of their Kickstart grant agreement, we take action to have that money returned, using the rights we have under the agreement.

More broadly, thank you for your helpful comments on how we respond to future recommendations from the Committee. I know we have a meeting planned (although apologies I could not be in London on 1 February), and I would be happy to discuss this further when we meet.

Yours sincerely

Peter Schofield

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