



Work and Pensions Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA
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From the Chair

Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey
Secretary of State
Department for Work and Pensions

26 March 2020

Dear Thérèse,

Very many thanks indeed for coming yesterday to give evidence to the Committee yesterday, and for writing so promptly to clarify the situation on both sanctions and Local Housing Allowance.

On sanctions, I am grateful for your explanation that, for the next three months, the DWP will not be “checking conditionality compliance regarding looking for and being available for work”, and that “no sanctions should be applied for that reason”.

That appears to fall short, however, of the complete suspension of sanctions which many organisations have been calling for. It seems to leave open, for example, the possibility that claimants might be sanctioned for failing to meet work preparation requirements. It would therefore be helpful to understand whether that is the case, and if so why you have decided on this approach.

Might you please set out for us:

- whether there are any circumstances in which claimants could still be sanctioned in the course of the next three months, and if so what those circumstances are;
- if there are such circumstances, why—given the enormous pressures on DWP staff—you consider it necessary to keep open the possibility of applying sanctions in some cases; and
- how you plan to make these changes clear to claimants, support organisations and Jobcentre staff.

On Local Housing Allowance, the news that the national maximum caps for 2020/21 will be increased is welcome. The attached table prepared by the House of Commons Library, however, shows that there will still be some areas in which 30th percentile rents remain above the cap. Claimants in those areas will therefore not be able to access the full support offered by the Chancellor.

Might you please let us know what support might be available for people in those areas, who may still face a shortfall between their rent and their benefits payments?

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Stephen Timms". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the name.

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Chair, Work and Pensions Committee