



Baroness Sherlock
Minister of State
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
London
SW1H 9NA

27 January 2026

Dear Minister,

Reply to the Government's response to *Reforming the Child Maintenance Service* report

1. As you know, the Public Services Committee published a report, *Reforming the Child Maintenance Service*, on 14 October 2025.¹ Our report set out a number of concerns regarding the service, particularly relating to plans to abolish the Direct Pay system, support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse who have child maintenance arrangements through the Child Maintenance Service (CMS), and effective enforcement of CMS-made agreements. We received your response to that report on 7 January 2026.²
2. We are pleased that the Government have included CMS reform in the recent Child Poverty Strategy. We look forward to hearing more about how CMS will be promoted to separating parents and included in Family Hubs and other local support. However, we are disappointed by the lack of progress that has been made in many areas where we raised concerns.
3. Ahead of the report debate, there are a number of areas where we would be grateful for further information and clarity.

Abolition of Direct Pay and support for victims and survivors of domestic abuse

4. Our report encouraged a rethink of the Government's plans to remove the Direct Pay system and to manage the entire CMS caseload through the Collect and Pay system. We also recommended that victims of domestic abuse be allowed to bypass requirements to try a Direct Pay arrangement before being allowed to have a Collect and Pay arrangement. We suggested this could be achieved through implementing the Child

¹ Public Services Committee, [Reforming the Child Maintenance Service](#) (3rd Report, Session 2024-26, HL Paper 181)

² Department for Work and Pensions, [Government response to House of Lords – Public Services Committee 'Reforming the Child Maintenance Report' Recommendations](#), 9 January 2026

Support Collection (Domestic Abuse) Act 2023, so that those parents would not need to remain in Direct Pay while the Government set up the new collect and pay system.

5. In the response you rejected both of these suggestions, indicating your plan to move forward with the removal of Direct Pay, arguing that this would more effectively support victims and survivors of domestic abuse as they would automatically be on a Collect and Pay arrangement if they had an arrangement through the CMS. However, you gave no indication of when the removal of Direct Pay would occur, meaning that for the time being, victims and survivors of domestic abuse must initially use the Direct Pay system if they wish to have a CMS arrangement.

Question 1: When do the Government expect to have completed the removal of Direct Pay and the transference of all Direct Pay cases on to Collect and Pay or into Family Based Arrangements?

Question 2: What impact will the Government's refusal to implement the Child Support Collection (Domestic Abuse) Act 2023 have on victims of domestic abuse who still need to use the Direct Pay system, before it is removed?

Question 3: What estimate have the Government made, if any, of the number of victims of domestic abuse in (1) the Direct Pay system and (2) the Collect and Pay system, in each of the last five years?

Administrative Liability Orders

6. In our report we noted concerns about the speed of CMS enforcement of arrangements where the paying parent had not made payments. We welcomed the Government's plans to introduce Administrative Liability Orders (ALOs) to speed up this process, allowing the CMS to take certain enforcement action without having to go through the courts.
7. When you spoke to us in June 2025, you stated that you would be implementing mechanisms so the Government could use ALOs "by the end of this year".³ To date, no secondary legislation enabling the Government to use ALOs has been laid, and your response to our report provided no indication of when this would happen, but said you would introduce regulations "as soon as possible". The reasoning for this appears to be ensuring ALOs work within the Scottish system, as well as England and Wales.

Question 4: When do the Government expect to introduce secondary legislation enabling the use of Administrative Liability Orders?

Calculation reform

8. During our inquiry we heard many concerns about the way maintenance was calculated, including calculation thresholds, what income was and was not considered, and communications regarding the CMS's variance scheme.
9. While we welcome the Government's plan to review the calculation, it was disappointing that your response included an outright refusal to consider the Family Court's approach to calculating child maintenance. We are concerned the Government is unwilling to

³ [Q 52](#) (Baroness Sherlock OBE)

consider how calculation is conducted in the courts, the only other formal calculation route in the UK, despite wanting to improve calculations.

10. In June 2025 you stated that the Government intended to publish “a consultation of the Child Maintenance Calculation in late 2025”,⁴ however the consultation has not yet been published, and your response to our report did not indicate when this would take place.

Question 5: When will the Government publish the consultation on the Child Maintenance Calculation?

Communication

11. Our report highlighted a number of concerns about how the CMS is promoted, and communications within the CMS.
12. As noted above, it is positive to see that the Government is taking steps to promote “confidence in the CMS”, to raise the service’s profile, and to “dispel common myths and signpost parents” to relevant information. This represents a welcome change in approach since our inquiry began. However, there is little detail in the response about this work, its targets or relevant timelines.

Question 6: Please can you provide further information of ongoing and planned work to improve confidence in the CMS, raise its profile, myth bust, and engage with parents. Please include: timelines, target outcomes, actions being taken, and impact seen thus far.

13. We also raised concerns about how the CMS communicated with parents who had cases with the CMS, in particular those who wanted to communicate with the CMS by phone. During the inquiry, at our request, you kindly provided information additional to that which is normally published regarding phone waiting times.⁵ We recommended such data on waiting times be published, to improve transparency and public accountability.
14. Disappointingly this recommendation was rejected, and your response stated that the CMS used such information for internal performance management, and publish only the percentage of calls answered. You did not provide a reason for not publishing the number of calls answered/not answered, or the number of calls which faced waiting times of over specified time periods.

Question 7: Why won’t the DWP publish the number or proportion of calls facing waiting times of over 15, 30, 40 and 60 minutes despite holding this data?

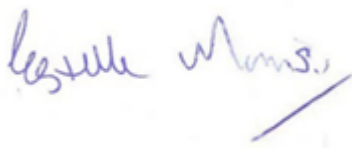
Question 8: What does the DWP view as an acceptable waiting time for parents to experience when phoning the CMS? If this has not been established, how is the CMS evaluating performance of telephony services using response times?

15. We kindly request that the Government respond to this letter by 6 March 2026, or one week ahead of the Report debate, whichever is earlier.

⁴ Department for Work and Pensions, [Government response: Child Maintenance: Improving the collection and transfer of payments](#), 23 June 2025

⁵ Department for Work and Pensions, [Child Maintenance Service: data insights](#), 23 June 2025

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Baroness Morris', with a diagonal line drawn through the end of the signature.

Baroness Morris of Yardley
Chair of the Public Services Committee

Members' interests

Committee Members' registered interests may be examined in the online Register of Lords' Interests at www.parliament.uk/hlregister.

For this letter, Members declared no interests.