



## Work and Pensions Committee

17 March 2026

### **Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP**

Minister for Social Security and Disability  
Department for Work and Pensions  
(By e-mail only)

Dear Sir Stephen

### **Carers Allowance**

The Committee welcomed the Sayce Review, and the Government Response. We agree that the Government inherited a system where busy carers found themselves with unexpected debts due to overpayments of Carer's Allowance, and it was right for the Government to assess what it can do to support unpaid carers who have incurred debts in the past, and how it can stop similar issues happening again.

In the Ministerial foreword to the Government response it states:

*The legacy of the Independent Review will ensure that carers' voices and concerns are heard and addressed through our policies, and we will continue to engage with key stakeholders as we implement its recommendations and deliver on these commitments.*

It is our view that the overall direction set by Ministers is right. However, that rhetoric seems to be undermined by, on the one hand the lack of a shared vision by senior DWP officials, and on the other hand a failure of implementation of Ministerial policy.

There is also a failure of communication. When the Government response was published, it was made clear that there would be a reassessment exercise. In [your letter](#) to me, you said that the plans for this would be announced in the "New Year" – which I think would commonly be read as the start of a new calendar year – and in [early 2026](#). And as [The Guardian have reported](#), it was also not explained to unpaid carers that while they waited for DWP to work out how to do the reassessment, they would be pursued with further demands to repay for allegedly breaking benefit rules that are known to be based on unlawful and discredited policy guidance.

On this we wholeheartedly agree with Helen Walker, Chief Executive of Carer's UK who said: "At a time when wider reforms to the system were approaching, these cases could have been considered under the new guidance rather than progressed under the previous guidance that had already been recognised as problematic. The extreme distress caused by overpayments for some carers could have been avoided by simply assessing under new guidance."

The actions of the Department flies in the face of the rhetoric that “The legacy of the Independent Review will ensure that carers’ voices and concerns are heard and addressed through our policies”.

It has also been drawn to my attention that it has always been DWP’s intention to continue making demands based on the discredited guidance. I see in your answer to Written Parliamentary Question [109366](#), you state:

*We have been clear that the Sayce review into earnings related Carer’s Allowance overpayments was not a substitute for legal proceedings. The report’s findings do not prejudice business-as-usual activity by DWP. The department must balance fairness for unpaid carers and its duty to taxpayers.*

We reject the assertion that DWP has been clear on this. It would have been clear if the intention to continue to make demands was set out in the response to the Sayce review. We are aware that paragraph 10 of the Independent Review of Carer’s Allowance overpayments: Terms of reference states “The review is not a substitute for legal proceedings and the existence of the review does not prejudice any business-as-usual action by DWP”. This catch all legalese is not a substitute for being upfront on what action was to be taken once the recommendations were accepted.

As a result, the DWP’s failure to tackle this issue with due care will cause many to conclude that the Department is not serious in its public commitment to do so, which is extremely damaging to the existing issues of trust with the Department. This would also raise significant doubts about the seriousness with which it also deals with the broader issue of safeguarding vulnerable claimants, on which we reported last year.

It would be helpful to us if we could understand what is happening inside the Department. As such, please can you respond to each of these in turn:

1. Why is it that the commitment made by Ministers to put things right, has not yet translated into an improvement for carers who are being affected?
2. What is delaying the reassessment exercise?
3. Why was it not set out in the response to the Sayce review that the Department would continue to make demands on carers accused of overpayments, even though this was based on the flawed guidance?
4. Please provide to us your assessment of the cost benefit analysis of continuing to make demands that might subsequently have to be cancelled or reduced, rather than pausing for the reassessment exercise to begin?
5. Who has been appointed Senior Responsible Owner for taking forward the agreed recommendations and reporting on progress? Can they make themselves available to the Committee as soon as possible to provide an update, and explain what the blockers to progress are?

We consider this to be the latest in a torrent of missteps from the Department. It has led us to question and focus on the Department's performance and its culture. The Committee will be reflecting on what tools it can use to fulfil its duty to hold the Department to account, using the spotlight of scrutiny. In light of this new information, we will also consider what further action we should take in respect of Carer's Allowance following our evidence session with Liz Sayce and others on 4 March.

I would be grateful for a response before the House rises for Easter recess. As is usual practice with the Committee's correspondence, I will be publishing this letter and your response on the Committee's website.

Yours sincerely,



**Debbie Abrahams MP**  
**Chair, Work and Pensions Committee**