



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Baroness Sherlock OBE
Minister of State in the DWP

Caxton House
Tothill Street
minister.lords@dwp.gov.uk
0207 340 4000
www.gov.uk/dwp

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Dear Baroness Morris,

I am pleased to enclose a response to the further questions from your committee ahead of the debate on your report. In doing so, I regret that I am unable to provide more specific timelines in relation to some very important areas of reform.

Where this is the case, it reflects the need to ensure that any changes are underpinned by the necessary legislation, and they are implemented in a way that is safe, effective, and that delivers the intended protections for parents and children.

The current calculation thresholds and rates have been in place since the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) started in 2012. They largely aligned with rates under its predecessor, the Child Support Agency, and were still considered appropriate when the CMS was introduced. They are now out of date, and both parents feel the current system is unfair.

Given the magnitude of some of the changes they will require to bring them fully up to date, we need to give careful consideration not only to the changes we need to introduce, but also how we introduce them while giving due regard to the need for our customers to adjust to what will for some potentially be significant changes to their maintenance arrangements.

In relation to plans to remove Direct Pay and transfer cases to the Collect and Pay service, primary legislation will be required to implement these changes, and the Government is committed to doing this as soon as the legislative programme permits. In the meantime, we are strengthening our existing support for victims and survivors of domestic violence.

On the introduction of Administrative Liability Orders (ALOs), work is ongoing and it is our plan to introduce the required legislation as soon as possible. I would hope to be able to say more by the time of the debate. In the meantime, my focus remains on ensuring that any changes to the Child Maintenance system are robust, carefully considered and deliver the right outcomes for

parents and children, so they are adequately supported and can have faith in a system that they rely on.

If further information becomes available ahead of the forthcoming debate, I will of course share this with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MSL' followed by a stylized flourish.

Baroness Sherlock OBE

Minister of State in the Department for Work and Pensions

Response to HoL PSC follow up questions

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?

- The Government will need to secure primary legislation to implement changes to Direct Pay before transferring cases to Collect and Pay or into Family-based arrangements.
- In the meantime, we are strengthening our support for victim/survivors, for example by making it easier for parents to switch to the Collect and Pay service and being clearer in our communication about what support is available for victims and survivors of domestic abuse and how to access it.
- Caseworkers have access to a list of resources which help provide signposting to supporting organisations, and a Domestic Abuse Plan which includes clear steps to follow in order to support customers who are experiencing abuse. The list of resources and Domestic Abuse Plan is regularly reviewed.
- As well as the Domestic Abuse Plan, we will continue to respond to cases involving domestic abuse, providing advice on how to set up bank accounts with a centralised sort code to limit the risk of a parent's location being traced.
- In addition, DWP has made a commitment within the cross-government Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, 'Freedom from Violence and Abuse' to upskill all DWP frontline staff across the country by 2029, to intervene early on VAWG. This includes CMS Caseworkers.
- DWP also has a VAWG commitment to continue to evolve the CMS Specialist Case Team who deliver targeted support to parents subject to the most challenging and complex domestic abuse.
- The CMS will continue to explore how we can strengthen our policies and processes, and will continue to review domestic abuse training regularly to ensure caseworkers are equipped to support parents in vulnerable situations.
- The Department will meet stakeholders regularly to maintain an open dialogue on how to improve the service including any specific measures needed to mitigate risks to victims and survivors in the period until reforms are introduced.

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?

- The Government's focus is on delivering a policy that meaningfully protects parents who are victims of domestic abuse.

- We believe the best way to achieve that is through the removal of the Direct Pay service and its replacement with Collect and Pay. This designs out the need for victims and survivors of domestic abuse to provide evidence of their abuse.
- Commencing the Domestic Abuse Act would, we estimate, only provide protection for a small minority of domestic abuse victims and survivors who are able and willing to provide evidence of domestic abuse, and would only benefit those who have gone to specific lengths to obtain legal recognition of their abuse and who are not already using Collect and Pay.
- As such, work on this will come second to activities designed to make our service more effective at dealing with all victims and survivors when they engage directly with the service. However, we will continue to explore suitable evidence mechanisms that might allow commencement of the Domestic Abuse Act 2023 should this be required as part of an overall package of support for victims/survivors of domestic abuse.

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?

- Until the removal of the £20 application fee in 2024, the CMS published information on application fee exemptions due to domestic abuse. This was based on the CMS applicant self-declaring that they had ever experienced domestic abuse (not necessarily by their ex-partner) or had witnessed abuse of their child. Since CMS started directly asking applicants about domestic abuse in 2018, 50 to 60 percent of the applicants in each calendar quarter self-declared some form of abuse. These estimates are available here: [Child Maintenance Service statistics: data to March 2024 - GOV.UK](#). The estimates were not available separately for customers in Direct Pay and Collect and Pay.
- Separately in a survey conducted in January to February 2024, 71% of receiving parents and 51% of paying parents in Direct Pay reported having experienced domestic abuse from the other parent. Amongst survivors of domestic abuse in Direct Pay, more than a quarter of receiving parents (27%) and more than 1 in 10 paying parents (13%) said they have already had support from a service to help them submit evidence of domestic abuse. However, around 2 in 5 of receiving parents (39%) and almost half of paying parents (45%) said they would not feel comfortable doing so. This research is published here: [Child Maintenance Service: Direct Pay Research - GOV.UK](#).

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

- Work is ongoing in order to implement Administrative Liability Orders. While Child Maintenance is reserved, enforcement in Scotland requires using the Scottish judicial system, which is devolved.

- We are working closely with HMCTS and the Scottish Government to ensure ALOs operate effectively across the UK, and our current plans are to introduce legislation as soon as possible.

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

- We will announce further details about the publication of the Government's consultation regarding the child maintenance calculation in due course.
- Given the significant amount of time since the child maintenance calculation was updated, we need to carefully assess the impact of changes on all parents that use the CMS to ensure any proposals effectively support families and children and ensure how we introduce them works well for CMS customers

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.

- The MfL and CMS engage consistently with MPs and external stakeholders through regular MP surgeries and ongoing work with charities and family support organisations — helping to build confidence in the service, ensuring the concerns of separated parents are heard, and sharing updates on operational initiatives.
- The CMS's Service Modernisation programme has significantly improved how customers interact with the service by expanding 24/7 digital routes that allow parents to manage their case, make payments, and report changes, supported by WebChat, Digital Assistance Telephony, and the new Customer Connect service, while extensive automation now handles over half of all requests; at the same time, strengthened telephony (including improved call-routing and trained staff who can guide customers through online self-service) ensures those unable to use digital channels still receive responsive support, helping CMS deliver faster outcomes, reduce demand on services, and improve the overall customer experience.
- CMS is improving its service through planned usability updates to the Online Calculator (aligning it more closely with the statutory application to strengthen confidence in estimates) and ongoing family-based arrangement Discovery work that tests new ideas and gathers direct user feedback on how parents understand, trust, and use private arrangements.
- The CMS has been, and will continue to be, proactive in raising its profile. This has included running targeted social media campaigns (Sept–Dec 2025) across English and Welsh channels—reaching over 90,000 people with explainer content and signposting to tools like the online calculator, 24/7 application service, and digital accounts—and is now reviewing feedback to refine future

materials while continuing to promote existing content from mid-February 2026 to ensure separating parents remain aware of available support.

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?

- All developments to Official Statistics are progressed through the [Statistical work programme - GOV.UK](#) and there are no current plans to expand publication of CMS stats to include further information on telephony call wait times.
- Since 2020, CMS has significantly expanded and improved its digital channels, giving customers greater flexibility in how and when they engage with the service. A dedicated telephony channel has been maintained throughout to support customers who require additional help or cannot use online services.
- As a result of these changes the vast majority of CMS customers now choose to engage through digital routes, with only a small proportion contacting the service via telephone. The service delivered today is therefore predominantly digital.
- Publishing call-wait-time data in isolation would not provide a balanced or representative picture of CMS's overall service, which is driven primarily by digital engagement.

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?

- The Department does not set a formal "acceptable call-waiting-time" standard for the CMS. Telephony performance data forms part of CMS's internal management information and is reviewed regularly in operational performance discussions.
- As explained in our previous response to the recommendation, CMS will continue to evaluate internal telephony performance metrics including call wait times to identify opportunities to further improve the telephony service for our customers.