

ISSUE NO:- 02/ 2018

BULLETIN



EVENTS

Drop-In:-

Greens Lane Methodist Church, Hartburn. We meet here 1pm to 4pm on a Tuesday. Alternative therapy is available for those who enjoy or would like to try Shiatsu.

Social Evenings:

These are held at the Orthoptic Supplies, 176 Belasis Avenue, Billingham, TS23 1EY, on the last Wednesday of every month at 7pm.

Shopping Online????

Buy items or book holidays through the Stockton MS Group web site and we will receive a donation. There are over 100 top retailers to choose from. It all helps raise funds for the group.

Monthly Bulletin

"If you would like to receive this bulletin by email, then just send a request to news@stocktonmsgroup.org.uk.

Remember if you change your email address to let us know by sending a message to news@stocktonmsgroup.org.uk"

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NEWS UPDATE

February 2018

MAKE A WISH CAMPAIGN

The total of tokens that was collected this year was 3,336 from the Evening Gazette. We would like to thank all our members, their families and friends for the continued support you all give us every year.

www.bbc.co.uk 6 December 2017

Young carers: 'I was tired when I was at school'

"Mum was too poorly to get out of bed some days, so me and my big sister would do things around the house and look after the babies," says Maisy, 11.

"We made meals in the slow cooker so we'd have something to eat when we got back from school.

"We'd bath the babies and put them to bed, change their nappies."

Maisy and her sister, who help look after their three younger siblings, are young carers who the charity Barnardo's says are being let down by schools.

In a survey of 808 teaching professionals, Barnardo's found 34% thought there were young carers at their school who were not sufficiently supported.

And 29% of those polled said they didn't think their school had any particular ways of supporting young carers.

The charity says schools must do more to support young carers.

"I didn't tell any of my friends at school - it was no-one else's business," says Maisy.

"I was tired when I was at school but I knew what needed to be done so I got on and did it."

Her mother, Lindsey, who has been diagnosed with heart failure, says: "My girls were brilliant - making packed lunches, bathing the babies, helping me with my medication.

"I found myself crying a lot, I felt very low because I couldn't do the things for them that I wanted to as a mum.

"I felt proud that they knew what to do and stepped up but found it really hard to let them do the jobs that I felt I should be doing. I felt I'd let them down as a mum."

The family is now receiving help through Barnardo's action with young carers scheme.

Why is the charity concerned?

The charity fears too many children are having their futures held back because of their caring duties.

It says young carers carry out tasks such as cooking, cleaning and shopping, as well as providing intimate personal care, administering drugs and taking care of household finances.

Barnardo's chief executive Javed Khan says it's not acceptable that children are "having to sacrifice their futures to care for the ones they love".

"A quarter of the children supported by Barnardo's young carers' services are carrying out more than 30 hours a week of caring - that's the equivalent of a full-time job.

"It's clear from our research that there is a lack of awareness among teachers that needs urgently addressing.

"Schools need to take more responsibility to make sure young carers are properly supported."

What do teachers say about this?

Schools say it can often be very difficult for them to pick up on the signs that a child might also be a carer.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "For schools to support young carers effectively they need to be aware of their circumstances, which are often extremely challenging.

"These families can be some of the most isolated from the wider school community, making it harder to pick up the warning signs in the playground or at parents' evenings, for example."

Mr Whiteman said automatically registering children who are entitled to extra funding under the pupil premium scheme would potentially help young carers, who may also be in households on low incomes.

"This funding is specifically targeted at students who face challenges not unlike those faced by young carers.

"They should get this support automatically, particularly as the person they are caring for may not be able to apply for the money themselves.

"The additional funding would help schools to properly resource the ways in which they can identify and help young carers."

The Department for Education says it recognises the contribution young carers make.

Children and Families Minister Robert Goodwill said: "We know that schools play a very important part in identifying pupils who are young carers and offering them appropriate support.

"We have worked with the Children's Society and the Carers Trust since 2011 to share existing tools and good practice, supporting local authorities to work collaboratively with schools to better identify and support young carers and their families.

"The joint Carers Trust and Children's Society young carers in schools programme is important to help identify young carers among teachers, non-teaching staff and school nurses to ensure that individuals get the support they need and are able to live a full life beyond their caring responsibilities."

www.bbc.co.uk 19 January 2018

Ministers back down in legal battle over disability benefits

Ministers have backed down in a row over paying higher disability benefits to 164,000 people by saying they will not contest a High Court decision.

Work and Pensions Secretary Esther McVey said she would not appeal December's judgement over payments to people with mental health conditions.

Ministers had sought to limit those suffering psychological distress from claiming higher rates of benefits.

Campaigners said this was "crude and unfair" and welcomed the U-turn.

The government introduced regulations last March stating that people who could not travel independently on the grounds of psychological distress, as opposed to other conditions, were not entitled to the enhanced mobility rate of Personal Independence Payment.

Ministers pressed ahead with the proposals despite criticism from an independent tribunal in 2016 but the High Court ruled shortly before Christmas that they were "blatantly discriminatory".

The government was expected to challenge the ruling, having previously said reversing the changes would cost an extra £3.7bn by 2022.

But Ms McVey, in one of her first major announcements since joining the cabinet last week, ruled out fresh legal action in a written statement to Parliament.

"My department will now take all steps necessary to implement the judgment in the best interests of our claimants, working closely with disabled people and key stakeholders over the coming months," she said, adding that all payments would be backdated to the effective date in each individual claim.

"Although I and my department accept the High Court's judgement, we do not agree with some of the detail contained therein.

"Our intention has always been to deliver the policy intent of the original regulations, as approved by Parliament, and to provide the best support to claimants with mental health conditions."

'Indefensible'

The Department for Work and Pensions will now go through all affected cases to identify anyone who may be entitled to more as a result of the judgement.

All payments will be backdated to the effective date in each individual claim.

Labour's shadow work and pensions secretary Debbie Abrahams said ministers had been wrong to "ignore" the view of an independent tribunal and to try and "defend the indefensible".

"Serious questions remain including, how many people have been adversely affected by the government's reckless decision to oppose the tribunal's original judgment?" she said.

"And how quickly will people with severe mental health conditions receive the support to which they are rightly entitled? This is yet more evidence of the duplicity and disarray of the Tories' social security policies."

Mark Atkinson, chief executive of disability charity Scope, said the original proposals were discriminatory.

"This announcement is a victory for the many disabled people who have been unable to access support they are entitled to. The regulations introduced last March made crude and unfair distinctions between those with physical impairments and mental health conditions," he said.

Today's announcement is about Personal Independence Payments or PIP, a benefit designed to help cover extra costs incurred when you have a disability.

Analysis

By Nikki Fox, BBC disability news correspondent

PIP has two parts, one for help with daily living, the other for mobility. Today's announcement is to do with the latter.

To get the standard rate of £22 per week a person must score eight points at assessment.

Scoring 12 points entitles a person to the enhanced rate of £58 per week.

Last February, the government introduced regulations that meant people who struggle to "plan and follow a journey" because of psychological distress would have got a maximum of 10 points. This made it impossible for them to get the enhanced rate unless they get further points elsewhere in the assessment.

Campaigners argued those who could not leave their homes unaccompanied or take public transport incurred extra costs.

Following a legal challenge, the High Court found in December that this was "blatantly discriminatory" and could not be justified.

It has been unclear whether the government would appeal against the decision but Esther McVey has now ruled this out. It means that if a person's condition is deemed severe enough, it's now possible to score 12 points in the assessment and qualify for the enhanced rate of PIP mobility.

Personal Independence payments: All 1.6 million claims to be reviewed

Every person receiving Personal Independence Payments (PIP) will have their claim reviewed, the Department for Work and Pensions has said.

A total of 1.6 million of the main disability benefit claims will be reviewed, with around 220,000 people expected to receive more money.

It comes after the DWP decided not to challenge a court ruling that said changes to PIP were unfair to people with mental health conditions.

The review could cost £3.7bn by 2023.

The minister for disabled people, Sarah Newton, said the DWP was embarking on a "complex exercise and of considerable scale".

She added: "Whilst we will be working at pace to complete this exercise it is important that we get it right."

Ministers made changes to PIP in 2017 which limited the amount of support people with mental health conditions could receive.

As a result, people who were unable to travel independently on the grounds of psychological distress - as opposed to other conditions - were not entitled to the enhanced mobility rate of the benefit.

'Vital support'

The government pressed ahead with the proposals, despite criticism from an independent tribunal in 2016.

An independent review of PIP in 2017 was critical of the assessment system, after **revealing 65% of those who appealed against rejected claims** saw the decision overturned by judges.

And in December, a High Court judge ruled the alterations "blatantly discriminate" against people with psychiatric problems and were a breach of their human rights.

Last week, new Work and Pensions Secretary Esther McVey announced the government **would not appeal against the judgement**, despite not agreeing with certain aspects of it.

Analysis: By Nikki Fox, disability news correspondent

The government's announcement to review all claims for PIP is not, as it may seem at first glance, a complete overhaul of the system.

This judgement won't affect people with physical disabilities, but the DWP will be going through everyone currently in receipt of PIP to narrow the 1.6 million claims down to approximately 220,000 people it thinks will be affected.

The DWP has told me it will prioritise claimants who were disallowed PIP over those already in receipt of the award.

Shadow work and pensions secretary Debbie Abrahams said it was "shocking" that so many claims were having to be reviewed and expressed concern that a timetable for action was yet to be put forward.

"The government was wrong to cut PIP benefits in the first place, wrong to bring in the PIP regulations last year and it was wrong to repeatedly ignore the views of the courts," she said. Mark Atkinson, chief executive at disability charity Scope, said more had to be done to address all the issues.

"While it's crucial that the government urgently identifies and pays the vast numbers of disabled people who lost out on this vital support, this will not address the root of the problem," he said.

"The fundamentally flawed PIP assessment needs a radical overhaul so it accurately identifies the extra costs disabled people face."

Philip Connolly, policy manager at Disability Rights UK, welcomed the review but expressed regret at "persistent failures" of the assessment process.

"Huge amounts of taxpayers' money is being wasted on poor quality assessments which deny disabled people benefits that they qualify for."

'I felt totally discriminated'

Keith Thompson, who lives with bipolar disorder, had his PIP reduced from £420 to £220 because he did not score enough points on his assessment.

The 49-year-old was moved from the Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to PIP in October 2017. He told the BBC: "I got a letter saying my payments would stop and I would be reviewed by assessment for PIP."

"The lady there wasn't a psychiatrist. She asked if I could walk, none of the questions related to any of my mental health problems."

He said that he "felt totally discriminated", and that the "whole process was totally disgusting". He was initially told he would receive no PIP payment, but that was later reviewed and he was informed he would receive a minor PIP, rather than the full amount.

"I don't know what's going to happen. What if it gets reviewed and I end up with nothing?"

'I've received no payment'

Kelly Bailey lives with borderline personality disorder, and says she had her PIP removed when she informed the DWP her condition had worsened.

"They sent me for a consultation, we spoke for a little while, and then they sent a letter saying thanks for letting us look at your claim again."

"I got the letter in January. The letter said that my needs have changed so now they're stopping my payments."

www.bbc.co.uk 14 February 2018

PIP assessments: 'Lack of trust' in benefits systems

Failings in disability benefits assessments - including claimants being asked when they had "caught" Down's syndrome - have led to a "pervasive lack of trust" in the system, MPs say. The Commons Work and Pensions Committee said reports by private contractors for the two main disability benefits, PIPs and ESA, were "riddled with errors".

And **it said contractors "universally missed"** the set performance targets.

A government spokesman said the assessments worked for the "majority".

'Shocking and moving'

The committee said it had received an "unprecedented" number of responses from people who had claimed Personal Independence Payments (PIP) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

Almost 4,000 claimants detailed "shocking and moving, credible and consistent" accounts, the report said.

A recurrent complaint was that claimants did not believe the companies' assessors could be trusted to record evidence of their conditions accurately.

Examples **given by the committee included:**

- One claimant was said in her assessment report to walk her dog, despite not owning one and being barely able to walk at all
- Attempts to self harm being left out of assessment reports
- Another claimant, who remained in bed throughout her interview at home, was reported to have risen from a chair "without any difficulty" even though the only chair in the room was the one the assessor was sitting on.

A former benefits assessor told the BBC some of her ex-colleagues "copy and pasted" their assessments.

The unnamed woman told Victoria Derbyshire: "The nurses (assessors) were under a lot of stress and I think it led to a lot of mistakes."

The MPs' report said ministers should consider taking the process back in-house from Capita, Maximus and Atos when contracts come up for renewal in 2019 and 2020.

'Professional and compassionate'

Committee chairman Labour MP Frank Field said the shortcomings were causing "untenable" human and financial cost.

"No-one should have any doubt the process needs urgent change," he said.

A Department for Work and Pensions spokesman said: "As the Work and Pensions Select Committee highlights, assessments work for the majority of people, with 83% of ESA claimants and 76% of PIP claimants telling us that they're happy with their overall experience."

The DWP had already accepted more than 100 recommendations from five independent reviews of the Work Capability Assessment and commissioned two independent reviews of PIP assessments, he added.

Capita said it was "firmly committed to delivering a high-quality service" and that its qualified healthcare professionals were "dedicated to delivering professional and empathetic assessments for all claimants".

The Maximus-operated Centre for Health and Disability Assessments said it had achieved its quality standards in January but was "fully committed to making further improvements".

And Independent Assessment Services - formerly known as Atos Healthcare - said its focus was on providing a "professional and compassionate assessment service".

www.bbc.co.uk 16 February 2018

£10,000 proposed for everyone under 55

The government should give £10,000 to every citizen under 55, a report suggests.

The Royal Society for the encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) said it could pave the way to everyone getting a basic state wage.

The idea sees two payments of £5,000 paid over two years, but certain state benefits and tax reliefs would be removed at the same time.

The RSA said it would compensate workers for the way jobs are changing.

The money would help to steer UK citizens through the 2020s, "as automation replaces many jobs, climate change hits and more people face balancing employment with social care", the report said.

'Storm clouds'

Payments would come from a British sovereign wealth fund in the form of two annual £5,000 dividends, the RSA proposes.

The payments would not be means tested, and applicants would only have to demonstrate how they intended to use the money.

Anthony Painter, director of the RSA's Action and Research Centre, said: "The simple fact is that too many households are highly vulnerable to a shock in a decade of disruption, with storm clouds on the horizon if automation, Brexit and an ageing population are mismanaged.

"Without a real change in our thinking, neither tweaks to the welfare state nor getting people into work alone, when the link between hard work and fair pay has broken, will help working people meet the challenges ahead."

A Government spokesperson said: "Our priority is to have a welfare system that supports those who work and cares for those who can't, while being fair to the taxpayer.

"Providing a universal basic income would not allow for the same targeted support that is tailored to meet individual needs."

But the RSA The report says the fund could help people: "A low-skilled worker might reduce their working hours to attain skills enabling career progression.

"The fund could provide the impetus to turn an entrepreneurial idea into a reality. It could be the support that enables a carer to be there for a loved one."

The fund would be built from public debt, levies on untaxed corporate assets and investments in long term infrastructure projects, and be similar to Norway's \$1 trillion sovereign wealth fund.

As the dividends would replace payments such as Child Benefit, Tax Credits and Jobseeker's Allowance, the savings for the government could also be ploughed into the fund.

The right questions

Anyone receiving the "dividends" would not be able to claim any tax allowances, which the RSA says would act as a disincentive to wealthier earners wanting to apply for the handout.

In all, the RSA puts the cost of the scheme at £14.5bn a year if it is fully subscribed to, and a total of £462bn over 13 years, more than half of which would be paid for by government savings.

The Labour Party has said it is looking into similar arguments for a Universal Basic Income (UBI).

Jonathan Reynolds MP, Labour's shadow Treasury minister, said: "This new report from the RSA raises the right questions about the future of work and the long-term challenges we face, including making sure automation and the changing nature of work deliver a fairer, more prosperous society."

Scotland is considering piloting UBI schemes in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Fife and North Ayrshire.

The RSA report suggests that options for funding a full UBI included a tax on wealth, levies on companies' assets, and a tax on tech firms - such as Amazon, Facebook and Apple - using or transferring people's data.

Universal Basic Income - a work in progress

The history of UBI can be dated back to Thomas Paine's essay, Agrarian Justice, where he proposes the idea as part of a social security system.

More recently the idea has been put into practice in limited ways. For instance, in Alaska all residents have been entitled since 1982 to a yearly cash dividend from the Alaska Permanent Fund.

Finland is half way through a two year nationwide pilot scheme, giving 2,000 unemployed Finns a monthly income of €560 (£497) which continues even if they find work.

Scotland has provided funding for four local authorities to look into the idea.

In the US one Democrat presidential nominee hopeful, Andrew Yang is proposing his version of UBI, a \$1,000 a month "Freedom Dividend".

Even so, some economists believe full UBI can't work.

Brexit campaigner Patrick Minford from Cardiff University's Business School said UBI is "not a workable scheme because it's far too expensive".

"It creates a tremendous tax, a disincentive for the average person further up the income scale who's paying for it all."

There are questions over how much of a social security system UBI would replace.

Would citizens still be able to claim disability allowance or help with housing?

The RSA believes that properly done UBI would help people get into work, give them an opportunity to rethink their lives and contribute to better health and wellbeing.

Others claim it would be a disincentive.

However, **a report by the National Bureau of Economic Research** into the Alaska Permanent Fund concluded that "it does not significantly decrease aggregate employment".

A report by the OECD into UBI said that its effect would be hugely different depending on the circumstances of each individual and the existing tax and benefits systems.

UBI could also be ruinously expensive for governments and provide limited benefit for the poor, it said.

According to the OECD report, if the UK were to fund UBI only with money saved by abolishing the existing benefits system it would lead to higher levels of poverty.

It adds: "However, even in the case where taxes are raised significantly to pay for [UBI] it does not significantly reduce poverty."

YOUR JOKES

A man washed up on a beach after a shipwreck. Only a sheep and a sheepdog were washed-up with him. After looking around, he realised that they were stranded on a deserted island. After being there a while, he got into the habit of taking his two animal companions to the beach every evening to watch the sunset.

One particular evening, the sky was a fiery red with beautiful cirrus clouds, the breeze was warm and gentle - a perfect night for romance.

As they sat there, the sheep started looking better and better to the lonely man. Soon, he leaned over to the sheep and put his arm around it.

The sheepdog, ever-protective of the sheep, growled fiercely until the man took his arm from around the sheep.

After that, the three of them continued to enjoy the sunsets together, but there was no more cuddling.

A few weeks passed-by and, lo and behold, there was another shipwreck. The only survivor was Nicola Sturgeon, Leader of the Scottish Nationalists.

That evening, the man brought Nicola to the evening beach ritual. It was another beautiful evening - red sky cirrus clouds, a warm and gentle breeze - perfect for a night of romance.

Pretty soon, the man started to get those feelings again.

He fought the urges as long as he could but he finally gave in and leaned over to Nicola and told her he hadn't had sex for months.

Nicola batted her eyelashes and asked if there was anything she could do for him?

He said, 'Take the dog for a walk.'

DISCLAIMER

Articles in this Bulletin are meant for the sole purpose of information only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the committee.

MEMBERS COMPETITION

A £5 prize will be given to the member whose entry has the most correct answers. Even if you do not answer all the questions, send in those you have answered – you could still win!

- 1/ Which London born actor has hosted the Academy Awards a record 18 times?
- 2/ Which part of India was occupied by the Japanese in WW II?
- 3/ In which city is each of the Taj Mahal found?
- 4/ The French call it La Manche, meaning 'the sleeve'. What is it called in English?
- 5/ Twenty five square feet of land in which US state officially belongs to the UK?
- 6/ In which harbour city did the Rainbow Warrior sink?
- 7/ Which famous conqueror's title translated means 'ocean ruler'?
- 8/ Carpenter, weaver, pharaoh, army, bull, meat and honeypot are all examples of what?
- 9/ Which magical creature played "along the cherry lane"?
- 10/ Which make of trenchcoat did Humphrey Bogart wear in the film Casablanca?

Name:

Address:

Send Completed Forms To:
Mr D Henderson
74 Windermere Road
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Cleveland TS18 4LY

All entries to be received by the next social. The winner will be drawn from entries received with the highest number of correct answers.

Answers to last quiz:

1/ Seven 2/ Jaws 3/ Honshu 4/ Fall far from the tree 5/ 18 6/ Bashful 7/ Witches
8/ Maverick and Goose (Top Gun) 9/ Something Stupid 10/ Two