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Consultation on the PIP assessment: *Moving around activity*

The Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation. Its views are set out below.

Among the savings measures announced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer during the Coalition Government's Emergency Budget on 22 June 2010, it was announced that Disability Living Allowance would be reformed by the introduction of a medical assessment for eligibility. He noted that the new benefit would be focused on '*those with the greatest needs*'¹ - a message that has subsequently been repeated by DWP Ministers.²

While we support that general statement of policy, it is important not to overlook what it will mean for those whose needs are lower, yet still significant. Specifically, it is important to consider the impact of the Government's decision to reduce the threshold of the mobility test from 50 metres to 20 metres which effectively removes support from individuals who are restricted in their mobility, but who are nonetheless able to walk 20 metres. The Department estimates that around 50,000 people will be adversely affected by this change. Given the size of the numbers impacted, the fact that those affected would be at the higher end of the disability spectrum, and the extent of the losses incurred in each case, the Committee is disappointed that a detailed risk / impact assessment of the change has not been made available.

¹ House of Commons Debate 22.6.10 [Hansard Col. 173]

² For example, Esther McVey, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions: "By reforming the system and ensuring that it is fit for the 21st century we can use the money we spend on disabled people more efficiently and effectively to help those most in need." House of Commons 13.12.12 [Hansard Col. 464]

The Committee is also concerned that the rationale for reducing the threshold to 20 metres may not represent an appropriate gauge for drawing the line on where 'those with the greatest needs' lie. For example, many disabled people may be able to get to the front door of their home but, unless there is support available to them beyond it, they remain housebound.

The 50 metre figure is long-standing and is widely accepted as being an appropriate threshold, including by the Government. For example good practice suggests that disabled parking bays should be no more than 50 metres from the entrance to the relevant facility; and that seating should be provided on pedestrian routes at intervals of no more than 50 metres. The DWP itself has recognised this point:

'50 metres is considered to be the distance that an individual is required to be able to walk in order to achieve a basic level of independence...'³

Therefore the case for decreasing it needs to be stronger than that currently presented in order to persuade individuals that 20 metres is a fair and more appropriate measure.

The Committee also believes that it would be helpful if the Department's consultation material could be expanded to cover the potential impact on individuals who will lose their Motability vehicles as a result of this change. There will almost certainly be some disabled people who will be unable to stay in paid employment simply through a lack of any suitable alternative transport. There are likely to be others whose resultant journeys will make their ongoing commitment to work non-viable, and others may be forced to reduce their hours of employment. The Committee urges the Government to look at this more closely in order that it understands the full impact of this proposal.

By the same token, the Committee is concerned by the lack of evidence available on the impact of the change in threshold on the quality of life of those affected. For example, what impact will this have on an individual's ability to attend an appointment with a doctor or at the hospital or on everyday activities such as shopping? For some, especially in rural areas where public transport tends to be less available, it may not be an exaggeration to describe the impact as catastrophic with more disabled people becoming increasingly isolated. It is also important not to underestimate the impact that this change will have on those caring for individuals adversely impacted by the change.

The Committee welcomes the Government's commitment that:

'In reaching our decision we will consider how any potential changes might affect individuals and the numbers of people likely to receive benefit. We will also consider the potential impact of any changes on PIP and overall welfare expenditure...'

³ Personal Independence Payment: second draft of assessment criteria: an explanatory note to support the second draft of the assessment regulations (page 61)

However, it urges the Government to go further still by considering in more detail the impact on unpaid carers, the potential shift of costs to other areas (for example employers, health service and social care etc), and the impact on the Motability Scheme.

I hope that this is helpful.

Yours,
Denise Whitehead.

Denise Whitehead
Committee Secretary