

Freedom of Information request 2354/2013

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Information request

Q1 Are you going to pay for the court fines for people on zero income because they couldn't afford to pay NECESSARY BILLS? (council tax, energy, water bills) whilst on appeal?

Q2 what resources are available for those on zero income? As there are no crisis loans available any more

Q3 I was offered assistance from a food bank, however, what good is the food when I have no energy to heat the food up? So why won't you at least pay a claimant enough to pay their necessary & energy bills so they don't get into arrears?

Q4 How long do you to keep disabled claimants' without money whilst awaiting a reconsideration?

Q5 How much is the total sum paid to ATOS and the cost of appeals per annum?

DWP response

Q1. The Department is responsible for the administration of benefit schemes that are regulated by Parliament. There is no legislative provision that would allow the Department to make payments in the circumstances described.

Q2. Other benefits are available, but claimants must meet the conditions of entitlement to be able to receive them.

Q3. See answer to Q1 above.

Q4. I will assume this question relates to the payment of Employment Support Allowance (ESA) at the assessment phase rate to claimants appealing a decision that they do not have limited capability for work following a work capability assessment.

Currently, claimants may appeal a decision that they do not have limited capability for work as soon as they receive the decision. Payment of ESA at the assessment phase rate is considered once the appeal request is received by the Department.

From October 2013 claimants must request revision of the decision before they may appeal against it, this process is known as mandatory

reconsideration. The length of time taken to complete mandatory reconsideration will vary from case to case and will be dependent on whether any additional evidence is required, and if so how quickly it is provided by the claimant. In any case where the Department requests additional evidence Regulations state that the Department must allow claimants one month to supply it, so these cases could take in excess of one month to process.

Q5. DWP re-awarded Atos Origin IT Services Ltd, trading as Atos Healthcare, a new Contract to provide Medical Services on behalf of the Department from 1

September 2005. The total cost of these services amounts to approximately £100 million per annum. This figure not only covers the total number of assessments undertaken across all benefits, but also costs relating to written and verbal medical advice, fixed overheads, administrative costs, investment in new technology and other service improvements.

In the financial year 2012/13 the actual cost was £112.4 million. The appeals process against WCA decisions relating to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is only partly handled by DWP, with the majority of the process being handled by the Tribunals Service, which is part of the Ministry of Justice; this information is not held by the Department. Information regarding appeals is the responsibility of the Tribunal Service, part of the Ministry of Justice. You can contact them directly at: Data Access and Compliance Unit, Information Directorate, Ministry of Justice, 1st Floor, Zone C, 102 Petty France, London SW1H 9AJ.

In 2012-13 the costs of processing ESA Appeals within DWP were £19.35 million; this includes direct staff costs as well as an appropriate share of local non staff costs.