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Rt Hon George Howarth MP

Our ref: POS(6)10077/490

23 February 2017

Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 13 February on behalf of
regarding bereavement benefit reform.

Bereavement Support Payment will replace the existing suite of bereavement benefits and will see the Government investing an extra £45 million over the first two years to support the changes. We are aiming to simplify a complex administrative process, whilst focusing financial support in the short term to help with the initial costs associated with bereavement. Those receiving an existing bereavement benefit at the point of change will not be affected.

Bereavement Support Payment will consist of a lump sum followed by 18 monthly instalments and those with children will receive a higher amount in recognition of the higher costs borne by these families. Unlike existing bereavement benefits, these payments will not be taxable and will be paid in addition to other welfare benefits and disregarded from the benefit cap.

Bereavement Support Payment will be easier to understand and fairer to surviving spouses and civil partners. The contribution condition has been simplified and will maintain the contributory principle whilst allowing more people to qualify for a full payment, rather than incremental payments as now. The lower age limit has been removed meaning those under age 45 will also have entitlement under the new arrangements. There are also fewer changes of circumstance that will affect the award (including remarriage or re-partnering) and the amount and duration of the payments will be known at the outset of the award.

This has been an area which has attracted considerable interest over the last few years, including through the Government's public consultation and then from Parliament as the new measures were passed.

highlighted four particular areas for suggested further change which I shall address in the order they are raised.

Bereavement Support Payment is designed to provide support with the immediate additional costs associated with bereavement, rather than providing an income replacement for on-going expenses. We do not believe that the period of payment could, or should, be equivalent to the period of recovery following spousal bereavement. Extending the duration of Bereavement Support Payment to three years without increasing overall spend would reduce payments to a token amount which would not help meet the intention of dealing with the immediate costs relating to bereavement. There seems to be little rationale to this approach.

A key principle of the National Insurance system is that all rights to benefits derived from another person's contributions are based on the concept of legal marriage or civil partnership. This point was debated extensively in the passage of the Bill. Extending the eligibility of the Bereavement Support Payment to unmarried couples would increase expenditure by several hundred million pounds over the early years of the new scheme. Additionally, the Government made reference to this issue in the bereavement benefits consultation, stating unambiguously that the question of extending bereavement benefits to unmarried couples was not something it favoured and that position has not changed.

The rate of Bereavement Support Payment will be reviewed annually. Regular review will allow the value of the benefit to be increased if considered necessary. Any decisions on future rate changes will be taken as part of the annual fiscal process in the context of the wider public finances.

Like the bereavement benefits it replaces, Bereavement Support Payment has no work-related conditions. Any obligation to participate in any work-related activity will come from claiming other benefits.

The Department has already made a commitment to monitor and review the effect of Bereavement Support Payment. This will be carried out at a point when sufficient evidence is available to assess all aspects of the new arrangements.

Yours ever,



Caroline Nokes MP

Minister for Welfare Delivery