



From the Minister of State  
for Work and Pensions

RECEIVED 13 JAN 2010 DWP

Department for  
Work and Pensions

Caxton House  
Tothill Street  
London  
SW1H 9DA

Telephone  
020 7340 4000

Email  
ministers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk  
www.dwp.gov.uk

Your ref: 01093763

Our ref: POS(3)10220/272

Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP

QK January 2010

Dear Tessa,

Your letter of 23 November to David Kidney at the Department for Energy and Climate Change on behalf of a number of your constituents concerning the Winter Fuel Payment and social tariffs for cancer patients has been forwarded to this Department for a reply. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for the Winter Fuel Payment.

As I am sure your constituents are aware, Winter Fuel Payments were introduced so that people aged 60 or over could afford to turn up their heating in the winter months without worrying about the cost. Older people are targeted because they are particularly vulnerable to the effects of cold weather during the winter months. The structure of the scheme, which provides for an annual lump sum payment, is not necessarily appropriate for the needs of people with cancer, whose extra heating needs can arise at any time of year, not just in the winter months.

We appreciate that some people with cancer can face extra expenses, including heating costs because of their condition and treatment and we believe that disability benefits and the disability premiums in the income related benefits are the most appropriate way of providing this extra help. Rather than create a confusing web of different allowances for different needs, successive governments have preferred to make general provision through Disability Living Allowance.

The Allowance is a non-contributory, non-income-related and tax-free cash contribution towards the disability-related costs of severely disabled people and the contribution it provides can be substantial. Payments are spread over 52 weeks to help with extra costs throughout the year rather than just for the winter period.

Disability Living Allowance is flexible; it can be paid regardless of whether or not a person is in work or training and the recipients have the choice to spend it in the way that best suits their circumstances. People who are terminally ill can receive the highest rate of care component of Disability Living Allowance without having to serve the three months qualifying period and the benefit is usually paid within 10 days from the time the claim is received.

Additional help is available to people with cancer through the disability premiums that are included in income-related benefits, such as Income Support, Council Tax Benefit, Housing Benefit and Pension Credit. A combination of these premiums and the support received through Disability Living Allowance means that the most vulnerable people, such as those with cancer, can receive up to an approximate £8,000 per year in recognition of their extra costs.

Furthermore, eligibility for the Warm Front Scheme, our main grant-funded programme for tackling fuel poverty in England, is determined by receipt of certain means-tested and disability benefits, including Disability Living Allowance and these recipients are also eligible for Cold Weather Payments.

I assure your constituents that we already take steps to ensure that people with cancer receive the financial help to which they are entitled and that this Department routinely consults with Macmillan Cancer Support and other organisations, such as the children's cancer group CLIC Sargent.

Social tariffs are a matter for the Department of Energy and Climate Change. However, I am advised that as part of their July announcement on this issue for a new proposed statutory framework for social tariffs in 2011, the Government will ensure there is an increase in resources available.

These resources will also be available for other vulnerable households in addition to older pensioner households on low incomes. The Department of Energy and Climate Change is continuing to develop its analysis on the eligibility criteria of the scheme, working with key stakeholders, and a consultation on this together with policy details is expected in the summer of 2010.

While I understand your constituents' concerns, I hope this explains the position of my Department and how we are trying to help people with cancer receive the help that they need.

*Kind regards*

*Angela*

**ANGELA EAGLE MP**