



From the Minister of State
for Work and Pensions

DWP Department for
Work and Pensions

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Councillor Sir Merrick Cockell
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20 March 2014

Jean Merrick

Thank you for your letter of 5 March expressing your concerns about my proposal to deliver councils' funds for local welfare support in quarterly instalments. This follows on from my letter of 27 January to all local authorities.

I welcome your proposal that Local Government Association (LGA) officials should be involved in discussions with my officials. I was particularly interested to learn that you are planning an information gathering exercise and it makes sense for them to work together on this to build an evidence base that would be valuable to all local authorities.

As you suggest, and despite unhelpful media stories, there is no evidence that local authorities are not fulfilling their responsibilities. On the contrary, from feedback supplied so far from local authorities to my Department, there is evidence of new approaches to providing support which appear to be having a positive effect.

I can reassure you that our aim is to encourage better targeted support and services. After all, the original rationale for localisation in place of the national Department for Work and Pensions scheme was that local authorities could better tailor services to need, and make efficiencies by joining up with wider social care provision.

DWP is committed to reviewing how local authorities have been providing this support until now, and it will continue to do so during the course of 2014. I hope the outcome from this will be that the very best practice carried out in some local authorities will be used more widely. We do not anticipate that the review will be an administrative burden as we will be requesting information that local authorities are already recording as part of their normal financial and audit activities, and probably as part of their own strategies for increased transparency. We will ask that local authorities return this information within the time that will be stipulated.

I am always happy to meet to discuss issues of concern. However, in the first instance, I think it may be best for our respective officials to meet and work together on this matter. I have asked my official Andrew Jennings to contact your office to arrange this.

Thank you for getting in touch.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Webb", with a large, stylized flourish below it.

STEVE WEBB MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR PENSIONS