

PART TWO

Confidential Filing.

Electricity Discount Scheme to help the poor with winter fuel costs.

Improving the Energy Efficiency of Pensioners' Housing.

Severe Weather Payments.

SOCIAL

SERVICES.

Part 1: May 1979

Part 2: March 1986

PREM 19/3540

Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date	Referred to	Date
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11.6.91							
14.6.91							



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS

Telephone 071-210 3000

Fax 071-210 5415

From the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People

cc Q2
PO
SM
✓

Barry Potter Esq
10 Downing Street

14 June 1991

Dear Barry

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

I attach, for information, a copy of the written answer to PQ 1792/1990/91 from George Foulkes, which my Minister will be answering today. This gives details of the proposed changes to the cold weather payment scheme detailed in my Minister's letter of 7 June (covering a draft statement) to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

I am copying this letter to Nicholas Holgate (Chief Secretary's Office), Robert Canniff (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office), Stephen Alcock (Department of Health), Jim Gallagher (Scottish Office), Judith Simpson (Welsh Office) Tony Pawson (Northern Ireland Office), John Neilson (Department of Energy), Phillip Ward (Department of the Environment), Tim Sutton (Lord President's Office), and Gillian Kirton (Lord Privy Seal's Office).

Yours ever

KEVIN SADLER
Private Secretary

Monday 10 June 1991
Written Answer
Friday 14 June 1991

PQ 1792/1990/91
Han Ref Vol
Col

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

246 Mr George Foulkes (LA Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley):

To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, what progress he is making in his review of the cold weather payments system.

MR SCOTT

Following my review of the cold weather payments scheme, I now propose some significant enhancements to the scheme.

The cold weather payments scheme provides additional payments to help vulnerable people with their extra costs of heating in periods of very cold weather and we have already introduced significant improvements to the scheme including a standard payment on a regulated basis; raising the trigger temperature from -1.5°C to 0°C for all regions, and for any consecutive 7 days; extending entitlement to households on Income Support with a child under 5 or a person over 60 or a disabled person; doubling of the capital limit for the elderly from £500 to £1,000; and increasing the weekly payment from £5 to £6.

These major improvements have increased the numbers eligible to 2.2 million and have also increased the cash amount and the frequency with which it becomes payable.

The substantial improvements I am now proposing are as follows:-

First, we will abolish the present special capital rule governing eligibility for these payments. The £1,000 limit for those over 60 (£500 for others) will be abolished. All will be covered by the £3,000 rule which applies generally for Income Support. We estimate that the numbers eligible will, as a result of this measure, rise from about 2.2 million to about 2.6 million.

Second, in future, payments will be made automatically to all those who are eligible. The abolition of the special capital rule will enable us to do that. Subject to consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee, I shall lay regulations abolishing the need for people to make a separate claim. The information already available about people on Income Support will identify those eligible, and they will then be paid automatically.

Third, I propose to assure eligible people that if very cold weather arrives, they can turn up their heating. The Meteorological Office can now supply daily a forecast for each of the weather stations which we use which will indicate, with sufficient accuracy, the likely average temperature over the next 7 days. Accordingly I propose to introduce a new regulation to provide for payments to be made for a 7 day period if the forecast for the local weather station shows that the temperature is likely to average 0°C or below.

This will be an enhancement, not a replacement, of the existing scheme. If there is no such forecast, but nevertheless 0°C or below is subsequently recorded for a 7 day period, payments will still be made.

Finally, I propose to make regulations further refining the ways in which the weather stations are linked to individual areas, details of which will be announced before the recess.

Corresponding changes will also be proposed for cold weather payments in Northern Ireland.

JP5081p+

POLICY IN CONFIDENCE



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS

Telephone 071-210 3000

Fax 071-210 5415

From the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People

Barry Potter Esq
10 Downing Street

11 June 1991

Dear Barry

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

Thank you for your letter of 10 June. My Minister will of course be taking account of the Prime Minister's helpful comments on his draft statement.

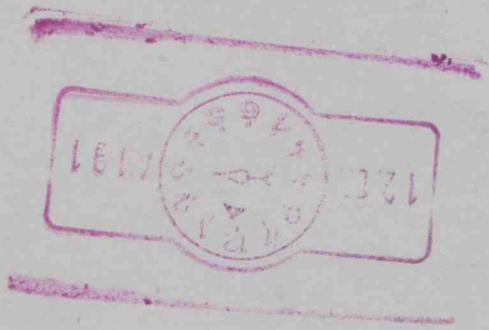
On the question of timing, you may now be aware that Business Managers have concluded that the best time for the statement to be made is next week, probably Thursday, 20 June. This is the last possible date on which, for operational reasons, my Minister can make the statement.

I am copying this letter to recipients of yours.

Yours ever

KEVIN SADLER
Private Secretary

copy
n.b. pms
BP
(fax copy
seen)



CCP



*n.s. p.m.
BHP
11/6*

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street SW1P 3AG

071-270 3000

Fax 071-270 5456

The Rt Hon Nicholas Scott MBE JP MP
Minister of State for Social Security and Disabled People
Department of Social Security
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

// June 1991

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

with BT?

Thank you for your letter of 7 June covering the draft statement which I understand you are now hoping to make next Tuesday or possibly later this week.

2. I still see great advantage in announcing the changes we have agreed in the context of the autumn uprating statement, as I said in my letter of 22 May. It is a pity to dilute the positive impact of Tony's statement by dribbling out news of elements of it in advance. And October is perhaps, despite the temperature so far this spring, a better time to be making announcements about cold weather than June!

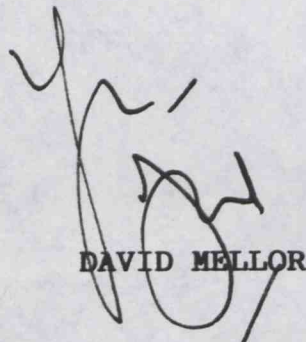
3. However, I can see the attractions of making an early announcement, as well as the operational case you mention. I am therefore prepared to go along with an announcement this week or next. I am sure you will take the opportunity of the uprating statement to repeat the good news.

4. I am glad we are at one on the question of volunteering information in the statement about the relative costs of the old and new schemes. Naturally you will have to give an answer if you are asked, but I am sure it would be better to stress the uncertainty of the weather rather than discuss the provision as it appears in the Estimates. That would just provide opportunities for our opponents to make trouble.

CONFIDENTIAL

5. No doubt your officials will be in touch with mine if the draft changes substantially between now and your statement.

6. I am copying this to the Prime Minister, William Waldegrave, Ian Lang, David Hunt, Peter Brooke, Michael Heseltine, John MacGregor and David Waddington.



DAVID MELLOR



a/economic/cold
MEM

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

10 June 1991

Dear Kevin,

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

The Prime Minister was grateful for a copy of your Minister's letter of 7 June covering the draft announcement on the improved cold weather payments system.

The Prime Minister very much welcomes the proposed announcement. It is an attractive good news item for this week.

The Prime Minister wonders, however, whether the presentation might be made more attractive by cutting back the first nine paragraphs a little, which perhaps set out the background in too great detail. Correspondingly, the good news to come might be trailed earlier in the statement.

I am copying this letter to Stephen Alcock (Department of Health), Jim Gallagher (Scottish Office), Judith Simpson (Welsh Office), Tony Pawson (Northern Ireland Office), John Neilson (Department of Energy), Phillip Ward (Department of the Environment), Tim Sutton (Lord President's Office), and Gillian Kirton (Lord Privy Seal's Office).

Yours,

Barry

BARRY H. POTTER

Kevin Sadler, Esq.,
Department of Social Security

MEM

CCP
CCDM
CCP
CCDIC



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS

Telephone 071-210 3000

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From the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People

Prime Minister

②

To note. The draft statement is too long. Paras 1-9 need cut back. And the good news to come should be included earlier in the statement.

Rt Hon David Mellor QC MP
Chief Secretary
HM Treasury
Treasury Chambers
Parliament Street
London
SW1P 3AO

Yes - but don't
omit it is
his statement for 10.6

7 June 1991

- i) Content for me to pass on to Mr. Scott?
- ii) Any other points to put to Mr. Scott?

Map BHP 7/6

Dear Chief Secretary

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

Thank you very much for your most helpful reply of 22 May to Tony's letter of 15 May which set out our proposals. Tony and I are very appreciative of your willingness that we should improve the cold weather payments scheme in the ways we suggested.

As you know, although we agree entirely with you about the attraction of having good news to tell in the autumn upratings package, it has been decided that these cold weather payments proposals should be announced next week. Indeed, for the operational reasons Tony set out in his letter, we consider that essential.

I am therefore sending you a draft of the statement officials have prepared. Your officials have already seen a draft and their comments have been taken into account. In particular, your officials suggested that I should say nothing on costs in the statement, but make the point in supplementaries instead. I am content with that approach. I will be tightening up the draft over the weekend but in the meantime I should be grateful for any further comments you have by close of play on Monday 10 June.

I am copying this letter and draft to William Waldegrave, Ian Lang, David Hunt, Peter Brooke, John Wakeham, Michael Heseltine, John McGregor, David Waddington, and the Prime Minister.

Yours ever
Nicholas Scott

approved by the Minister and signed in his absence.

NICHOLAS SCOTT

DRAFT ANNOUNCEMENT BY MINISTER OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SECURITY AND
DISABLED PEOPLE

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS REVIEW

1. With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on Cold Weather Payments. In February I promised to the House that when the winter was over I would be reviewing the operation of the scheme.

2. Since my announcement, I have received and carefully considered suggestions for improvements from a wide variety of sources, (and) have now decided to propose to the House certain changes which will significantly enhance the help available when cold weather next strikes. My proposals will require new regulations, which I shall introduce in time to come into effect by next winter. I understand that corresponding changes will be proposed for Northern Ireland.

3. Before I come to the detailed changes (I am proposing) I should emphasise first that the problems associated with cold weather extend well beyond the Department of Social Security. For example, the Department of Health ran a highly successful Keep Warm Keep Well campaign last winter; and the Departments of Energy and of the Environment ran several initiatives to assist people in installing insulation.

4. (I should perhaps also remind the House that Cold Weather Payments are additional payments for periods of very cold weather. (1)
Normal weekly benefit payments are intended to cover general heating costs. The former Supplementary Benefit scheme included weekly heating additions which in the last year of Supplementary Benefit amounted to more than £400 million. That sum was included in the Income Support premium structure introduced in April 1988 which provided extra help for lone parents, pensioners and the long-term sick and disabled. Nearly 3 million claimants, (about two thirds of the Income Support caseload), qualify for such a premium.

5. We have also directed extra help to pensioners amounting to over a quarter of a billion pounds in the current year.

6. I should also like to remind the House that we have already introduced significant improvements in the Cold Weather scheme. In 1980 we introduced regulated payments, but the methods of establishing claimants' extra costs were still pretty complex, and temperatures in Scotland had to be lower than in the South before the payments could be triggered.

7. During the 1980's we introduced several further improvements: a standard amount of £5 was payable, subject to a capital rule, to any household on supplementary benefit which had a child under two, or a pensioner over 65, or a disabled person; and the trigger temperature was raised for all regions from -1.5°C to 0°C . In 1988, when our social security reforms were introduced, we extended entitlement to families with children under 5 and people over 60; and we made the trigger period any consecutive 7 days when the average temperature is 0°C or below, instead of the previous fixed Monday to Sunday period. Then last year we doubled the capital limit for people over 60 from £500 to £1000, and improved the linkages of individual areas to weather stations. Finally, in February this year, besides acting swiftly to ensure that eligible people anywhere in the country could get the payment for those two very cold weeks, we raised the payment from £5 to £6.

8. These are already major improvements, which have increased the numbers eligible to 2.2m and have increased the cash amount and the frequency with which it becomes payable.

9. Having carefully reviewed the working of the scheme last winter I have further proposals to improve the scheme.

10. First, subject to consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee, I propose to make regulations altering slightly the ways in which the 64 weather stations are linked to individual areas of the country. Despite the changes introduced last year, there are still one or two problem areas, where people living on high ground are linked to a low-lying weather station. I am anxious that the linkages are as sensitive as possible bearing in mind the need for consistent, accurate and regular monitoring of local temperatures. I am grateful to the Meteorological office for the help they give in this regard.

11. Secondly, there is the present requirement that people who already have an underlying entitlement to the payments should have to make a separate claim. We have done our best to make the process of claiming as simple as possible, but the fact remains that not everyone who is entitled makes a claim.

12. To tackle this problem, and to ensure that the people who should get these payments do receive them quickly and without difficulty, I have decided that in future payments should be made automatically to all those who are eligible. I propose to lay regulations abolishing the need for people to make a separate claim: we shall use the information already available about people who are on Income Support to identify those eligible, and those people will then be sent payments automatically.

13. I also propose to abolish the present special capital rule governing eligibility for the payments. At the moment savings in excess of £1000 for people over 60, and £500 for other people, are taken into account. That rule is more restrictive than for Income Support generally. By abolishing it we shall extend significantly the help given, bringing in a substantial extra group of beneficiaries. We estimate that the numbers eligible will, as a result of this measure, rise from about 2.2m to about 2.6m.

14. My final proposal addresses the problem which vulnerable people face when cold weather strikes. That problem, as I am sure the House will recognise is, can they turn up their heating in the certain knowledge that they will receive extra money?

15. Last winter, when the severe weather struck, the Prime Minister assured the House, and the country, that we would waive the usual rule of waiting for 7 days of cold weather to be proved. That meant that all those eligible could be certain that they could get the extra help. My proposal would turn that assurance into a regulation.

16. As the House knows, at present every area of Great Britain is linked, for the cold weather payments scheme, to one of 64 weather stations. When one of those stations gives readings showing an average temperature of 0°C or below for the past 7 days, eligible people living in the areas linked to that station are entitled to a payment. The Met Office assure me that they can supply daily a forecast for each of those weather stations which will indicate, with sufficient accuracy, the likely average temperature over the next 7 days. I accordingly propose to introduce to the House a new regulation to provide for payments to be made for a 7 day period if the forecast for the local weather station showed that the temperature was likely to average 0°C or below.

17. If the forecast for a weather station did not show cold weather, but a week later the station showed that the average temperature had in fact been 0°C or below for the past 7 days, then eligible people would still be entitled to a payment for that period, just as they are now. So we would be adding to the certainty of payments under the scheme, without removing any of the present entitlements.

18. Thus if really cold weather strikes, there should be no worries about payment: we shall be able to announce the areas where a spell of cold weather is forecast, so that those eligible will know that extra money will be paid to them. They will be able to turn up their heating without more ado.

POLICY IN CONFIDENCE

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19. To conclude, I should like to emphasise that my proposals will increase the numbers eligible for cold weather payments; will remove the extra restriction on savings; will remove the need to claim, which is an irksome requirement inhibiting some people from obtaining the payments for which they are eligible; and will provide for payments to be made not just automatically but also whenever cold weather is forecast, not merely when it is past. I am also proposing some improvements in the definitions of areas linked to weather stations. I believe that these proposals together represent in total a major improvement in the present scheme, which I am sure will be widely welcomed and which I commend to the House.

SOCIAL SERVICES: Cold weather
Payments

Pt 2

CONFIDENTIAL

cc PLH



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS

Telephone 071-210 3000

From the Secretary of State for Social Security

Barry Potter Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

31 May 1991

Dear Barry,

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

topenc (date 23/5)

Following your letter of 27 May I thought it might be helpful to copy recipients to drop you a quick line to confirm the latest position.

Very shortly after you wrote it was agreed that this announcement ought really to be made to Parliament rather than in the recess. Subsequently the business managers agreed that next week was not the ideal time to make the announcement and have asked us to agree with them a date on or after 10 June. We hope to settle a date very soon and will keep you, and colleagues, in the picture.

I am copying this to recipients of your letter and to Murdo Maclean.

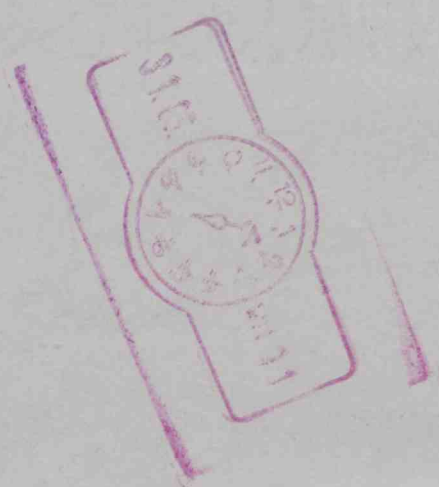
Yours,

Alan

ALAN WOODS
Principal Private Secretary

SOCIAL SERVICES : Severe Weather
Payments

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copy
Northern Ireland Office
Stormont Castle
Belfast BT4 3ST

The Rt Hon Tony Newton OBE MP
Secretary of State for Social Security
Richmond House
LONDON
SW1A 2NS

28 May 1991

Dear Tony.

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter of ^{Par} 15 May to David Mellor about the proposed revision of the scheme of cold weather payments for the Social Fund.

I fully support your intention to make payments from the scheme automatic and to introduce a forward trigger. Both of these changes will do much to remove the criticisms of the scheme, while at the same time making it easier to administer. These changes would of course operate in Northern Ireland on a parity basis.

Linkage to weather stations is an equally sensitive issue in the Province, where at present four stations are used in the scheme. I shall be examining the need for four stations in the light of the Meteorological Office data about the frequency with which each would have triggered payments under the present criteria.

I do not envisage that the proposed changes will have much impact on public expenditure in Northern Ireland.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, David Mellor, William Waldegrave, Ian Lang and David Hunt.

Lewin

Par

PB

PM/SOFS/6101

SOCIAL SERVICES: Severe Weather
Prz



CONFIDENTIAL



RCO
DCA
cc PU

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

23 May 1991

Dear Alan,

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

The Prime Minister has seen a copy of your Secretary of State's letter to the Chief Secretary setting out proposals for a revised cold weather payments scheme. The Prime Minister has also seen the Chief Secretary's letter of 22 May on this subject.

The Prime Minister agrees with the Chief Secretary that your Secretary of State's proposals represent an attractive package. On balance, however, like your Secretary of State, he sees advantage in an early announcement of the proposed improvements to the cold weather payments scheme. The Prime Minister considers that a high profile announcement during the Recess would be appropriate.

I am copying this letter to Nicholas Holgate (Chief Secretary's Office), Robert Canniff (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office), Stephen Alcock (Department of Health), Jim Gallagher (Scottish Office), Judith Simpson (Welsh Office) and Tony Pawson (Northern Ireland Office).

*Yours,
Barry*

BARRY H. POTTER

Alan Woods, Esq.,
Department of Social Security.

CONFIDENTIAL

ST



cel
n.s.p.m.

BHP

22/5

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street SW1P 3AG

071-270 3000

Fax 071-270 5456

The Rt Hon Tony Newton OBE MP
Secretary of State for Social Security
Department of Social Security
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London SW1

22 May 1991

D.H.

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

WILL REQUEST IF REQUIRED

Thank you for your letter of 15 May about your proposals for the cold weather payment scheme in the Social Fund.

2. The package you suggest is very attractive. I am persuaded that it will go a long way to meet the criticism to which we were exposed in those chilly days in February. I am grateful for your efforts to contain the cost of the scheme by avoiding its extension to substantially larger groups, raising the trigger temperature or other special kinds of help.

3. Normally I would want to consider measures such as this in the context of the Survey. If there is no urgency about changes in the benefits system it is surely best to reserve decisions on them until they can be evaluated - and indeed presented - in the context of the rest of your programme.

4. However, I understand that you have an operational need to get ahead with part of your package of proposals on cold weather in order that the new regime can come into effect next winter. I can quite see the difficulty of delaying the response beyond the coming winter. So I am willing to look at the Survey implications a little ahead of time.

5. Without the context of the remainder of your programme, I am sure that you will appreciate that my main concern is whether the cost is affordable. It is somewhat alarming that the potential maximum expenditure in a very cold year might exceed £100m. If that were a serious risk in a typical year, I should have grave

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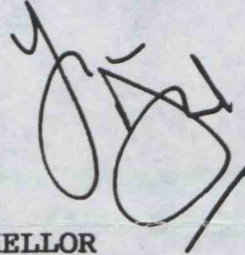
reservations about your proposal. But I am reassured that this should be a rare event and that in practice the provision required should be no more than £8m a year.

6. It is fortunate that the public expenditure plans allow for £11m a year for cold weather payments, so that the change can be made without a claim on the Reserve. But on a comparable basis, the existing scheme would need provision of only about £3m a year, less than half the provision required by your new scheme. I am sure you will understand that in a difficult year such as this even a modest and well merited increase in expenditure requires careful consideration.

7. I appreciate the sensitivity of this area of policy and can see why you feel it important to make improvements. I am therefore prepared, exceptionally, to agree to your proposal now. For future years we will clearly need to revise public expenditure provision down to £8m a year, in line with your proposals, now that we have a clearer appreciation of the weather patterns and payments. I am sure you will understand that any unused parts of this provision cannot be deployed for any other purpose in the years when spending is less.

8. As you know, I was much struck the other day by your explanation that relatively modest gestures such as this can go a long way to improve the general balance of your autumn upratings package. I wonder therefore whether it would be possible to reserve the announcement of this concession until then. The timing might fit rather well, just at the start of next winter. If there are enquiries in the meantime about the progress of your review it would surely be natural to explain that it falls to be considered in the Survey.

9. I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister.



DAVID MELLOR





DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY
 Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS
 Telephone 071-210 3000

copy

From the Secretary of State for Social Security

Prime Minister

②

CONFIDENTIAL

The Rt Hon David Mellor QC MP
 Chief Secretary to the Treasury
 HM Treasury
 Treasury Chambers
 Parliament Street
 London
 SW1

To note. DSS & Treasury
 have reached agreement on a new
 cold weather payments scheme which:
 i) is automatic;

Next week
 - in the recess.
 (with cap + bells please!)

15 May 1991

ii) is triggered by forecast
 bad weather.

Only the timing of the announcement
 is still to be sorted out - now or in
 the Autumn.

Dear Chief Secretary,

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

BHP

22/5.

I promised to consult you as soon as possible about the results of our consideration of the cold weather payments scheme, following the promise in the House to review the scheme. Nick Scott and I have given the matter careful thought and have the following proposals to make.

The essential problem we faced in February, as indeed the Government faced on the occasion of the previous cold snap in 1986, was that very cold weather had clearly arrived in a large part of the country, but that under the present rules of the scheme no-one could be sure of getting any extra help with their heating until the cold weather had been proved to have lasted 7 days.

I think you would agree that that produced an inordinately difficult political situation, remedied only by the Prime Minister's swift announcement that the rules were being set aside.

In addition, there was strong public opposition to the need to submit claims for these payments, since eligibility is almost entirely based on Income Support conditions. It was seen as inappropriate to insist that the most frail and vulnerable should make claims for payments which were in almost all cases theirs by right already.

E.R.

It is clear to us that we could not avoid encountering similarly difficult situations in the event of further spells of very cold weather unless we remove or alleviate the worst features of the present scheme. We have therefore examined the scope for changes which would achieve this objective without undermining the scheme's fundamental nature. For that reason we are not proposing (with one minor exception, explained below) to extend the payments to anyone who is not eligible now. We do not propose to change the rules which limit help to those living in areas linked to weather stations which trigger, and to complete periods of 7 days. Nor do I propose to raise the temperature trigger above 0°C or to seek a further increase in the level of payment. And I have ruled out the introduction of special help for Scotland, or other expensive changes urged upon me by various interested bodies.

The changes we propose are threefold. None of them requires primary legislation, which I wish to avoid, though they do require regulations. They are as follows:-

- a) to make the payments automatically to those eligible, so that they do not have to claim;
- b) to introduce a forward trigger, so that, if the Met Office forecast for a weather station shows that a period of sufficiently cold weather is expected, payment will be made (replacing the payment that would otherwise be made after the present backward-looking trigger);
- c) to do some further tidying up of the linkages between weather stations and the areas triggered by them.

1) AUTOMATICITY

It makes enormous sense that payments should be automatic, both politically and administratively. With the present requirement to claim, we cannot say that all eligible people will get help. I am especially conscious of the danger we face if, during another cold spell, substantial numbers of low income pensioners and families can be shown not to be getting the help they need and to which they are fully entitled. Such a situation is extremely hard to defend politically and is wholly unsatisfactory, judged against the goal of ensuring that those with the greatest needs get appropriate and timely help. Automaticity would remove the burden of claiming, and would be administratively simple.

Automaticity does have a cost, even though the administrative cost per payment is substantially reduced. The chief reason is the obverse of the point above: take up would be raised to around 100 per cent. The other reason is that the eligible population would be increased from about 2.2 million to about 2.6 million, because we would have to abolish the special capital rule. At present, people are eligible if they are on Income Support, and receive certain premia (for age or disability or children under five), and have capital of less than £500 (under pension age) or £1000 (over pension age). Only the last rule - which derives from the conditions for help from the Social Fund, of which cold weather payments form part - creates a need to claim separately, because all the

others are conditions of the Income Support and premia already being paid. (There is already a capital limit for eligibility for Income Support, on a sliding scale between £3000 and £8000.) If we abolish the special capital rule, we can change our system so that the Income Support computer can identify all those eligible and arrange payment, obviating any necessity for claims or clerical intervention. We are examining ways of overtly linking such automatic payments to the original Income Support claims, so that there would still be a claim for adjudication purposes, but we do not see that as a problem.

The extra cost of automaticity would depend on the weather. The Met Office have given my officials data for the past 35 years which have enabled them to estimate the number of triggers which would have occurred under the present system (one trigger represents a single 7 day trigger for a single weather station - there are 64 stations covering the country for this purpose). I attach a chart showing the results. As the chart shows, winters can be roughly divided between "mild", "cold" and "severe" winters, with one "worst" winter in 35 years. "Mild" winters occurred in over half the period.

On that basis my officials estimate that the costs of automatic payments would be as follows:

	Likely frequency in next 10 years	Average number of triggers	Cost with automatic pay- ment assuming £6 benefit fm
mild	5½	12	3
cold	3	80	19
severe	1½	207	50
worst	-	451	110
average*	-	71	17

*over 35 years

2) FORWARD TRIGGER

The Met Office have also advised that they can supply 6 day forecasts for each weather station. Last winter's experience indicates that such forecasts could be used to predict 7 day periods of 0°C or below with remarkable accuracy. That is, such forecasts predicted only 7 per cent more such periods than did in the event materialise. The accuracy in the other direction is not so good: about half the time the forecasts failed to predict a period of 0°C or below which did materialise (the bias apparently results from an element of caution in the forecasting system).

E.R.

We propose that we introduce a new regulation that payments would be made on such a forward trigger. That is, if a weather station's 6 day forecast showed 0°C or below, payment would be made to those eligible in that area. The regulation would be drafted so that such payment replaced any payment that would otherwise be made if the ensuing 7 day vindicated the forecast.

That would not cost us much - perhaps around 10 per cent extra on the basis of the available evidence - and it would go a very long way towards enabling us to declare, when a cold spell was about to strike, that people could be sure of getting their money. I do not say it would never be necessary to take the sort of emergency action which we took in February, but the need to do so should be substantially reduced, even in a severe winter.

3) TIDYING UP LINKAGES

There are two reasons for doing something here. One is that, despite our efforts last year, we have still got some nonsenses in the linkages which have recently caused inordinate political trouble (notably the people living near Eskdalemuir not getting payments triggered by the weather station there). Another is that, subject to a little further investigation, we think we need to change the linkages to areas defined by postcodes in order to enable automatic payments.

We intend to achieve the changes in linkages at nil cost.

PUBLIC EXPENDITURE AND TIMING

I am conscious that this is a very uncomfortable time to be making proposals which cost money, however modest. If I thought we could avoid making changes until 1992/93, I would put our proposals forward to be considered alongside other matters in the current public expenditure survey.

However, there are strong reasons why I feel obliged to put our proposals now.

First, I believe it is essential to have the improvements in place in time for next winter. It may or may not be a cold one, but it would be disastrous to say that we intended to make changes but could not do so for another year. However, the operational process of changing over to automatic payments requires several months: we must begin it very soon, but I cannot allow it to begin until we have announced our decision, for the worst of all worlds would be for the plans to leak out without our being ready to say what we had decided.

E.R.

Secondly, there seems to me a political imperative on us to announce very soon now some proposals for improvement. Plenty of interest has been shown in the review, and even if we had not said we would review the scheme at the end of the winter I do not think it will be politically safe to defer an announcement until the autumn.

And although automaticity, in particular, will cost more than the present scheme, much of the time it will cost substantially less than the present provision of £11 million per annum, as you can see from the above table. All depends on the weather. So you may judge that it is not necessary to increase provision (or for me to make a claim on the Reserve in the current year): my proposal is more like a contingent bid.

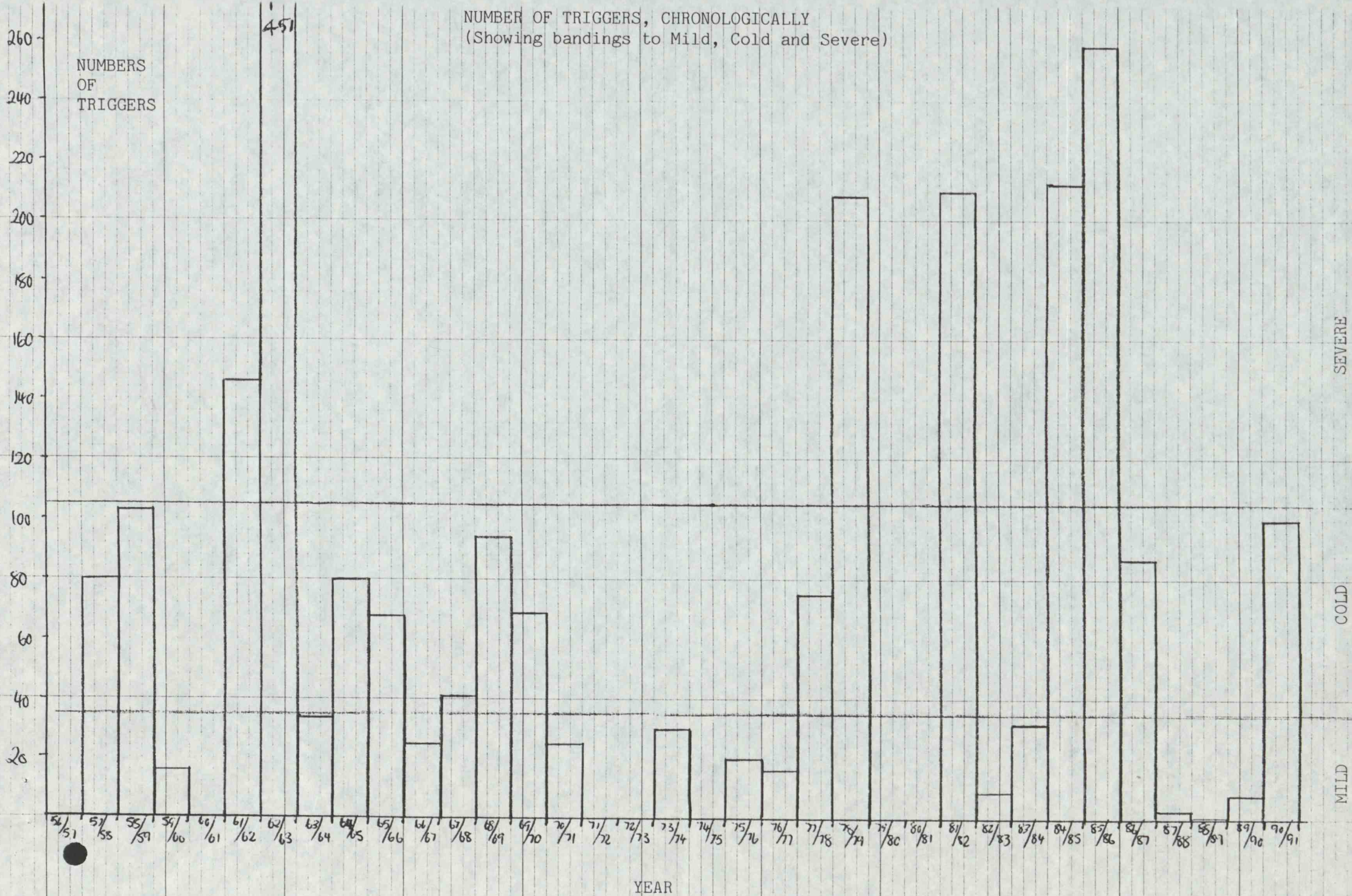
I do hope you can agree to my proposals. My officials will be happy to discuss with yours the full details of the mechanisms and costs.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, in view of his particular role in the events of February; and to William Waldegrave, Ian Lang, Peter Brooke and David Hunt.

Yours sincerely,
Debbie High

TONY NEWTON
(approved by the
Secretary of State and
signed in his absence)

NUMBER OF TRIGGERS, CHRONOLOGICALLY
 (Showing bandings to Mild, Cold and Severe)



CCFO



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS

Telephone 071-210 3000

Fax 071-210 5415

From the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People

Barry Potter Esq
10 Downing Street

Prime Minister
'X' is important. Much
of the recent difficulty
reflected Treasury officials
being outmanoeuvred
by a sharp DSS Grades
- one Margaret Pearson.

No! No!

BHP

18 February 28/2

Dear Barry

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

- at Nap.

Thank you for your letter of 12 February. When it first arrived, I understood that you knew Ministers and the Department were reflecting carefully on the experiences of the past 2-3 weeks and that you did not expect a reply. I now understand that you are interested in our conclusions.

DSS Ministers share the Prime Minister's regret that the impact of his prompt announcement on 7 February came under question. The goodwill generated by that announcement derived from the assurance that people would be helped immediately and would not have to wait before they felt able to afford extra heating. It was essential that we gave full effect to that assurance, and took account of the many weather stations that were already triggering for 7 day periods ending on or before 7 February.

The only workable means of ensuring that help was immediately and universally available was to deem the trigger for payment to have operated in the rest of the country on the day of the announcement. The agreement to this effect reached between Secretary of State and the Chief Secretary on 7 February was reflected in the form of words which I understand the Chief Secretary's office sent you.

The Chief Secretary authorised the expenditure involved, however, on the clear understanding that the 7 day qualifying period would be deemed only for that week.

E.R. MC/2620/p+

It was in the light of this that my Minister answered the PNQ on Monday 11 February. Only the next day, as a result of the continuing cold weather and the Prime Minister's concern to extend the relaxation of the rules, did the Treasury authorise the expenditure required for a universal extra payment for a further week.

4 Both my Minister and Secretary of State entirely agree that we ought to prepare for future severe cold spells. Mr Scott has written to the Chief Secretary about handling any further such spells this winter, and he hopes to consult the Prime Minister very shortly about their joint proposals. My Minister and the Secretary of State are of course also considering policy for the longer-term, as Secretary of State indicated at Cabinet on 14 February, and will in due course consult colleagues about that too.

I am copying his letter to Jeremy Heywood in the Chief Secretary's office.

Yours ever

Kevin Sadler

KEVIN SADLER
Private Secretary



Cui

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS

Telephone 071-210 3000

Fax 071-210 5415

From the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People

Dear Colleague

February 1991

The past fortnight has seen a period of very severe weather and I would therefore like to bring you up to date on the help that we are providing for the most vulnerable groups and the further steps we have taken.

Income Support, which goes to the poorest people in the community, is designed to cover normal day to day living expenses including heating. Through additional premiums we provide for the extra needs of the elderly, disabled and very young.

Cold Weather payments from the Social Fund give additional help to the most vulnerable groups on Income Support for the higher heating costs resulting from a period of very cold weather. Income Support recipients who have a child under 5 or whose benefit includes a pension or disability premium are eligible to claim for any period of 7 consecutive days where the average temperature in their area is 0°C or below. Any savings of up to £500 (£1,000 for those aged 60 or over) are ignored. In this way the payments can be targeted precisely at those with the least available resources to meet higher fuel costs.

As you know John Major has announced that the weekly cold weather payment was being increased from £5 to £6 for any period of cold weather after 1 February. He has also explained that the whole country would be treated as having triggered a cold weather payment for the 2 weeks 1-7 February and 8-14 February.

The effect of these measures is that up to 2.2 million people in the most vulnerable groups are eligible for these payments for the recent cold snap. Moreover, as the Prime Minister said, we shall continue to monitor the situation carefully.

E.R.

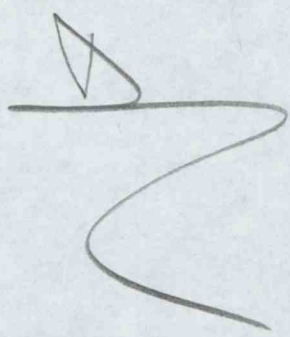
Some relatives of the servicemen in the Gulf may be among those who qualify for these payments so we have ensured that the Gulf Helpline at the MoD has full information on the help available.

Local offices have already advertised in the local press inviting claims, and advertisements were put in the National press over the weekend. Some people have already received payments, but people can make their claim up to 3 months after the end of the period of cold weather. Those who successfully claim for any one such period receive further payments automatically for any later periods during the same winter.

Of course, payments to help with heating costs are not the only way to help people at risk and the Government is again running the "Keep Warm, Keep Well" publicity campaign this winter, in conjunction with Age Concern, Help the Aged, and Neighbourhood Energy Action. The aim of the campaign is to persuade elderly people at risk from the effects of the cold weather to minimise the risks as well as to advise them of the help that is available from various sources. This includes a "freephone" service on 0800-289404.

Finally, as I told the House on 13 February, we shall be reviewing the cold weather payments scheme at the end of this winter to see whether any changes are needed for future years.

NICHOLAS SCOTT



FOR THE URGENT ATTENTION OF

..... Dominic Morris

Room Extn

Building

From Kevin Sadler - Nicholas Scott's Office
Room 216 Tel: 01 210 5121

Number of pages sent (including covering page

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

ANY RESPONSE SHOULD BE FAXED TO 01 210 5415

Mr Morris Private Secretary (No 10)
Mr Heywood Private Secretary / CST

I attach a copy of a "Dear Colleague" letter which Ministers
plans to send out at midday tomorrow (20/2/91). If you
have any comments could I therefore receive them by
11-30am on that day.

Kevin Sadler

File
CONFIDENTIAL



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

Prime Minister

MFJ
②

You asked to see this letter.
DSS care is no doubt that a
response is requested.

BHP

20/2

12 February 1991

Dear Kevin,

COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

The Prime Minister spoke to your Minister this afternoon about cold weather payments. He was grateful to learn that your Minister is proposing a thorough review of the system for the future.

The Prime Minister is however concerned that the handling of this matter over the last ten days or so has left much to be desired. It would have been better if the changes to the present system recently announced had been put forward and discussed by the relevant Ministers earlier - for we did have several days warning of severe weather on the way.

The Prime Minister has also commented that, after his announcement on Thursday 7 February, the subsequent handling and the apparent lurches in policy have tended to undermine the goodwill generated by the Government's prompt initial response. Indeed a letter on this point from the Leader of the Opposition arrived this afternoon.

The Prime Minister hopes that, in future handling of such sensitive issues it will be possible for the Department of Social Security and the Treasury to achieve better co-operation and move more rapidly to a thorough and complete understanding, than was achieved on this occasion. Where officials are implementing a policy change announced by the Prime Minister, it is also necessary to keep No.10 officials fully informed.

I am copying this letter to John Gieve and Jeremy Heywood (HM Treasury) and to Sir Robin Butler.

Yours,
Barry
Barry Potter

Kevin Sadler Esq
Department of Social Security

CONFIDENTIAL

88

Prime Minister
Unconvincing.



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS
Telephone 071-210 3000
Fax 071-210 5415

From the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People

- i) a 20% fuel price ↑ is not justification for a 100% rise in payments
- ii) the excess provision this year is either diverted elsewhere or returned to Treasury; extra public spending is extra public spending;
- iii) a back signal on PE to double the payment.

P.S.
CST will oppose
- is angry about
N. Scott's accusation
BHP

The Rt Hon David Mellor QC MP
Chief Secretary to the Treasury

February 1991

Dear David,

X/ argue that exceptional nature of weather will allow 'trigger' after 5 days only. I put this suggestion to CST.
- Contact to circuit CST response?
- or wish to not indicate to DSS

I am writing to seek your agreement to doubling the current level of Social Fund cold weather payments from £5 to £10 a week with immediate effect.

The present spell of extremely harsh weather has rekindled much public criticism of the inadequacy of the current level of Social Fund cold weather payments. Set at £5 a week in 1986 under the supplementary benefits scheme, the payments have not been uprated for 5 years. Over the same period fuel prices have risen by more than 20 per cent.

want a solution
ans of 'X'
above?
BHP
6/2

Since 1988 when cold weather payments were incorporated into the Social Fund a combination of mild winters and extremely low take-up has resulted in total payments of less than £410,000 being made.

So far in this cold spell payments have been triggered in 22 out of the 63 weather station areas (to trigger payments the temperature must average 0 degrees celsius for seven consecutive days). The forecast by the Meteorological Office is that the present cold weather will end by about 10 February, but there will be another cold spell in late February. From this we estimate that cold weather payments are likely to be widely triggered for a maximum of three weeks this winter, though payments could trigger in one or two lightly populated upland areas for further weeks.

On this basis, and assuming a take-up rate of 33 per cent of the eligible population, (which is considerably higher than has been the case so far) we would expect total expenditure on cold weather payments to be about £3.75 million in the current financial year. Set against provision of £11 million we believe that the likely

E.R.

underspend coupled with the absence of any uprating over the past 5 years puts us in an extremely exposed position and open to the charge of failing to make use of provision available to help the poorest and most vulnerable groups in the community.

Doubling the weekly amount to £10 would enable us successfully to rebut these charges while remaining comfortably within provision for this year, even though the winter is proving to be the most severe for some years. It would also leave sufficient margin to cope successfully with more extreme winters in the future. I believe that taking this course would enable the Government to demonstrate its responsiveness to public concern at very little cost.

I have informed the Private Secretary to the Prime Minister that I would be writing to you on this subject.

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas

NICHOLAS SCOTT



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY
Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS
Telephone 071-210 3000

From the Secretary of State for Social Security

6 February 1991

Barry Potter Esq
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister

Dear Barry,

SOCIAL FUND COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

We spoke earlier today about the amounts payable under the Social Fund Cold Weather Payments scheme.

You will be interested to know that Nicholas Scott has tonight written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to seek his agreement to a proposed increase in the amount of Cold Weather Payments from £5 to £10 a week. The annual cost of this measure, estimated at a maximum of £3.7m, will be met from within existing provision.

Naturally I will keep you informed.

Yours ever
Debbie Heigh

DEBBIE HEIGH
Private Secretary

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20535

TELEPHONE (202) 452-2000





DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY

Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS

Telephone 01-210 3000

ccps
✓

From the Secretary of State for Social Services Security

CONFIDENTIAL

The Rt Hon Cecil Parkinson MP
Secretary of State for Energy
Department of Energy
Thames House South
Millbank
London
SW1P 4QJ

NBM

Ac 6

28/10

JS

October 1988

Dear Lord,

FUTURE TRAINING ARRANGEMENTS

will requests resumed.

Thank you for your letter of 18 October.

I share your general concern about the future of Community Insulation Projects, though my Department's interest is at best peripheral. I am however aware that the Department of Health intend to mount a campaign jointly with the voluntary sector - called "Keep Warm, Keep Well" - the aim of which is to inform vulnerable people about the risks to health arising from cold weather and ways of reducing this risk. Literature for that campaign will stress the importance of a well-insulated home and will refer to the Community Insulation Projects as a source of help in providing that insulation.

I am copying this letter to members of E(A), the Home Secretary, to Kenneth Clarke to draw his attention to the potential difficulties you have identified, and to Sir Robin Butler.

JOHN MOORE



12/10/88

AM

11



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY

Richmond House, 79 Whitehall, London SW1A 2NS

Telephone 01-210 3000

From the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Social Security

Rt Hon John Wakeham MP
 Lord President of the Council
 Privy Council Office
 Whitehall
 London SW1A 2AT

Prime Minister 2

REC 30 SEP 1988

35/9

Dear John,

THE SOCIAL FUND COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS (GENERAL) REGULATIONS 1988

John Moore has asked me to write to you to let you know that we intend to lay regulations on Friday next (7 October) to enable extra payments to be made to pensioners, disabled people and families with children under the age of 2 who receive Income Support during any spells of very cold weather this coming winter.

Such payments were made last winter under the Supplementary Benefit scheme and fresh regulations are needed to enable payments to be made under the Social Fund in the future. In essence the regulations will largely bring forward the old rules though the scheme as a whole should benefit by the simplifications which have been built into the Income Support structure which make the system easier for administrators to operate and for the general public to understand.

It is, I am afraid, necessary for us to proceed at this time, just before Party Conference. If we delay, the legislation requires us to refer the regulations to our advisory committee. There is not sufficient time to do this before the winter and it would anyway be undesirable politically.

In view of the political sensitivity which these payments have assumed in recent years, I imagine that you - and other members of H Committee to whom this letter is copied - will want to know how matters stand.

I am copying this letter also to the Prime Minister and the Chief Whip.

PETER LLOYD

CCBG



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY
Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY
Telephone 01-407 5522
From the Secretary of State for Social Services

David Norgrove
Private Secretary
No 10 Downing Street
LONDON SW1

12 November 1987

Dear David

cc BF
and pa.

DHSS PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN "KEEP WARM, KEEP WELL"

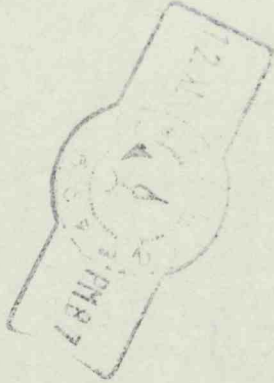
The attached press release should have been attached to my ^{fiap.} Secretary of State's minute to the Prime Minister of 10 November. I enclose it now with apologies. Copies go also to Private Secretaries to the Secretaries of State for Energy, Environment, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Chief Secretary and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever
Bma

BRUCE CALDERWOOD
Private Secretary



Faint, illegible text centered on the page, possibly a header or title.



CONFIDENTIAL



PRESS RELEASE

Alexander Fleming House
Elephant and Castle
London SE1 6BY

Telephone 01-407 5522

87/324

15 September 1987

JOHN MOORE ANNOUNCES NEW CAMPAIGN ON 'KEEPING WARM IN WINTER'

The Social Services Secretary John Moore today announced a new publicity campaign to help elderly people and other vulnerable groups cope with the risks they face from the effects of cold weather.

Speaking at an international conference on "Ageing Well" in Brighton, Mr Moore said:

"My Department is planning a special publicity campaign to persuade people at risk from the effects of cold weather to take the necessary steps to minimise the risks as well as to advise them of the help that is available. The stress will be on simple preventive measures - about everyday things like clothing, diet and exercise. But we hope also to cover the whole range of help services and advice available, from whatever source."

Stressing that the problems of elderly people in winter are for relatives and friends as well as statutory and voluntary agencies, Mr Moore also said:

"The voluntary sector has always played an important role in advising elderly people and others how to cope with cold weather. My Department will be contacting as a matter of urgency the main voluntary organisations active in this field, inviting them to discuss how we can best co-ordinate our advice and information efforts during the forthcoming winter."

[MORE]

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The "Ageing Well" conference in Brighton from 15 to 18 September is organised by the European Section of the International Association of Gerontology. The conference is sponsored by three British societies concerned with elderly people - the British Society for Research on Ageing, the British Society of Gerontology and the British Geriatrics Society.

[ENDS]

SOCIAL SERVICES: Severe Weather 112



ce BG

Prime Minister ² ce BT

PRIME MINISTER

NEA to see
then pa

DRS
10/11

DHSS PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN: "KEEP WARM KEEP WELL"

On 15 September I announced a new Government publicity campaign for the forthcoming winter to help elderly people and other vulnerable groups cope with the risks they face from the effects of cold weather. The object of the campaign is to inform people both about sensible self-help measures and of the assistance and advice which may be available from whatever source. I enclose a copy of my Department's press release.

Not enclosed.

The campaign reflects our concern about the problem of excess winter mortality. Although this problem has declined over the past thirty-five years, and the Government can defend its record on winter mortality, the increase in mortality and morbidity in the United Kingdom in the winter months remains higher than in most of the rest of Europe or in North America. Apart from the campaign, we are also considering the possibility of further research into the medical aspects of this complex problem.

I think that in previous winters the Government has found itself at a political disadvantage because too much emphasis has been focussed, often by the efforts of pressure groups, on the claiming of benefits. This campaign will seek to correct the imbalance by drawing attention to the whole range of advice and help - particularly self-help - which is available to counter the adverse effects of cold weather. While the proposed literature will cover social security, we will take care to avoid generating a 'take-up' campaign.

Clearly, my Department is not alone in combatting the effects of cold weather and the Department of Energy, the Department of the Environment, the Scottish Office, the Welsh Office and the Northern

Ireland Office are represented on the steering group which is running the campaign. This will ensure that the considerable efforts being made across Government on this problem are fully coordinated, and are presented as such. Another important feature will be the cooperation between the Government and the leading voluntary organisations concerned with elderly people and with insulation. Constructive discussions are taking place with representatives of Help the Aged, Age Concern and Neighbourhood Energy Action.

Work on the details of the campaign is now well in hand. The elements will be:

- (a) a Government leaflet giving basic practical advice on such matters as clothing, diet, home insulation, draught proofing, benefits and budgeting for fuel costs;
- (b) a package of more detailed leaflets, looking at particular issues;
- (c) press articles and advertisements;
- (d) short public information broadcasts on television and radio;
- (e) a national advice and information telephone service, operating on a freephone. This will operate as a joint venture with Help the Aged, Age Concern and Neighbourhood Energy Action.

I am planning for the campaign to be launched personally by Ministers in the week beginning 16 November.

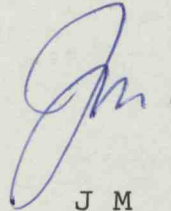
I am sure that by coordinating our advice and information in this way we can make a positive contribution to reducing the risks of cold weather. We will also be able to show the different Departments of the Government working together on this issue, a point on which the Government have been criticised in recent years.

E.B.

In addition, this is a very positive example of cooperation between the Government and the voluntary sector.

I am copying this minute to Cecil Parkinson, Nicholas Ridley, Malcolm Rifkind, Peter Walker, Tom King and John Major and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

10 November 1987



J M



10. XI

COMMUNICATIONS

10

STATEMENT ON SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFIT PAYMENTS FOR EXCEPTIONALLY
COLD WEATHER

1. With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement about supplementary benefit payments for exceptionally cold weather.
2. Last Tuesday, I informed the House that for that week payments of £5 would be made available to everyone in the qualifying groups to help them heat their homes during the current extremely cold spell. This announcement was made in the expectation that the trigger point of minus 1.5° celsius in the regulations would be reached. In the event that judgement has proved to be correct and the trigger point has been reached widely throughout the country. In many areas it was dramatically exceeded with average temperatures as low as 'minus 5° celsius'. In two thirds of the weather stations average temperatures for last week of minus 2° celsius and below were recorded. In these extremely rare circumstances I believe the decision we took to announce the payment early last week has been amply vindicated.
3. The Government has considered carefully the position both for this week and future weeks. As I told the House last week our primary concern is to ensure that vulnerable groups should not be discouraged from heating their homes. It is clear that many people are still experiencing difficulties and are looking for assurance that they will get extra help to keep warm this winter.
4. In these circumstances I wish to make it clear therefore that a further payment of £5 will be available, for this week only, to those in the qualifying groups. This entitlement will be widely advertised and existing claimants who have already made a claim will be paid automatically if eligible. Others eligible may claim immediately.

5. The Government believes that our initiative in introducing a statutory entitlement to extra help in very cold weather was right. The rules are clear and can be operated speedily fairly and effectively. But we recognise the anxieties felt by vulnerable groups that the temperature trigger-point may not be reached even in prolonged periods of cold weather.

6. Since the whole purpose of this cold weather payment is to give people the confidence to keep warm we have decided to amend the trigger point from -1.5° celsius to 0° celsius - ~~freezing~~point. I have laid amending regulations before the House to this effect today. Our intention, Mr Speaker, is that they will come into operation from next Monday, 26 January. In all other respects, the scheme will continue to operate as presently designed.

7. The amending regulations also provide for the further payment of £5 in respect of this week. The additional cost is within the normal margin of adjustment to the social security programme and will be met from the reserve.

8. Mr Speaker, I believe the Government has acknowledged anxieties that have been expressed. Today, we have responded to them quickly, flexibly and with great concern. I hope the House will welcome this statement.



VC
bc MA
189

SUBJECT CC MASTER

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

19 January 1987

From the Private Secretary

Dear Sir,

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

The Prime Minister this afternoon discussed exceptionally severe weather payments with your Minister and the Chief Secretary. Mr. Michael Alison and Mr. Norman Blackwell (No. 10 Policy Unit) were also present.

Mr. Major said that payments had been triggered last week in some 48 out of rather more than 60 areas. Legal advice was that it was not possible to make retrospective regulations, so payments would need to be made extra-statutorily. The Chief Adjudication Officer was content with this, and it seemed unlikely that local Adjudication Officers would take the severe weather payments into account as a resource in assessing supplementary benefit entitlements. Powers were available to override any who did choose to take these payments into account.

The position was likely to be different this week: at this stage weather forecasts were suggesting that payments would not be triggered in most areas. It would be difficult to justify and explain further extra-statutory payments and the PAC might also be critical.

In discussion, the difficulty of making further automatic payments in all parts of the country this week was clearly recognised. Against this, not to make the payments risked dissipating all the goodwill generated by payments made last week. And there were still areas which were suffering badly. The weather did not operate in one week periods and there was a strong case for seeing the problems this week as a continuation of last week's quite exceptional weather. It was nevertheless recognised that to make another special payment throughout the country would weaken the basis of the whole scheme. There was a strong case now for raising the temperature trigger to 0°C. This would be more readily understood and defended and would make it easier to resist pressure for yet further special payments. Your Minister said he would be prepared to recommend that more generous exceptionally severe weather payments should in due course be financed by a reduction in the income support payments to be introduced from April 1988.

The Prime Minister, concluding the meeting, said the Government should undertake again this week to make exceptionally severe weather payments throughout the country. This could be justified by pointing to the continuing severity of the weather in many areas of the country. It would be right at the same time to announce that the temperature trigger would be raised to 0°C and this new trigger should operate if possible from next week. Such a change would help the Government to resist any further pressure for special payments to be promised throughout the country before they had been triggered under the regulations.

I am copying this letter to Jill Rutter (Chief Secretary's Office).

Yours sincerely,

David Norgrove

DAVID NORGROVE

Colin Phillips, Esq.,
Department of Health and Social Security.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL



SUBJECT

COMASTER

10 DOWNING STREET

LONDON SW1A 2AA

13 January 1987

From the Private Secretary

Dear Tony,

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

The Prime Minister this morning held a meeting with your Secretary of State, the Chief Secretary and the Minister of State for Health and Social Security to discuss exceptionally severe weather payments. The Chief Whip was present for part of the meeting. Mr Norman Blackwell, No.10 Policy Unit, was also present.

The main outcome of this meeting has already been made public in the form of Mr Major's announcement this afternoon that exceptionally severe weather payments will be made for this week. However some pointers for the future also emerged.

The meeting recognised the need to take special action this week in view of the severity of the weather which was more exceptional even than had been envisaged in creating the new system of payments. Mr Major explained that there were four options: to make no change in the arrangements; to raise the temperature trigger point to zero degrees centigrade (in the worst conceivable winter the cost of the payments would then amount to some £18-20m as opposed to £12m last year); to introduce a rolling seven day period for assessing whether the payments should be made, which would be technically feasible but costly in terms of manpower and perhaps difficult to understand; or, finally, to assume that the trigger of minus 1.5 degrees centigrade would be reached this week and if necessary to take powers to validate payments if the trigger was not reached in all areas. Mr. Major noted that this last option would risk increasing the pressure for change in the regulations and it would lead to pressure on the Government whenever there was a cold snap to declare in advance that payments would be made.

After discussion it was agreed nevertheless that the Government should now declare that the payments would be made for this week: it would be wrong at this early stage to change the regulations without proper consideration and without having given the new system a chance to work. The announcement should say that in view of the quite

CONFIDENTIAL

exceptional weather the Government could not allow regulations to stand in the way of severe weather payments this week. Claim forms should be distributed and local offices should be authorised to make the payments. Broadcasting services should be asked to give publicity to the availability of the payments. The possibility of retrospective provision to validate the payments could be acknowledged. It might also be necessary to say that if this weather continued the Government would be willing to consider a similar announcement next week. It was finally agreed that in any future review of the operation of the regulations one option would be to raise the trigger point for the exceptional payments and to find offsetting savings by reducing the uprating of the heating addition.

I am copying this letter to Colin Phillips (Department of Health and Social Security), Jill Rutter (Chief Secretary's Office) and Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office).

Yours,

David.

David Norgrove

Tony Laurance Esq
Department of Health and Social Security



BM

beg.

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

23 December 1986

EXCEPTIONALLY COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

The Prime Minister has seen your letter to me of 12 December about the arrangements for publicising the new system for making exceptionally cold weather payments and has noted the position.

I am copying this letter to Andrew Lansley (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office).

(David Norgrove)

Colin Phillips, Esq.,
Department of Health and Social Security

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CUB



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY
 Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY
 Telephone 01-407 5522

From the Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled

David Norgrove Esq
 10 Downing Street
 LONDON
 SW1A 2AA

Prime Minister²

You and Mr Tebbit were concerned about the lack of publicity for the new system of cold weather payments. The DHSS proposals seem to strike a reasonable balance between publicity and not exciting exaggerated expectations.

Dear David,

EXCEPTIONALLY COLD WEATHER PAYMENTS

ATTACHED DRN 22/12

Thank you for your letter of 1 December; I am sorry not to have replied before now.

Ministers here do of course fully appreciate the importance of effective publicity for the new arrangements. There has already been considerable interest in the national media and Ministers have given a series of interviews to put across the new proposals. The recent Supply Day Debate on an Opposition Motion on fuel poverty also provided a useful opportunity for Ministers to put the overall Government achievements, certainly as compared with the action of the previous Government firmly on the record.

The first defence against the sort of adverse publicity we had last year are the new arrangements themselves. Part of the difficulty last year was that there were no clear rules for help. First, there were no objective criteria to enable decisions to be taken on when the weather counted as exceptionally severe. Initially, very few areas were designated, the problem being overcome somewhat late in the day by Adjudication Officers' decisions so that virtually the whole of the country qualified. Second, there were difficulties about the position of those who bought their fuel in advance such as through pre-payment meters. Third, there was no certainty on the amount of help that would be available, since decisions on payments could not be taken until fuel bills were received some time afterwards.

Our new rules respond to those difficulties. There will be an objective test of coldness to determine whether the weather in a particular area counts as exceptionally cold. Our local offices will be linked to designated meteorological office weather stations which can provide information quickly. In addition, there will be standard payments for each week of very cold weather payable to the eligible groups, without the need to wait for the fuel bill some time later.

E.R.

Ministers will continue to take the opportunity to stress the advantages of the new proposals. So far as further and more detailed publicity action is concerned, the main effort will be at local level. This is because, under the rules we are adopting within the very limited resources we can make available for this small part of the scheme, only a proportion of local office areas will qualify at any one time. They are more likely, for example to be in the North and East Midlands than in the warmer western half of the country.

The difficulty of national publicity is the counter productive effect of raising expectations of payments throughout the country, which are then dashed when help is found not to be available in particular areas. The Department is therefore concentrating on revising and improving the arrangements for local publicity.

Our Local Offices will be given clear instructions on the action to be taken as soon as help is triggered in their particular area. Local Offices are being instructed to place advertisements (including a claim form) in their local press. This follows the successful example of national press advertising last winter, adjusted for the more localised arrangements that will apply under the new rules. In addition, posters and leaflets (again incorporating a claim form), and designed to catch the eye, will be distributed to as many local advice and information centres as possible when help is to be given. These include Social Services Departments, Housing Benefit Offices, Job Centres, health centres, general practitioners' surgeries, gas and electricity showrooms, advice bureaux, libraries, and other sources of display which the local office is able to identify. Local offices will of course also display the leaflets posters in their own reception areas.

Finally, the information will be available on the DHSS freephone service and the Department's Regional Information Officers will, where possible, appear on local radio programmes to publicise the availability of these payments. This, targeted, local publicity effort will no doubt be supplemented by Ministerial interviews and statements if there is an extended spell of very cold weather.

I hope this explanation shows that we are taking seriously the question of publicity, adapting the arrangements to the more localised help that is likely to occur under the new rules.

I am copying this letter to Andrew Lansley, (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office).

Yours ever,
Colin

C A H PHILLIPS
Private Secretary

SOCIAL SERVICES

SENATOR WEAVER

PAYMENTS

PT 2

12/16/12

file

SH



cc: S. Shekhar
cc Prof. Griffiths

10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

From the Private Secretary

1 December 1986

Dear Sir,

HEATING BENEFITS

The Prime Minister understands that the DHSS intend to give little or no publicity to the new system of cold weather payments. She believes that it would be useful to tell people very clearly what the Government is doing in this area in order to avoid a repeat of last winter's row about the supposed Government stinginess on provision for heating.

I should be grateful if you could let me know what the position is and for your comments.

I am copying this letter to Andrew Lansley (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office).

Jan.

David.

DAVID NORGROVE

Colin Phillips, Esq.,
Department of Health and Social Security

SH



10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister 2

I have written to
DHSS about advertising
what the Government is
doing on heating
payments.

DLW
1/12

ms



Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

David Noygrave

NBN

To see the
attached letter from
this office, which
parallels your
letter of 1 December.

A. S. L. W. H.

2/12

P.S. No reply yet

DHSS, F
LUBG

Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

CABINET OFFICE,
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2ASTel No: 233 3299
7471

24 November 1986

Colin Phillips Esq
 Private Secretary to the
 Minister for Social Security and
 the Disabled
 Department of Health and Social
 Security
 Alexander Fleming House
 Elephant and Castle
 LONDON
 SE1

Dear Colin,

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS *at flap*

The Chancellor of the Duchy has seen the correspondence initiated by your Minister's letter of 4 November to the Lord President.

While the Chancellor shares the views of colleagues in welcoming these new regulations, he would wish to emphasise that they do not obviate the need to take action to avoid another winter of bad publicity on this issue, not only if exceptionally severe weather should be experienced, but also if the weather experienced does not trigger the exceptionally severe weather payments but old people nonetheless suffer from the effects of hypothermia - as doubtless they will.

The Chancellor would be most grateful to know what action is in hand to forestall bad publicity of this kind over the forthcoming winter.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Joan MacNaughton (Lord President's Office), Bruce Calderwood (DHSS), Robert Gordon (Scottish Office) and to Bernard Ingham (No 10).

Yours sincerely,

ANDREW LANSLEY
 Private Secretary

Social Services: Severe Weather Payments

PTD



CEG



SCOTTISH OFFICE
NEW ST. ANDREW'S HOUSE
ST. JAMES CENTRE
EDINBURGH EH1 3SX

John Major Esq MP
Minister of State
Department of Health and Social Security
Alexander Fleming House
Elephant and Castle
LONDON
SE1 6BY

19 November 1986

NBP7

Dear John,

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

Thank you for copying to Malcolm Rifkind your letter of 4 November to Willie Whitelaw. ^{at Nap}

I am glad to note that the Committee support the proposals as a significant improvement on the previous scheme. I share that view and am confident that the new scheme will be recognised as such in Scotland.

Although there will probably continue to be criticisms - for example, of the coastal location of meteorological stations to which much colder inland areas may be linked - I believe the scheme can be defended as more equitable and comprehensible. Accordingly I agree that you should seek to lay the necessary regulations as quickly as possible.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Peter Walker, members of H Committee and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours sincerely,
Ian Lang

IAN LANG

SOCIAL SERVICES SENIOR Welfare
Payments #12



CCBA



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

The Rt Hon Viscount Whitelaw CH MC
 Lord President of the Council
 Privy Council Office
 Whitehall
 London
 SW1A 2AT

NBA

14 November 1986

Dear Willie,

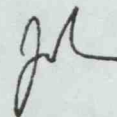
EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

John Major wrote to you on 4 November seeking endorsement of the proposals on payments for exceptionally severe weather.

I am pleased to see a helpful response from the Social Security Advisory Committee. I note in particular that they endorse the chosen criteria for defining "exceptionally severe weather". I strongly support the intention to stick by the original proposals, subject to the minor concessions on time limits and procedures for claims, with which I am content.

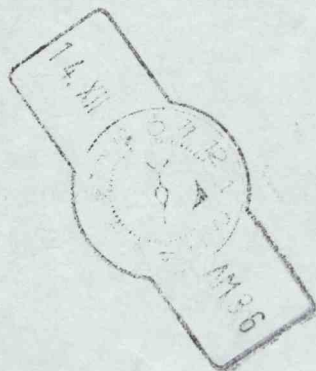
I have some reservations about the suggestion that these grants should be handled through the Social Fund after April 1988, but I note that John Major intends to get in touch with me about that, and about the financial arrangement generally. I will wait to hear from him. Subject to that, I am content that the regulations should be laid as quickly as possible.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Peter Walker, John Major, members of H Committee, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever,


JOHN MacGREGOR

SOCIAL SERVICES - Seneca Weatman PTZ





DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY
 Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY
 Telephone 01-407 5522

From the Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled

The Rt Hon the Viscount Whitelaw CH MC
 Lord President of the Council
 Privy Council Office
 68 Whitehall
 LONDON
 SW1A 2AT

4 November 1986

Dear Wilke,

Prime Minister²

*DLW
6/11*

[Handwritten signature]

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

Tony Newton wrote to you and colleagues on 28 July explaining the proposals on exceptionally severe weather payments we were about to put to the Social Security Advisory Committee for consultation. In view of the continuing interest in this issue, you and colleagues may wish to see the report we have now received from the Committee and the response we intend to make.

The Committee's report is generally helpful. Subject to some detailed reservations, they support the proposals as a significant improvement on the previous schemes in terms of simplicity, comprehensibility and certainty of payment. They have accepted the limited scope of the system. In more detail; they accept the test of severity based on an absolute standard of coldness; support the principle of a fixed 7-day period; consider the system of linking local offices with meteorological office stations a clear improvement on previous methods of collecting information; accept that payment to all claimants would not be a high priority for available resources; and support the system of flat-rate payments. These cover the main elements of our proposals.

They do however make a number of specific recommendations. They suggest extending payment to all those with a child under five. We propose to resist this for the reasons set out in the draft response. We do however propose to accept the Committee's recommendations that the time limit for a claim should be three months rather than 28 days and that one claim should normally be sufficient to cover consecutive weeks of severe weather. Both changes are marginal - they do not affect our assessment of the impact or cost of the proposals.

The Committee also recommend that similar arrangements should continue after April 1988 (when the single payments system itself will end) and payments made as of right. We propose to defer final decisions on this until we are able to

assess the experience this winter. But our preliminary inclination is that any future arrangements should be handled as grants through the social fund, largely through directions. I shall need to consider the financial arrangements separately with John McGregor.

Colleagues should however also note the information we propose to publish (Annex B to our response to the Committee's report) on the effect the present criteria would have had during previous winters. In his earlier letter, Tony Newton explained that we would expect to come under some pressure to introduce the more generous standard of -1°C . The information in the annex shows clearly that the proposed system would have given less help in the most recent winter than was in fact given. For example, neither London nor Glasgow would have qualified for help. On the other hand, more help would have been given in 1984/85; in particular in Scotland where no payments were made in that year. We intend to stick by the proposals in our consultation document but can expect difficulties as their implications are assessed.

It is in our interest to lay regulations as quickly as possible before the winter gets underway. Accordingly, I would be grateful if you and colleagues to whom I am copying the letter could let me know by Friday, 13 November, if you see objection to our proceeding in this way. I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Peter Walker, members of H Committee and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours Ever,
John

JOHN MAJOR

The Rt. Hon. Norman Fowler, MP.,
Secretary of State for Social Services,
Department of Health and Social Security,
Alexander Fleming House,
Elephant and Castle,
London, SE1 6BY.

REPORT OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MADE UNDER SECTION 10(3) OF
THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT 1980 ON PROPOSALS FOR REGULATIONS TO PROVIDE A NEW
SCHEME OF SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFIT EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. We give below our report on the proposals for regulations which will make changes to the system of extra help with fuel bills for supplementary benefit claimants during periods of exceptionally severe weather. The proposals were referred to us on 6th August 1986 and on the following day we published notices inviting comments to reach us by 8th September 1986. We have been able to take account of comments reaching us up to 19th September 1986.

2. We received 67 representations on the proposed changes: the 67 organizations who wrote to us are listed at Appendix 1 to this report. We invited the Department of Health and Social Security to comment to us on the points raised and we are grateful for the help which we received from officials.

SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSALS

3. The content and purpose of the proposals were described to us in a note provided by the Department which is reproduced at Appendix 2. We would prefer to have seen the draft regulations also but we recognize the Government's desire to introduce a new scheme for the coming winter and we understand that this meant that the proposals had to be referred to us as quickly as possible.

4. The proposals would introduce a standard sum for single payments for periods of exceptionally severe weather, prescribe the circumstances for the award of such payments and define the eligible claimant groups. The detailed proposals are:-

- (i) a period of exceptionally severe weather would be defined as an average temperature at or below minus 1.5° celsius recorded over seven days from Monday to Sunday;
- (ii) a standard amount of £5 would be paid for each week of designated exceptionally severe weather;
- (iii) the information on temperature measurement would be provided by the Meteorological Office;
- (iv) local office areas would be linked to specific meteorological stations;
- (v) claims for payment would be required within 28 days of the end of a period of exceptionally severe weather;
- (vi) the eligibility for help would be restricted to specified claimant groups in households including an elderly or chronically sick or disabled person or a child under 2.

Background to the proposed changes

5. The Department's note to the Committee outlined the history (since 1980) of the various supplementary benefit systems of extra help for claimants during periods of severe weather. The details of the previous schemes, based on the single payments regulation 26, are fully covered in the Department's note at Appendix 2 and we do not propose to reiterate them here. We think it will, however, be helpful to highlight some of the problems that have arisen with regard to the two previous schemes and the present scheme by way of background to the Government's current proposals for change.

6. The regulatory supplementary benefit system was introduced in 1980 and the severe weather payments provision was first used during the 1981/82 winter. The application (and interpretation) of regulation 26 was found to give rise to two main problems: the definition of what constituted a period of

exceptionally severe weather and how to determine the amount of additional fuel consumption caused by that weather. As a result of the 1981/2 experience the Department decided to link each local office area with one of seventeen weather stations and to use a complex system of temperature measurement based on degree days to determine whether a period of exceptionally severe weather had occurred. The temperature levels recorded by each weather station were then compared with the normal average temperatures for the stations in historical terms. The comparison was used to work out the percentage of a claimant's fuel bill that was attributable to the severe weather.

7. This system was first used in the 1984/85 winter but was found to have several drawbacks:-

- (i) help was given on the basis of a comparative, not an absolute, measurement of temperature;
- (ii) linking a large number of local offices to a small number of weather stations meant that the information on temperature obtained was not necessarily representative of the conditions in the local office locality;
- (iii) the use of degree days introduced complications into the system and was little understood.

8. In a test case in October 1985 the Social Security Commissioners decided that the guidance then in operation was not a correct interpretation of regulation 26 and that claims for severe weather payments should be decided on the facts of the individual case not by "arbitrary rules of thumb" involving trigger points and degree days. As a result the Chief Adjudication Officer revised his guidance in the light of the Commissioners' comments and the decision on whether a period of exceptionally severe weather had occurred was vested in the adjudication officers in each local office. The amount of the single payment award during severe weather was to continue to be based on the individual claimant's increased fuel costs as a result of the severe weather.

9. This system was used last winter (1985/6) and ran into considerable criticism. There was initially a wide variation from office to office in deciding whether exceptionally severe weather had occurred, since the adjudication officer's decision was of a subjective nature with very few

criteria on which to base the judgment. The difficulty in determining the extra consumption caused by the severe weather persisted, and the time lag between the period of severe weather and the decision to award help gave rise to uncertainty, particularly among pensioners. Those claimants who used prepayment methods for obtaining fuel faced difficulties in demonstrating a need for a payment. The reaction to the 1985/6 system, and the inherent difficulties in operating regulation 26 encouraged the Department to re-examine the subject and put forward new proposals for a severe weather payments scheme.

Scope of payments

10. The proposals submitted to us by the Government provide for a scheme which is similar in scope to the previous arrangements for exceptionally severe weather (ESW) payments. Under the supplementary benefits scheme claimants are expected to meet their normal heating costs out of the scale rates. People who need extra heating - on account of age or infirmity - and people with abnormally high heating costs - e.g. those living in hard-to-heat accommodation - are assisted through weekly additions to benefit. In 1984 around 2.8 million claimants received weekly heating additions at a cost of about £400 million. By contrast, under the exceptionally severe weather payments system £3.6 million was paid to 278,000 claimants in 1982 and £1.7 million to 170,000 claimants in 1985. Exceptionally severe weather payments thus account for a very small part of the assistance with heating costs available under supplementary benefit.

11. Since exceptionally severe weather, by definition, does not occur every year there is no regular sum allowed each year for ESW payments. The Government's intention is, however, that the cost of the new scheme should be consistent with the costs of previous arrangements. The features of the new system - the chosen trigger temperature, the limitation on eligible groups, the size of the weekly payment - are matters of judgment which have been determined by the Government in the light of the decision on the resources which can be made available. We have considered the proposals in this context and have not attempted to propose an alternative strategy which would involve significantly greater expenditure.

The proposals in detail

12. We now look at the proposed changes in detail. Where we do not comment we are content with what is proposed.

Test of severity

3. On the advice of the Meteorological Office the Government has concluded that the single most important factor in determining the severity of the weather is coldness. The proposed test of ESW is therefore linked solely to the measurement of temperature. No account would be taken of other factors such as wind chill, exposure, rainfall etc. Some commentators have argued that temperature should not be the sole criterion of severe weather. We recognize that factors such as rainfall and wind chill may have an effect on fuel requirements but we accept the Government's desire to introduce a more easily understood indicator of severity.

14. One of the persistent criticisms of previous systems has been the system of comparing the actual temperature with the average for the area to determine whether the weather is exceptionally severe. The Government proposes to introduce a test of absolute coldness triggered by a temperature of minus 1.5° celsius (29.5 degrees fahrenheit) or lower over a seven day period. The Chief Supplementary Benefit Officer (predecessor of the Chief Adjudication Officer) during the winter of 1984/85 held that exceptional in terms of regulation 26 implied that the prescribed conditions were likely to occur with a frequency of approximately once in every five years. The Meteorological Office computed this probability in terms of "degree days" (a recognized system for assessing temperature variations) and advised that an average temperature of minus 1.64° celsius over a seven day period would be likely to occur on average around one year in five. The figure of minus 1.64 has been rounded up (i.e. to the benefit of claimants) to minus 1.5° celsius for the purposes of the scheme.

15. We sought clarification from the Department as to how the average temperature would be determined for each week. We were told that the Meteorological Office would provide the Department with a mean weekly temperature for each weather station calculated from the daily maximum and minimum temperatures recorded at these stations over a seven day period from Monday to Sunday. This would determine whether the minus 1.5° celsius trigger has been reached.

16. We agree that an absolute standard of coldness rather than a comparative basis should be a fundamental requirement for any new system. This would avoid the problems that have arisen in the past where one area is said to be suffering severe weather while another area, suffering lower temperatures, was not, because the temperature was not significantly lower than normal for the

ea. The trigger point on the proposed standard of coldness has inevitably given rise to argument. We were given information by the Department which showed that, had the proposed system been in operation during the last five winters, payments would have been triggered in some areas in each of the severe winters (1981/2, 1984/5 and 1985/6) with the number of weeks and the areas covered varying according to the pattern and severity of the weather across the country.

17. A higher trigger point - for example minus 1^oc or 0^oc - would clearly increase the total of qualifying exceptionally severe weather weeks. Some areas would have longer periods of ESW and some new areas would qualify. The total effect would be to produce a system which would come into play more frequently than an average of once in five years. A system which allowed for periods of ESW to be declared on average every two years, for example, could hardly be described as catering for exceptional weather conditions. How infrequent an event must be to be classified as exceptional is, of course, a matter of judgment. We think that "once in five years" is a reasonable definition of exceptional, in the context of the Government's decision about the resources available for the scheme.

The period

18. The period to be used in the determination of severe weather is another area that gives rise to argument. The Government considered three periods before deciding to adopt the criterion of a seven day period of bad weather to run parallel with the benefit week, i.e., from Monday to Sunday. A retrospective assessment over a previous four week period was rejected on the grounds that claimants would face uncertainty and could not be confident at the time of the severe weather that help would be given. We support the proposal not to use a retrospective assessment over such a comparatively lengthy period.

19. Another possible option was a running seven day period but although this would relate the help to the actual spell of bad weather and would maximize the possibility of ESW payments it was rejected on grounds of complication. We were told by the Department that although it would be technically possible to introduce such a system it would be cumbersome to operate and would create serious difficulties especially in the interaction with the fixed benefit week. Where the spell of bad weather ran on for more than one week it would be difficult to establish the start and end of the period for which ESW payments would be made. In any extended period of exceptionally cold weather different

cycles of weeks would qualify in different parts of the country and the operational difficulties would be substantial. We agree that simplicity and ease of operation should be major requirements of the new scheme since this will maximize the take-up of the payments.

20. The period the Government proposes to introduce is a seven day one concurrent with a Monday to Sunday benefit week. Two separate objections have been raised by some commentators to this proposal. First, that no payments would be awarded when a temperature of minus 1.5° was recorded for part of the week but the average for the full week was above this level. We accept however that the new proposals are intended to help only with extended very cold spells, and not with odd days of very cold weather which are likely to occur in any winter. The second objection is that where a very cold spell lasted from, say, Thursday to the following Wednesday, the qualifying temperature might not be reached in either of the two fixed seven day periods spanned by the cold snap so that no help would be available. The Department pointed out that this would only happen if temperatures over the rest of the two week period were sufficiently mild to lift average temperatures in each of those weeks above the qualifying threshold. It is equally possible that a very cold spell spanning two fixed seven day periods would lead to average temperatures in both weeks reaching the qualifying level. We understand the objections to the seven day fixed period but the Government's proposal has the advantage of simplicity, ease of understanding and straightforward operation - it would enable help to be announced and given quickly - and we support it.

Linking of local offices and Meteorological Office data

21. A criticism of the 1984/85 degree day system was the linking of local offices to a small number of meteorological office stations. The Government now proposes to link each local office to one of 68 weather stations (64 in Great Britain and 4 in Northern Ireland) where information on temperatures would be available quickly. Some commentators have pointed out that there may be areas within a local office boundary that are affected by special conditions, such as altitude. One solution to this problem would be to make use of every weather station in the country and to decide which station to use on a claimant by claimant basis. This is clearly not practicable and we also understand that there could be long delays in obtaining details of temperatures recorded at some of the stations. The Department, in consultation with the Meteorological Office, has tried to take into account local climatic

conditions, speed and reliability of information in matching local offices to weather stations. While the proposed system is not ideal it is manifestly an improvement on the methods of temperature collection used in the past.

Qualifying groups

22. The Government proposes to direct the help available to those groups of people who are at greatest risk of hypothermia because of severe weather conditions. The groups said to be at highest risk are young babies under one and elderly people over 75. The Government's proposals would allow the following groups to qualify:-

households -

- (i) containing someone over 65; or
- (ii) containing someone who is chronically sick or disabled; or
- (iii) with a child under two.

These groups would be subject to the standard single payment qualifying condition of having less than £500 in capital. We were told by the Department that the eligible groups would total around half of all households with capital under £500. A number of commentators suggested that all people receiving supplementary benefit should be eligible for a payment under the proposed scheme. If all groups were covered the costs would broadly double, and although the cost would remain small in relation to the total cost of the supplementary benefit scheme we accept that this would not be a high priority for available resources.

23. We now turn to our comments on the qualifying groups. In our recent report on the supplementary benefit single payments regulations (Cmnd.9836) we drew attention to the concern expressed by some organizations about the definition of "chronically sick and disabled" people. The definition, which would also be used in the proposed ESW scheme, does not cover people who are in the first six months of a period of prolonged sickness. We recognize that alternative definitions might be more restrictive - for example, by listing

qualifying conditions - and we do not wish to recommend any change, but we hope that the Department will operate the system in a sensitive manner and we would like to see the problem kept under review.

24. Although we accept that in relation to children it is young babies under one year old are most at risk from hypothermia we are concerned about the position of young children in general. We recommend that, in line with the payment of age related heating additions, ESW payments should be available to households containing a child under five years old.

25. Many of the representations we received referred to the role of exceptionally severe weather payments in preventing hypothermia. We regard the system of ESW payments as serving two main purposes: to reimburse claimants who have used extra heating and incurred higher heating costs because of exceptionally severe weather and to encourage claimants who might be inclined to skimp on their heating to use some extra fuel during exceptionally severe weather in the knowledge that they will receive some additional help from the Department. This encouragement to spend a bit more on heating should help to prevent vulnerable claimants from failing to maintain an adequate temperature in their homes but we do not believe that the ESW system is the primary weapon in the battle against hypothermia: many other factors are important including the availability of single payments for draught-proofing, grants through the Home Insulation Scheme, and advice on diet, clothing and the maintenance of a household temperature sufficient to prevent a drop in body temperature.

Payment

26. The Government proposes to pay a standard amount - £5 - for each week of designated exceptionally severe weather. Provided the temperature criterion is satisfied during the seven day period eligible claimants will be certain of help and will be aware of the extent of that help. There would no longer be any need to show that there was additional fuel consumption or to determine the amount of extra fuel consumption caused by the severe weather. We welcome the proposal to introduce a standard amount of payment and to do away with the need to compare previous fuel bills. This is a particularly welcome simplification.

27. Some of the representations we received implied that only one payment of £5 would be made, however long the spell of bad weather. In practice, claimants living in the coldest parts of the country could expect to receive payments of £15 or more in a severe winter. ESW payments also need to be seen in relation to the main supplementary benefit help with heating costs - the weekly additions. An addition of £2.20 a week is paid to households containing a child under 5, a person aged 65 or over, or someone who is chronically sick. A higher rate addition of £5.55 a week is paid if the household includes a person aged 85 or more, or someone who is disabled. Although some commentators have argued that the scale rates are set at inadequate levels, a severe weather payment of £10 or £15 (for two or three weeks' ESW) on top of a year round weekly addition of £2.20 or £5.55, would represent a useful contribution to the average claimant's weekly fuel bill.

28. Once a period of exceptionally severe weather had been designated and an administrative announcement made by the Secretary of State the availability of help would be publicised locally. The effectiveness of the local publicity will be vital to the success of the scheme. Local offices should be encouraged to make use of local press and radio wherever possible. Information must be available to claimants quickly and must set out clearly who are the eligible groups. The emphasis on payments for the elderly has, in the past, led to pensioners who are not entitled to supplementary benefit believing that they may be entitled to a payment.

29. On the other hand experience suggests that elderly people in particular are likely to be unaware of their entitlement to single payments and may fail to claim assistance which has been designed to meet their needs. Given that the qualifying conditions for an ESW payment would in future be based on age/disability and a maximum level of capital we discussed with the Department the possibility of automatic payments being made to eligible claimants without the need for a claim. We were told that this was not administratively feasible at present and that in any case the Department would encounter severe problems in identifying and maintaining an up-to-date register of qualifying claimants. The Department does not think that the start-up costs across the whole country could be justified, especially when there is no guarantee in any given year that help would be triggered in a significant proportion of local offices. When the Department's operational strategy is fully implemented we

hope that it will be possible for potential claimants to be identified automatically by computer. We recommend that consideration be given to the extension of automatic payments when the operational strategy is implemented.

Time limit for claiming the payment

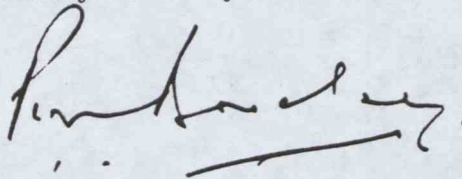
30. We feel that the 28-day time limit for claiming is too restrictive, especially when many claimants are only alerted to the need to claim on receiving a larger-than-average fuel bill. Claimants should be given adequate opportunity to submit a claim and we recommend that the time limit for claiming should be three months. During a prolonged spell of bad weather it is possible that not every week will qualify for an ESW payment. We recommend that where two or more consecutive weeks of ESW payments are triggered only one claim should be needed. We understand that where there is a gap between qualifying weeks separate claims will be required. We hope that in these cases the Department will do its best to ensure that people who make a successful claim for the first week of bad weather are encouraged to claim for any subsequent weeks, during the same spell of bad weather, or during a later spell during the same winter.

Conclusion

31. Help with fuel costs is provided through the supplementary benefit system in three ways: the scale rates, weekly heating additions and single payments during periods of exceptionally severe weather. Several of the representations we received suggested that the scale rates and heating additions are too low to ensure an adequate level of heating for claimants. We have already noted that the proposed system has been designed to operate within available resources. We do not believe that within these constraints a system of lump-sum payments during exceptionally severe weather can, or should, sensibly be used to make good any perceived deficiencies in weekly benefit rates. The proposals submitted to us represent a significant improvement on the previous schemes for exceptionally severe weather payments, in terms of simplicity, comprehensibility and certainty of payment. Subject to the recommendations we have made we support the new proposals and we recommend that a similar scheme should continue when single payments are abolished in April 1988. In our Fourth Report (published in October 1985) we suggested that certain payments from the Social Fund, which will be introduced in 1988, should be on the basis of entitlement. The Social Security Act 1986 provides that

payments for funeral and maternity needs will be made as of right. We
recommend that exceptionally severe weather payments should similarly be
available as of right, rather than on a discretionary basis.

Signed on behalf of the
Social Security Advisory Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. M. Barclay', with a horizontal line underneath.

P. M. Barclay

22nd October 1986

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 10(4) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT 1980

1. Proposals on single payments for exceptionally severe weather, presently provided in regulation 26 of the Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments) Regulations, were submitted to the Social Security Advisory Committee in accordance with the requirements of section 10(1) of the Social Security Act 1980 on 6 August 1986. The regulations now laid before Parliament implement the proposals submitted to the Committee, as modified by changes explained in the statement. The Government welcome the Committee's general support for the proposals. Their particular recommendations are discussed in the statement.

2. The Government's proposals are consistent with the scale of help that has been given at times of very cold weather over the last few years. As the Committee recognise, payments for periods of exceptionally severe weather have never been a major element in the total benefit help to claimants for their heating costs, compared to the scale rates themselves and specific heating additions; nor do they believe that the system for specific payments is the primary weapon in the battle against hypothermia. The Committee have considered the proposals as a replacement of the present arrangements with a similar limited role and resources. In that context, they:

- support an absolute standard of coldness as the basic test of severity;
- recognise the reasonableness of the Government's definition of exceptional weather as implying occurrence broadly once in five years, in relation to the scale of the scheme;
- support the principle of a fixed 7-day period in view of its advantages of simplicity, ease of understanding and straightforward operation;
- recognise that the system of linking local offices with meteorological office data is a clear improvement on previous methods of temperature collection;
- accept that giving all supplementary benefit claimants entitlement to payments would not be a high priority for available resources; and

- welcome the introduction of a system of standard payments, thus ending the need to compare fuel bills.

Accordingly the regulations now laid before Parliament largely give legal force to the proposals referred to the Committee. Annex A sets out the main elements of the proposals, the Committee's comments and recommendations and the Government's comments. Annex B reproduces the information provided to the Committee on the relation of the criteria to previous years' experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The Committee make a number of specific recommendations on the proposals

(a) Qualifying groups

4. While accepting that giving all claimants entitlement to payments would not be a high priority for available resources, the Committee recommend that payments should be given to households containing a child under five (rather than under two as proposed). In 1980 the scale rates for children under five was levelled up to that for those under eleven. As a result, the value of their support has increased by nearly 30 per cent under this Government. In addition, households with a child under five are now automatically entitled to the lower rate of heating addition; worth over £100 a year to an unemployed family on the ordinary rate. There is no similar, automatic provision for those with children over five. The system therefore already guarantees extra weekly help to families with children under five. In the longer term, the family premium is intended to give help to all those with children, regardless of their age. Under the Government's proposals for payments in exceptionally cold weather, help would be given automatically to those with a child under two. Children above that age would qualify the family for a payment if they were chronically sick or disabled; for example, through receiving attendance allowance (payable at age two). In view of the improvements in the scale rate and extra weekly help already guaranteed for those with a child under five, the Government do not consider a further extension of the criteria a priority.

(b) Rules for claiming

5. The Committee recommend that payments should be made where a claim is submitted within three months of the period of exceptionally cold weather, rather than four weeks as proposed and that, where two or more consecutive

weeks of designated cold weather are triggered, only one claim should be needed. The Government have responded to both these recommendations in the regulations. The regulations provide for claims to be made within 13 weeks of the end of the period of exceptionally cold weather, and for one claim normally to be treated as a claim for consecutive weeks of exceptionally cold weather.

(c) Automatic payments and the future of the scheme

6. The Committee's report explains the reasons why the Department could not set up a system of automatic payments with the present, largely manual, administration of benefit. The Committee recommend that consideration be given to the extension of automatic payments when the operational strategy is implemented. This will not occur until after the wider social security changes have taken effect in 1988. This recommendation has therefore to be seen alongside their further recommendations that a similar scheme should continue when the present single payments arrangements end in April 1988, and that such payments should be available as of right rather than on a discretionary basis. Final decisions on the future of the scheme will be taken in the light of assessment of the effectiveness of the system in the coming winter, should weather conditions be severe. Consideration of the practicalities of automatic payments following the implementation of the operational strategy will be kept in mind in that context.

CONCLUSION

7. The Government are encouraged by the general support of the Social Security Advisory Committee. They share the Committee's view that the proposals represent a significant improvement on previous schemes in terms of simplicity, comprehensibility and certainty of payment. The Government are grateful to the Committee - and to those interested parties who made representations to them - for their consideration of the proposals and for their comments and recommendations.

8. The regulations are now laid before Parliament.

November 1986

CONSULTATIVE DOCUMENT PROPOSAL

SOCIAL SECURITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION

GOVERNMENT COMMENT

ANNEX 1

1. Test of Severity

The test of severity would be based on temperature. Help would be given where, in a particular locality, average temperature over a 7-day period did not exceed -1.5°C . The intention is to provide help in overall average terms once in 5 years.

The Committee accept the Government's desire to introduce a more easily understood indication of severity and support an absolute standard of coldness. They consider a "once in five years" criterion a reasonable definition of exceptional in the context of the scope and resources for the scheme.

The regulations incorporate the -1.5°C criterion as the test of exceptional coldness.

2. Period of Assessment

Temperature would be measured over a fixed 7-day period, running from Monday to Sunday.

The Committee support the principle of a fixed 7-day period. They note the objections to such a basis, but consider it has the advantage of simplicity, ease of understanding and straightforward operation.

The regulations incorporate the 7-day fixed period.

3. Linking of local offices and Meteorological Office Data

Local offices would be linked to some 70 meteorological office stations in Great Britain.

The Committee comment that, while the proposed system is not ideal, it is manifestly an improvement on the methods of temperature collection used in the past.

The regulations list the areas covered by each of 63 meteorological stations. Some detailed adjustments to the original proposals have been made in the light of consultation with the Meteorological Office.

4. Qualifying Groups

Help would be given to claimants whose family contained someone

- over 65;
- chronically sick or disabled;
- under 2.

The Committee accept that giving all claimants entitlement to payments would not be a high priority for available resources.

They hope however the rules on chronically sick or disabled claimants will be kept under review and recommend that payments should be extended to cover households with a child under five.

The Government have aimed to focus help on those most vulnerable to the cold. The definition of chronically sick or disabled is not a new proposal for these regulations: it follows the definition in the recent general revision of the single payments regulations. It makes sense to have a consistent definition throughout the single payments regulations.

5. Payment

A flat-rate payment of £5 would be paid for each designated week of exceptionally cold weather.

The Committee welcome the introduction of a standard payment, doing away with the need to compare previous fuel bills. This is seen as a particularly welcome simplification. The Committee stress the importance of effective local publicity if the scheme is to be successful.

While noting the operational problems in making automatic payments in the present manual scheme, the Committee recommend that consideration be given to the extension of automatic payments when the operational strategy is implemented.

6. Time Limits

Claims would need to be made within 28 days of a period of exceptionally cold weather.

The Committee recommend that the period of claim should be 3 months and that, where two or more consecutive weeks of designated exceptionally cold weather are triggered, only one claim should be needed.

7. Future of the Scheme

The proposals make changes to the present single payment regulations due to be replaced in 1988 as part of the wider social security reforms.

The Committee recommend that a similar scheme should continue after 1988 and that payments should be available as of right.

As with other parts of the benefit system, the Government will keep the operation of the rules under review.

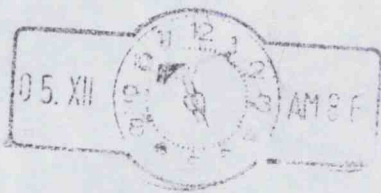
For the reasons explained in the main body of the statement the Government do not consider an extension of the criteria a priority.

The regulations incorporate the £5 flat-rate payment. Local offices are given instructions on publicity arrangements. These are being revised in the context of the new arrangements.

The possibility that implementation of the operational strategy might enable automatic payments to be made will be borne in mind, subject to final decisions on the future of these arrangements after the wider 1988 reforms.

The Government have responded to these recommendations. The regulations provide for claims to be made with 13 weeks of the end of the period of exceptionally cold weather. They also provide for one claim to be treated as a claim for consecutive weeks of exceptionally cold weather, provided that the claimant remains in receipt of supplementary benefit and in a qualifying group during that period, and that the claim has not been adjudicated before the end of an extended period of exceptionally cold weather.

Final decisions on the future of the arrangements will be taken in the light of this winter's experience.



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CEBG
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EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

Please find attached an up-dated copy of the Secretary of State for Social Services' draft response and replace copy attached to John Major's letter to Viscount Whitelaw dated 4 November 1986. ✓ with DRN

Thank you.

Sent to: The Prime Minister
 Mr P Walker
 Members of H Committee
 Sir R Armstrong

Superseded

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL SERVICES IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 10(4) OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT 1980

1. Proposals on single payments for exceptionally severe weather, presently provided in regulation 26 of the Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments) Regulations were submitted to the Social Security Advisory Committee in accordance with the requirements of section 10(1) of the Social Security Act 1980 on 6 August 1986. The regulations now laid before Parliament implement the proposals submitted to the Committee, as modified by changes explained in the statement. The Government welcome the Committee's general support for the proposals (subject to a number of particular concerns and recommendations).

2. The Government's proposals are consistent with the scale of help that has been given and times of very adverse weather over the last years. As the Committee recognise, payments for periods of exceptionally severe weather have never been a major element of the total of help for claimants with their heating costs, compared to the scale rates themselves and specific heating additions. The Committee do not believe that the system for specific payments is the primary weapon in the battle against hypothermia. The Committee have considered the proposals in the light of the limited role of the arrangements over the years. In that context, they:

- support an absolute standard of coldness as the basic test of severity;
- recognise the reasonableness of the Government's definition of exceptional weather as implying ^{occurring in} broad terms once in five years, in relation to the scale of the scheme;
- support the principle of a fixed 7-day period in view of its advantages of simplicity, ease of understanding and straightforward operation;
- recognise that the system of linking local offices with meteorological office data is a clear improvement on previous methods of temperature collection;

- accept that giving all supplementary benefit claimants entitlement to payments would not be a high priority for available resources; and

- welcome the introduction of a system of standard payments.

Accordingly the regulations now laid before Parliament largely give legal force to the proposals referred to the Committee. Annex A sets out the main elements of the proposals, the Committee's comments and recommendations and the Government's comments. Annex B reproduces the information on the relation of the criteria to previous years' experience provided to the Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. The Committee make five specific recommendations on the proposals

- (a) Qualifying groups

4. While accepting that giving all claimants entitlement to payments would not be a high priority, the Committee recommend that payments should be given to households containing a child under five (rather than two as proposed). In 1980 the scale rates for children under five was levelled up to that of those under eleven. As a result, the value of their support has increased by (29%) under this Government. In addition households with a child under five are automatically entitled to the lower rate of heating addition. This is worth over £100 a year to an unemployed family on the ordinary rate. There is no similar, automatic provision for those with children over five. The system therefore already guarantees extra weekly help to families with those under five. In the longer term, the family premium is intended to give help to all those with children, regardless of their age. Under the Government's proposals for payments in exceptionally cold weather, help would be given automatically to those with a child under two. Children above that age would qualify the family for a payment if they were chronically sick or disabled; for example, though receiving attendance allowance, (payable at age two). In view of the improvements in the scale rate and extra weekly help already guaranteed for those with a child under 5, the Government do not consider a further extension of the criteria a priority.

(b) Rules for claiming

5. The Committee recommend that payments should be made where a claim is submitted within 3 months of the period of exceptionally cold weather and that, where two or more consecutive weeks of designated cold weather are triggered, only one claim should be needed. The Government accept both these recommendations which have been reflected in the regulations. Technically, the three month recommendation has been met by a 13 week rule, consistent with the normal use of weeks rather than months in setting time rules.

(c) Automatic payments and the future of the scheme

6. The Committee's report explains the reasons why the Department could not set up a system of automatic payments with the present, largely manual, administration of benefit. The Committee recommend that consideration be given to the extension of automatic payments when the operational strategy is implemented. This will not occur until after the wider social security changes have taken effect in 1988. This recommendation has therefore to be seen alongside their further recommendations that a similar scheme should continue when the present single payments arrangements end in April 1988 and that such payments should be available as of right rather than on a discretionary basis. Final decisions on the future of the scheme will be taken in the light of assessment of the effectiveness of the system in the coming winter, should weather conditions be severe. [The Government's present intention would be to look to arrangements handled within the social fund, operated substantially through directions rather than discretionary guidance]. Consideration of the practicalities of automatic payments following the implementation of the operational strategy will be kept in mind in that context.

CONCLUSION

7. The Government are encouraged by the general support of the Social Security Advisory Committee. They share the Committee's view that the proposals represent a significant improvement on previous schemes in terms of simplicity, comprehensibility and certainty of payment. The Government are

grateful to the Committee - and to those interested parties who made representations to them - for their consideration of the proposals and for their comments and recommendations.

8. The regulations are now laid before Parliament.

November 1986

CONSULTATIVE DOCUMENT PROPOSAL

1. Test of Severity

The test of severity would be based on temperature. Help would be given where, in a particular locality, average temperature over a 7-day period did not exceed -1.5°C . The intention is to provide help in overall average terms once in 5 years.

2. Period of Assessment

Temperature would be measured over a fixed 7-day period, running from Monday to Sunday.

3. Linking of local offices and Meteorological Office Data

Local offices would be linked to ~~some~~ ^{some 70} meteorological office stations.

4. Qualifying Groups

Help would be given to claimants whose family contained someone

- over 65;
- chronically sick or disabled;
- under 2.

SOCIAL SECURITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMENT AND RECOMMENDATION

The Committee accept the Government's desire to introduce a more easily understood indication of severity and support an absolute standard of coldness. They consider a "once in five years" criterion a reasonable definition of exceptional in the context of the Government's decision on the scope of the scheme.

The Committee support the principle of a fixed 7-day period. They note the objections to such a basis, but consider it has the advantage of simplicity, ease of understanding and straightforward operation.

The Committee comment that, while the proposed system is not ideal, it is manifestly an improvement on the methods of temperature collection used in the past.

The Committee accept that giving all claimants entitlement to payments would not be a high priority for available resources.

They hope however the rules on chronically sick or disabled claimants will be kept under review and recommend that payments should be extended to cover households with a child under 5.

GOVERNMENT COMMENT

The regulations incorporate the -1.5°C criterion as the test of exceptional coldness.

The regulations incorporate the 7-day fixed period.

The regulations list the areas covered by each of 63 meteorological stations. Some detailed adjustments to the original proposal have been made in the light of consultation with the meteorological office.

The Government have aimed to focus help on those most vulnerable to the cold. The definition of chronically sick or disabled is now a new proposal for these regulations: it follows the definition in the recent general revision of the single payments regulations. It makes sense to have a consistent definition throughout the single payments regulations.

5. Payment

A flat-rate payment of £5 would be paid for each designated week of exceptionally cold weather.

The Committee welcome the introduction of a standard payment, doing away with the need to compare previous fuel bills. This is seen as a particularly welcome simplification. The Committee stress the importance of effective local publicity if the scheme is to be successful.

While noting the operational problems in making automatic payments in the present manual scheme, the Committee recommend that consideration be given to the extension of automatic payments when the operational is implemented.

6. Time Limits

Claims would need to be made within 28 days of a period of exceptionally cold weather.

The Committee recommend that the period of claim should be 3 months and that, where two or more consecutive weeks of designated exceptionally cold weather are triggered, only one claim should be needed.

7. Future of the Scheme

The proposals make changes to the present single payment regulations due to be replaced in 1988 as part of the wider social security reforms.

The Committee recommend that a similar scheme should continue after 1988 and that payments should be available as of right.

As with other parts of the benefit system, the Government will keep the operation of the rules under review.

For the reasons explained in the main body of the statement the Government do not consider an extension of the criteria a priority.

The regulations incorporate the £5 flat rate payment. Local offices are given instructions on publicity arrangements. These are being revised in the context of the new arrangements.

The possibility that implementation of the operational strategy might enable automatic payments to be made will be borne in mind subject to final decision on the future of these arrangements after the wider 1988 reforms.

The recommendations have been accepted. The regulations incorporate a 13 week time limits for claims and provide for single claims for consecutive weeks of designated exceptionally cold weather.

Final decisions on the future of the arrangements will be taken in the light of this winter's experience.

WEATHER STATIONS (AND NEAREST CENTRES OF POPULATION) NUMBER OF WEEKS (MON-SUN) WHEN MEAN WEEKLY TEMPERATURE REACHED OR WAS LOWER THAN MINUS 1.5 DEGREES CELSIUS

No WEATHER STATION 79/80 80/1 81/2 82/3 83/4 84/5 85/6

SCOTLAND

1	LERWICK	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
2	WICK	0	0	2	0	0	1	0
3	STORNOWAY	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	KINLOSS (INVERNESS)	0	0	2	0	0	1	1
5	DYCE (ABERDEEN)	0	0	3	0	1	0	1
6	FORT WILLIAM	-	-	-	-	-	2	0
7	LEUCHARS (DUNDEE)	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
8	ABBOTSINCH (GLASGOW)	0	0	4	0	0	2	0
9	TUMMELBRIDGE (STIRLING)	-	-	-	-	-	2	3
10	TURNHOUSE (EDINBURGH)	0	0	5	0	0	1	0
11	MACRIHANISH (CAMPBELT'N)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
12	PRESTWICK (AYR)	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
13	ESKDALEMUIR (GALASHIELS)	0	0	5	0	1	3	3
14	WHITHORN (STRANRAER)	-	0	1	0	0	0	0
15	DUMFRIES	-	-	-	-	0	1	0

ENGLAND

16	BOULMER (BERWICK)	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
17	CARLISLE	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
18	ESKMEALS (WHITEHAVEN)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
19	LEEMING (NEWCASTLE)	0	0	5	0	0	1	1
20	TYNEMOUTH (SUNDERLAND)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
21	WHITBY (SCARBOROUGH)	0	0	2	0	0	0	-
22	SQUIRES GATE (BLACKP'L)	0	0	3	0	0	2	0
23	LEEDS	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
24	AUGHTON (LIVERPOOL)	0	0	2	0	0	1	0
25	RINGWAY (MANCHESTER)	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
26	FINNINGLEY (SHEFFIELD)	0	0	4	0	0	2	1
27	BINBROOK (HULL)	0	0	3	0	0	1	2
28	CRANWELL (LINCOLN)	0	0	4	0	0	2	2
29	CONNINGSBY (SKEGNESS)	0	0	4	0	0	1	2
30	SHAWBURY (SHREWSBURY)	0	0	4	0	0	2	1
31	ELMDON (BIRMINGHAM)	-	-	4	0	0	2	2
32	WATNALL (DERBY/NOTTS)	0	0	4	0	0	2	2
33	MARHAM (KING'S LYNN)	-	-	-	-	0	3	2
34	COLTISHALL (NORWICH)	0	0	1	0	0	2	1
35	WYTON (CAMBRIDGE)	0	0	4	0	0	2	3
36	BEDFORD	-	0	4	0	0	2	4

37	STANSTED	0	0	3	0	0	3	3
38	HONINGTON (BURY ST E)	0	0	3	0	0	3	2
39	WATTISHAM (IPSWICH)	0	0	2	0	0	3	3
40	BRIZE NORTON (OXFORD)	0	0	2	0	0	2	2
41	HEATHROW (LONDON)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
42	MANSTON (DOVER)	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
43	HERSTMONCEAUX (BR'TON)	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
44	GATWICK (GUILDFORD)	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
45	EASTHAMPSTEAD (B'STOKE)	0	0	1	0	0	3	2
46	BRISTOL	-	-	0	0	0	1	0
47	LYNEHAM (CHIPPENHAM)	0	0	2	0	0	3	3
48	BOSCOMBE DOWN (SARUM)	0	0	0	0	0	3	2
49	SOUTHAMPTON	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
50	HURN (BOURNEMOUTH)	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
51	YEOVILTON (YEOVIL)	0	0	1	0	0	3	0
52	EXETER	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
53	CHIVENOR (BARNSTAPLE)	-	-	-	-	-	1	-
54	OKEHAMPTON (LAUNCESTON)	0	0	0	2	0	3	4
55	MOUNT BATTEN (PLYMOUTH)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
56	ST MAWGAN (TRURO)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
57	CULDROSE (PENZANCE)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

WALES

58	VALLEY (CAERNARVON)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
59	TRAWSFYNYDD (DOLGELLAU)	0	0	0	0	0	-	1
60	ABERPORTH (ABERYSTWYTH)	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
61	BRAWDY (PEMBROKE DOCK)	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
62	MUMBLES (SWANSEA)	0	-	0	0	0	0	0
63	CILFYRDD (M TYDFIL)	-	-	1	0	0	2	1
64	RHOOSE (CARDIFF)	0	0	0	0	0	2	0

SOCIAL SERVICES: Severe weather payments: Pt 2



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Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

Tony Newton OBE MP
Minister of State for Social Security
and the Disabled
Alexander Fleming House
Elephant and Castle
LONDON
SE1 6BY

15th August 1986

NB

Dear Tony,

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER

Thank you for your letter of 5 August.

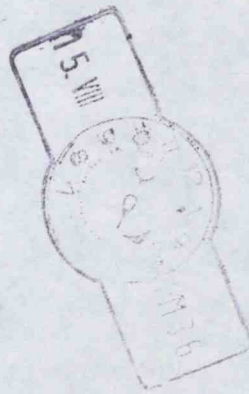
Of course, I do not rule out minor changes to the proposals if that seems sensible in the light of the responses from SSAC. But such changes should not add to the expected cost of the scheme in either a normal year or an exceptionally severe one. I gather Age Concern's initial reaction to the scheme is very favourable. I hope, therefore, that we can expect a more considered and sensible response from SSAC than we have received on several recent occasions.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Willie Whitelaw, Peter Walker, other members of H Committee and Sir Rober Armstrong.

Yours ever,

JOHN MacGREGOR

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CONFIDENTIAL



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY
 Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY
 Telephone 01-407 5522

From the Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled

The Rt Hon John MacGregor OBE MP
 Chief Secretary to the Treasury

05 AUG 1986

John John

M3PM

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

Thank you for your letter of 30 July. I am grateful for your agreement to proceed with the consultation document. *at nap*

I am sure you would not wish me at this stage to rule out all consideration of the Advisory Committee's comments: in the light of the past two winters' experience, it would be foolish to decline even some limited adjustment if, without undermining our objectives, it enabled us to point to the Committee's clear support. Nevertheless, I can of course confirm that we would expect to stand firm on the basic structure of what we are proposing, which is undoubtedly a sensible one.

Copies as before to the Prime Minister, Willie Whitelaw, Peter Walker, other members of H Committee and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever
Tony
 TONY NEWTON

CONFIDENTIAL

SOCIAL SERVICES SENIORS

Weat WPTZ



CONFIDENTIAL

CC/BA



PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AT

31 July 1986

Dear Gary -

NJPN

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

You wrote to me on 28 July seeking H Committee's agreement ^{at top} to your consulting the Social Security Advisory Committee about a set of proposals for a new system of exceptionally severe weather payments. I am sure you recognise that your deadline for comments, of Wednesday 30 July, made it difficult for colleagues to consider proposals of this kind, especially as your letter did not contain any comparisons of the costs of the new scheme with the old.

However, we all appreciate the importance of getting a better scheme in place before the winter so that we can avoid the difficulties of previous years and I accept that this means giving the proposals to the Social Security Advisory Committee in August. I agree, therefore, that you should consult the SSAC on the basis of your paper, but this must be on the understanding that colleagues have not yet given their approval to it and that they have the right to comment on the proposals on a more realistic timescale.

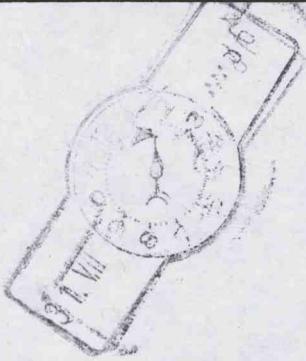
I am sending a copy of this letter to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Energy, the members of H Committee and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Alfred M.
W.M.

Antony Newton Esq MP

CONFIDENTIAL

SOCIAL SERVICES / Severe Weather
Payments PT2



CONFIDENTIAL



NGM

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

Tony Newton Esq OBE MP
 Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled
 Department of Health and Social Security
 Alexander Fleming House
 Elephant and Castle
 London
 SE1 6BY

30 July 1986

Dear Tony,

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

FILE WITH DRW

Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter of 28 July to the Lord President which followed Norman Fowler's letter to me of 11 July on this subject.

I appreciate that you need to move quickly and consult the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) shortly if you are to have a more acceptable system in place for this winter. I agree with you and Norman that this is necessary and I am content with the consultation document which has been prepared.

The main elements of your proposals seem sound. The principle of a national criterion of severe weather, measured by reference to absolute standards of coldness, seems to me to be far more defensible than the previous system of comparison with temperatures normally expected in particular localities. It must also be right to target help on vulnerable groups and to have a standard payment per week. This combination should mean that significant help can be given quickly and to those most in need.

I am also content that the consultation document should suggest a temperature standard of -1.5°C over a fixed 7 day period. The former criterion is entirely consistent with a policy of helping in exceptional weather, rather than making these payments a regular winter occurrence. But at the same time it seems reasonable, with help being given more often than one in five years in the colder parts of the country like Scotland. I do not see how it could be fairly criticised as

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SOCIAL SERVICES
SERVICE UNIT

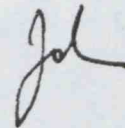
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PT 2
niggardly. This is particularly so since our record on regular heating help for the poorest through supplementary benefit is excellent, with £140 million more in real terms being spent in 1984-85 than when we came to office.

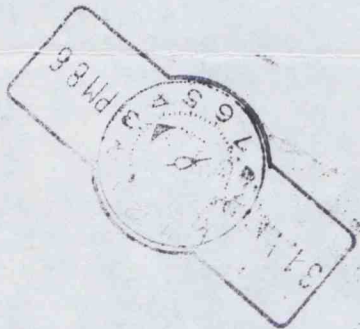
I very much hope that SSAC will give due praise to the proposals as they stand. They seem to me to represent a genuine attempt to introduce a logical and well-targetted system of help. As you say, we are never going to get a wholly ideal system which satisfies many of our critics who will always demand more spending. This includes many organisations who regularly offer advice to SSAC. So I hope that you will agree that we should stand firm on these proposals, and it is on that basis that I am content.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Willie Whitelaw, Peter Walker, other members of H Committee and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever,



JOHN MacGREGOR



CONFIDENTIAL



mk

10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister 2

cc B.I.
(plus
apps)

To be aware that
Mr Fowler now intends to
send his proposals on
severe weather payments to
the Advisory Committee
before the end of the week.

DRW
29/7

This could be linked by the
press to the publication of
the poverty statistics on the
last day of the sitting. But
it needs to be done.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY
 Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY
 Telephone 01-407 5522

From the Minister of State for Social Security and the Disabled

The Lord President of the Counsel

28 JUL 1986

Dear Lord President,

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

I wrote to the Chief Secretary on 18 July on the question of exceptionally severe weather payments with a view to announcing an intention to consult on revised arrangements for this winter at the same time as we announced our single payment proposals. In the event, the view of colleagues was that such an announcement should not be made simultaneously with those wider single payment changes.

My letter of 18 July did however make clear my view that we need to have revised arrangements in place before the possibility of bad weather next winter can occur. If we are to do so, we need first formally to consult the Social Security Advisory Committee. If we are to be able to lay revised regulations shortly after Parliament returns in the Autumn we are under severe time constraints.

The next meeting of the Social Security Advisory Committee is 6 August. Thereafter, they take a summer break and meet next on 1 October. They take two meetings to consider proposals for regulations. At the first they discuss the general principles in relation to the Government's consultation document. At the second they decide their conclusions in the light of the views expressed during the consultation period. Our soundings have made clear that the Committee are not prepared to fit in an extra meeting in September. If, therefore we are to have a response from the Committee in October then we need to refer proposals for change in time for the 6 August meeting. Otherwise, we will not get a response until sometime in November. With the time needed to prepare our reply to the report and lay and bring into force regulations, that produces a timetable running up to Christmas. Given the experience last year, I am clear that is something we must avoid.

My earlier letter explained the broad lines on which we are working. This is now set out in more detail in the attached draft consultation document we have prepared for the Social Security Advisory Committee. In my earlier letter I mentioned that we were still considering two matters; the degree of coldness which should trigger help and the period over which cold weather should be measured. The draft consultation document suggests a temperature standard of -1.5°C over a 7 day period. This is broadly consistent with a 1 in 5 year likelihood of help being given. The intention has never been for this to be a routine part of the system and such an approach is consistent with previous systems. Nonetheless, using this precise method may look somewhat niggardly. I would expect to come under some pressure to introduce a more generous standard; say -1°C .

E.R.

The period over which help is assessed is rather more difficult. The advantage of a fixed 7 day period is its consistency with benefit arrangements themselves; simplicity; and speed of response when cold weather is designated. Its disadvantage is that help may not be given during extended cold spells interrupted by milder weather. Ways round that, such as having running 7 days periods, are however distinctly unattractive operationally.

Both these aspects suggest we are unlikely ever to get a wholly ideal system. On balance, I have included these elements in the consultation document. However, I think we ought to be prepared to consider some movement on these matters if the overwhelming weight of consultations suggests that the line in the document will be difficult to sustain politically.

The cost of the system depends on how severe the weather is; how much of the country is designated at any particular time; and how many of those eligible in fact submit a claim. Our best estimate on the basis of a reasonable spread of coverage and take-up is that the 1 in 5 year criterion and eligible groups we have adopted would imply costs of around £5 million in a designated week in a severe winter. Clearly, if the period lasted for longer than that, costs would increase. Equally, payments would reduce virtually to nil in milder winters.

If the Social Security Advisory Committee are to consider proposals for change at their 6 August meeting, we need to send them the paper by the end of this week. I would therefore be grateful if you and colleagues to whom I am copying the letter could let me know, not later than Wednesday, if you see objection to our proceeding in this way. I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Peter Walker, members of H Committee and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Phillips

TONY NEWTON

*(approved by the Minister & signed
in his absence by the print secretary)*

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY
SOCIAL SECURITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS - CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

1. This document refers proposals for regulations revising the present system of help for supplementary benefit claimants during periods of exceptionally severe weather.

2. Far and away the most significant help that supplementary benefit claimants get with their fuel costs are the normal weekly rates of benefit. Those who need to spend extra on heating, for example because of age or ill health, get extra weekly benefit by way of heating additions. At the end of 1984 (the latest date for which data is available) some 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ million heating additions were in payment on a regular weekly basis at amounts worth, on current rates, from £2.20 upwards. Overall the cost of these extra heating additions in 1984/85 was approximately £400 million.

3. Claimants have also been able to get lump sum payments through the single payments system, subject to the normal capital rule, in periods of exceptionally severe weather. These payments have never been intended to be more than a very small part of the help given towards heating costs. Payments have been made in three winters since the regulated scheme was introduced in 1980. In 1982 some 280,000 payments were made at a cost of £3.6 million. In 1985 170,000 payments were made at a cost of £1.7 million. Figures for 1986 are not yet available but it is known that, by the end of May, some 300,000 payments had been made.

HISTORY

4. Discretionary payments in very cold weather were made on occasion under the National Assistance scheme before 1966, for instance in the severe winter of 1962-63. These arrangements continued under the Supplementary Benefits Commission in the period before 1980. The provision was probably little used,

however, as most of the winters during the 1970s were mild. Guidance of a very general nature was given to staff on the provision. No data is available on frequency and amounts of payments.

5. In 1980 provision for payments for exceptionally severe weather was included in the Supplementary Benefit (Single Payments) Regulations. Regulation 26 states that:

- "A single payment shall be made to meet the fuel costs of the assessment unit where they are greater than the amount which has been put aside to pay for them because a period of exceptionally severe weather has resulted in consumption greater than normal, having regard to any available information on previous levels of consumption; the amount payable shall be the cost of the amount of the excess over normal consumption"

Decision on entitlement are made by local Adjudication Officers (AOs) who are guided by the Chief Adjudication Officer (CAO) - formerly the Chief Supplementary Benefit Officer (CSBO) - on the interpretation of the regulations.

6. During the cold winter of 1981/82 the CSBO issued guidance to the effect that the regulation applied across the whole country. If claimants satisfied the usual criteria for a single payment, and were able to produce the previous year's bill, they were to be awarded a single payment to cover the difference in consumption between that of the winter in 1981/82 and the previous one. Where the previous year's bill was not available, a formula was applied to the current bill based on an estimate of increased fuel consumption provided by the local fuel board.

7. A number of problems arose from the application of the regulation during the winter of 1981/82, in particular in defining a period of exceptionally severe weather and in determining the extent to which extra fuel consumption was caused by that severe weather. Discussions were therefore held with the Meteorological Office during 1982 to devise a more objective method of interpreting and applying the conditions of regulation 26.

THE REVISED ARRANGEMENTS

8. The new system worked on the basis of the extent to which the weather in a particular locality at a particular time, measured in terms of degree days in each week, varied from that which would be expected in the same place normally at that time of the year. One degree day is counted for each °C that the mean outside temperature falls below 15.5°C in a 24 hour period. It is a measure widely used in industry as an indicator of the amount of heating required over a particular period. There is no presumption that 15.5°C represents a proper standard of heating a claimant's home. It is simply a baseline to calculate degree days.

9. Information was supplied weekly by the Meteorological Office covering 17 weather stations situated throughout Great Britain. Local office areas were matched to these 17 weather stations. The levels selected for each area as constituting exceptionally severe weather were those at which, on the basis of temperature levels recorded over a number of years, it was considered that the number of "degree days" was exceptionally high. The numbers recorded at individual weather centres vary, and the levels were fixed individually on the basis that the regulations would be triggered approximately 1 year in 5 in any one area. This was on the basis that a more frequent interval would not indicate that weather conditions were **exceptional**.

10. Once it had been decided that a period of exceptionally severe weather had occurred, a comparison was made of the temperature levels (again expressed in degree days) at each of the weather stations over the period of severe weather with the normal average temperature for that station in historical terms. The comparison was spread over the period of the fuel bills and produced a percentage figure which was applied to the claimant's actual fuel bill. The resulting amount was paid as a single payment.

11. ~~Information was supplied weekly by the Meteorological Office covering 17 weather stations situated throughout Great Britain. Local office areas were matched to these 17 weather stations. The levels selected for each area as constituting exceptionally severe weather were those at which, on the basis of temperature levels recorded over a number of years, it was considered that the number of "degree days" was exceptionally high. The numbers recorded at individual weather centres vary, and the levels were fixed individually on the basis that the regulations would be triggered approximately 1 year in 5 in any one area. This was on the basis that a more frequent interval would not indicate that weather conditions were exceptional.~~

12. The guidance was tested for the first time during the spell of bad weather at the beginning of 1985. It was widely criticised on the following main grounds

- Because help was based on comparison with that normally expected at the time in the locality, it meant that in absolute terms it had to be colder in the parts of the country that are normally colder before help was given. As a result, no help was given in Scotland, while help was given in the South of England which was in absolute terms warmer at the time.

- The fact that information from only 17 stations was used (restricted because of the need to have comparisons with historical data) meant that help was decided in a particular locality by reference to a weather station which could be some way away and not therefore seen as necessarily representative of the conditions in the locality.

- The system was widely perceived to be very complicated. The concept of degree days was little understood, nor was the method of calculating the amount of the payment over the whole period of the fuel bill (which could lead to relatively small sums being paid).

There are arguments in principle for the approach adopted; both that exceptional weather conditions are best judged in relation to those normally expected by people in the locality (whether mild or severe), and that it is reasonable to take account of weather over the whole period of a fuel bill when deciding help (so that extra consumption in bad weather can be balanced against reduced consumption in milder spells in the same period).

13. It was however clear that the system had little general support. The adjudicating authorities therefore asked the Social Security Commissioners to hear a test case to confirm whether or not the guidance then in operation was a correct interpretation of the regulations.

14. The Commissioners' decision issued in October 1985 rejected the CAO's guidance. They held that the regulation was written in terms of general English usage ("a period of exceptionally severe weather", "the amount of the excess over normal (fuel) consumption"). The adjudicating authorities should therefore make value judgements, on the facts of each individual case, as to whether the conditions of the regulation applied. They should not be

constrained by "arbitrary rules of thumb" involving trigger points, degree days and set systems for amounts of payments. Similarly, meteorological data could be taken into account as evidence of severe weather, but could not be treated as any more than that. Essentially, the effect of the Commissioner's verdict was that interpretation of the regulations was a matter of judgement for the local adjudicating authorities.

REVISED GUIDANCE

15. As a result of the Commissioners' verdict, the CAO issued revised guidance in November 1985.

The new guidance advised that decisions on whether the weather had been exceptionally severe should be made by an adjudication officer in each local office, and should be based on locally available information. Once a period of exceptionally severe weather had been declared, claims for single payments should be assessed on the basis of the individual claimant's increased fuel consumption as a result of the severe weather.

16. The guidance was tested in practice during the long lasting spell of bad weather at the beginning of 1986. Initially, there was considerable variation in practice amongst local offices as to whether the conditions qualified as exceptionally severe weather. As a result, there was mounting public concern about the system, particularly in relation to the position of frail and housebound elderly people. Eventually, after further advice from the Chief Adjudication Officer, a period of exceptionally severe weather was declared for all local offices except Lerwick (Shetland) in February this year. The Department is currently in the process of collecting information from local offices on numbers of payments and costs of the system. Collection has been slowed by the general pressure on local offices as a result of the major upsurge in single payments claims generally, but information will be passed to the Committee as soon as it is available. The indications are, however, that more payments will be made, at a higher overall cost, than in either of the two previous years that help has been given since 1980.

17. There can be no dispute that the new arrangements which applied for the first time this winter have in their turn come in for major public criticism. This has been on the following grounds.

- Decisions on whether the weather has been exceptionally severe are now too subjective. Allegations have been made that the system implies that adjudication officers "stick their head out of the window" to decide how cold it is. The absence of any clear criteria for triggering help are a recipe for inconsistent decisions and wide variations in practice.
- There is no clear method of working out how much should be paid. It is not in practice feasible to make a comparison of an actual fuel bill with normal consumption (an elusive concept, particularly where previous bills are not retained), nor how much the fuel bill presented may also reflect other factors such as illness in the family, or changes in numbers and type of appliances in use.
- There is no certainty in the system. Claimants are not able to know whether they would be entitled to any help until they receive the fuel bill covering the relevant quarter, some time after the actual period of bad weather. This will discourage people, particularly pensioners, from increasing their consumption during the actual bad weather.
- Claimants who do not receive fuel bills quarterly, including those who have slot meters or who make bulk purchases of coal in advance, cannot get help under the provisions in regulation 26 itself. This is because they cannot show a need for the items in question at the date of claim. In the past, help has been able to be considered under a different regulation but this is seen as a cumbersome sideways system of meeting the problem.

It is clear from the reaction at the time that the new arrangements continue to cause major difficulties and to lack public acceptance.

SUMMARY

18. The history of provisions since 1980 show clearly that no adequate or acceptable basis has yet been found for running this relatively minor, but contentious, part of the system.

GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES

19. The Government are clear that further change is required before the onset of the coming winter. In framing their proposals, the Government have taken account of the following objectives for revised arrangements.

- Exceptional remit. Payments for periods of exceptionally severe weather have always intended to be a small part of total help, payable only in truly exceptional circumstances. The Government have no plans to change the scope of the arrangements, which has applied over the years.
- Clear criteria. The evidence since 1980 is that a system working on the basis of considerable exercise of judgement at a local level, in the absence of clear guidelines, does not command public acceptance. It produces the problems of confusion as to whether help is to be given and inconsistency in application in particular areas. The Government therefore believe the new system should incorporate objective criteria, wherever possible.
- Simplicity. It is however clear that some of the technicalities of previous objective criteria - in particular the operation of the degree day system and complicated methods of calculating the amount paid have been seen as too complex. The Government have therefore sought criteria which can be readily understood and explained.
- Certainty. The evidence suggests that arrangements need to be such that people are able to know as quickly as possible that the circumstances for help have been satisfied and have a reasonable understanding of how much help will be available. The Government consider that arrangements therefore need to be triggered as quickly as possible during a cold spell and to enable the amount of help that will be available to be readily ascertainable.

- Vulnerable groups. During the recent winter, attention focussed in particular on groups such as the frail elderly considered to be at most risk from hypothermia. The Government therefore consider that future arrangements should take particular account of the needs of such vulnerable groups.

GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS

20. The Government's proposals for regulations on which comments are now sought would have the following main elements.

(a) Test of severity

21. The Government consider the most appropriate test of severity is the degree of coldness. The key criterion is temperature. Other factors have of course been mentioned in the context of measuring exceptionally severe weather such as "radiation" (that is hours of sunshine), exposure, and wind speed. Some of these however are difficult to assess and others, such as wind speed, may be more indicative of conditions outside the home than the need for fuel inside it. More data could be secured on factors other than temperature but, the more factors that are included, the greater difficulty there is in judging how particular factors should be weighted and the more complicated and slow the system becomes in responding to need. Accordingly, the Government consider that the basic test of severity should be linked to measurement of temperature, as the most important indicator of severity.

22. The Government consider, in the light of the experience of previous arrangements, that the measurement of temperature should be based on absolute standards of coldness. That is, there should be one standard of severity applied throughout the country. While, as noted above, there are arguments for comparing the weather in a locality with that which would normally be expected there, the Government believe that a more acceptable system would be one that concentrates help on those parts of the country that are, at any given time, coldest in absolute terms. This basis does of course mean the reversal of the situation in 198 - that some parts of the country, in particular in Scotland where the weather is normally colder, are more likely

to get help than parts such as the west and south where the temperature is milder. Nonetheless, the Government consider this is the best, common-sense, approach.

23. During the winter of 1984/85, when the previous objective criteria applied, it did so on the basis of the then Chief Supplementary Benefit Officer's view that "exceptional" in terms of the regulations implied an order of frequency of some 1 in every 5 year likelihood of occurrence. The Government consider that approach sound. The arrangements have never been intended to provide help most years. Adopting such a criterion does not mean that help will be given in any particular area exactly 1 in 5 years - in practice this will vary both between particular localities and because the weather cannot be expected to behave exactly in a regular 5 year cycle. The purpose is, however, to set up a system which, on the basis of historical data, would imply that help over a significant part of the country overall would be expected to be given about 1 in 5 years over a longer period of years.

24. Advice from the Meteorological Office is that a 1 in 5 year probability would be satisfied by a recording of 120 degree days over a 7-day period. Technically, variations in temperature are usually assessed in terms of these "degree days". One degree day is equivalent to a variation from the standard of 1°C over a 24 hour period. This is expressed in terms of the comparison of the average of the maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in a particular place over a 24 hour period with the standard figure used by the Meteorological Office (15.5°C). In layman's terms, 120 degree days is equivalent to an average temperature of -1.64°C over a 7-day period. While the Government accept that the 1 in 5 year basis of help is a reasonable yardstick, they consider that experience has shown that the technicalities of degree days are little understood and cause confusion. Accordingly, they intend to work in terms of temperature expressed in degrees Celsius. They accordingly propose to work on a trigger point set in the rounded terms of -1.5°C over the 7-day period.

(b) Setting the period

25. Supplementary benefit is assessed on a weekly basis. The Government consider it sensible to work in terms of 7-day periods of bad weather. This is also consistent with the common-sense approach that a settled spell of weather is one where the particular conditions (whether good or bad) have persisted for 7-10 days or more.

26. There are however three ways in which such a 7-day period could be calculated. First, the system could work in terms of fixed periods, say from Monday to Sunday. Its advantage is that it is linked to the standard benefit week and enables help to be announced and assessed quickly once a week of bad weather eligible for help has been triggered. In practice, the Department could get information from the Meteorological Office to enable them to assess whether the conditions have been met shortly afterwards in the following week. Its main drawback is that it does not necessarily match with actual periods of bad weather. Second, the system could work in terms of running 7-day periods - that is, payments would be made if, over any 7-day period in the winter, the circumstances were satisfied. This has the advantage of relating help to the actual spell of bad weather. It does however have the major complication that it implies assessment of weather in the previous 7-days each day during a period of potential cold weather. This is operationally cumbersome, creates difficulties for receiving and passing on information, and causes difficulty in relating claimants' weekly entitlement to periods that may well straddle two benefit weeks.

27. The third option is to work on a retrospective assessment say over a previous 4 week period. This in principle allows variations to be applied in calculating eligibility over a 7-day period, for example in relation to shorter periods of bad weather interrupted by equally short mild days. It has the disadvantages that it is again cumbersome and complex and means that decisions on whether help can be given can only be decided some time after the event. Its main drawback therefore is that claimants could not be confident at the time the bad weather actually occurs that help will be given.

28. On balance, in the interests of speed of response, comprehensibility, and matching help with the basis of supplementary benefit itself, the Government propose to work in terms of fixed 7 day periods running from Monday to Sunday.

(c) Linking of local offices and Meteorological Office data

29. The Government consider it sensible to work on the basis of reliable data on temperature measurement available from the Meteorological Office. In 1984/85 the degree day system, for reasons of the need to have historical comparisons, worked on information from 17 Meteorological Office stations. It is clear that these were too few to be satisfactory in relation to coverage of the whole of Great Britain. The Department currently receives temperature data for some 70 weather stations in the United Kingdom within a couple of days of the end of the week. There are more weather stations in existence, but these are for the most part less formal affairs with what can be considerable delays in collecting and disseminating the data from all these stations - up to 6 weeks after the week in question. The Government consider that it is essential that the system works quickly after the week of bad weather. They have therefore worked on the basis of the main weather stations from which information is gathered quickly.

30. The Government's draft proposals for matching meteorological local office stations with the local office areas are at Annex Local office areas have been grouped on the same basis as those that apply in the board and lodging arrangements. The matching of stations and local offices has been discussed with the Meteorological Office. The matching reflects not just nearness, although this is the most significant criterion, but also some general account has been taken of matching similar local climatic conditions so far as possible. Where there are more than one potential weather station for a particular grouping, the bias has been in favour of selecting that most favourable for claimants. Thus, the Greater London Area is triggered by weather information at the colder Heathrow rather than the station at Holborn where conditions are normally milder. During the period of the consultation, the Government will be considering with the Meteorological Office whether further refinements of this matching can be achieved to improve the fit of stations and local office areas.

(d) Qualifying groups

31. The Government consider it sensible to target help on those most at risk from adverse weather conditions, taking particular account of groups likely to be at higher risk from hypothermia. The Department is undertaking separate analysis, following this winter's experience, on deaths related to hypothermia but, on present evidence, the groups at higher risk from hypothermia appear to be the youngest children under 1 and those over 75. For the purposes of exceptionally cold weather payments, however, the Government propose wider coverage as follows:

(a) Householders with someone over 65 in the family. This is the condition that now applies for the basic age-related heating addition;

(b) Householders with a chronically sick and disabled member of the family. The same definition would be used as would apply generally to single payments following the recent amending regulations (which have been the subject of a separate reference to the Committee);

(c) Families with children under 2. This is a group referred to in Chief Adjudication Officer advice on health and safety payments. Two is also the age dividing line for receipt of attendance allowance. Children above that age receiving attendance allowance would qualify the family for help under the criteria for sickness or disability.

The normal £500 capital rule for single payments would be applied.

(e) Payments

32. The Government propose a standard payment for each week of designated exceptionally cold weather. The amount they propose is £5 a week. Its main advantage is that it gives certainty of help so that eligible claimants know what extra help will be given. It also enables help to be given near to the time of the bad weather, without any need to wait for the bill and try to compare the cost against some elusive idea of "normal" fuel consumption. Payment in this way does of course mean that help can be given during a longer period where, notwithstanding one week of exceptionally cold weather,

overall the conditions are sufficiently mild that on previous comparative methods of comparing fuel costs no help would have been given. This does, to some extent offset the effect of fixed 7 day periods of help.

ADMINISTRATION

33. In administrative terms information would be received centrally by the Department from the Meteorological Office. Here the relevant conditions were satisfied, the information would be passed to local offices and the Secretary of State would announce administratively that a period of exceptionally cold weather had occurred. This would be publicised locally in a similar way to the arrangements that have operated during previous cold spells. People in qualifying categories would be expected to make claims for payments within 28 days of the end of the period of exceptionally cold weather. Payments would be subject to the normal £500 capital rule.

COVERAGE

34. The exact coverage of eligible groups and the cost of the system in any one year will clearly fluctuate according to the spread and duration of cold weather in any particular year. Some indication can however be given on potential coverage of claimants and the historical experience.

35. The Government would expect that somewhere around 1½ million claimants would satisfy the basic qualifying conditions; roughly 1 million pensioner householders (after taking account of the capital rule); somewhat over 200,000 claimants with sick and disabled members; and roughly 175,000 families with a child under 2.

36. To illustrate the coverage, the Department has assembled data on particular population centres in relation to an historical 10 year period 1974-83 and the more recent bad weather. In the 10 year period to 1983, for example, help would have been given; in 2 years and 2 weeks in London, 2 years and 4 weeks in Manchester, 4 years and 7 weeks in Glasgow and 3 years and 6 weeks in Birmingham. In 1985, during the worst week in that spell of bad weather, help would have been given in the following main centres - London, Birmingham, Bristol, Leeds, Newcastle and Glasgow. In 1986, help would have been given at some stage (although not necessarily over the whole period - the

spread of intensity of bad weather varied over the whole spell) in the following centres - London, Birmingham, Leeds, Newcastle, Glasgow and Edinburgh. This pattern, which shows the tendency implicit in the system to give help to those parts of the country which are normally colder, is broadly consistent with the starting criterion of a 1 in 5 year probability overall.

REGULATIONS

37. Technically the regulations will replace the present Regulation 26(1)(a) and (2)(a) by provisions which:

- prescribe the specific temperature (-1.5°C) recorded as the average over a standard 7 day period;
- specify that this will be assessed on the basis of data recorded at specific meteorological stations;
- link local office areas (as in the board and lodging regulations) with specific meteorological stations. The regulations will enable data from alternative meteorological stations to be used if, for any reason, data cannot be provided from a particular station;
- require claims to be made within a specified time (28 days) from the end of the period of exceptionally cold weather;
- prescribe the groups who are to be eligible for help (householders with a member of the assessment unit aged 65 or over, householders with a chronically sick or disabled member of the assessment unit, as defined in the Single Payment Regulations as amended, and householders with a child aged under 2 years in the assessment unit. The normal capital rules elsewhere in the regulations are to apply);
- set a standard sum (£5) payable for each week of exceptionally cold weather.

Claims will be decided by adjudication officers and appealable in the normal way.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

38. The Government consider that the present arrangements for considering payments for periods of exceptionally severe weather have clearly been shown to be unsatisfactory. They intend new arrangements to be in place before the onset of the coming winter. The Government consider that their proposals would represent a significant advance on present arrangements in terms of providing clear rules for help, consistency on the basis of a standard test of coldness, and payment of set sums for groups most at risk from the cold.

39. The views of the Committee are invited.

WEATHER STATIONS LINKED TO LO AREAS

<u>Weather Station</u>	<u>LO Area</u>
ABERPOTH	ABERYSTWYTH
ABBOTSINCH (GLASGOW AIRPORT)	AIRDRIE, BELLSHILL, CLYDEBANK, COAT BRIDGE, DUMBARTON, EAST KILBRIDE, GREENOLK, HAMILTON, JOHNSTONE, MOTHERWELL, PAISLEY, GLASGOW, PORT GLASGOW.
AUGHTON	BIRKENHEAD, ELLESMERE PORT, WALLASEY, LIVERPOOL, SOUTHPORT
BEDFORD	CORBY, WELLINGBOROUGH, NORTHAMPTON, BEDFORD, LUTON, MILTON KEYNES
BINBROOK	GRIMSBY, HULL, SCUNTHORPE
BOSCOMBE DOWN	SALISBURY, TROWBRIDGE, ANDOVER
BOULMER BRAWDY BRISTOL	ASHINGTON, BLYTH, BERWICK PEMBROKE DOCK, HAVERFORD WEST BATH, WESTON, BRISTOL
BRIZE NORTON	CHELTENHAM, GLOUCESTER, STROUD, BANBURY OXFORD
CARLISLE	KENDAL, PENRITH, CARLISLE, WORKINGTON
CHIVENOR	BARNSTAPLE
CILFYND	ABERDARE, ABERTILLERY, BARGOED, BLACKWOOD CAERPHILLY, CWNBRAN, MERTHYR TYDFIL PONTYPRIDD, PORTH, RHONDDA WEST, EBBW VALE
COLTISHALL	NORWICH, GT YARMOUTH, LOWESTROFT.
CONINGSBY	BOSTON SKEGNESS
CRANWELL	GRANTHAM, LINCOLN
CULDROSE	PENZANCE
DUMFRIES (DRUNGANS)	DUMFRIES
DYCE (ABERDEEN AIRPORT)	PETERHEAD, ABERDEEN, ARBROATH
EASTHAMSTEAD (BRACKNELL)	ALDERSHOT, BASINGSTOKE, NEWBURY, READING BRACKNELL
ELMDON (B'HAM AIRPORT)	LEAMINGTON, RUGBY, COVENTRY, NUNEATON, B'HAM, DUDLEY, SMETHWICK, WALSALL, WEST BROMWICH, WOLVERHAMTON, KIDDERMINSTER, REDDITCH, WORCESTER

ESKDALEMUIR

ESKMEALS

EXETER

FINNINGLEY

FORT WILLIAM

GATWICK

HEATHROW AIRPORT

HERSTMONCEUX

HONINGTON

HURN (BOURNEMOUTH AIRPORT)

KINLOSS

LEEDS

LEEMING

LERWICK

LEUCHARS

LYNEHAM

MACHRINHANISH

MANCHESTER AIRPORT

GALASHIELS

WHITEHAVEN, BARROW

TORBAY EXETER

DONCASTER, GOOLE, BARNSELY, ROTHERHAM,
WATH-ON-DEARNE, SHEFFIELD

FORT WILLIAM, OBAN

TUNBRIDGE WELLS, CRAWLEY, EPSOM, GUILDFORD,
REDHILL, WOKING

AYLESBURY, HIGH WYCOMBE, HEMEL HEMPSTEAD,
ST ALBANS, WATFORD, SLOUGH, LONDON (inner and
outer)

BOGNOR, BRIGHTON, CHICHESTER, HOVE, LEWES,
WORTHING, EASTBOURNE, HASTINGS

BURY ST EDMUNDS, DISS

NEW FOREST, WEYMOUTH, BOURNEMOUTH, POOLE

ELGIN, INVERNESS

CASTLEFORD, PONTEFRACT, HARPOGATE, YORK,
LEEDS, DEWSBURY, HEMSWORTH, WAKEFIELD,
HALIFAX, HUDDERSFIELD, BRADFORD, KEIGHLEY,
SKIPTON

BISHOP AUCKLAND, DARLINGTON, HEXHAM,
STANLEY, GATESHEAD, NEWCASTLE, WALLSEND,
CHESTER-LE-STREET, DURHAM, STOCKTON
NORTHALLERTON

LERWICK

DUNDEE

CHIPPENHAM, SWINDON

CAMBELTOWN

CHESTER, CREWE, BUXTON, MACCLESFIELD,
NORTHWICH WARRINGTON, WIDNES, WILMSLOW,
ST HELENS, BLACKBURN, PRESTON, SKELMERSDALE,
ACCRINGTON

BURNLEY, PRESTON, SKELMERSDALE, ASHTON,
BOLTON, BURY, FARNWORTH, HYDE, LEIGH,
MANCHESTER, OLDHAM, ROCHDALE, SALE,
SALFORD, STOCKPORT, WIGAN, ROSSENDALE

MANSTON	CANTERBURY, DOVER, FOLKESTONE, THANET, ASHFORD, SITTINGBOURNE, CHATHAM, DARTFORD, GRAVESEND, MAIDSTONE, ROCHESTER
MARHAM	KINGS LYNN
MOUNT BATTEN (PLYMOUTH)	DEVONPORT, PLYMOUTH
MUMBLES	LLANELLI, MORRISTON, NEATH, PORT TALBOT, SWANSEA, AMMANFORD, CARMARTHEN
OKEHAMPTON	LAUNCESTON
PRESTWICK	AYR, IRVINE, KILMARNOCK
RHOOSE (CARDIFF AIRPORT)	BARRY, BRIDGEND, CARDIFF, NEWPORT
ST MAWGAN	ST AUSTELL, TRURO
SHAWBURY	NEWTOWN, WREXHAM, HEREFORD, SHREWSBURY, TELFORD, CANNOCK, LICHFIELD, STAFFORD, NEWCASTLE, STOKE
SOUTHAMPTON	NEWPORT (IOW), SOUTHAMPTON, WINCHESTER, FAREHAM, HAVANT, PORTSMOUTH
SQUIRES GATE (BLACKPOOL)	FYLDE, LANCASTER,
STANSTEAD	BASILDON, GRAYS, SOUTHEND, HARLOW, HERTFORD, STEVENAGE, BRAINTREE, CHELMSFORD
STORNOWAY	STORNOWAY
TRAWSFYNYDD	DOLGELLAU, PORTHMADOG
TURNHOUSE (EDINBURGH AIRPORT)	EDINBURGH, BATHGATE, FALKIRK, DUNFERMLINE KIRKCALDY
TUMMEL BRIDGE	COWDENBEATH, LEVEN, PERTH, STIRLING
TYNEMOUTH	NORTH SHIELDS, HOUGHTON-LE-SPRING, JARROW PETERLEE, SEAHAM, SOUTH SHIELDS, SUNDERLAND
VALLEY	RHYLL, COLWYN BAY, CAENARFON, ANGLESEY
WATNALL	BURTON, DERBY, ILKESTON, CHESTERFIELD, MANSFIELD, SUTTON-IN-ASHFIELD, WORKSOP NOTTINGHAM, LEICESTER, LOUGHBOROUGH
WATTISHAM	ISPWICH, CLACTON, COLCHESTER
WHITBY	BRIDLINGTON, SCARBOROUGH, REDCAR, ESTON, HARTLEPOOL, MIDDLESBOROUGH

WHITHORN

WICK

WYTON

YEOVILTON

STRANRAER

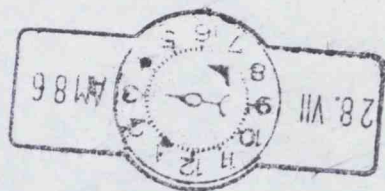
WICK

CAMBRIDGE, PETERBOROUGH

BRIDGEWATER, YEOVIL, TAUTON

SOCIETY SERVICES

STRIKE WEATHER REPORT



PTD



2

NEW ST. ANDREW'S HOUSE
ST. JAMES CENTRE
EDINBURGH EH1 3SX

SECRET

The Rt Hon The Viscount Whitelaw, CH, MC
Lord President of the Council
Privy Council Office
Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AT

28 July 1986

Dear Willie,

NBF

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

I understand that you wish Norman Fowler's letter of 18 July to John MacGregor about severe weather payments to be the subject of comments by members of H Committee before any public announcements are made about the new proposals.

There is absolutely no doubt in anyone's mind that the present scheme is quite unsatisfactory and unworkable. It has given rise to a level of political attack, especially here in Scotland, quite disproportionate to its size and relative importance in terms of assistance to those in need. It is therefore essential that we should effect changes before next winter.

Norman Fowler's proposals strike me as a great improvement, being potentially much simpler in operation, more equitable both in geographical terms and in the amounts to be paid out to individuals and directed to those likely to be hardest hit by exceptionally cold weather. I therefore favour an early announcement in order that the necessary consultations with the Social Security Advisory Committee can get underway.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister, Norman Fowler, Peter Walker, other members of H Committee and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever,
Malcolm

MALCOLM RIFKIND

SOCIAL SERVICES: Severe weather Pt. 2



10 DOWNING STREET

PRIME MINISTER

SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

This is a new and potentially sensitive element in the single payments announcement, with no figures for costs.

The new scheme does seem an advance on the present system (or lack of it)

Content if colleagues, particularly the Chief Secretary, are?

DRS

DN

18 July, 1986.

I fear this
will lead to
a considerable
increase in



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY
 Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY
 Telephone 01-407 5522

From the Secretary of State for Social Services

The Rt Hon John MacGregor OBE MP
 Chief Secretary to the Treasury
 HM Treasury
 Parliament Street
 LONDON
 SW1P 3AG

18 July 1986

Prime Minister
 This seems to me *prima facie*
 likely to be more generous than
 the existing system, though I can't
 be more content, subject to

Dear Chief Secretary,

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER PAYMENTS

You and colleagues will need no reminding of the difficulties we have experienced in recent years over single payments to supplementary benefit claimants for periods of exceptionally severe weather. These have always been a very small part of the scheme but have caused disproportionate political difficulties.

To recap briefly, in 1984/85 payments were made on the basis of a system which compared actual temperature in a particular locality against that which would be expected normally at the time of the year in that same locality. The amount paid was a percentage of the eventual fuel bill, also worked out on the basis of a comparison of the temperature with normal winter experience assessed over the whole period of the fuel bill. The system was roundly condemned because it was complex and highly technical. Most importantly, the system meant that no help was given in Scotland although the temperature was in fact lower there than in parts of the country where help was given.

The system was subsequently ruled invalid legally by the Social Security Commissioners. We discussed the consequences of this last autumn and in particular in H Committee just before Christmas. Further action was overtaken by the extremely severe weather last winter. Because of the legal ruling, no clear criteria operated. Deciding whether the weather was severe was left purely as a matter of local judgement. Payments had to be judged on the basis of the comparison of an actual fuel bill with some notional assessment of what expenditure might have been in a normal period. The result was confusion and much criticism of the Government. The present position remains extremely unsatisfactory and inoperable in practice.

I am sure it is in all our interests to have a more acceptable system in place before this winter. To do so we have to start the formal round of consultation with the Social Security Advisory Committee shortly. That raises the question of how we handle any public announcement.

Your officials are aware that we have been working up proposals with the following main elements. First, we would give payments to standard groups most likely to be vulnerable in extremely bad weather - pensioners, the chronically sick and disabled and families with young children under 2. Second, we would pay a standard amount for each week of severe weather, probably around £5 to those eligible for help. This avoids the difficulties we now experience in working out how much help to give, particularly where claimants use slot meters.

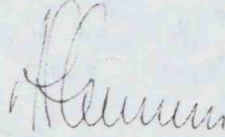
Finally, we intend to designate periods of severe weather in particular localities by reference to actual coldness of temperature. That is, help would be given where, over a given period, the average temperature does not rise above a certain standard. This does, of course, tend to mean more payments in the parts of the country such as Scotland where it is normally colder than in the warmer West and South. In terms of public acceptance, however, it seems easiest to defend a system which gives most help to the parts which are in absolute terms coldest; certainly, a system of comparison with normal has been discredited by the 1984/85 experience. We are still considering the details of the average temperature at which help should be designated, and how we set the period over which the temperature is measured.

The major advantages of this system are that it provides clear criteria with a consistent standard on when help is given, applied across the whole of the country. I will of course ensure that your Department and colleagues who have expressed an interest are given an opportunity to consider more detailed proposals before they are sent for consultation.

Time is, however, short. If we are to lay revised regulations when Parliament returns in the autumn we need to start consultations in the very near future. Now that we are to make the single payments statement next Monday, I would like to include a brief reference to our proposals to revise the exceptionally severe weather system in it. This would head off any subsequent charge that we had deliberately deferred the announcement until the Recess. The reference would be in general terms only. We would simply say that, following reconsideration of the arrangements, the Government will shortly be referring proposals to the Social Security Advisory Committee with the following main elements: payments of a standard amount to set vulnerable groups, made on the basis of a common test of absolute coldness in a given period. The statement would not go beyond that expression in general terms, and supplementary questioning would be answered on the basis that full details would be provided in the consultation document on which comments would be invited before final decisions were taken.

I am sorry to be giving such short notice, but I hope that you and colleagues see no objection in our proceeding in this way. I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Peter Walker, members of H Committee and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours sincerely



NF

NORMAN FOWLER

(Approved by the Secretary of State
and signed in his absence)



CONFIDENTIAL



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP
Secretary of State
Department of Health and Social Security
Alexander Fleming House
Elephant and Castle
London
SE1 6BY

NBPM

6 March 1986

Dear Sir,

EXCEPTIONALLY SEVERE WEATHER

at Ayr.

Thank you for your letter of 4 March.

I recognise the exceptional sensitivity of this area at the moment and am content with the general line you propose on severe weather payments.

However, we need to start considering quite urgently where we go from here. In its present form, the scheme is completely open ended and H Committee concluded that it should be abolished. I gather that, if asked, you will take the line that the government will be considering what if anything needs to be done in the light of this winters' experience. I must ask you not to go beyond that and to imply any commitment to continue the scheme, or, for example, if you perpetuate it through the Social Fund, until we have had a chance to consider it.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Willie Whitelaw, John Wakeham and Peter Walker.

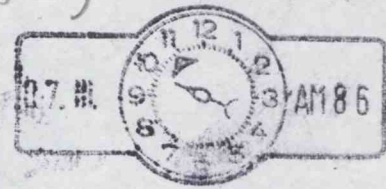
Yours,
JH

JOHN MacGREGOR

CONFIDENTIAL

Soc. SERVICES

General Wearin Payments RTZ





SUBJECT cc MASTER

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

6 March 1986

WINTER CONDITIONS

The Prime Minister discussed this morning with your Secretary of State his minute of 5 March in which he suggests that he should announce in his speech today the establishment of an expert group to identify the root cause why winter deaths in the UK are proportionally higher than elsewhere in Europe.

Your Secretary of State explained that the higher incidents of winter deaths here was a long-standing problem. His purpose in announcing a study group was to move the public debate away from the narrow social security issue to higher ground. The Prime Minister doubted whether it was right to publicise in this afternoon's speech that the Government intended to do work on this problem. The Department already had good material to counter the Opposition's criticism. To inject this new thought into the debate would look defensive and could undermine the progress which the Government had made in counteracting Opposition criticism. The outcome of the study group's deliberations could well be pressure for additional public expenditure, for example on insulation or better heating.

After further discussion, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State agreed that he should not make any reference to any study of this issue in his speech this afternoon, but the Department could, if they felt necessary, consider it quietly and without publicity.

N.L. WICKS

Tony Laurance, Esq.,
Department of Health and Social Security.



CONFIDENTIAL

MS
CEBG

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

5 March 1986

Dear Tony

WINTER CONDITIONS

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's letter of 4 March to the Secretary of State for Energy proposing a conference later this year to examine the wider public health dimensions of this country's response to winter conditions.

The Prime Minister fears that to propose such a conference in tomorrow's debate would appear defensive and as if the Government was ashamed of its record on the provision of special help for the elderly during winter. She believes that the Government has a strong record on this, and should be prepared to stand upon it. There is also a clear risk that a conference would lead to greater pressures for higher public spending. With these factors in mind, the Prime Minister believes that it would be better not to propose a conference in tomorrow's debate.

I am copying this letter to Joan MacNaughton (Lord President's Office), Richard Broadbent (Chief Secretary's Office), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office), Robin Young (Department of the Environment), Robert Gordon (Scottish Office), Colin Williams (Welsh Office), Jim Daniell (Northern Ireland Office) and Geoff Dart (Department of Energy).

David
Norgrove

David Norgrove

Tony Laurance Esq
Department of Health and Social Security

CONFIDENTIAL

✓6

PRIME MINISTER

WINTER CONDITIONS

I am sure that it would be a mistake for Mr Fowler to mention in his speech tomorrow, as he proposes in his minute below, the establishment of an expert group to identify the root cause why winter deaths in the UK are proportionately higher than elsewhere in Europe.

Such an announcement would only raise expectations "that the Government would do something about the problem". But we do not know precisely what the problem is. Nor whether it is a problem that can be dealt with by Government action. The risk would be that the study group, whose report would have to be published, would come up with a great menu of expensive recommendations that could not be financed within existing expenditure limits, so the Government would have created a rod for its own back.

Mr Fowler will no doubt maintain that he could keep control of the study group to prevent such an outcome. All experience is against him. Remember the report on council housing maintenance, originally commissioned by Mr Gow, which produced recommendations costing £19 billion.

None of this is to suggest that DHSS should not study, in a quiet unpublicised way, the problem. But nothing should be said in the debate tomorrow. Mr Fowler has enough positive material on the Government's record to see off Mr Meacher in tomorrow's debate.

Should I reply to Mr Fowler, tactfully, in the sense above?
He may raise the issue at Cabinet.

N. L. W.

N. L. WICKS
5 March 1986

Since dictating this Mr Fowler's P.S. has telephoned to say that he will raise this in Cabinet unless he can have 5 minutes with you. See him for 5 minutes before Cabinet? (He will be at E 4.) Yes mt



PRIME MINISTER

WINTER CONDITIONS

I have seen your Private Secretary's letter of ^{att} 5 March. I entirely agree with you that the Government's record in this area needs no apology. Both I and the Minister of State will clearly be emphasising, for example, the real improvement in pensions and the increased help in payments for heating which are now being made.

However, there are two problems which I believe should concern us. First, winter deaths in the United Kingdom have been proportionately greater than in virtually any other part of Europe. This is a longstanding problem though it has actually improved over the last twenty years. Nevertheless, it remains a serious concern. Second, the continuing growth in numbers of the very elderly from half a million in 1981 to a million at the turn of the century will mean that the scale of the problem is likely to increase.

There is no single or simple solution. It is certainly not just an issue for the social security system. But what we urgently need to do is to bring together a wide range of scientific knowledge, skills and experience. I am content not to have a "public conference". But I do need an expert group to identify the root causes and to advise me how best to tackle them in the longer term. I have in mind in particular those expert in relevant scientific disciplines and with a deep understanding of the needs of the over-80s - for example, a physiologist, an epidemiologist and a geriatrician. I believe it is important that the Government retains the initiative in the Debate tomorrow and I would be grateful for your agreement to my announcing my intentions on this. The point is really that Government does need such advice to enable it effectively to discharge its responsibilities for the public health.

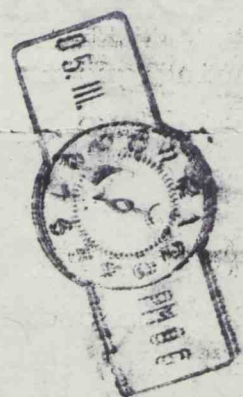
5 March 1986

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "R. ...".

N F



COMMUNICATIONS



11 11



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY

Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY

Telephone 01-407 5522

From the Secretary of State for Social Services

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MBE MP
 Secretary of State for Energy
 Department of Energy
 Thames House South
 Millbank
 LONDON
 SW1P 4QJ

Prime Minister 2

DKW

5/3

4 March 1986

This is potentially an expensive proposal, despite Mr Fowler's protestations. An announcement of a conference now also looks defensive and as if the Government is ashamed of its record. Do you want to oppose this idea?

DKW

5/3

Dear Secretary of State

WINTER CONDITIONS

As I mentioned to you, I propose to convene a conference a little later this year to examine the wider public health dimensions of this country's response to winter conditions. You have agreed to be represented as too has Kenneth Baker. I would also like to invite Malcolm Rifkind, Nick Edwards and Tom King to be represented.

The theme of the conference will be that as a nation we do not appear to be as successful in adapting our way of life to winter conditions as well as many of our European neighbours or North American countries. A striking feature is that the monthly variation in mortality from all causes in England is greater than in other western countries with more severe climates, affects almost all age groups and extends far beyond the formal diagnosis of "hypothermia" to include mortality from coronary heart disease, stroke and chest infections.

The aims of the conference, bearing in mind the growing numbers of very elderly people in the United Kingdom, will be to:

- identify the nature of the problems which any winter causes for elderly people and others in this country;
- identify the various economic, social and cultural factors which affect the ability of elderly people to cope with severe weather;

E.R.

- identify gaps in our knowledge which could be filled by, for example, further research;
- consider what immediate measures could be taken to improve matters, and how far these can sensibly be coordinated by Government, for example advice on how best to cope with winter conditions.

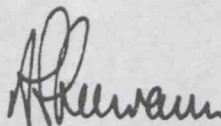
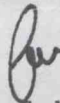
One aspect to the background to the conference is the general tendency to concentrate on cash help for elderly people and in particular on supplementary benefit heating additions and special help during severe weather. Our record in cash terms is markedly better than previous Governments but we need to make it clear that cash help is not enough to solve the problem of seasonal mortality. I believe that a conference on the lines I am proposing will do much to establish that we are talking of a much wider issue and will lead to a variety of different ideas and not just a simple recommendation to spend more money in an ill-targeted fashion on benefits generally.

The outcome of the conference will depend on how far we can carry out the aims set out above. But my expectation is that we should be able to establish an agreed long term programme for action which will attract wide cross-party support.

I propose to announce that I shall convene this conference during the Debate on the Elderly, which the Opposition have called on Thursday.

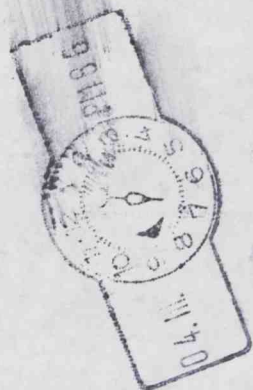
I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, Willie Whitelaw, John MacGregor, John Wakeham as well as Ken Baker, Malcolm Rifkind, Nick Edwards and Tom King.

Yours sincerely

NORMAN FOWLER

(Approved by the Secretary of State
and signed in his absence)



By not deeply heat failed to
meet their slave state
commitments thereby undermining
the integrity . . .

Answer: what happens to
the Ruffer Stock.

PART 1 ends:-

Harvard extract 26-2-86

PART 2 begins:-

SS/DHSS to SS/Energy 4-3-86

Grey Scale #13



A 1 2 3 4 5 6 **M** 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 **B** 17 18 19

