



All Members

18 December 2020

Dear Members of Senedd

During Plenary on 18 November 2020, in response to a question from Huw Irranca-Davies MS, the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government offered to share details of the communications strategy in place to make sure people are aware of the opportunities available to them to help maximise their household income. It was agreed this would be shared with Members across the Chamber, to enable you to amplify and share those messages in your own constituencies.

Given the acute financial pressures many families are experiencing as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic Ministers have agreed a set of practical actions that Welsh Government will take forward over the next six months to help maximise the incomes of families living in poverty in Wales, reduce essential living costs and provide support to build their financial resilience. Further details can be found in our recently published [Child poverty: Income Maximisation Action Plan 2020 to 2021](#).

We have delivered time limited social media communication campaigns covering a range of Welsh Government financial support schemes throughout the pandemic to target and promote the specific support that is available. This has included:

- encouraging families to find out if they were eligible to claim **Free School Meals** and the **Pupil Development Grant** to improve take up of the grant and spread awareness to those families who may be new to the benefits system;
- raising awareness of the **Discretionary Assistance Fund (DAF)** and delivering targeted messages to support people on low income, people who had recently lost their job and those awaiting Universal Credit payments;

In addition, we are also using social media to direct people who are tempted to borrow unaffordable credit for Christmas, and at high cost, to affordable sources of credit such as credit unions.

https://twitter.com/WG_Communities/status/1337063663107248129
https://twitter.com/LIC_Cymunedau/status/1337063071752335364

<https://www.facebook.com/lookingoutforeachothersafely/photos/a.107594427557244/216913669958652/>
<https://www.facebook.com/lookingoutforeachothersafely/photos/a.107594427557244/216915836625102/?type=3>

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

We are currently working with one local authority to develop an exemplar approach to publicising the DAF on their web site. Once agreed this will be promoted to all local authorities in Wales as best practice to be adopted.

We also will be utilising all of our Welsh Government social media channels to target and promote the specific support that is available for individuals, this will include:

- Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- Emergency Assistance Payment
- Self-isolation payments
- Healthy Start
- CALL Helpline

We will produce a social media template for stakeholders with key messages and the relevant web links to target and promote the specific support that is available for individuals.

We understand that not everyone has access to social media so we have disseminated our covid-19 financial support leaflet to partners which include foodbanks, local authorities, third sector organisations and the mental health network to provide support to those families in need. The most recent versions can be seen here:

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-06/financial-support-leaflet.pdf>

We are also providing support and advice for individuals and businesses affected by the coronavirus through the following links:

<https://gov.wales/find-support-affected-coronavirus>

<https://gov.wales/work-skills-financial-support>

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Information for individuals and businesses in Wales - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

The leaflets and websites are being updated regularly to reflect any changes and to ensure all of the information included is still relevant.

One of the objectives of the Income Maximisation Plan is to ensure families are supported to claim all the financial support they are entitled to. Personal barriers, a lack of awareness and difficulties completing the necessary claim forms and/or providing evidence to support claims mean many people are not claiming the range of welfare benefits and other financial support available to them. This can be more prevalent for some groups, in particular families with disabled children or with a disabled adult in the household, BAME families, and families with experience of domestic abuse or a relationship breakdown. Co-ordinated action is critical to ensure all those eligible for support are made aware of, and are encouraged to claim, their correct entitlement to welfare benefits and payments.

Through Citizens Advice Cymru, we are delivering the Early Alert Scheme for Rent Arrears and other Household Debt in the Private Rented Sector. Private rented sector tenants can access free, confidential and independent advice on paying rent, rent arrears, debt, housing, benefits, financial capability and a range of other legal issues.

They can contact advisers on the private rented sector debt helpline which is a free phone number - 0808 278 7920. Further information for tenants struggling to pay rent can be found here: <https://gov.wales/problems-paying-your-rent-during-coronavirus-pandemic>

As part of this scheme, Citizens Advice Cymru have also trained their advisers to provide help and support for tenants in the private rented sector to maximise their income. Citizens Advice Cymru have collaborated with Rent Smart Wales to produce a Universal Credit e-learning training course which has just been launched. The objective of the training is to enable private sector landlords to support their tenants to navigate the benefits system and help to reduce any stigma attached to claiming benefits. Further information about the course can be found here: <https://www.rentsmart.gov.wales/en/courses/>

A further two activities within the Plan focus on the funding and delivery of training for key front-line workers who work directly with children, young people and their families. The training will help to increase their knowledge and skills in order that they're better equipped to provide appropriate benefits support to the people they help. Staff in these roles have often built trusted relationships with families. Evidence shows having such relationships and linking support to well-established and regarded services i.e. basing support services in places where families already go or regularly visit, is a critical factor in encouraging people to engage with support services or programmes, including claiming welfare benefits.

In addition, we have commissioned Ferret Information Systems to develop and deliver information packs and online training for around 1,000 frontline workers across Wales (including family support workers; housing support workers; community leaders; community health teams). This training will be designed to improve participants' understanding of welfare benefits and wider financial support systems, as well as coaching on how to work with families to overcome any barriers they may have to claiming. The above training will help participants to have the tools and information they need to support households to maximise their incomes, however it will not go as far as training people to become benefits advisers. The Action Research 'Income Maximisation Pilot' will take that next step.

We are also undertaking six 'Test and Learn' pilots across Wales which will aim to raise awareness of benefit entitlements, encourage take-up and facilitate longer-term behavioural change amongst groups least likely to claim the financial support they are entitled to. This includes BAME households, families with disabled children/disabled adult(s) and people experiencing domestic violence.

The Welsh government is committed to ensuring that families in Wales are aware of and are able to access the support they are entitled to and I would encourage all Members across the Chamber to support the work we are doing by circulating the information available within your constituencies and communities.

Yours sincerely



Julie James AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Tai a Llywodraeth Leol
Minister for Housing and Local Government