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Caritas Social Action Network consultation response

Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit: exceptions to the 2-child limit

Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) represents over 40 Catholic charities in England and Wales. Following consultation with our member charities providing children's services, please find our response to question 3 of the consultation *Exceptions to the limiting of the individual Child Element of Child Tax Credit and the Child Element of Universal Credit to a maximum of 2 children*.

The majority of the exemptions were judged to be fair and reasonable, and we welcome the opportunity to add our expertise to the policy implementation process.

Q3. Where a formal order does not exist, do you agree that evidence from a social worker is the best approach to providing the necessary evidence of the need for an informal family and friends care arrangement?

Caritas Social Action Network (CSAN) member charities do believe that social workers are ordinarily the best people to confirm a third or subsequent child is living in an informal care arrangement.

Where there is an informal fostering arrangement the local authority should have this fact registered. Therefore a social worker could confirm this as part of their role is to support and advise carers in informal fostering arrangements. However, if the local authority has not been informed by the carer, no penalty should be imposed on the carer as registration can then take place.

The exception to this is where a child is placed with someone as a ward of court, in which case our members have suggested that the court should provide the relevant evidence.

In addition, they have expressed concerns surrounding the use of social workers to confirm a family's eligibility for an exemption from the two-child limit to tax credits.

Firstly, they raised the issue of social workers' current workload and the risk of additional pressures upon a stretched service.

Secondly, there is a risk that the responsibility to provide the evidence will be shifted onto guardians, who will be told they must find a social worker and are then left to do this alone. Given the pressures on social workers mentioned above, this may not be easily done. This would then be an added strain on children's services in the voluntary sector as families turn to charities for advice and support, simply for claiming the benefits they need and are entitled to.



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Finally, our members fear a further bureaucratic step will stretch translating resources even further, disadvantaging those from ethnic minorities without English as a first language.

We therefore recommend that DWP carefully consider the additional costs and resources that should be made available to local authorities in order to ensure that social workers are able to take on this extra responsibility and ensure that no-one be deprived of tax credits to which they are entitled.