

A Fit and Proper Healthy Start

The Council, on 15th March 2023 passed a Motion - A Fit and Proper Healthy Start - and the reply that has been received from the Department of Health and Social Care is copied below:

Our ref: DE-1451347

Dear Mr Catherall,

Thank you for your correspondence of 22 March to the Minister for Social Care about the Healthy Start scheme. I have been asked to reply and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

I appreciate your concerns.

You may be aware the Healthy Start scheme is delivered by the NHS Business Services Authority (NHS BSA) on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care. The NHS BSA led the work to digitise the Healthy Start scheme, on behalf of the department, to help families to apply for, receive and use the benefits. The digitised Healthy Start scheme introduced an online application form, to replace the paper form, and a pre-paid card to replace the paper vouchers. The paper voucher system ended on 31 March 2022.

Following the introduction of the online application form the department was aware of some issues for some applicants, these have now been resolved. More generally the NHS BSA continues to work with stakeholders and users on service improvements to make the user experience as simple as possible

You ask that the Government increase the value of the Healthy Start benefit by at least 14%. The Healthy Start scheme is kept under continuous review. In April 2021 the value of the Healthy Start benefit increased from £3.10 to £4.25 per week, providing additional support to pregnant women and families on lower incomes to make healthy food choices. Due to this increase, eligible families with children aged under one each receive £8.50 per week instead of £6.20. There are currently no plans to increase the value of Healthy Start.

The latest figures for May 2023 show that uptake of the Healthy Start scheme in Oldham is 70%, higher than the national average figure of 64.9%. The NHS BSA actively promotes the Healthy Start scheme through multiple digital channels and has created tools to help stakeholders promote the scheme at a local level, which are easy to access through the Healthy Start website. The NHS BSA has also reached out to stakeholders to see how it can support them to promote the Healthy Start scheme and is engaging with contacts in priority areas.

Uptake of the fully digitised scheme is higher than the previous paper voucher scheme.

I hope this response is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

K Jarvis
Ministerial Correspondence and Public Enquiries
Department of Health and Social Care