



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Maggie Throup MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Vaccines and Public Health*

*39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

PO-1397939

Ms Kath Dalmeny
Chief Executive
Sustain
By email to: kath@sustainweb.org

27 April 2022

Dear Ms Dalmeny,

Thank you for your correspondence of 10 March to Sajid Javid, co-signed by a number of interested parties, about the roll-out of the digital Healthy Start scheme. I apologise for the delay in replying.

I am grateful to you for raising these concerns. I am aware that you have recently met departmental policy officials to discuss this matter and that you are due to meet colleagues in the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA). I hope that these meetings provide better insight into the Healthy Start scheme. Nonetheless, I hope the following information is useful.

In November, the NHSBSA took over responsibility for delivering the Healthy Start scheme. Since the digital Healthy Start scheme went live, there have been over 345,000 successful applications, with over 107,000 of these coming from households new to Healthy Start.

The online application process and prepaid cards bring many benefits, including applicants receiving a much quicker decision on their application, greater flexibility to use the Healthy Start card in any shop that accepts Mastercard and sells eligible food items, and improved purchase flexibility, with any funds not spent remaining on the card for up to 16 weeks for future purchases of healthy food and milk.

We recognise that there have been some issues with the transition to the new Healthy Start scheme. We would encourage anyone who believes that they are eligible and has had an online application rejected to reapply, as there is now a solution in place to resolve this matter. The paper voucher scheme closed on 31 March.

The NHSBSA has also had reports that some people were having issues using the card. The NHSBSA has updated the letter issued with the card to provide further details to cardholders to help reduce potential issues, including information about activating their card and receiving their PIN, checking their balance, using the contactless payment feature, where they can use their card, and what items can be purchased. The NHSBSA will be working with its user research team and stakeholders to support card users and will also continue to monitor feedback and investigate issues that are reported.

The NHSBSA operates a number of helplines for Healthy Start beneficiaries, which include options for those using the prepaid card and those in receipt of vouchers. They are charged at a local rate rather than a premium rate, following the NHSBSA's move away from 0845 numbers

to 0300 or 01 and 02 numbers as part of the Fair Telecoms Campaign, and in line with national and other Government agencies. Telephone companies must include calls to 0300 numbers in the free minutes of a call plan, and any call charges outside a plan will be charged at the local rate specific to the caller's telecoms provider.

The NHSBSA will continue to consider the extent to which Healthy Start beneficiaries have call plans, and its user research to date has shown that most beneficiaries do have them. For those who have access to digital services, general queries about Healthy Start can be made via email and to the Healthy Start Facebook and Twitter social media channels, which are both free services. The department is working with the NHSBSA to keep demand on the contact centre under review.

Online shopping is not available with the prepaid card at the moment and there are no current plans to include this. Beneficiaries can use their Healthy Start card to make part payments where the checkout systems allow this. The NHSBSA continues to welcome feedback on all issues relating to the card's use.

With regard to data on the Healthy Start scheme, the number of beneficiaries on the digital scheme will be made available as soon as possible.

For the past two years, the NHSBSA has hosted regular showcases and updated stakeholders on the promotion of the scheme. It has developed a communications pack, which was issued in February to stakeholders and local authorities so that they can promote the scheme within their networks and in their local areas. This is available online, and the NHSBSA continues to promote the scheme through targeted social media posts, which have reached over one million people and which direct people to the website to apply.

The Healthy Start scheme is kept under continuous review. There are no current plans to extend its eligibility criteria.

I hope this reply is helpful, and I would be grateful if you could share it with your co-signatories.

Yours ever,



MAGGIE THROUP MP