

ANGUS COUNCIL

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

21 AUGUST 1997

SUBJECT: JOB SEEKERS ALLOWANCE - PROBLEMS FACED BY RURAL RESIDENTS

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, TRANSPORT & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Abstract: This report explains the background to problems faced by rural residents who want to claim the Job Seekers Allowance

1 RECOMMENDATION

1.1 It is recommended that the Angus Council:

- a) note the contents of this report and, in particular, the current rules regarding postal claims for the Job Seekers Allowance; and
- b) request that COSLA make representations to the new Government to look again at the position of rural residents who wish to claim the Job Seekers Allowance.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Job Seekers Allowance which was introduced in October 1996 requires people claiming benefit to "sign on" every 2 weeks. There is a relaxation for people who live more than one hour away (from the Job Centre) by public transport or who would have to be away from home for four hours or more. These people are allowed to sign on using a postal client system. Before the Job Seekers Allowance was introduced, people had the right for a postal claim if they lived more than six miles away from the Job Centre.
- 2.2 The only exceptions to the new rule are people who have a mental or physical disability restricting their mobility. Those claiming benefit have the option of signing on at Arbroath, Forfar or Montrose. People living in some rural areas such as Edzell are treated as postal clients.
- 2.3 This report has been prepared in response to a question raised by Councillor G Allan at the last meeting of the Economic Development Committee on 29 May 1997.

3 SCOPE FOR CHANGE IN POLICY

- 3.1 COSLA has already challenged the previous Government by asking the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to look again at the position of rural residents who want to claim the Job Seekers Allowance.

- 3.2 COSLA believes that the change in rules for postal claimants has given insufficient consideration to the impact of a more general policy on rural residents and that rural residents are further disadvantaged as a result.
- 3.3 The new rules do not take into account the fact that public transport services in rural areas are expensive, often infrequent and sometimes non-existent. Even for those claimants with a car, the higher cost of petrol in rural areas means that a journey to the Job Centre adds to the already high cost of rural living. Those claimants affected are likely to be among those already experiencing disadvantage and poverty and changes such as this have only exacerbated the problem.
- 3.4 In the circumstances it is proposed to write to COSLA requesting that the matter be raised again with the new Government.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

5 CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Chief Executive, Director of Law & Administration, Director of Finance, Director of Personnel, Director of Education and Director of Social Work have been consulted and are in agreement with the recommendation contained in this report.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The new rules governing postal claims for the Job Seekers Allowance are unnecessarily exacerbating the disadvantage experienced by people in rural areas. Therefore COSLA should be asked to re-affirm its stance by making appropriate representation to the present Government.

NOTE

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

AA/DV/MR

30 July 1997

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