

Councillor P. Black
Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

(By Email)

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Please ask for: Councillor Andrea Lewis

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Our Ref: AL/JG

Your Ref:

Date: 7 March 2024

Dear Councillor Black,

Re: Scrutiny Letter to Cllr. Andrea Lewis (SPC 13 Feb - Call In)

Thank you to the Scrutiny Performance Panel for giving us the opportunity to discuss the wording clarification and change to the Service Standards.

In my presentation to Cabinet, I explained that the Charter and Service Standards will continue to change and develop over time. We deliberately put a start date of the beginning of April so that we could make them as current as possible before they go live for the first time.

As I made clear in the meeting, the standards have been updated to take account of the helpful amendments to the Free School Meals standard, suggested by the Chief Executive and quoted in your letter.

In respect of the last paragraph of your letter, as was mentioned in the meeting, in practice, we regularly deal with applications within days of them being received and it is usual for eligibility information to be sent to the Education Service on the same day entitlement is confirmed by the Eligibility Checking Service.

Having made some enquiries about the other local authorities mentioned we can see that they have purchased the online application form referred to in the meeting. We would need to undertake a cost/benefit analysis to determine whether purchasing this service would be value for money given it would only provide a minor improvement in the service currently provided.

In addition, as was explained in the meeting, an instant yes or no assessment is often not available from the online service due to DWP processing times so there would be no real benefit in those cases as customers could only be told, automatically, that their entitlement could not be confirmed. Where that currently happens, a member of staff contacts the applicant to help resolve any issues and this personal engagement is something we would want to continue with.

That said, the service is always looking for even a small improvement in customer experience. To that end our inhouse Digital Service had started to work on an improved online application form, but resources were redirected to work on COVID and cost of living related grant processes. When we are in a position to restart this work, we will seek to include the best elements an externally purchased application form has to offer where we can.

Yours sincerely



Y Cynghorydd Andrea Lewis / Councillor Andrea Lewis
Dirprwy Arweinydd / Aelod y Cabinet dros Drawsnewid Gwasanaethau
Deputy Leader / Cabinet Member for Service Transformation