

WASPI CALL TO ACTION: COVID-19 HEALTH EMERGENCY

TEXT OF LETTER SENT TO MPs FROM SOLENT WASPI SUPPORTERS' GROUP

22nd April 2020

“You will by now have received an email from the WASPI Campaign calling for action for WASPI women. As I represent women born in the 1950s in your constituency, I thought I would give you some background as to why we are making this urgent plea.

We have received emails/responses from WASPI women who have been very badly affected by the Covid-19 emergency. Women are telling us that they are affected in several ways:

- Their shopping habits have had to change. They can no longer pick up the cheapest items at several outlets (e.g. cleaning materials in Wilco's) or pop down to the supermarket at the end of the day to buy the short-dated items that have been marked down
- Prices in the food stores are beginning to creep up. Also, some cheaper items - e.g. tinned tomatoes used to make cheap, nutritious meals - are now rationed.
- Their work has dried up. Some do casual work (e.g. exam invigilation) which is no longer available. Some work as cleaners in people's homes. They are not able to continue as their employers are now at home all the time. Some worked in tourism on a casual/seasonal basis; again, these opportunities are now closed.
- People are having to spend more to heat their homes, as the free places they used to frequent are now closed (libraries, museums etc.)
- Many are responsible for the care of elderly, vulnerable relatives, and have had to stop working to reduce the risk of bringing the virus home
- Others supplemented their income by providing services like exercise classes, or home teaching support, which has now dried up. They fall through the net of being self-employed as they had not been doing it long enough to qualify under the present scheme.

It feels as though WASPI women working in the gig economy (temporary, part time, zero hours, no paid holidays, often casual or short term) fall through all the Government support proposals currently on offer.

Women are also telling us that if they have a small income, they are not eligible for Universal Credit.

To verify, I used one of the benefits calculators recommended by the Government to calculate what benefits a woman could receive. As an example, she lives alone, in her own bungalow, Council tax band B, with no outstanding mortgage, receiving an occupational pension of £400 per month and with savings of £5,000. If she were born in June 1954, she would be entitled to pension credit of £352.92 per month plus Council tax support of £89.42. If she were born in June 1956, she would only be entitled to Council Tax support of £82.62.

Can you imagine having to live on £400 per month, with no prospect of supplementing your income in any way because we must follow the guidelines to keep ourselves and others safe? These women are desperate; they need help now.

That is why we are calling for:

- early access to Pension Credit for all WASPI women. This will give immediate relief to those who are desperate and cannot afford the basics required to live during this emergency.

- early access to State Pension for those due to reach State Pension age in this financial year. This will give those women who usually go out to work an income. It will cover all women, even those on zero hours contracts or short-term casual work. It will take them out of the many unemployed people that the Government needs to help in other ways. This measure will also prepare these women so that they are able to contribute to the economic recovery through spending, rather than being impoverished with no disposable income.

You may have already heard from some of your constituents, and we do advise them to keep you informed.

I very much hope you will be able to support this urgent call.”

Shelagh Simmons
Coordinator
Solent WASPI Supporters' Group

Portsmouth, Southampton, Winchester, South Hampshire and the Isle of Wight

SENT TO:

Suella Braverman MP	Fareham
Steve Brine MP	Winchester
Caroline Dinenage MP	Gosport
Flick Drummond MP	Meon Valley
Paul Holmes MP	Eastleigh
Dr Julian Lewis MP	New Forest East
Alan Mak MP	Havant
Penny Mordaunt MP	Portsmouth North
Stephen Morgan MP	Portsmouth South
Caroline Nokes MP	Romsey & Southampton North
Bob Seely MP	Isle of Wight
Royston Smith MP	Southampton Itchen
Sir Desmond Swayne MP	New Forest West
Alan Whitehead MP	Southampton Test