



Personal Independence Payments

COVID 19 Factsheet

July 2020

Introduction

Personal Independence Payments – generally known as PIP for short – is the government benefit paid to Deaf and Disabled People to help with the extra costs of living with an impairment/disability or a long-term health condition.

PIP is replacing Disability Living Allowance – generally known as DLA for short. Everyone has been getting DLA will have to apply again under the new rules for PIP. This includes people who were given a life-time award for DLA.

Almost every-one applying for PIP or being reassessed because they were paid DLA would normally have to go to a centre to be assessed by a health care professional.

The Covid 19 crisis has meant the government has had to change the way people applying for PIP or being reassessed having been on DLA. This factsheet gives you details about these changes.

Important note

The government announced the changes on 23 March 2020 and said they would be in place for at least 3 months and would then be reviewed. In July the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)s confirmed that most of the changes would continue but the situation would be kept under review.

Merton CIL try to make sure we update this factsheet when changes are made but there may be a short gap between changes being announced and the factsheet being updated

Reassessments

For people who receive PIP

In March, DWP said that people who had been awarded PIP for a certain amount of time and were due to be reassessed would have the reassessment delayed and keep getting their PIP for at least another 6 months.

In July DWP said it would slowly re-start assessments. It will start with reassessments that had to be stopped in March. It will contact you when it is ready to do your reassessment.

However, if you think you are now entitled to a higher rate of PIP because your impairment/disability has changed, you can still ask to be reassessed at any time. This is likely to involve a telephone assessment – see below.

For people who receive DLA

The DWP stopped the process of moving people from DLA to PIP in March because of the Covid 19 crisis. In July DWP said they would slowly start the process again and will write to people when they are ready to do the assessment.

You do need to do anything until the DWP contacts and you will keep getting DLA until the reassessment is completed.

Current arrangements for PIP applications assessments

The normal process for applying for PIP is filling in the application form and then attending a centre for an assessment by a medical professional.

People are not being asked to go to assessment centres because of the covid 19 crisis. Decisions about PIP are being made based on the application form with a telephone assessment where needed.

Telephone assessments are not a new idea. They have always been available to some people applying for PIP but the DWP and the companies that run the assessment process for them have always preferred to get people to go to assessment centres.

How telephone assessments happen

How they let you know about the call

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) or the company working for them should send you a letter at least a week before the assessment. Sometimes they will telephone you before the assessment too to make sure you have got the letter and know when the assessment is happening.

However, sometimes people are only told a few days before the assessment and this can make it difficult for some people. There are also reports that sometimes people are not called at the time they are told.

Tips:

- If the date/time for the call is a problem for you, let them know. You are normally allowed to change the date once – but they might change it more than once if there is a problem like not being well but you will need to talk to them about this.

- If you have problems with using the telephone, let them know about any arrangements you might need like an interpreter or an advocate.

How long it will take

Telephone assessments should take about an hour. Sometimes they will take longer.

Tips:

- Ask if you need a break during the assessment – especially if you need to get a drink or go to the toilet.
- It's your assessment – if there are things you want to say, take the time to say them.
- Have a list or notes of the things you want to say – you can write things down and read them out if it helps.
- If you are using a mobile, make sure it's charged.

Having someone with you

You are allowed to have someone with you on the telephone call. This can be a relative, a friend, or an advocate/advisor.

Tip:

- Merton CIL can help with the telephone assessment and do the call with you.
- Talk to the person who's going to be with you before the call about what you want to say during the assessment.

Arrangements for appeals

If you disagree with the result of the assessment, you can still challenge the decision by making an appeal. In a lot of cases the tribunals decide in favour of the benefit applicant so it is always worth considering this.

There is usually a hearing for an appeal but these are also being held by telephone because of the Covid 19 situation. Plans are also underway to use internet system like Skype and Zoom for hearings but the courts need to make sure this is secure.

Tribunals also make some decisions using the papers that are supplied to them about the case without holding a hearing.

If you are thinking about making an appeal, Merton CIL can give you support and advice be with you for the hearing.

Help and advice

There are a number of organisations in Merton that you can contact for help with PIP and other benefits.

Merton CIL – Support for local Deaf and Disabled people – 0203 397 3119

Age UK Merton – Support for older people around benefits and pensions, housing options, social care and befriending - 020 8648 5792

Citizens Advice – 0344 243 8430 (weekdays 10.00 am – 4.00 pm)

Merton Council Welfare Benefits Team – 020 8545 4178