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Fairness for Carers:

I welcome that most benefits, including Carer's Allowance, were uprated by 10.1% from April this year. However, I note that this is still less than the rate of inflation recorded in October 2022, and so is not the real terms increase that many charities have called for. With food prices and rents increasing, heating bills going up and taxes rising, I know this is a very difficult time for many. That is why I have been calling on Ministers to offer real help to people who need it.

As constituents may know, the Chancellor did not raise the earnings limit for Carer's Allowance in this year's Spring Budget beyond the small increase preannounced in November 2022. Nor have Ministers given any indication that they plan to amend the rules stipulating that a claim can only be made for one person per carer. I recognise that this will be disappointing to some constituents and I hope the Government will reflect on this as it determines the rate of benefits such as Carer's Allowance for the next financial year.

The Opposition has also asked the Government to assess the potential merits of providing Cost of Living Payments to recipients of Carer's Allowance along similar lines to the Disability Cost of Living Payment, as suggested by carers' groups. Unfortunately, I note that Ministers have declined to provide an answer on this point.

In my view, we also need to reform social care so that families can get the support they need to look after sick and disabled relatives, so that they themselves can work if they are able to.

More widely, I believe we must reform the way Universal Credit operates and ensure that the system treat people with dignity, not burden them with unaffordable debts. I believe that our economy has been forced into a spiral of higher taxes, lower investment, squeezed wages and the running down of public services, all of which damage growth. In contrast to this Government's record, I want to see policies which create jobs and help people into work to widen opportunities across our country.

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