

Mark quizzes Government over 'wages' for people with learning disabilities

Mark Lancaster has quizzed the government after constituents with learning disabilities were no longer paid their 'therapeutic wage'.

The city MP highlighted the legal 'grey area' in Work and Pensions Questions yesterday (Monday) after the Â£2-a-day payment was ceased for people working at outlets run by the MacIntyre charity.

The Milton Keynes North MP wrote to Milton Keynes Council, which has a contract with MacIntyre, who said that they were advised paying this 'therapeutic wage' was not the minimum wage and therefore illegal.

However, parents and carers have argued that Â£2 is a vital reward for the MacIntyre workers' efforts in the cafes and shops, who have been greatly distressed by its removal.

Minister for disabled people, Maria Miller MP, said that there were lots of volunteering opportunities for disabled people.

But her answer did not address the point about therapeutic payments, and Mr Lancaster has vowed to continue to push for a resolution for the MacIntyre workers, their families and carers.

After the debate he said: "The National Minimum Wage Act was a great achievement by the previous Government in ensuring people are not exploited. However, it has produced this unintended consequence. The Act seems to say that you are either a worker, and should be paid Â£5.93 an hour, or a volunteer, in which case you should earn nothing. However, not everything is black and white and I am assured that this small financial reward is greatly appreciated by the people involved with MacIntyre. I am determined to get to the bottom of what can be done to help my constituents."

Mr Lancaster has also written to the Department for Work and Pensions on the matter and awaits a response.