

USING THE MEDIA CREATIVELY AND POITEVELY TO HELP FAMILIES IN NEED

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Here's a scenario from the UK. Imagine something similar in your country.

Consider your media strategy to bring your view on this issue into the public domain. Consider 'new' media as well as 'old', so incorporate Twitter, Facebook as well as radio, printpress, websites.

Changes to the Child Maintenance system

What is the current system and why does it need changing?

- The current system provides for the payment of maintenance when couples with children split up. It allows the parent bringing up the children to receive money from their former partner.
- In most cases it is the father who pays maintenance to the mother.
- There is a problem with the current system because the amount to be paid is often disputed and payments are regularly missed.
- The Government want to encourage families to take greater responsibility by empowering them to come together and resolve their issues in a collaborative fashion rather than relying on a bureaucratic system.

Why is the child maintenance system important?

- The government believe that the child maintenance system should be one that places positive outcomes for families and children at its heart.
- It should also deliver an efficient maintenance service for those who need it and provide value for money to the tax payer.
- Children who grow up in stable families have a better start in life than their peers who experience fractured and chaotic home environments. This affects education, mental health and future employment prospects.
- It is not only individuals who benefit, there are economic and societal benefits when a supportive family environment is reflect in adulthood.

What is changing?

- Advice and support services are to be made more accessible, this is so parents can agree maintenance payments for their child without the intervention of the Child Support Agency or the courts.
- A parent caring for children will only be able to access the statutory child maintenance scheme if they can show they have taken reasonable steps to see whether a voluntary arrangement is possible.

- A calculation only service, this will enable either parent, for a fee of £25 to seek an authoritative figure on how much maintenance should be paid.
- For parents with care wishing to use the statutory child maintenance system an application fee of £100 would be paid (this can be deducted from the first year's payments).
- Where the parents require the use of the statutory collection service the parent with care would face a deduction of 10% of any child maintenance paid and the non resident parent would pay a surcharge of 15%.
- When payments are not made and enforcement action is required further enforcement charges would be levelled at the non-resident parent.
- Non-resident parents will be able to avoid the collection charge by paying the amount due direct to the parent with care.

Case Study:

Charlie and Zoe have separated following the birth of their son William. Charlie refuses to pay maintenance so Zoe has to use the Child Maintenance System (CMS). She pays £25 for an assessment of how much Charlie should pay, this shows she is due £20 a week, or £1040 over the year. To make an application through the CMS it will cost Zoe £100, and if Charlie fails to pay it will cost her £2 out of every £20 she is due each week, £104 over the year. In the first year Zoe could face charges of £229, and receive £811 for William. On top of this Charlie will have to pay a surcharge of 15% so each week he will pay £23 per week or £1196 over the year.

After the first year Charlie will continue to pay £156 a year in charges, and Zoe will pay £104, William will receive £936.

Money due to Zoe & William: £1040

Money Charlie pays: £1196

Money Zoe & William receives: £811 in first year, £936 in subsequent years

What is the problem?

- Many parents use the Child Maintenance System out of necessity not choice, for many couples voluntary arrangements do not work, as payments are missed, late, or refused.
- Single parents on low incomes will struggle to pay the charges, the calculation fee and application fee, £25 and £100, respectively, will take a considerable chunk out of the payments owed.
- The 10% collection fee which is deducted from payments is punitive on the parent caring for the child as it would not be necessary if non resident carer could be relied on to pay.
- The new system may save the government money through greater efficiency, but the principle savings will come through fewer families using the system. It is financially beneficial in the long run if disadvantaged children lose out.

The way forward:

- Charges incurred should fall on the parent who failure to fulfil their child maintenance obligations has made state intervention necessary. This would reinforce compliance by penalising those who don't pay.
- Costs should be reduced by removing compliant cases through regular reviews, focusing intervention on cases when payments are late or missed.
- Invest in positive support to encourage voluntary arrangements. As well as obstacles to using the Child Maintenance System there need to be positive incentives for parents, especially non-resident parents, to voluntarily make the arrangements for payments without incurring charges.

Task – to be achieved in 4 hours:

Consider your media strategy to bring your view on this issue into the public domain.

Consider 'new' media as well as 'old'

1. Identify 1 or 2 clear messages you want to say

- to the authorities
- to wider society
- to the Church.

Try to work out what you are for, rather than what you are against. What message will honour Christ and point to His Kingdom?

2. Develop a strategy, using old and new media which will be positive and effective in getting your message heard and understood.

- Thoughts on research e.g. finding a family which illustrates your message?
- Extra creative thoughts? Using a celebrity? Art?
- A twitter week? Facebook? Your website?
- Letters to newspapers? radio phone-ins? Press releases?
- Other ideas?