

PE1533/V

Petitioner Letter of 29 February 2016

Michael McMahon
Chair
Scottish Parliament Petitions Committee

Dear Michael

Our argument about ending social care charges has always been based on a question of human rights. Social Care plays a vital function in the lives of disabled people. It allows them to participate in society and to overcome the barriers created by the way our infrastructure and society has been created.

We welcome the engagement of the City of Edinburgh Council in this debate and are glad it has been able to correct any errors that were contained in our last submission. As Ms Miller will agree, the care charging structure is very complicated and it is hard to keep it clear and simple. We note, for example, she says "a "taper" is applied, which on average in Edinburgh disregards a further 50% of income above the charging threshold." This in itself is a dramatic simplification as Edinburgh applies the most complicated taper system in Scotland.

Edinburgh applies a taper formula as follows 30% of first £20 plus 50% of the second £20 plus 70% of any remaining income. This comes on top of an already complicated system of income disregards, excluded benefits, allowable expenses and varying service charges.

Nonetheless our main point remains that currently in Edinburgh the raised income threshold of £177 still sees the 5,722 older and disabled people pay social care charges. The Scottish Government's proposals to raise the income threshold for most people under 65 to about £135 per week will not substantially alter the current position.

However, to put this increase into perspective, local authorities in Scotland charge an average of £13 an hour for home care, £15 in Edinburgh, meaning this threshold increase equates to less than an hour's home care a week.

Furthermore, the question of age discrimination still remains; the Scottish Government, in their submission, say that older people have a "greater ability to pay for services" yet, based on current threshold levels in most local authorities, there is still a difference of £54 between those under 65 and those over 65

We did meet with officials from the Scottish Government in February 2016 and enjoyed a frank debate with them over the way that they had approached this issue.

We discussed the financial calculations that were included in the Scottish Government's last submission which we contested and still contest are wrong, believing them to be based on assumptions rather than facts.

They are interested in other steps that they may take to reform the care charging system. These could include

- A national maximum weekly charge applicable across Scotland (currently Wales has a £50 maximum) to
- A single national taper rate (perhaps set at the average of 46.5% identified by Professor Bell)
- Clear exemptions for Disability Related Expenditure
- An independent appeal system for those who find difficulty in paying charges.
- An ending of all age differentials in charging

However we still believe that it is wrong to charge. Many people subject to charges still have no understanding of what and why they are paying. The inconsistencies that emerge continue to make a mockery of the Scottish care system. Why do recovering drug users and alcoholics get free meals in social care services while people with dementia who would not eat without the provision of meals by social work have to pay? Why do coeliacs get free food from the NHS when people with profound learning disabilities have to pay for their meals at their day centres? Is it just because they can and will pay?

We will continue to campaign for an end to a system which prevents disabled people enjoying their human rights. We want real independence, true dignity and social justice which can only be achieved by abolishing care charges.

Finally, can I take this last opportunity to say thank you to you as chairperson and all the other members of the Petitions Committee for your hard and diligent work over this Parliamentary Session. All of our group are impressed by your commitment and dedication on so many subjects and your willingness to push for a satisfactory resolution.

Yours Sincerely

Jeff Adamson
Chair Person
Scotland Against the Care Tax