

PE1533/L

Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport

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John Pentland MSP
Public Petitions Committee
c/o Public Petitions Clerks
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Dear John

Thank you for your letter of 1st April, which highlights the most recent submission from Scotland Against the Care Tax, in connection with Petition 1533, urging the Scottish Government to abolish local authority charges for non-residential care services.

As suggested by the petitioner in his submission, I understand that the Committee agreed to ask the Scottish Government to convene a round-table discussion on the issue of non-residential care charges involving local councils, the NHS, the petitioner and other third sector organisations representing the interests and concerns of people with disabilities.

COSLA's Charging Guidance Working Group already provides a round table forum where COSLA, Scottish Government, local authorities and third sector organisations are able to discuss the issues around charging. The Charging Guidance Working Group is open to all interested stakeholders and includes representation from Disabled Peoples' Organisations. The group aims to work co-productively and whilst some DPOs made the decision to remove themselves, I understand that the group would welcome them back. This would be the appropriate place for any round table discussion on charging to take place.

I am aware that some of the organisations supporting the petition are frustrated at the pace of progress being made by that Working Group. However, the Working Group have made a range of improvements aimed at increasing consistency over the past few years including: treatment of compensation claims, the temporary waiving of charges following discharge from hospital, consideration of disability related expenditure (DRE) and partners income and the introduction of a minimum Standard Financial Assessment Template. In addition, the information councils provide about their local charging policies has been improved and a network of nominated charging policy benchmarking officers has been established across Scottish councils.

I understand that going forward the Charging Working Group will continue to be concerned with enhancing the anti-poverty measures set out in current guidance by exploring a

proposal to increase the minimum charging thresholds, investigating policy options around the application of tapers to income over and above the charging threshold and the development of an annual report on charging policies. These are all important matters that will contribute to the objective of a more consistent and fairer approach to charging.

Finally I think the agreement of the Standard Financial Assessment Template is a positive step and its introduction as a minimum is intended to ensure that councils are not required to introduce less generous rates and thresholds simply in order to align with the COSLA charging guidance.

I recognise that charges made by local authorities for social care, where necessary, need to be fair and affordable. We have already, in partnership with local government, ensured that no-one in the last 6 months of a progressive terminal illness should be charged for the care that they receive at home, and we continue to work with our colleagues in local government to improve the system of charging for social care and address the issues raised by Committee members.

SHONA ROBISON