

PE1533/AA

Scotland Against the Care Tax Letter of 9 December 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Petitions Committee on the latest communication from the Cabinet Secretary. In her letter Ms Robison makes two points that we would like to respond to.

First it would appear that the Scottish Government now plan to carry out a feasibility study in extending free personal care to people under the age of 65 with dementia. While it can be hard for people who have lived long and healthy lives to develop long term conditions such as dementia, many of our members who have physical disabilities, learning disabilities or long-term conditions that have affected them all their lives will quite rightly be angry that this feasibility study does not include them.

Once again disabled people are being treated as second class citizens. It is hard to believe that the Scottish Government which puts so much store on verbal commitments to human rights, signed up to the Scottish National Action Plan on Human Rights and called on the newly elected leader of a foreign country to promote “fundamental values of equality, tolerance, diversity and human rights for all” would ignore the rights of the disabled people in such a blatant fashion.

On 2 December 2016 the Scottish Government published its Disability Delivery Plan. Many disabled people will not understand why they bothered when they find out that the Cabinet Secretary does not even plan a “feasibility study” on extending Free Personal Care to them.

We would respectfully remind Ms Robinson of her words to this Petitions Committee on the 6th of October 2015. She said “We must ensure that any charging system is for people born with a range of conditions, not just those that I have mentioned **[Alzheimer’s, dementia, other degenerative diseases, motor neurone disease]**, and that any changes that we make to the charging system are fair to all service users. That is the focus of our attention.” We can remember them even if she cannot.

The second point in Ms Robison’s letter that we would like to touch on in is that the Scottish Government’s efforts to raise the income threshold with their £6 million have, by and large, worked. Almost every council who previously allowed £123 per week for those under 60/65 have raised it to £132 per week.

However, we warned in our previous comments that this would not deliver a straightforward improvement in social care charging and this has proved to be the case.

We have seen three councils who previously allowed their social care clients under the age of 60/65 to keep more of their own money take this opportunity of Ms

Robison's extra £6 million to announce that they would take up to £60 more per week from social care users by lowering the Income Threshold and not increasing it!

- In Highland new social care users will pay up to £30 more per week (tax rate 50%)
- In Dumfries & Galloway all existing social care users will pay up to £39 more per week (tax rate 65%)
- In Perth and Kinross all existing social care users will pay up to £60 more per week from 2018 (tax rate 100%)

But that is not all. Previously we warned the Scottish Government that if they piecemeal tried to reform care charging. Councils would simply find other ways of getting more money out of disabled people.

- Aberdeenshire has increased charges on some residents of sheltered housing complexes by up to £14,000 per year.
- Highland have increased charges for day centres for Older People by 38%
- West Lothian has introduced new charges of £50 per week for a further 300 people.

It is not clear how the Scottish Government's offer of £9 per week per person can really make a dent in the level of increase in charges when we see annual increases of up to £14,000 per year.

Whilst we welcome the threshold increase of £9 it should be put into context. One hour of social care in Edinburgh costs £15 therefore, the saving of £9 equates to 36 minutes of home care a week. In Angus disabled people under 65 can pay up to £24.50 an hour for personal care – meaning people using this service have a free 22 *minutes support a week*.

The failure to address social care charging will see councils continue to increase the income they take from some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland. Social Care is a service that makes Scotland a civilised place to live in and should not be a new income generating opportunity for Scotland's local authorities.

Not only are care taxes going up, but the criteria for care are narrowing to such an extent that only those in dire need are eligible. Many who, with such help, could get a job, or train for a career, cannot because they do not meet such narrow criteria.

Therefore, the care tax is being used to maintain the poverty and dependency of disabled and elderly people in the community, and to deny them their right to participate therein, as equal citizens.

Returning to the Scottish Government's Disability Delivery Plan, *A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People*, a number of 'Ambitions' are listed. These include:

- Making sure disabled people have enough money to participate in whatever they want to do in life.
- To improve disabled peoples' participation in sport and physical activity.
- To make a plan to deal with social isolation and loneliness of disabled people.
- To reduce the barriers to employment for disabled people.

How can any of these ambitions be realised when disabled and older people who require support have to pay a tax to allow them to leave their houses never mind participate in a social and civic life? How can barriers to employment for supported disabled people be reduced when any money they earn above their income threshold, plus £20 of these earnings, is taxed by their local authority at rates as high as 100%? This is after paying national taxes.

We hope that the Petition Committee will agree with us that Social Care charges remain a barrier to the achievement of human rights.

We would ask the Petitions Committee to write to the Cabinet Secretary and ask them to widen their proposed feasibility study in two ways. First to look at extending Free Personal Care to everyone under the age of 65 and secondly to look at the feasibility of ending social care charges to everyone.

That truly would help to make a better Scotland that promoted the fundamental values of equality, tolerance, diversity and human rights for all.