

Scottish Parliament Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Social Justice and Social Security Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2024-25

Written submission by the Inclusion Scotland, 18 September 2023

Pre-Budget Scrutiny: Inclusion Scotland

1 Introduction

- 1.1 Inclusion Scotland is a 'Disabled People's Organisation' (DPO) – led by disabled people ourselves. Inclusion Scotland works to achieve positive changes to policy and practice, so that we disabled people are fully included throughout all Scottish society as equal citizens.
- 1.2 We are an independent, non-party political, representative organisation of disabled people across Scotland with a network of over 40 Disabled Peoples' Organisation (DPO) members, and partner organisations we reach thousands of disabled people across Scotland, many of whom experience profound exclusion and intersectional barriers to participation in society.

As disabled people are involved in every aspect of Scottish family, social, community, cultural and economic life it would be impossible for us to address the funding decisions on all of the policy areas that are important to disabled people. Instead, we will focus on some areas prioritised for spending in the Programme for Government (PfG) and some, that though not mentioned in the PfG, also need to be prioritised.

2 Social Care

- 2.1 Social care support should continue to be prioritised in this budget alongside healthcare. Improvements in the assessment and delivery of care following the effective collapse of support services during the pandemic will require to be resourced.
- 2.2 Inclusion Scotland welcomes the commitment to increase the wages of those delivering care services (made in the Programme for Government) which should assist with the recruitment and retention of staff and therefore have a positive impact for the disabled people they support. However, this has implications for those utilising Option 1 as their choice for the delivery of self-directed support. The increase in wages for those staff directly employed by disabled people must also be fully funded otherwise the pay of these staff will fall behind that of care staff employed in the public, private and third sectors leading to a potential exodus of staff employed under Option 1.

- 2.3 There is considerable disquiet amongst disabled people that they were effectively shut out of the discussions and agreement between the Scottish Government, COSLA and the NHS on the National Care Service. This was not in line with the Christie Principles and suggests that service users needs and rights are viewed as secondary to those of service providers.
- 2.4 The work on progressing the National Care Service will therefore require additional resources for Disabled People's and Carers Organisations to ensure that they can be fully involved in the policy and decision-making aspects of the new service.

3 The Care Tax (Social Care Charges)

- 3.1 Inclusion Scotland welcomes the commitment to end non-residential social care charging (in the Programme for Government) before the end of this Parliament but notes that Frank's Law should have ensured that this had happened already and that previous commitments to end social care charging have not been honoured.
- 3.2 Scottish Government funded all local authorities to end social care charging but it has continued in many. Effectively those who did not end charging got money for nothing. This cannot be allowed to continue as social care charging is effectively an additional tax on disabled people over and above those paid by non-disabled members of Scottish society.

4 Independent Living Fund

- 4.1 Inclusion Scotland welcomes the announcement of an additional £9 million of funding for the Scottish Independent Living Fund which will allow it to re-open and support an additional thousand disabled people with complex needs.
- 4.2 However, we note that when the Fund was transferred to Scotland it supported 3,000 disabled people and now assists under 2,000. This means that the additional funding, though it will increase the number supported to 3,000, will see the same number of Scots being supported as was the case nearly a decade ago.
- 4.3 Inclusion Scotland believes that funding for the ILF should be boosted further to allow the ILF to support all the disabled people who need it. The Independent Review of Adult Social Care suggested an additional investment of £32 million should be made and we would suggest that this is the funding allocation that should be made in the Budget.
- 4.4 Research suggests that further funding of the ILF would bring about long-term savings. For example, in Northern Ireland, 'the social value generated by ILFS demonstrates extended impact and value for money. The ILF Scotland, through its £6.85 million allocation to Northern Ireland recipients in 2019 generated a social value of £1: £10.89 (ref: <https://ilf.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/44188-ILF-NI-Impact-Evaluation-Report.pdf>).

5 Social Security

- 5.1 The ongoing cost of living crisis is impacting on most layers of our society but is being felt most acutely by disabled people and their families. Disabled people received the least generous support from the package of measures announced last year, receiving a one-off payment of just £150 (if they were not claiming a low-income, means-tested benefit or were over retirement age). Yet disabled people are much more likely to be suffering poverty, including fuel poverty.
- 5.2 Once the costs of living with an impairment (see 5.5 below) are taken into account almost half (48%) of all those living in poverty in Scotland are disabled people and their families, despite disabled people making up only 22% of the population.
- 5.3 Recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the Cost-of-Living Crisis found that low-income households with a disabled person were being hit hard with almost 6 in 10 experiencing food insecurity (57%), 7 in 10 going without essentials, and almost half in arrears with at least one household bill¹
- 5.4 Therefore Inclusion Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to increase the Scottish Child Payment by inflation from next April. As disabled people and their families are more likely to be reliant on low-income benefits for some or all of their income this increase will tend to benefit them.
- 5.5 Disabled people also have significant additional costs. Recent research by the disability charity, Scope², found that disabled people spent on average £935 per month on disability-related expenses (e.g., taxis, increased use of heating, special equipment, care costs, etc.). These cost are likely to be even higher in remote rural areas of Scotland.
- 5.6 Therefore Inclusion Scotland welcomes the commitment to an independent review of Adult Disability Payment but only if it is a full and thoroughgoing review which looks at the adequacy and entitlement criteria for the benefit.
- 5.7 Inclusion Scotland believes that disabled people and their families need to be given additional, targeted, social security support from the Scottish Government otherwise they will experience severe fuel poverty, debt, destitution and death³.

6 Childcare

- 6.1 The cost of childcare is one of the biggest barriers to parents, particularly women, taking up job opportunities. Therefore, the extension of childcare provision announced in the Programme for Government is welcome. However, looking at the small print of this commitment, it seems that the extension will only occur in 6 local authority areas, meaning parents in the other 26 authorities will not benefit from it.

¹ Full JRF report - <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/unable-escape-persistent-hardship-jrfs-cost-living-tracker-summer-2023>

² Disability Price Tag 2023, Scope, 2023 - <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/extra-costs/disability-price-tag-2023/>

³ <https://inclusionScotland.org/news/dpo-collective-letter-to-the-first-minister>

- 6.2 The Programme for Government states that the expanded national offer for two-year-olds will be “**focused on those who will benefit most**”. This suggests that funded childcare support for 2-year-olds may be means tested. If it is this will deepen the poverty trap where parents can end up worse off if they take up employment as they may now also lose existing support with their childcare costs.
- 6.3 Inclusion Scotland also believes that more needs to be done to ensure that the funded childcare that is available is both accessible to and inclusive of disabled children and parents. Such availability is relatively rare even in urban areas and virtually non-existent in more rural ones. However, increasing the availability of (and funding for) accessible childcare was not mentioned in the published Programme for Government.

7 Human Rights Incorporation

- 7.1 Inclusion Scotland welcomes the Scottish Government’s commitment to incorporate the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) into Scots law, and other treaties and the Right to a Health environment (within the limits of devolved competency).
- 7.2 However, Inclusion Scotland notes that no funding seems to have been set aside to ensure that these rights are both progressively realised by Scots public authorities and to make redress available to those whose rights have, been transgressed. We believe that some additional funding will be needed to ensure that UNCRPD rights, and others, are “real” and not just paper ones.

8 Employability

- 8.1 The Programme for Government states that the Scottish Government will work with “the third sector to deliver person-centred employability support, helping those who face barriers to labour market participation into work, with a particular focus on parents, helping to meet our child poverty targets”.
- 8.2 However, Inclusion Scotland notes that funding for Employability programmes was cut last year and has not yet been restored to the levels which were previously set despite rising costs. This seems to indicate that funding for employability support to assist those facing barriers to labour market participation – such as disabled people, less than 50% of whom are in work – far from being prioritised has instead been de-prioritised.
- 8.3 Several DPOs and disability charities provide exactly the sort of person-centred employability support mentioned in the PfG but few, if any, receive funding from local authorities for the provision of such services. Indeed, Inclusion Scotland is aware of at least one organisation which has provided employability support to young disabled people in Dumfries and Galloway for the last 8 years who were denied “No One Left Behind” funding (as were all other specialist providers in that authority).

- 8.5 As recent JRF research⁴ shows current employability services do not well serve the needs of minority ethnic communities in Glasgow. This is because of a “one size fits all” type of approach which means that those seeking the support of services are expected to adapt to the needs of service providers rather than providers having to adapt their services to suit the needs of users. This type of approach which fails one excluded community is also likely to impact on other excluded communities, such as disabled people, in similar ways.
- 8.6 Inclusion Scotland believes that Scottish Government should be funding Disabled People’s Organisations to provide the type of person-centred approaches to employability support that genuinely addresses disabled people’s needs and at a level that can begin to reduce the employability gap.

9 Cost of Living Crisis

“If you can’t get out of bed because it’s too cold and you’re in pain, what would be the point of living” - Inclusion Scotland member.

- 9.1 The Cost-of-Living Crisis far from being over is continuing to impact disproportionately on low income households and particularly on disabled people and their families. Although energy prices have now fallen they remain approx. 70% higher than they were two years ago. Yet the additional financial support that was made available by the UK Government last winter to help low income, older and disabled households families has been ended.
- 9.2 Energy costs tend to be higher for households containing disabled people for several reasons including: needing to stay warm (or cool) to manage pain; needing to charge or power independent living equipment such as stairlifts and powerchairs; additional laundry and higher use of home appliances.
- 9.3 Disabled people have told us of horrendous hardships that they have endured because they have been unable to afford energy – eating cold food throughout winter because they cannot afford to use their cookers, going to bed when it becomes dark because they cannot afford to switch on the lights, isolation from family and community, going without heating during the coldest months of the year because they have “self-disconnected”, with deepening impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing. This anecdotal evidence has been confirmed by several research studies including JRF’s “Cost -of-living” tracker ⁵. There is every prospect that this will continue to be the case this winter.
- 9.3 We note that 800 Scots were taken to hospital suffering from hypothermia during the period 1st to 18th December last year. In addition, at a UK level excess winter deaths

⁴ “Glasgow communities of colour failed by employability services and workplace racism”, JRF, Aug 2023 - <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/glasgow-communities-colour-failed-employability-services-and-workplace-racism>

⁵ [https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/our-social-security-system-must-support-households-disabled-person-afford-essentials#:~:text=We%20find%20that%20low%2Dincome,one%20household%20bill%20\(48%25\).](https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/our-social-security-system-must-support-households-disabled-person-afford-essentials#:~:text=We%20find%20that%20low%2Dincome,one%20household%20bill%20(48%25).)

due to cold, damp housing increased by about half from 3,186 in 2021/22 to 4,706 in winter 2022/23. Indicating that people are literally freezing to death in modern Britain.

- 9.4 Disabled people desperately need more financial support to cope with increased energy costs. Therefore, Inclusion Scotland recommends that the Scottish Budget should include sufficient funding to increase the current Winter Heating Payment from £50 to at least £100. Of the 400,000 households who receive this payment over half contain a disabled adult or child and the others are also “vulnerable” energy consumers (e.g. lone parents and older people). Thus, this additional support would be well-targeted and require no additional claims to be made making it the most efficient way of delivering additional support.

Health related energy costs

- 9.5 Energy costs for powering essential equipment that disabled people need such as hoists, beds, breathing equipment, dialysis machines, powered chairs and monitors were already expensive before the rise in fuel prices. Now disabled people are facing choices between powering vital, life-saving equipment, staying warm or eating.
- 9.6 The end of life support charity, Marie Curie, carried out research in England that found that the cost of running an oxygen concentrator can be £65 per month, a dialysis machine £27 per month and a ventilator £35 per month. Children’s Hospices Across Scotland (CHAS) carried out similar research amongst families that use their services and produced similar but even higher costs. Yet the use of these machines keeps disabled people as well as possible, and out of hospital, which would be much more expensive and also a drain on already over-extended NHS resources.
- 9.7 The cost of running medical equipment imposes additional costs on disabled people that have become hugely more expensive over the last two years and do so at a time when they are ill or dying of serious illnesses. Inclusion Scotland believes that the NHS should be paying these health-related costs and not disabled people and again urges the Scottish Government to make funding available in the Budget to allow local NHS Boards to provide this support.

10 Taxation/Raising Revenue

- 10.1 Disabled people would benefit from more progressive taxation measures such as reform of the Council Tax as they are disproportionately likely to be living in poverty and are also more reliant on local services such as social work, social care, concessionary taxi-cards etc.
- 10.2 If MSPs are genuinely concerned about closing the funding gap whilst protecting local services then proposals such as those made by the Fair Tax Reform Group (Oxfam Scotland, IPPR Scotland, CPAG in Scotland, Scottish Women’s Budget Group, One Parent Families Scotland, and the Wellbeing Economy Alliance Scotland and others) which redistribute wealth whilst also raising additional income must be given much more serious consideration.