

PE1533/Y

Letter from Jeff Adamson of 16 September 2016

Thank you for forwarding on the Scottish Government response. Unfortunately it does not really address the issue of the future plans for the Scottish Government and we remain uncertain of what is due to happen.

For example, in his letter of 4th August, Mike Liddle, a senior adviser to the Cabinet Secretary says, “the Scottish Government remains of the view that any changes to the charges to service users for the care they receive at home must be fair to all users, irrespective of their illness or long-term condition, and affordable in the long-term.”

Yet in the Programme for Government published on the 6th of September, there is a clear promise to “conduct a feasibility study of expanding free personal and nursing care to people with dementia who are under 65, and examine the potential relationship with social security provision through this study.”

Why would they plan to do this when the Cabinet Secretary said in evidence to this committee on the 6th of October said “. “We must ensure that any charging system is for people born with a range of conditions, not just [dementia and motor neurone disease] and that any changes that we make to the charging system are fair to all service users.”

There is an opinion that this sort of review is only hitting the ball further into the long grass.

The letter also makes reference to £6 million specifically given to make charging fairer. We have long had concerns over this approach and given that the Scottish Government and COSLA have been working for ‘fairness’ for the last 15 years, it has achieved very little. While their efforts sound great, the reality is different. Working through COSLA can only be advisory and councils are able to make their own decisions about what to do with this money.

1. We see some councils such as Angus simply ignore the advice and leave their income thresholds unchanged.
2. Others such as Highland and Dumfries & Galloway have chosen to exploit a loophole and actually reduce income thresholds in their areas by up to £60 per week.
3. Even those that increased their income threshold in line with the proposal such as Aberdeenshire have found other ways to increase their income from charges – trebling the amounts that groups of social care users have to pay.

The result is that in many areas of Scotland, this £6 million has disappeared or is being used to fund other areas in local councils with financial shortfalls thereby delivering no benefits to social care users.

A more robust way to establish fairness across Scotland, such as “One Tax Allowance For Everyone” which would use the HMRC single person tax allowance as an Income Threshold benchmark, delivering real change in the future.

We would ask that the Petitions Committee write again to the Cabinet Secretary to ask

1. Why they plan to launch a review into an area where she and her departmental staff already hold clear views that such changes should not go ahead.
2. Why, when the Scottish Government has more powers in relation to local authorities, income tax and social security, they don't simply establish a single simple income threshold based on the HMRC tax allowance.

In the long term, we remain committed to the end of social care charges throughout Scotland – that is the only way that true fairness will be achieved.

Yours Sincerely

Jeff Adamson

Chair, Scotland Against the Care Tax.