

## **Adult Disability Payment**

### **Social Work Scotland response to publication of the Independent Review of Adult Disability Payment**

**September 2025**

#### **Introduction**

Social Work Scotland is the professional body for social work leaders, working closely with our partners to shape policy and practice, and improve the quality and experience of social services. This document is a response to the publication of the Independent Review of Adult Disability Payment, published on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025, which is available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/independent-review-adult-disability-payment-final-report/>

#### **Response**

Social Work Scotland and our members believe the Independent Review of Scottish Adult Disability Payment (ADP) represents a significant and commendable effort to reshape disability support in Scotland around the principles of dignity, fairness, and respect. At its core, the review places the voices of disabled people and those with long-term health conditions at the centre of its findings and recommendations. This client-led approach is not only ethically sound but essential for building a system that truly meets the needs of those it serves.

Social Work Scotland and our members note the Chair's commitment to empowering individuals to live with dignity and independence, and this is reflected throughout the review. The inclusion of an Advisory Group composed of people with lived experience added depth and authenticity to the process, ensuring that scrutiny and guidance were grounded in real-world understanding. The engagement programme was comprehensive, involving a wide range of consultation methods and reaching over 160 individuals and 70 stakeholder organisations. This breadth of input has produced a rich tapestry of perspectives, which strengthens the credibility and relevance of the review's conclusions.

Importantly, the review does not shy away from acknowledging the societal and cultural stigma that continues to surround disability benefits. It rightly identifies this as a barrier to application and commits to making the process more accessible and

less anxiety-inducing. The emphasis on continuous improvement, informed by previous consultations and interim findings, demonstrates a thoughtful and iterative approach to policy development.

Clients' experiences with Social Security Scotland have been overwhelmingly positive, with many describing interactions as respectful and kind. The absence of medical assessments and the supportive nature of staff were frequently highlighted, marking a welcome departure from previous systems such as Personal Independence Payment (PIP). The use of the Charter Measurement Framework to assess progress adds a layer of transparency and accountability that is both necessary and reassuring.

Social Work Scotland and our members recognise that the review's recommendations are forward-looking and pragmatic, offering a roadmap for enhancing client experience and improving systems and processes. It is encouraging to see that these proposals are grounded in human rights principles and consider the broader fiscal and economic context. The framing of social security as an investment in people, rather than a cost to be minimised, is a vital shift in perspective.

However, while the review's aspirations are laudable, there are significant concerns regarding the resource implications for local authorities and third-sector organisations. These bodies play a crucial role in delivering advice and support services that are essential for clients navigating the ADP system. Yet, they are often constrained by short-term funding models and reductions in financial support, which limit their ability to respond flexibly to the needs of service users.

The review itself acknowledges that independent advice and support are vital, particularly in relation to applications, re-determinations, and appeals. These services are typically delivered at a local level, and there is clear evidence that they are under strain. The Scottish Government's investment of £4.6 million in 2024–25 is a positive step, but much of this funding is directed toward national initiatives. There remains a pressing need for increased and sustainable funding for local welfare rights advice services, especially to support seldom-heard communities who face additional barriers to accessing their entitlements.

The review also highlights the importance of Welfare Advice and Health Partnerships and recommends strengthening Local Delivery service partnerships. While these initiatives have the potential to improve outcomes, they will inevitably place additional demands on local services. Without adequate resourcing, there is a real risk that these pressures will exacerbate existing financial challenges and undermine the effectiveness of the support system.

Furthermore, the recommendation to draw on practices from the Blue Badge scheme, administered by local authorities, raises additional concerns. If similar fast-tracked assessment models are adopted for ADP, this could increase the administrative and assessment burden on local authorities. While such changes may

improve client experience, they must be accompanied by appropriate funding and support to ensure they are sustainable.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the Independent Review of ADP sets out a compelling vision for a more humane and effective disability support system in Scotland. Its strengths lie in its inclusive methodology, its grounding in human rights, and its commitment to continuous improvement. However, to fully realise this vision, it is essential that the Scottish Government addresses the resource implications for local authorities and third-sector organisations. These partners are integral to the delivery of ADP and must be adequately supported to ensure that the system is not only aspirational but also practical and resilient.

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