

PE1480/S

Cabinet Secretary for Health, Wellbeing and Sport
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Mr Michael McMahon MSP
Convener
Public Petitions Committee

By Email.

Your ref: PE1533 and PE1480
24 February 2016

Dear Michael

CONSIDERATION OF PETITIONS PE1533 and PE1480

Over the last year, the Frank's Law and Scotland Against the Care Tax campaigns have raised some very important issues and this has opened up the debate about fairer charging for social care in Scotland.

I want to pay tribute to Amanda Kopel, The Courier and their fellow campaigners, as well as Jeff Adamson, for their efforts in taking these campaigns forward and we have been listening very closely to what they have had to say.

On 29th January, I announced that we are putting forward an offer to local authorities that would help many of those on the lowest incomes pay no or fewer charges. This would benefit more than 13,000 people who will pay a smaller contribution towards the cost of their care and around 900 people who will be taken out of charging altogether. Further details on the changes and their estimated cost are set out in a paper on the Scottish Government website: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Health/Data/Expenditure>

As part of the quarter of a billion pounds of additional funding for social care announced for next year's budget, we have made this offer to COSLA as a **first step** towards making charging fairer. We are taking an anti-poverty approach by prioritising support for those on low incomes first.

These changes to the charging thresholds will mean that people on low incomes who currently pay for services such as personal care, equipment like community alarms, or help with laundry and meals, may have their bills reduced or in some cases paid for entirely.

While personal care is already free for everyone over 65, the changes are a positive step towards ensuring people of all ages can afford the care they need to maintain their independence and dignity through periods of illness.

This move demonstrates our commitment to delivering a fairer charging system for social care, particularly as it has been achieved against the background of a challenging financial settlement for Scotland by the UK Government.

We will continue to work with our local authority partners, as well as Amanda Kopel and her fellow campaigners, to look at what more can be done to ensure equitable access to high quality social care.

The Committee has asked for clarification on the responsibility for administering the £6m which has been announced to cover the changes in the charging thresholds. The £250m will be directed to Integration Authorities. Any costs accrued by moving to the new charging threshold can be met from the funding being provided. In the event that a Local Authority is already applying a higher threshold, its allocation will not be adjusted downwards.

In my last letter to the Committee of 11th January, I suggested that it would be helpful for Scottish Government officials to meet with Mr Adamson to discuss the next steps. I can confirm that officials met with Mr Adamson on 15th February and outlined our proposals to him.

SHONA ROBISON