

Annex A

Scottish Carer's Assistance

You asked about progress on the development of Scottish Carer's Assistance, the replacement benefit for Carer's Allowance. A range of work has been carried out to hear from carers and the organisations who support them about ways in which our benefit can best meet the needs of unpaid carers. This includes discussions with our Carer Benefits Advisory Group (CBAG), taking advice from the independent Disability and Carer Benefits Expert Advisory Group (DACBEAG), research with our Experience Panels, and an evaluation of our Carer's Allowance Supplement.

This work has identified a number of areas in which the existing Carer's Allowance benefit could be improved. We have used this feedback to develop draft aims for Scottish Carer's Assistance, which have also been designed to contribute to our overall vision for unpaid carers. This vision, set out in the draft Carers Strategic Policy Statement¹, is that carers '*are supported on a consistent basis to allow them to continue caring, if that is their wish, in good health and wellbeing, allowing for a life of their own outside of caring*'. We shared these draft aims in a discussion paper published in March of this year².

We have also used what we have heard to develop a set of options for how Scottish Carer's Assistance could improve support for unpaid carers in future. Options have been developed to address what we have heard are the key issues with the existing benefit, and include the commitment to extend the time for which Scottish Carer's Assistance will be paid after a cared for person has passed away.

There are a number of areas we have heard that carers would like to change, but it may not be feasible to deliver all of these changes at once. Therefore decisions on proposals for Scottish Carer's Assistance will be supported by a Multi Criteria Analysis (MCA) process. The MCA process will assess the options for change against a set of criteria which will be based on the aims for Scottish Carer's Assistance and the social security principles. As part of this process we have held series of internal and external discussion events this summer to take feedback on the draft aims and options for Scottish Carer's Assistance, and the criteria to be used in assessing options. Following the MCA process we will carry out a public consultation on proposals for Scottish Carer's Assistance.

As you have noted in your letter, to ensure a safe and secure transition of benefits for carers already in receipt of Carer's Allowance, changes to eligibility criteria for Scottish Carer's Assistance will not be made before the end of 'case transfer'. To support this safe and secure transfer we also intend to continue to pay Carer's Allowance Supplement separately until case transfer is complete. We will then integrate Carer's Allowance Supplement with Scottish Carer's Assistance.

When all eligible carers in Scotland are receiving Scottish Carer's Assistance from Social Security Scotland instead of Carer's Allowance from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), we will be able to make changes to eligibility criteria. However, as Carer's Allowance

¹ Draft Carers Strategic Policy Statement, Scottish Government, September 2019

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/carers-strategic-policy-statement-draft-consultation/>

² Scottish Carer's Assistance: Discussion Paper, March 2021 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-carers-assistance-discussion-paper/pages/1/>

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is the most complex benefit being devolved in terms of its links with support which will remain reserved to the UK Government, we will need to take into account potential impacts on reserved support.

In particular, we need to consider very carefully that if the eligibility criteria for our benefit were to become very different from UK Carer's Allowance, we would need to reach agreements with the DWP about how our benefit would be treated by their systems so carers are not penalised. Many carers receive extra amounts in means-tested benefits because they are in receipt of Carer's Allowance, including important support for living costs, such as Housing Benefit. It is vital carers in receipt of Scottish Carer's Assistance do not lose other reserved benefit support which is currently linked to Carer's Allowance, or we risk carers being worse off when our aim is to ensure carers will be better off as a result of changes we make.

While we will not be making eligibility changes to Scottish Carer's Assistance until after the end of case transfer, we are committed to making improvements to how we deliver this support from day one, including by working with carers on the design of all aspects of the benefit, including application processes and systems.

Social Security Scotland's local delivery services will also allow us to reach more carers and offer face to face support for applications. We are also working to ensure Scottish Carer's Assistance will align better with wider carer support, and to use the introduction of this new benefit to make sure carers are given information on the wider support available to them.

Additional payments for people with multiple caring roles

We are committed to providing extra support to people in receipt of Carer's Allowance who are caring for more than one disabled child. Work had progressed on the development of this support, known as the Carer's Additional Child Payment, but had to be paused due to the coronavirus pandemic. Resources were refocused on frontline delivery, to ensure we could continue to provide the existing support people rely on, as well as delivering vital new support including the Child Winter Heating Assistance and the Scottish Child Payment.

We are now considering how the additional support can be delivered as part of Scottish Carer's Assistance, as well as how best to extend this to meet our commitment to provide extra support to those caring for more than one disabled person of any age. This development work is being carried out in parallel with the work to consider options for Scottish Carer's Assistance, and we will consult on the detailed policy for this additional support as part of the public consultation on Scottish Carer's Assistance.

Wider support for unpaid carers

The Bill itself is part of the Scottish Government's commitment to a wide range of support for unpaid carers. The Carers (Scotland) Act 2016 introduced the right for all carers to an adult carer support plan or young carer statement to identify each carer's personal outcomes and needs for support. This year's budget contains an additional £28.5 million in the local government settlement for Carers Act implementation. Added to similar (baselined) increases in previous years since the Act came into force in April 2018, this brings the total additional investment for 2021-22 to £68 million per year.

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We have accepted the recommendations of the Independent Review of Adult Social Care, many of which are designed to improve carer support, including the establishment of a National Care Service. We are engaging with partners, including COSLA and Health and Social Care Partnerships, over what more they can do now to ensure carers receive the support they need.

As you will know, across government, we are committed to a number of other actions to support carers. This includes introducing a £1.4 million holiday voucher scheme which will provide thousands of vouchers for short breaks and days out to carers, people with disabilities and families on low incomes, investing in carer centres, and making sure carers are given information on the variety of support available to them.

Alongside this we are funding Carers Trust Scotland to develop resources and work with education professionals to improve awareness, identification and support for young carers in schools, linked to young carers' rights to support under the Carers Act. We have also funded the update of the Equal Partners in Care learning resource in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland and the Scottish Social Services Council. This is an e-resource primarily for workforce to help staff with carer identification and awareness.

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