

**Scottish Parliament
Social Justice and Social Security Committee
Low Income and Debt Inquiry
Additional Comments by Betty Stone, Edinburgh Tenants Federation**

Jeremy Balfour: I suppose that what we have been hearing over the past few weeks is that that is not working. We have a crisis at the moment with the fuel bills, food bills and all these other issues that people are facing, but the evidence that we have been hearing is that local authorities seem to be pursuing this process quite rigorously. What you have highlighted might be happening on paper but it does not seem to be happening in practice.

The question, therefore, is: what should local authorities be doing over the next six or seven months? I have to say that six months is quite a long time for a lot of people who are struggling with debt at the moment, but what advice should the Scottish Government, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Parliament be giving local authorities at this particular moment to deal with the current situation? ([Official Report](#), page 7)

Additional comment from Betty Stone: I previously wrote to Westminster on this dept and was told it was a matter for the Scottish Government

Betty Stone: If the issue is picked up soon enough by the local housing officers, they can visit that person as soon as they start to get into arrears. As you say, council tax is definitely the last thing that a person will pay if they are struggling with money. I have seen that umpteen times. They do not see the need to pay council tax; they do not think that they can be evicted for not paying council tax. We need more officers out on the ground to visit these people. Housing officers come and visit them but I am getting stories that officers are quite aggressive with people. I have asked for housing officers to be retrained in how to deal with people because there are so many mental health problems out there. People, once they are talked down to, will not go back and talk to the council. Housing officers have to learn how to talk to these people in a manner that helps them to understand that they are in arrears and how to pay those arrears rather than saying to them, as they have been doing, "You need to pay that off right away". If officers work out a plan with them on how to address those arrears, that helps ([Official Report](#), page 27)

Additional comment from Betty Stone: Mental Health has increased dramatically since the pandemic