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Aithisg Oifigeil

DRAFT

Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee

**Comataidh a' Cheartais
Shòisealta, Taigheadas
agus Riaghaltas Ionadail**

Wednesday 30 September 2026

Session 7



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SOCIAL JUSTICE, HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

5th Meeting 2026, Session 7

CONVENER

*Craig Hoy (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Gary Bouse (Falkirk West) (SNP)

*Kate Campbell (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP)

Mark Griffin (Central Scot and Lothians West) (Lab)

*Morven-May MacCallum (Highlands and Islands) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Tressa Burke (Glasgow Disability Alliance)

Fiona Collie (Carers Scotland)

Emma Jackson (Citizens Advice Scotland)

Kirsty McKechnie (Child Poverty Action Group)

Dr Pauline Nolan (Inclusion Scotland)

Paul Traynor (Carers Trust)

LOCATION

The Adam Smith Room (CR5)

Scottish Parliament

Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee

Wednesday 30 September 2026

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:30]

Social Security

The Convener (Craig Hoy): Good morning, and welcome to the fifth meeting in session 7 of the Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee. Under our only—busy—agenda item in public, we will take evidence from a range of stakeholders on social security. I have received apologies from my colleague Mark Griffin.

I welcome everyone around the table, particularly our witnesses: Tressa Burke, chief executive, Glasgow Disability Alliance; Fiona Collie, head of public affairs and communications, Carers Scotland; Emma Jackson, assistant director of policy and research, Citizens Advice Scotland; Kirsty McKechnie, early warning system project manager, Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland; Dr Pauline Nolan, head of participation and policy, Inclusion Scotland, which is a leading voice in disability rights in Scotland; and, last but not least, Paul Traynor, head of external affairs for Scotland, Carers Trust.

We have a wide variety of topics to cover, and we will bring everyone into the discussion. Instead of having opening statements, we will move straight to questions. This is a round-table session, so we hope that the format will be as interactive as possible.

Recently, we took evidence from Social Security Scotland about the administration of benefits in Scotland. It is important to capture information on how organisations feel about the application and appeal processes. The system in Scotland is moving from introducing new benefits to improving the management and administration of new benefits and those that have been devolved. It would be interesting to take advice from Emma Jackson, initially, on behalf of the clients whom Citizens Advice Scotland represents. What would make the biggest significant difference for people who apply for benefits in Scotland, appeal decisions or seek to reapply for benefits?

Emma Jackson (Citizens Advice Scotland):

The citizens advice network in Scotland is probably the largest provider of independent advice on all 15 devolved payments from Social Security Scotland. In the past year, we advised about 45,000 people, covering all the payments. The greatest strength of a local citizens advice

bureau is that, when someone arrives for advice on one issue from one of our expert advisers, that adviser is able to provide whole-person advice and consider the totality of the circumstances that the person faces, covering social security, energy, housing and so on. Advisers endeavour to work constructively with people to deliver solutions.

As you have heard me describe previously, the greatest demand across our network is for advice on social security. Our advisers work with individuals to work out, first and foremost, what they are entitled to. Social security is a right, so it is important that people are able to access what they are entitled to. Advice is given on completing applications, and people are then supported through the whole claim journey in relation to providing sufficient evidence, appeals, redeterminations and so on.

We are aware that Social Security Scotland is adopting a model of continuous improvement. We have a constructive relationship with the agency, which we meet regularly to highlight points in the system that are creating friction for people. People might need support with redeterminations or appeals, or they might need to access instant support when there are safeguarding concerns or other such issues.

We are seeing some issues that are worth noting. There has been an increase in demand for support with appeals relating to the agency. That demand has increased by about 13 per cent compared with this time last year.

About a fifth of all the adult disability payment advice that we give is on redeterminations and challenging decisions. Where people can access free, independent advice, advisers are able to successfully support them with redeterminations. That shows that there is continued work for the agency to do on decision making, and we would welcome any activity that would strengthen that, such as training and guidance for the members of staff who make those decisions.

The Convener: Will a fresh applicant for any benefit—let us say ADP—who comes through the CAB route and is advised through that process have a higher success rate for their application than applicants who go through other routes? There has been a significant increase in the number of applicants who have been refused at stage 1. Is there in effect a—for want of a better term—higher hit rate for applicants who go through the CAB route?

Emma Jackson: As I described, our advisers are experts in the advice that they give. They look at the totality of a person's circumstances and seek to gather the full evidence that is needed for an application. Over half the ADP awards that we supported through our network were granted after

the initial application. That demonstrates that our advice gets decisions right the first time and enables essential income to be delivered to the disabled people who need it.

The Convener: Does that point to the process being too complex for somebody to do independently, or is it that CABs have developed a knowledge base of how to navigate the system?

Emma Jackson: It is undoubtedly complex to navigate the social security systems in Scotland. Those systems are plural; unlike in other parts of the United Kingdom, many people will perhaps navigate universal credit from the Department for Work and Pensions, payments from Social Security Scotland and payments from their local authority. Working with and navigating through three agencies and systems at the same time is undoubtedly complex, but there are opportunities to improve on and tackle such complexity. Where complexity has been designed in, it can be designed out, and we take every opportunity to point Social Security Scotland to where it can make changes.

I also echo the point that I made about the incredible advice that our advisers give. Their advice changes lives—they sit down with people and they are able to walk with them on a journey, no matter how long it takes, to try to get support in place.

Therefore, it is a combination of those things.

The Convener: I have a final question on CABs, and I will then bring in Dr Pauline Nolan in a second or two. Morven-May MacCallum may also want to return to this point when I bring her in.

There are significant funding issues that face citizens advice bureaux across the country. We have seen the metric that every £1 spent potentially delivers £50 in that area. As you go into what could be quite a tough funding round for external bodies such as CABs, what is your appeal to local authorities and the Scottish Government?

Emma Jackson: As you already heard me say, our advice changes lives. Last year, the network returned about £167 million into people's pockets. Those are predominantly households on the lowest incomes, and we know that that money will be spent in local communities and circulate around local economies. It is hard to fully stress the benefits that come to individuals, communities and our whole society, not just from our network but from anyone who delivers free, impartial and independent advice.

We need multiyear funding in order to provide support, stability and sustainability to the network as it goes about such work, and that level of funding needs to be adequate. Not only do we see more people at the moment but, given the

complexity of the issues that people face, such as the cost of living and energy crises, our advisers need to spend more time with people.

Advice is preventative. As the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament journey through public service reform, we urge the Government to consider the preventative work of advice as we work to improve our public services.

The Convener: Dr Nolan is nodding vigorously.

Dr Pauline Nolan (Inclusion Scotland): Yes, advice is crucial. The same report from Citizens Advice Scotland reported that redeterminations and appeals unlocked more than £2.1 million in adult disability payment entitlements. As has been said, that money goes into the circular economy. Disabled people tend to spend their money in their local economies and on the support that they need and the additional costs that they face, because they are more likely to be in poverty.

Therefore, advice and advocacy services are crucial, but we are seeing that not just citizens advice bureaux but other forms of advice in local authorities are being cut, because of the extreme spending pressures that local authorities are under. Tressa Burke will probably want to say more about this, but Glasgow integration joint board has made swingeing cuts to welfare advice services, which is going to have an impact on disabled people of all ages, so we are really concerned about that happening all over Scotland.

Fiona Collie (Carers Scotland): I want to emphasise the crucial role of local carers centres, because 28 per cent of carers live in poverty, and the complexity of the issues that they are facing can be very significant. Independent support from carers centres is crucial, but, like many advice services, in relation to benefits and other services, they are facing significant challenges in meeting demand. Given the complexity of their lives, the ability to visit a carers centre and to find out what support they can get—not just social security but social care, breaks from caring, and support in relation to their whole lives—is crucial. However, many carers centres are struggling to meet the demand.

The Convener: That is helpful, and we will return to carers issues late in the evidence session. Morven-May MacCallum has some questions on the administration of benefits.

Morven-May MacCallum (Highlands and Islands) (LD): On Monday, I had the pleasure of meeting staff at Shetland Islands Citizens Advice Bureau, and I was astonished by their passion for the work that they do—it was phenomenal. They highlighted the fact that there is no advisers line into Social Security Scotland and no way to escalate an individual case that has gone wrong.

They pointed out that the DWP has a line that is run generally by email and picked up by regional managers and that it has quite a quick response time. What difference would an escalation route make?

Emma Jackson: Thank you for taking the time to visit Della Armstrong and the team in Shetland CAB. A dedicated national escalation route is something that we at Citizens Advice Scotland and other colleagues have been calling for for some time. It is no exaggeration to say that that would make a significant difference. Social Security Scotland has been running a pilot scheme, which three of our local CABs have been participating in. They speak incredibly positively about having a direct route to the agency to escalate operational issues, perhaps, but, more importantly, safeguarding issues or cases involving vulnerable people that need to be resolved.

All the evidence points to that being enormously successful, first and foremost for the people who are in receipt, or who we hope will be in receipt, of the payment, because they get the payments faster. It is good news for our advisers, because it means that they are able to move on to other cases and offer other support. It is also good news for the agency to be able to resolve issues as quickly as possible. We are aware that Social Security Scotland is reviewing the pilot, with an intention, we hope and believe, to roll that out. We have had constructive conversations with the agency, and we urge it to move at pace and scale to deliver that, because it is a vital and needed solution that could bring important progress and positive outcomes for everybody involved.

Morven-May MacCallum: I am glad that you brought up the pilot, because that was going to be part of my next question. In Shetland, they had not heard anything about it, so they were a bit unsure about what was going on. Has Social Security Scotland given a timescale for when it might be implemented? You said that you are encouraging it to move at speed, but has it intimated a timescale?

Emma Jackson: No, we do not yet know when the review of the pilot will be completed and, therefore, when action would be taken, so we just continue to urge the agency to make it happen as soon as possible. As I said, all the evidence points to the fact that it could be really successful.

Morven-May MacCallum: It was also highlighted to me that section 8 of the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2025, which would allow appeals to lapse, has not been commenced. I am curious to know whether any of you have had contact with the Government about the timescale for that, or have been asked to feed into the commencement regulations.

09:45

Kirsty McKechnie (Child Poverty Action Group): We have not been asked as yet, but we are keen to see that happen. The current situation means that there are appeals waiting to go to tribunal, when we know that there are huge waiting times of sometimes up to a year before an appeal date is fixed. Bringing forward commencement regulations would remove some of those appeals from the system and ensure that matters could be resolved much more quickly for the client and for Social Security Scotland, taking some pressure off the appeals system. The sooner section 8 can be commenced, the better.

Morven-May MacCallum: There are more than 10,000 appeals outstanding. What proportion of those appeals do you feel would be resolved if lapsing were available?

Emma Jackson: I am not sure—that is the honest answer. I am not going to pretend that I have that statistic to hand. However, as Kirsty McKechnie said, enacting that provision as soon as possible would be incredibly welcome. It is a solution that is clearly there and would make a difference, so we need that to happen.

The Convener: I turn to one specific area of social security expenditure: that relating to child poverty. The Government has set tackling child poverty as its number 1 target. You will be aware that there is a live political debate, both in Scotland and in the rest of the United Kingdom, about the overall level of benefits expenditure. For the record, my party would like to see that come down.

However, it appears that there is an emerging view, if not a consensus, that public expenditure could be directed to other areas in order to reduce child poverty in particular. When the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and Housing recently appeared before the committee, she said:

“How do we address intergenerational poverty within families? That is best done not through increases in social security spending but by ensuring that people have the right skills and are in well-paid and respected employment.”—*[Official Report, Social Justice, Housing and Local Government Committee, 16 September 2026; c 11.]*

That is, in part, why the Government is reviewing the income-based targets for child poverty assessments. There is a discussion as to what the next step in the evolution of tackling poverty should be, and it may not necessarily be done through additional payments from the benefits system.

Does anyone have any thoughts as to other areas in which the Government should be seeking to invest urgently in order to address the underlying drivers of child poverty, rather than always looking necessarily at income-related support?

Kirsty McKechnie: That is absolutely right—there are multiple ways in which we can tackle child poverty, and we should be looking at barriers to employment and supporting childcare. We need to address childcare in particular as quickly as possible. However, there are children in poverty now, and such measures will take time to set up. Although it is important, therefore, to look at all the things that we could do to reduce child poverty, we should also look at how we tackle child poverty while we are waiting for those measures to be set up and to start running. When those measures are up and running, people who are not currently in poverty will be better able to engage with them.

Fiona Collie: I want to raise the issue of unpaid caring. A total of 58 per cent of parent carers have had to reduce their hours or give up work entirely, and I highlight two areas in that regard. One is childcare, which has been mentioned. The right childcare must be in place and it must be accessible, for example to enable someone with a child with complex needs to have 2:1 support. It can sometimes be complicated to provide such support, and it can be difficult for families to access it.

Another area concerns support for anyone who is caring who also has parental responsibility for a child. We know that levels of poverty among that group of people are greater, and that they often fall out of employment. The biggest driver of that is a lack of social care, and we cannot shy away from that. We have continued to shy away from addressing the key role of social care in supporting unpaid carers, whether they are parent carers or carers who have parental responsibility for a child—or indeed any carer—in order to enable them to be in employment. That is a real barrier.

When we talk about social care as a preventive measure, a lot of the conversation has been about hospital discharge and older people. However, the reality is that we need to consider the role of social care as a provider of support to enable parents to be in employment.

The Convener: That is helpful.

Thomas Kerr wants to come in on the broader issue of child payments.

Thomas Kerr (Glasgow) (Reform): Obviously—[*Interruption.*] Sorry, my throat is a bit tingly today. It looks as if progress on meeting the Scottish Government's target of ensuring that the child poverty rate is under 10 per cent by 2030 is going to stall at around 18 per cent. Before I go on to the child payment, I want to go round the table and ask stakeholders whether there are any policy ideas that we could implement to fix that issue. The stagnation of progress on child poverty is a big scourge that our country faces, so are there any ideas around the table?

Tressa Burke (Glasgow Disability Alliance): Obviously, there is a connection between child poverty and disabled people's poverty. The most recent figure that we had was that 52 per cent of all children living in poverty live in a household with a disabled person. The barriers that disabled people face to work and as a result of having a lower income need to be tackled at a policy level. We would ask the Government to look at the adequacy of disability benefits, which has never been looked at. Despite all the increases and improvements that have happened, that area has not been touched.

There are also barriers to social care, to employability support and to work, and in respect of the employability support that is needed, because disabled people face so much discrimination in the job market. We need to look at routes into work such as education, qualifications, access to peer support, building capacity and building aspirations and motivation to work. There are connections in that regard with the reserved access to work programme, which the United Kingdom Government runs. A range of things need to be looked at to reduce disability poverty, which it is absolutely vital to do if we are to reduce child poverty.

Emma Jackson: I completely echo everything that Tressa Burke said about the relationship between disabled people's poverty and child poverty and the fact that we need to look at both of those things in the round.

It is important that we acknowledge the vital work that the Scottish child payment has done. It shows the value of having a cash-first payment. Our evidence shows that the payment really makes a difference to the families who receive it, as it provides them with dignity and choice, and people tell us time and again that that is what matters and makes a difference.

All the evidence that has been gathered so far suggests that there is no credible route to our being able to meet the child poverty targets without further investment in social security, so it is absolutely right that we consider other measures. However, we must be attuned to what the evidence points towards in relation to the Scottish child payment. That should involve looking not just at the adequacy of the payment but at other aspects. For example, we could consider whether we can make changes to introduce an earnings taper, a work allowance and age tapering from ages 16 to 19.

We know that families find financial cliff edges incredibly hard to deal with, when financial stability slips from under their feet and they move into precarity. Tapering is a valuable tool to enable us to support families—and in particular single

parents—into the transition back into employment that so many people want. We would urge consideration of all aspects around the Scottish child payment, not just adequacy.

Dr Nolan: I back up what my colleagues have said. We know that disabled people are more likely to be paid less than non-disabled people and that there is a wider pay gap between disabled women and non-disabled men. The Scottish Trades Union Congress has said that the difference is around £4,000 a year on average between a non-disabled person and a disabled person. We are really concerned that the gap has widened.

In addition, we support the idea that social security payments could be made more adequate, and we would support a basic income that included disability elements. There is an employment gap as well, and I echo what Tressa Burke said about support for employability.

The employability supports that we have in local areas are not great—they are okay but, because a lot of disabled people have faced so many barriers in, for example, specialist education, they come out of it and face huge barriers to employment. We have a project that supports disabled people into paid internships, which works well, but we are told that the local employment support does not necessarily support disabled people from those backgrounds.

The disability pay gap is worse for women, and women are more likely to be unpaid carers. We also know that about a third of unpaid carers are disabled people, and they are likely to be disabled because of the impacts of caring, mental health issues and various other things. We also know that disabled unpaid carers face additional barriers to work.

Kirsty McKechnie: We agree that, until other things are in place, such as childcare, employability support and low-cost housing for families, we are not likely to meet the child poverty targets without further investment in social security. However, there are things that can be done to expand the Scottish child payment and reduce the number of children in poverty without having to increase the payment or introduce new mechanisms in the social security system, which would take time to set up.

We suggest a 12-week run-on, which would support low-income workers who have fluctuating earnings and who might feel anxious about the impact of increasing their hours or changing their working pattern. We know that families do not necessarily think about that in relation to the Scottish child payment but, with universal credit, if you have ever tried to calculate when you might lose entitlement, you will know that it is really difficult. A 12-week run-on would give people the

confidence to make such changes and would also mean that there was a reliable source of income.

We agree that the payment should be extended to 16 to 19-year-olds who are in full-time non-advanced education. That is relatively simple to do, because the DWP holds that information in the universal credit claim already. We think that that would result in a 0.3 percentage point reduction in child poverty.

Making housing benefit and maternity allowance qualifying benefits would support the people who are on the lowest incomes. Again, the information is already available to enable the Scottish child payment to be paid to those people.

Thomas Kerr: I know that my colleagues want to come in, but I have a question on the child payment in particular. Some stakeholders, in particular the Child Poverty Action Group, have called for the payment to be increased to £55. The cabinet secretary told the committee that she does not want to do that; she wants to look at other poverty-related benefits and ways of working. What is your response to that?

Kirsty McKechnie: The targets are there. The Parliament was in unison in agreeing on those targets and, unless we increase the payment to £55 a week, the targets will not be met. As we have said, we fully agree with using all the other things in the toolbox, but that is the quickest tool to address child poverty at the moment.

There are children who are in poverty now. We do not just leave them until we have everything else in place; we need to look after them now. Therefore, we should put the money in place until we have built all the infrastructure. Ultimately, that will probably mean that fewer people have access to the payment because their earnings will be too high et cetera but, for now, we should use the fastest tool in the toolbox.

Thomas Kerr: My last question is a very quick one. The Parliament legislated in 2025 to allow the Scottish child payment to become a stand-alone benefit rather than a top-up to universal credit, but those provisions have not yet been brought into force. What difference could they make?

Kirsty McKechnie: The things that I just talked about—the 12-week run-on and allowing the payment to be paid to people who are in receipt of housing benefit and to 16 to 19-year-olds—all rely on those provisions being enacted, because at the moment the payment can be paid only if someone gets universal credit at that point.

The Convener: Gary Bouse has been very patient.

Gary Bouse (Falkirk West) (SNP): I know that we have been talking about the child payment, but

I want to extend the discussion to consider workplaces, which have been highlighted as an issue. To me, this should be a joint effort between the employer and Government. We have covered the Government side of things, but could employers do more? That is important to what we are talking about.

10:00

Tressa Burke: I know that my colleagues will want to come in, but our view is that employers do not know their duties and responsibilities under the legislation, and everybody, including Social Security Scotland, could do with boosting and increasing their disability equality competence, so that they better understand those duties and responsibilities.

For a start, employers need to have more understanding not only of the support that they can get through the access to work scheme to employ disabled people but of the vital contribution that disabled people can make. Many employers do know about that, and they want to employ disabled people, but the delays with access to work—I realise that it does not fall within the committee's jurisdiction—are causing major problems. For example, we wanted to appoint a young woman last October, and we got her access to work application sorted only in May. That would have been off-putting for most employers, and we had to cover the costs until we were able to get her package sorted.

That is an example of some of the barriers that we are facing. This is a brilliant young woman—she is a graduate; she was the editor of her university newspaper; and she got a first-class honours degree. She is 22 and sharp as a tack—absolutely brilliant. If we had not been a disabled person-led organisation—and I know that Pauline Nolan would have done the same thing, had she been in a similar position—nobody would have taken that step. Well, perhaps not nobody, but it is very unusual for anybody to take that step and that risk without the money coming in.

Employers do not necessarily know the help that they can get from access to work, and perhaps from other places, to boost their knowledge of what they can do. Moreover, employers put blocks in place in relation to discrimination and other issues. They might not need to do that to the extent that they think that they do, but I think that there is fear, and a sense of risk, when it comes to this issue.

I know that Pauline Nolan has had a lot of experience with the intern project.

Dr Nolan: Among employers, as with the rest of society, a high level of stigma is associated with benefits, disability and so on. ADP is an in-work and out-of-work benefit—working status does not

matter to whether someone gets it, because it is to address the additional costs of impairment and the impacts of society being inaccessible.

We have wider problems with employment. We talk about employerability and how employers need to be more disability competent, but, to be honest, I think that there is a wider societal fear and unacceptance to address. A lot of disabled people are scared to admit when they apply for a job that they are disabled, unless they are applying to a disabled people's organisation like ours; they are not necessarily going to admit that they are disabled, unless it is really obvious. An employer might see the disability when the person comes to an interview and think that they are perfectly suitable for the job but still refuse to hire them, because they are scared of the amount of sick leave that they might take. There is no evidence to show that disabled people are more likely to take sick leave when they are in employment, but that is the fear that employers have, and it is why employers need to have that competence.

I wanted to bring up access to work because it was the subject of one of our recommendations to the committee. We, too, are facing issues in that respect. We had a young woman, who is a little bit older than Tressa Burke's colleague, apply for a job, which she got last November. She needs access to work support; in fact, she needs more support than she needed when she first applied. A year passed, and when her access to work application was finally considered, it was refused.

Another colleague waited eight months for a response to her application. Attitudes came into this, too, because the DWP did not take account of her physical impairment and the impacts of fatigue; it took account only of the fact that she said that she was neurodivergent. Because that did not really have any impact on her travelling, she was not awarded the travel support that she needed. People are going through reconsiderations and reviews of their access to work support, and it is being cut.

I chair the access to work stakeholder group for the Scottish Government and the DWP, and I know that there is a wide range of issues. All the stakeholders in that group say that there are huge issues. We know that the DWP is doing its best to hire more advisers and that it is listening to us, but there are so many blocks in the DWP.

I know that the cabinet secretary does not want to do this, but we think that access to work should be devolved to Scotland and co-designed with disabled people. Co-design works, and it works for Social Security Scotland. Access to work brings great advantages—it brings disabled people into the workforce and retains them there. It is huge value for money, but it is not being used properly

by the DWP. It would work better in Scotland because of the local knowledge of advisers and so on, and we have all the evidence on that in a report that we can share with the committee.

Steven Bonnar (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): It is illuminating to hear about access to work. Those kinds of problems have been long lasting.

I will jump back to ask a question about child poverty, then return to access to work. This is for Kirsty McKechnie first, but I would like to hear everybody else's views, too. Have you considered the fact that £791 million has gone unclaimed in child maintenance money? We know that most single-parent families are led by mothers, so they are missing out on that. That is another system that is failing, just as access to work is. It is failing the people who are its users.

Is that considered when you talk about child poverty and its causes? That is nearly £1 billion that children and families are entitled to, and it does not need additional Government funding. What are your views on that? Would you support devolution of the child maintenance service to Scotland?

Kirsty McKechnie: I do not think that the Child Poverty Action Group has taken a stance on devolution of child maintenance. Our colleagues at One Parent Families Scotland have worked very hard on their child maintenance report, and we support the recommendations in that report.

On the point about there being unclaimed money that families are entitled to, we absolutely agree that having that money would boost families' incomes. However, as we know, making that happen requires further investment and it requires people to go through often quite uncomfortable processes. For that reason, it is not the thing to do in order to tackle child poverty immediately, although that is not to say that that is not to happen. Again, we fully support the recommendations that One Parent Families Scotland has made on that issue.

Steven Bonnar: Does anybody else have views on the devolution of child maintenance to Scotland? Okay—that was interesting.

Do you support devolving access to work to Scotland?

Dr Nolan: Yes. That was in our manifesto.

Steven Bonnar: Could you illuminate for us whether the delays that are happening in the system are causing people to lose jobs or to turn work away because they cannot access the funding that they are entitled to?

Dr Nolan: I am under the impression that it is little known that people can apply for access to

work support for an interview, and people cannot really apply for a whole package of access to work support until they have got the job.

The delays are preventing access. Tressa Burke mentioned a colleague who did not get her access to work package for a year. Most employers will not pay the additional costs. They have duties under the Equality Act 2010 to provide reasonable adjustments, and some are not aware of that, but they are not going to pay additional costs if they have not had the person working for them. We know that people are having to walk away, or roll away, from jobs when they cannot get access to work support.

We also know that, as I said previously, people's support is being reviewed and they are having up to half of it taken away, even though there has been no decrease in their needs. There has been a change to how support is provided through job aides, which now provide 25 per cent less of the support that people need to do their job. Job aides do not take over the role; they provide particular support to remove barriers and so allow the disabled person to do the work.

That support has been cut, but people say, "Well, my needs haven't gone." In fact, their needs may have increased, and that might be why they are seeking a review of their access to work support. The DWP has recruited 400 new caseworkers, but we are concerned about a lack of experience. The DWP has said that a lot of those caseworkers were recruited from people who worked on the personal independence payment.

We are also concerned about wider attitudes. Negative attitudes came through strongly in the experience that I had with a caseworker. He kept saying, "Yeah, but does she have challenges? Is she cognitively capable of travelling?" I said, "Well, of course she is—she's a policy officer. She is cognitively able to make a journey but, if she's leaving Edinburgh to get to Glasgow, she'll be exhausted by 4 o'clock because of the impacts of her impairment." He kept dismissing that point, even in conversation with the woman's manager, who has lots of experience of analysing access to work and working with the DWP on it. Another manager might not have been able to challenge that, but the woman still did not get the travel support that she needed.

That is happening all over the country. Advisers do not know about where people live, including the impacts of living in rural Scotland and how difficult it is to get from one place to another. There are expectations that people can just get a lift or a bus, but disabled people are saying, "That's not possible where I live—I could get one bus but I would not be able to get back from work." Advisers

do not understand the conditions that people in Scotland are living in, nor do they really understand the impacts of impairment.

Emma Jackson: The evidence that we are hearing anecdotally across the citizens advice network is that, because of significant delays in getting support from access to work, people are using ADP to pay for the costs that they are incurring to enable them to go to and stay in the workplace. About a quarter of everybody we give ADP advice to is in work, which proves that it is an enabling benefit that helps people to enter and stay in the workforce.

Disabled people experience some of the worst poverty in Scotland, and it puts further financial pressure and hardship on individuals when ADP is not being used for its intended purpose—whether that is to access specialist diets, counselling, aids or any of the many things that people need. That is particularly the case at a time when disabled people are battling with the cost of living—we need only look at the rising price of energy and what that means for them.

Although some disabled people are being creative and doing everything that they can to stay in the workplace, the delays are having a detrimental impact on their health and wellbeing and are further entrenching them in poverty.

Steven Bonnar: I agree—thank you.

Kate Campbell (Edinburgh Eastern, Musselburgh and Tranent) (SNP): Thank you for all your responses. Most of my questions have already been asked and answered, but I am interested in the first thing that you put in your submission, Pauline Nolan, about the

“language and framing of social security”.

What difference would there be if access to work were to be managed through Social Security Scotland rather than the Department for Work and Pensions? In your previous answer, you referred to misinformation, stigma and language that is used about deserving and undeserving groups without an understanding of the help that people actually need.

Dr Nolan: Yes, that is right. You can see articles in the media and social media that frame disabled people as fakes and fraudulent, but the fraud rate is tiny. It is actually even smaller in Scotland for ADP than it is for PIP, for which it is already tiny.

Because Social Security Scotland was set up with dignity and respect at its heart and co-designed with the people who need it, that proposal could be a way of doing it. However, there needs to be a partnership with the employability services that exist to provide

employment support, and I am not sure how access to work would work as a benefit.

I do not see any appetite from the cabinet secretary to bring any more benefits in, but we could make part of the employability support that disabled people get support to access work. We could have a genuinely co-designed way of doing that so that disabled people are supported, are not scared and have their needs assessed in a person-led way with dignity, with respect at its heart and with the assumption that the person is not defrauding the system. That is the impression that I get from the DWP, but these are disabled people who actively want to work—they have a job.

10:15

Kate Campbell: Yes, it is frustrating that so much of the conversation we have had around this has been about how to support people out of poverty when it is about helping people to work. When people want to work, are applying for jobs and have a job, to then have another barrier put in place is frustrating, so I appreciate all the evidence that we have had on that issue.

Emma Jackson: I want to come in on the question on language and framing, which is incredibly important as we have this conversation. Social security continues to be discussed widely, not just in Scotland but across the UK. Unfortunately, we have to acknowledge the weaponisation of social security and the very dehumanising language that continues to be used in certain pockets of the media that seek, ultimately, to villainise disabled people who are accessing the payments that they are entitled to in order to live a dignified and decent life.

Social security is an investment in us all—first and foremost, in the people who receive it, local communities and our wider society and economy. It should be there as a safety net to catch any of us during the challenges of life that we might not expect, and to act as a springboard that helps us to take positive steps forward, whether towards volunteering, employment or participating in our community.

Unfortunately, far too much of the conversation remains in that dehumanising and weaponising space instead of celebrating and acknowledging the deep and valuable contributions that disabled people make to our society and our communities as our families and our friends. Those are the things that we should be doing, and we should be enabling disabled people to participate fully in society. Collectively, we are choosing that social security is a vehicle to do that, and we should therefore not weaponise the very thing that people need as an enabling tool.

Kate Campbell: I will follow up on that. Absolutely everything that you have said rings true to me. I feel that we have a responsibility in this committee to set a tone, so is there anything that you think we could do that would be helpful as part of that national conversation?

Emma Jackson: Absolutely—language matters, and thinking carefully about the language that we use when talking about the issue is incredibly important. Above and beyond that, we should take the lead directly from disabled people themselves. It is critical that disabled people's organisations and disabled people themselves are around the table today in order to help us to have that conversation in a constructive way and to have the confidence to call out when language is not acceptable.

We need to collectively make decisions about things that we are not going to tolerate, because, ultimately, they are causing further entrenched harm. Therefore, we welcome any steps that this committee or the Parliament would be willing to take to be mindful of the conversation that we have when we are discussing not only social security in general but, in particular, disability payments.

Tressa Burke: I will come in on another action that the committee could take. Language is definitely important: it conveys meaning, and it conveys the values and ideology that are driving the policies. It is also important to be very clear about the purpose of disability benefits. Disability benefits help people to manage extra costs, and they help people to manage the financial hardship that they face from all the barriers that come with being a disabled person instead of constantly having to manage financial hardship themselves, which is really important.

I was looking back at the Hansard reports of the debate that introduced disability living allowance—because I was around in 1990; I am of that age—and it was clear from the very first passages that it was not only about improving people's ability to rely on benefits when they were out of work, but about helping them into work. Separately, but related to all of that, it was about improving

"the coverage of help with the extra costs associated with disability".

The report goes on to say that the disability living allowance would

"restructure and significantly extend the help with the extra costs of disability."—[*Official Report, House of Commons*, 21 November 1990; Vol 181, c 311, 312.]

That was said by Tony Newton, the then Secretary of State for Social Security, in November 1990. There was a second reading thereafter. I think that that has been lost in the mists of time.

I am a social worker to trade. The GDA works extensively on social care as well as all the interrelated barriers that disabled people face. A myth that has become of legendary proportions is that disabled people get ADP—previously PIP, previously DLA—to pay for the cost of social care. That is just not true, and it has never been true, but people who are in social work now think that it is true—they truly believe it—and that the legislation permits them to apply those charges. Now, every local authority in Scotland is doing it, because times are hard and public services are facing extreme challenges.

The committee could make clear the purpose of disability benefits and what they are for—the extra costs, rather than the cost of living crisis and rather than not having an access-to-work package in time to start work. They were not for social care. All those things contribute, but there are many more things as well.

A question that I would put back to anybody who says they are for social care charges is, who are the disabled people who get the benefit but do not get social care, and why are they getting it? Many thousands of people do not get social care. Some people who get social care are paying charges and some are not, but they are all getting the same benefit. That is an example of an anomaly in the system. I think that it is to do with its evolution over time, but there is also a deliberately misleading aspect to it, and the committee could take a role.

Fiona Collie: I want to feed back on Gary Bouse's question but also about the narrative on carers and requiring care, because all of us around the table have a 60 per cent chance of being an unpaid carer—if you are a woman, it is a 70 per cent chance and 12 years earlier, I am afraid. As our population ages, and as more people live longer with multiple conditions, the reality is that, at some point in our lives, we will all be a carer, require care or both.

The huge contribution that unpaid carers make is often ignored. One thousand people a day are becoming carers. To lead into Gary Bouse's question on employment, the cost to the UK of unpaid carers falling out of employment—about 15 per cent either lose employment or have to reduce their hours—is £38 billion. That is the cost that we are paying for not supporting people—carers and disabled and older people—effectively.

Employers have a key role to play, as we have heard more and more. Andy Burnham has been talking about caring. Ed Davey made caring, disability and normal life a part of the general election campaign—I cannot remember which, as there have been quite a few.

In Scotland, the Scottish Government funded the carer positive accreditation scheme, which has

been supporting employers across Scotland. Near enough 600,000 people work for a carer-friendly employer—and, by the way, we are encouraging all MSPs to become carer-positive employers.

How people are supported to remain in work makes a real difference. That can include things such as carer networks, flexible working or simply enabling access to a telephone during the day. It is about just getting employers to think about it. The more the Scottish Parliament—our Parliament—talks about caring, disability and older age as normal parts of our lives and things that we want and need to support, and as normal rather than a problem, the more we build the narrative that social security is a part of it. However, we all—including employers—have a role to play.

Gary Bouse: Convener, I was going to ask about care. Would now be the right time?

The Convener: Before we move on to that, I have a couple of quick questions on disability benefit and the cost of living.

The cabinet secretary set out to us that the Government is actively looking at alternative ways of tackling poverty. One of the Government's proposals in the programme for government and the SNP manifesto was to look at having a policy of food price caps in supermarkets, which strikes me as very complicated and something that could have unintended consequences. Is there any response around the table as to whether supermarket price caps could be an effective measure?

Steven Bonnar: I could answer that for you. *[Laughter.]*

The Convener: I have to go to a witness for that one.

Emma Jackson: I am happy to offer some general reflections. Undoubtedly, the impact of the cost of living crisis is what so many people are acutely struggling with, not least the 200,000 people who are seeking advice from the Citizens Advice network. In recent years, it is not only the price of food that has risen dramatically and significantly but also the cost of energy. Energy debt is one of the biggest issues that folks bring to a local CAB. The average level of energy debt is sitting around £2,700 for people, and there are issues around energy. Rent arrears have risen dramatically over the past four years, with people facing an average of £4,700 of average rent arrears. Folks are grappling with multiple, compounding issues that ultimately mean that people have insufficient income and cannot afford the essentials that we all need.

One of the very best ways to get support to those who need it most is to take incredibly

targeted approaches that consider those people who are experiencing the most harm. Those are, undoubtedly, disabled people and perhaps single-parent families—people who fall into the priority family groups that the Scottish Government is already aware of. In this situation, we would urge Government and Parliament to look at targeting support to those people whom we know are experiencing the worst of hardship, instead of considering a universal approach.

The Convener: Obviously, focusing on a small basket of products means that you just displace the profit margin to other products—so, the cost of bread might fall but the cost of Fairy liquid rises.

Emma Jackson: Our network is not expert in food prices and that industry. As I said, to mitigate some of the worst harms that people are experiencing right now, we really would like to see methodologies that target support at those people who need help the most.

Dr Nolan: We have evidence from the Trussell Trust's "Hunger in Scotland" report from last year that highlights the disproportionate impact of food insecurity on disabled people: 75 per cent of people who referred to the Trussell Trust for their community food banks were disabled. The report also found that, compared with 8 per cent of non-disabled people, 27 per cent of disabled people experience food insecurity.

We are responding to the food cap consultation and looking at the impacts of food poverty in certain areas. For instance, GDA did some research and found that 75 per cent of its 6,000 members faced food insecurity—I am sorry for quoting you again, Tressa—and that there are higher levels of food insecurity in Glasgow because there are higher levels of disability and impairment there.

Another issue is food deserts—you have heard about Castlemilk. Disabled people are more likely to live in areas that have fewer public transport links and big supermarkets. So, although we understand the concerns about small businesses in local areas losing out because of food capping, we also have concerns about disabled people not being able to get the fresh food that they need—or the foods that they need if they have dietary issues and are on special diets—because they cannot get access to the supermarkets where those kinds of foods are sold. That is a big concern, which needs to be looked at in the round in the food capping work.

The Convener: Before we close the questions on disability benefit and move on to carers in particular, I have a question, which people watching at home will say that many people in the country, although obviously not the majority, might want to ask. Emma Jackson, you said that cash

payments are the most effective way to eradicate poverty.

I have knocked on a lot of doors and have spoken to a lot of people in the pub and in the street, and there is a concern that some people mispend—for want of a better expression—the benefits that they or their household receive. Is there any mechanism that we could look at to ensure that those in receipt of benefits do not, as some might characterise it, mispend that money on alcohol, tobacco or, say, scratch cards? What could be done to ensure that households who are in receipt of benefits actually spend that money in the best way possible, as I think we would all initially hope and intend?

10:30

Emma Jackson: I am not sure that I recognise the use of the word “mispend”. Social security payments are made to individuals for them to make the choice in their own lives about where and how that money needs to be spent. The social security system that we have built here in Scotland is anchored in the principles of dignity, fairness and respect, and we trust our fellow citizens to make decisions for themselves about where the money from the payments that they get needs to be spent.

The unequivocal evidence that we are seeing across the citizens advice network is that people are really struggling to make social security payments go far enough and that, in fact, the money is not enough to cover the essentials that we all need to live decent and dignified lives. I am talking about food, energy, providing a roof over your head, accommodation costs, school shoes for children and so on—all the things that, in a just and compassionate society, we should all be able to expect.

Therefore, instead of our considering any kind of draconian or compliance measures for individuals and what they may or may not spend their money on, I think that our time would be better spent considering whether the payments that people are receiving are sufficient and whether we are getting them to those who need them most. Social Security Scotland is about to launch its new benefit uptake strategy, which is a really important piece of work that seeks to ensure that people access the social security that they are entitled to.

Again, we in Scotland have accepted that social security is a human right—that it is people’s right to access that money. As a result, we would encourage work on uptake and the provision of free, independent and impartial advice so that people can access the payments that they are entitled to.

Dr Nolan: I absolutely agree with my colleague Emma Jackson, and I would add that this is part of the stigmatising narrative that pits poor people against other poor people. You get people down the pub and in the community saying, “Well, I’ve seen so-and-so spending their money on scratch cards.” Do you want to be told what you spend your money on? I actually think that it is outrageous that people have these views, but they are being fed them by the media, which are filled with animosity towards disabled people and are basically saying that there are deserving and undeserving disabled people. People have said as much to me—indeed, someone who works for the DWP has said it to me. They say, “You can see that some people do need it but other people don’t, do they?” If someone says that they are disabled, they are disabled. How do you know what challenges they are facing? Do you see all their impairments? No, you do not.

This issue makes me really angry, as you can see, and I am very passionate about it, but it is important that we challenge these stigmatising narratives and say, “Disabled people should be allowed to spend this money on what they need.” In fact, it is probably not enough to cover what they need, given the news this week that energy prices are likely to go up by as much as 12 per cent this winter. Disabled people use that money to pay for the additional energy costs of, say, running a washing machine more often or charging a power wheelchair. It is really important.

Tressa Burke: I share Pauline Nolan’s passion, and frustration, about this, and I support what Emma Jackson said, too.

That said, I think that there is confusion about disability benefits among the general public, and those who are watching at home might well share it. Everybody knows somebody who they think is cheating, and everybody thinks that they are absolutely honest and would never cheat. These are stories that we hear.

I do think, though, that this narrative, and the cutting of disability benefits, are not as popular as politicians might think. We need only look at what happened with Keir Starmer’s green paper last year. There was not just opposition to that from the DPOs and Citizens Advice; there was a massive groundswell of general opposition, which stopped it in its tracks. There was also a lot of back-bench rebellion, which was partly due to campaigning. I was taken aback with the groundswell of opposition across the whole of the UK.

It is interesting that the National Centre for Social Research launched a report this week that says that no fewer than 63 per cent of people say that benefits for disabled people should be a priority for extra spending on social benefits. It is

really interesting that more people say that about benefits for disabled people than about any other benefit, including retirement pensions.

There is huge support for spending on disability benefits despite all the narrative. We hear it a lot in the media and in the political context. However, those are the facts, as evidenced by the report, other social attitude studies that tell us similar things and what happened to the UK green paper.

The Convener: Kate Campbell, did you want to come in?

Kate Campbell: It has all been said, probably much better than I could say it, but I will add that it is important that we in the committee are careful about the language that we use. As has been said, disability payments are payments to help people with the extra cost of disability. If we are talking about dignity and respect, it is not up to us to decide what people can spend that on. People are struggling, and they will make the choices that they need to make to get by. We should understand and respect that and be very careful about saying anything in the committee that might emanate out from it in a way that could be very unhelpful to the national conversation.

The Convener: That conversation is taking place—we must be cognisant of that.

Thomas Kerr has a couple of final questions in relation to disability benefits.

Thomas Kerr: Last week, the committee heard from Edel Harris, who carried out a review of the Scottish Government's ADP. This question might be more for Dr Nolan and Ms Burke, but can I get your reaction to the Scottish Government's response to the ADP review?

Dr Nolan: I have not really prepared anything to say about the Scottish Government's response, but I have not seen many of the recommendations being taken forward. A couple of the recommendations of that review that have not been taken forward are the ones on the 50 per cent requirement and on the 20-metre rule, which should be extended for mobility purposes. Mobility costs are additional costs that disabled people face. If you are a wheelchair user, you are more likely to use a car, whether that is a car obtained through Motability or just a private car, and you are more likely to have issues in accessing public transport. The costs of that are sky high at the moment.

Mobility is absolutely crucial. A disabled person might be able to walk 20 metres, but they can be exhausted for three days afterwards, so that distance should be extended. Edel Harris had evidence from DPOs and others on that, and made the recommendation based on that hard evidence. Therefore, that is what should be done. That has

been our recommendation for many years, yet the decision has not been taken. We would like to see that recommendation move forward.

Tressa Burke: Similarly, I have not prepared an answer to that particular question. I support what Dr Nolan says. It is welcome that some of the recommendations around waiting times, escalation routes and other aspects are being taken forward, but a matter that was not in the scope of the review was adequacy. Therefore, that issue needs to be looked at. We have looked at it for all benefits except the benefits for disabled people. We know that benefits are being used by disabled people to manage the cost of living crisis rather than for the extra costs—people are not even getting to the extra costs. Disabled people are facing all of the barriers that we have mentioned, and many children in poverty live in a disabled household—it is all interrelated. I think that Emma Jackson wants to come in on that.

Emma Jackson: Citizens Advice was on the advisory group for the independent review of ADP, as were other colleagues. We worked intensively on the final report that was submitted to the Scottish Government.

We want to see all the 50-plus recommendations implemented. The recommendations represented the views of DPOs, advice organisations and disabled people themselves.

At the end of the previous parliamentary session, the Scottish Government indicated which actions it could do and which ones it would consider whether it could do, and then there was a small number that the Scottish Government indicated that it would not be doing at that point. I believe that the cabinet secretary has indicated that she will update the committee on progress—on where those three buckets, as it were, are. We would welcome that update so as to understand the direction in which things are moving.

We have already begun to see some progress in an area where we are doing work with Social Security Scotland to develop the ADP application and review form, so that there are fewer binary questions, more prompts and more free text space. That is a positive step, and it is live and in train now. Undoubtedly, however, other work could and should be taking place on criteria, the points-based system and how we move towards including information that is more about personal circumstances and social barriers. We, too, look forward to an update on where that work is.

Thomas Kerr: There is a wider conversation taking place across the UK with the ongoing Timms review. We are still waiting to see what that will come back with, but it could have implications

for Scotland. Do the witnesses have any thoughts on what we have heard so far from that review?

Dr Nolan: We have been involved a little bit in working with the Timms review—although the recommendations are for PIP, which is no longer applicable in Scotland. Everybody has been moved across to adult disability payment, unless they are moving from England or Wales, for example.

We have been concerned throughout the review about the focus on employment and getting people off PIP because they need to be in employment, whereas we have been saying that PIP is support for the additional costs of disability, and it is not an out-of-work benefit. It seems to be conflated with other out-of-work benefits in the narrative, however. That does not seem to be getting challenged by the Timms review, as far as we can see. We have concerns about that.

We also have other concerns that we are discussing with the review to do with the accessibility of its consultation events. We are concerned that the review's interim recommendations include payments for things, such as payments for supports or credit for supermarkets, rather than cash payments. We have made it clear that that is absolutely inappropriate. We should be ensuring dignity and respect for disabled people so that they can manage and spend their own money in the way that they need to, given the cost of living. We completely support a cash-first principle. We find the idea of giving things instead of money quite paternalistic, frankly.

Tressa Burke: I support what Emma Jackson and Pauline Nolan have said.

Last week in England, a cross-party group of MPs warned the UK Government against using the Timms review to cut PIP, saying that it would put pressure on other systems and services across the piece. There has been quite a lot of resistance to the idea of buying one-off pieces of equipment—as though disability-related extra costs can be chunked up in that way. The reality is much more pervasive and everyday—and there would be a groundswell of support for that position.

Emma Jackson: There are a number of things in the interim report that we can take encouragement from. The Timms review has carefully considered ADP, considering the independent ADP review. There are some positive things there around choice and control, the use of a tell-us-once principle and moving to allow a wide range of evidence to be accepted. Those are all positive things.

As colleagues have indicated, the Timms review is ultimately about PIP, which is no longer paid in

Scotland. One of our biggest concerns, as the review comes into land and recommendations are made, is what the interaction and intersection will be with any changes that might happen to PIP that could have consequences for ADP. Tressa Burke mentioned the proposed welfare reforms last summer. Some quite wide-ranging reforms were being proposed by the UK Government, which, frankly, did not seem to understand the relationship between PIP and ADP, which are fundamentally and inextricably linked in how they are designed and delivered, nor how ADP acts as a qualifying and passporting benefit on to other payments.

We have been intent on urging the Timms review to take a four-nations approach as it goes about its work, and we have communicated that it should endeavour to work with the Scottish Government at the earliest opportunity if there is any possibility that changes in PIP might mean changes in ADP, in particular around the qualifying payments.

A big question remains around what will happen to the work capability assessment and what it would mean for us in Scotland if that element is removed from PIP. Looking through a four-nations lens is, therefore, essential as that work happens.

10:45

Kate Campbell: That is helpful. Last week, as part of the committee's pre-budget scrutiny, in which we discuss where money is spent, we had a chat about the evidence. In particular, we discussed public understanding of what ADP is being spent on and what impact it has on people's lives. As we have said, it is about meeting the additional cost of disability, but what does that mean? It would be helpful, in order for the committee to understand, if you could give us an idea of your experiences regarding what ADP pays for and the impact that it has on people, and of what impact there would be if it was withdrawn.

Tressa Burke: I have many stories about that, because we work with thousands of people, but we also run a welfare rights service called rights now, which is free and accessible and operates alongside the services that CABs provide in Glasgow.

We know that disabled people who are Glasgow Disability Alliance members—I think that their experiences would be quite representative—use the money for the extra costs of disability, which sounds like an obvious point, but people are now also using it to meet the costs of living. We have recently been making a film about the preventative role of disability benefits and what else needs to be done. There is a young man in the film who is still at school, and he is using disability benefits

exactly as they were intended: to meet the extra costs. He is doing things with his Motability car and he is able to use the money for extra clothing and independent living equipment. Disabled people are doing that, but they are squeezed, so they are now having to make choices.

There are the extra heating costs, which are extortionate for some disabled people. I am a very privileged disabled person, but I have multiple sclerosis and I have extremely large heating bills. That is no problem for me as I have a good wage and all the rest of it, but I can only imagine what it is like for our members. There can be costs for special diets, and definitely for special clothes and shoes. I recently spoke to one of our members who goes through a pair of shoes every three weeks because of her gait. She has cerebral palsy, but it should not matter what the condition is—I am just explaining that those are the legitimate extra costs of disability, and she uses her money for that. People are using their money for all sorts of things, but it has been very much squeezed.

We might think about what happens if people do not have a Motability car, either because they do not drive or they do not have a designated driver. With the Motability component, even at the higher rate, someone could blow that on two taxis a week if they were going from one part of Glasgow to what was the Southern general and is now the new Queen Elizabeth hospital. Those are the realistic costs that people are experiencing.

There are so many extra costs—we could list many things. That is why it would be hard to say that people could use the payment for this or that piece of equipment; there are things that come up every day in people's lives that should be life enhancing, but at this point, people are very much being squeezed.

The Convener: Fiona Collie wants to come in.

Fiona Collie: Yes, I want to come in briefly on the Timms review, but I also want to add something else. Our colleagues at Carers UK have been clear about the link between PIP and carers allowance in England and Wales. They have highlighted the implications for carers allowance if changes are made to PIP and, equally, what that would mean across the board for ADP and the carer support payment. That needs to be considered carefully. The indications are that, as a result of the original proposals around PIP, around 100,000 carers would have been affected and would have lost their entitlement. That is the only income that they have, and that needs to form part of the discussion.

We also have significant evidence from carers that they are using the carer support payment to pay for the additional costs of disability, and in general. For many people, it is a household

payment; the costs involve special diets, transport and things such as incontinence products, because it is very difficult for them to get what they need from the national health service. The payment is also used to meet additional costs for clothing—transport is another big cost, plus accessible childcare. Disabled people and carers are paying for a wide range of things.

I go back to the point that Tressa Burke made about social care charging. Disability benefits are taken into account in deciding how much someone will be charged for social care, so if someone is getting social care, a chunk of their disability benefits go into that. The costs can be pretty significant, but we know that, because the cost of living has become such a challenge. Around half of carers are cutting back on essentials such as heating and food. Those are households with people with disabilities and people with children, and those are the choices that folk are having to make.

Narrowing the payments down—by saying, for example, that PIP could cover a certain piece of equipment—would not really stack up with the reality of people's lives.

The Convener: I will bring in Emma Jackson before we turn to some detailed questions on carers benefit, and perhaps bring in Mr Traynor.

Emma Jackson: I will be brief. I thank Kate Campbell for the question. In my job, I spend a lot of time pointing out when things are not working and are going wrong, and the harm that that is causing. It is important, therefore, that we take a moment to acknowledge the power and the impact of ADP. When it works and gets it right, it is a transformative payment for people.

Our network has been working with a girl who I will call Cara. She said:

"ADP has been nothing short of life-saving. It provides me with the financial support to survive but also improve my day-to-day living. I've been able to buy tools and equipment that directly support my health and help me to manage my conditions better."

There are incredibly positive stories about the transformative power of payments such as ADP, and it is important that we acknowledge that.

It is also important for us to acknowledge that, as well as the challenges that people experience with Social Security Scotland, we continually hear about the kindness and compassion that people experience as they navigate what is often a very difficult process and confront the reality of the things that they can and cannot do. Undoubtedly, Social Security Scotland could be going further and faster in delivering improvements from its continuous learning. However, when ADP works, it is transformative and changes people's lives.

The Convener: Okay—great. I will bring in Gary Bouse.

Gary Bouse: I will move the conversation slightly more towards the carer side, which Fiona Collie covered a couple of minutes ago. As was said earlier, carers need a dignified life—they need to have enough food and a secure roof over their head, in a house that they can actually afford to heat. They also need the funds to have a meaningful social life—they need to make connections and get involved in activities with their peers, because they often do not get out in order to get anywhere near them.

I have three questions—I am giving you all a heads-up in case you need to grab a pen. I will go through them, and that will allow people to feed in. First, although the carer support payment is available for carers who are in paid work, what are the challenges with the current system, and what could improve it?

Secondly—

The Convener: Given the number of witnesses, maybe we can take one question at a time, as that might make it easier to streamline the responses.

Gary Bouse: I am happy to do that.

The Convener: Mr Traynor, do you want to come in?

Paul Traynor (Carers Trust): Thank you for the question. The carer support payment is an income replacement benefit. However, if we include the carer support payment and the Scottish carer supplement, that equates to £98.15 as an income replacement benefit. There are a lot of challenges in relation to the carer support payment more generally. First, we estimate that there are around 700,000 to 800,000 unpaid carers in Scotland, but recent Social Security Scotland figures highlight that only around 100,000 carers are actually entitled to the carer support payment. That means that between one in seven and one in eight unpaid carers meet the eligibility threshold for the carer support payment more generally.

Unpaid carers benefit is interlinked with the cared-for person's benefit, so there is a complication about ensuring that the person who is cared for receives one of the qualifying benefits. For many carers, the person who they care for might have a long period before they are diagnosed and benefits can be put in place. Also, any pauses in the cared-for person's benefit impact on the carer's benefit. That can happen if the cared-for person goes into hospital for a long stay, if the cared-for person's benefits change or if that person loses entitlement, which ultimately means that the unpaid carer will lose entitlement. That interconnection is important.

Generally, we welcome the changes that the Scottish Government has made to carer support payment, and the work that Social Security Scotland has done to further raise awareness of the payment. We were one of the main champions of removing the 21-hour study rule, which still exists for carers allowance. The removal of that rule allows more carers the opportunity to go to college or university but still be entitled to carer support payment. One challenge with that is that not all students get the payment—you might have seen that in the briefing that I submitted. Those who are 16 to 19 in non-advanced education are the only unpaid carers who are not entitled to carer support payment if they meet all other elements of the eligibility criteria.

There are aspects around earnings, which I am sure Fiona Collie will want to talk about in more detail. If you earn even a penny or a couple of pence over the earnings threshold for carer support payment, you lose your entitlement entirely. There is no taper, as exists with universal credit. We would welcome it if the Scottish Government and the committee, as part of its work, considered how that could be modelled to allow more carers to choose to stay in work and earn if they are able to do so. The issue also means that carers have to make very difficult choices in employment. They might refuse to take on extra hours, because that will affect their carer support benefit, and it really impacts on those who have fluctuating incomes.

In relation to carer support payment more generally, more needs to be done on benefit take-up. We welcomed the carer additional person payment, which was launched just before the end of the previous parliamentary session, but it was launched right in the middle of an election campaign and almost got lost. We ask the committee to use its influence to encourage Social Security Scotland to ensure that there is more focus on benefit take-up and raising awareness that the benefit exists as a top-up payment for those who care for more than one disabled person.

I am sure that Fiona Collie will want to come in on that.

Fiona Collie: I will focus on the issues of paid employment. As Paul Traynor said, if you earn a penny more than the earnings threshold, you lose the entitlement. Some people who are in the room were involved in the Scottish Government's carer benefits advisory group. One area that the group's consultation considered was what a taper could look like. We believe that a taper is needed. At UK level, a current consultation is looking at that issue in relation to carers allowance. Nearly half of carers who are in employment said that a taper would enable them to take on more hours. The earnings threshold is 16 hours at the minimum

wage, so people are potentially being forced into lower-paid employment, which goes on to affect their pension and other things.

There is also a need to have a more predictable approach to averaging earnings. Social Security Scotland has learned from some of the issues with carers allowance and overpayments, but more work still needs to be done to enable carers to fully understand what they need to tell Social Security Scotland about changes to earnings and what they can take into account. At the moment, in considering the earnings threshold, you can take off national insurance, half of your pension contribution, some childcare costs and some care costs. However, it is difficult for carers to judge what they can take off, so we need to find ways to reduce that complexity.

11:00

Ultimately, we need to think about maintaining a higher earnings threshold. The Scottish Government, as part of its work on public contracts, says that organisations must pay the real living wage, but the threshold for carer support payment is based on the national living wage. As a point of principle, it should be based on the real living wage. That would actually only be around £10 or £12 a week, but the principle is important. We want to ensure that more carers can balance work with paid employment and get support through carer support payment.

There are wider improvements. Paul Traynor mentioned hospital stays. If somebody is in hospital for 28 days—that includes having more than one stay within a certain period—they lose their entitlement to a disability benefit, which means that the carer also loses their entitlement. A household can lose a huge amount of income almost immediately. Meanwhile, caring continues when someone is in hospital. The tasks might change, but caring continues. We have argued—and argued and argued—that carer support payment should continue when someone is in hospital.

I know that Paul Traynor has submitted information on how we support older carers, but the carer support payment can be improved. We can do a lot more on take-up and to allow people to balance the different parts of their lives, whether that is education, hospital stays, employment or just normal life.

Gary Bouse: My next question is in two parts. You mentioned pensions. What are the longer-term financial implications for carers? What could Social Security Scotland and others do to try to alleviate and lessen those?

The other part is about the older carers recognition payment, which I know Carers

Scotland is supportive of. Is there a way of taking that forward?

Fiona Collie: I can say something on later-life poverty, which is tied up with caring, particularly for women. The reality is that, if you are a woman, you are more likely to be a carer and more likely to be underpensioned in general. Twenty-one per cent of carers say that they have stopped or paused a pension because of their caring responsibilities—that is just because the money will not stretch.

That has long-term implications. Carers face having only a state pension or a minimal pension from employment. Women are four times more likely than men to have given up work to care. It stuns me that 50 is now called older, but the age when people provide care is usually between 45 and 60. For women, it is a little earlier and, for men, it is slightly towards the end of that. It is so difficult to get back into employment if you are an older person. If you have lost employment and are out of employment for two years, the likelihood is that you will not get back into it. The evidence is that you are less likely to be offered interviews, but you are also less likely to think that you will get a job.

For carers who have had a period out of employment, we need to do a lot more to provide employability support and to help carers to recognise the skills that they have developed. I do not know how some carers manage to juggle all the responsibilities that they have. If nothing else, their time management is amazing. They also have to negotiate with providers and many other things, but they perhaps do not recognise those skills. The Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland need to do more to support people to stay in employment and to support people to get back into employment.

Age Scotland has done great work with employers in tackling indirect discrimination and unconscious bias around older people, which, terribly, starts at 50. However, there is much more that the Government could do to get behind that and get more employers thinking about how to help people at different stages in their life. As I said, we will all provide care or need care at some point in our life; our employers should start to recognise that, and the Government could do a lot more around that.

Paul Traynor: I will speak more specifically about the older carers recognition payment. For many years, we have been calling for older carers to be entitled to what was the carers allowance and is now the carer support payment. We recognise that it is not a devolved area and would require the UK Government to make changes to state pension rules and complexity. What we have proposed—Fiona Collie and I have been working on a case for change together, which we just submitted this

week to the cabinet secretary—is the creation of an older carers recognition payment.

For background, older carers who receive a full state pension receive zero award in relation to the carer support payment. They have underlying entitlement to it, but they do not get paid it because the state pension is at a greater level than the carer support payment. Some carers who receive a partial state pension might be topped up through the carer support payment, but only a very small proportion, and the majority of carers who receive a full state pension receive no award. Many unpaid carers find that very unfair. They recognise that they would have been in receipt of their full state pension regardless of whether they were caring, and that their state pension is not a payment for the role of unpaid caring or a recognition of their unpaid caring.

Many unpaid carers have told us that they were not informed about this; it is assumed knowledge that this will happen. If you have been receiving the carer support payment and you are approaching state pension age, you do not get an awful lot of notice to tell you that you are about to lose your entitlement to your carer support payment before you start receiving your state pension. That is a major issue for financial planning.

We have proposed the creation of an older carer recognition payment, which is in the gift of the Scottish Government, and we have looked at modelling it on the existing young carer grant. The focus is the key words of “recognition payment”. The young carer grant is a recognition payment, as well. It is not intended to be an income replacement benefit; it is supposed to recognise the additional costs that are incurred as a result of your caring role. As with the young carer grant, we want to ensure that an older carer recognition payment would be disregarded as income in calculations in any other part of the benefit system. There is a process in place through the young carer grant that could be modelled for the new payment.

Around 34,000 older adult carers have underlying entitlement to the carer support payment. The vast majority of them are likely to be older carers receiving state pension. We do not currently have the exact data for that number, but it is estimated at around 34,000 people.

It is very important to recognise the added costs that older carers experience. Caring does not stop when you reach state pension age. As our population gets older, we are finding that more people are needing care as they get older, as well.

Part of the conversation and the proposal is about not just recognising older adult unpaid carers, but recognising and appreciating care and the vital contribution that all carers make across

society. As Fiona has said, the cost of care that carers across the board are providing in Scotland is around £18 billion, and we must recognise that vital contribution.

Emma Jackson: As colleagues have so eloquently communicated over the past couple of questions, it is a really complex and difficult landscape for carers to navigate. First, you are dealing with the emotional and practical challenge of becoming a carer, and then you need to engage with multiple agencies or charities, be that at local or national level. Quite simply, people do not know where to start or understand what they are entitled to, when or how to apply, or how one thing might butt up against another. People are afraid of claiming something that they might not be entitled to and having to pay back huge overpayments, as we have seen in recent years.

All of that underscores the vital importance of free, impartial advice in local communities for carers and the other groups that we have been discussing today. Alongside the charities that Fiona and Paul are here representing, the citizens advice bureaux network provides advice to people as they try to navigate their care journey, making sure that people can get timely advice as early as possible. That is critical so that they can start to get the payments and support that they need and get a little bit of breathing space.

The complexity that has been described underscores the need for Social Security Scotland to continue to tackle the areas in which we know there is complexity. There could be a better user journey across the system. The agency could consider looking at a tell-us-once approach across the 15 different payments, so that people do not have to retell their story over and over again. That could go as far as using data and automation to pre-populate applications. If someone has already applied for one thing, let us use that data for another thing. We could also consider how to duplicate identification verification.

The use of automation; free and timely advice; and trying to rub out some of the complexity in the system will not solve all the problems that Fiona and Paul have described, but it would make a really important contribution towards that.

Gary Bouse: Thanks for that. I was hoping to get through a meeting without artificial intelligence being mentioned, but you just cannot these days.

I will finish with a question that I asked Tressa Burke earlier, but about carers this time; it might have been partly covered through a number of earlier questions. It talks to the challenges that carers have. Even writing this was a bit challenging, so please listen carefully. When caring ends and a carer tries to get back into work, or when a carer wants to retain their career while

caring, what are the barriers? The important question, which is one that I asked earlier in regards to disability, is whether there is more that employers could do.

Fiona Collie: The biggest barrier—carers say this again and again—is the lack of services to support them to balance work with care. When they seek out services, they find that they are simply not there. That is a significant issue in rural Scotland and the islands, as well. During hospital discharge, someone might not even be asked if they are willing and able to take on a caring role, yet it is part of the legislation that you have to be willing and able to take on that role. There is an assumption that people will provide care, so some barriers are systematic, in that carers are not offered assessment or the services that they need to support and balance care.

We would like social care to be seen as the same enabler as childcare, although I am aware that there are problems with the provision of childcare, as well. The investment in social care and being able to help people to negotiate and manage the challenges in their lives is one of the biggest barriers.

The carer support payment is itself a barrier. Carers fall out of work because they just cannot deal with the complexity of it. The payment is a barrier—claiming it, the threshold and all those things are a challenge.

Employers can be a barrier, which is why it is so important that we continue to build the network of carer-positive employers who act as exemplars. We have employers who talk about how important it is to do the things that they are doing; the business benefits to them are also important, because, given the peak age of caring, they could lose some of their most experienced employees. That is the risk, whereas some small changes could make the difference.

The other side of that is that you then have to recruit and train others, which will involve time and give rise to costs. In fact, evidence that was given to the consultation on carers leave at UK level estimated those costs at around £8.2 billion for business.

It actually makes great sense to encourage and support employers to think about carers. After all, even if we are talking about a small business with only three employees, it might be in trouble if it loses its most experienced employee. Therefore, this is about not just big business, but employers of all sizes, and as I have said, we are encouraging all MSPs to become carer positive, too.

11:15

The Convener: I am just looking around the table at colleagues, although I think that we have approached the subject from different angles. Kate, do you have any other questions?

Kate Campbell: I have a couple of questions. I was just reflecting on what Emma Jackson said at the beginning of the session about the complexity of the landscape and how it can be quite difficult for people to manage, and what she was saying about how advice is really helpful and Social Security Scotland's tell-us-once approach. This is quite a difficult question, and it is for everyone on the panel: is there anything that you think can be done to try to simplify the approach across DWP, Social Security Scotland and local authorities? I suppose it is too optimistic to hope for a joined-up tell-us-once approach across all three, but could anything be done to make the system easier for people to navigate?

Emma Jackson: Absolutely. We need to remember that we have designed these systems in this way, and therefore we can take opportunities to design them differently. That should begin with a ruthless focus on outcomes to ensure positive outcomes for the people who are navigating and using these systems. If we start with that end in mind and build systems around it, we will be going in massively the right direction. We also need, as far as possible, to co-produce the systems; Social Security Scotland has done some excellent work in that respect, but we need to do it across the board.

The UK Government has been carrying out, to varying levels, a review of universal credit. We are not actually aware of where that work is at the moment, and I think that it is incredibly important that there is harmony with other things that are happening by having, for example, that review take place alongside the review of ADP, the Timms review and what is happening at local government level. We are still getting these silos of work, and if politicians cannot understand what is happening where, what chance do individuals have?

We just need to bring together all of the work that is happening. A colleague of mine likes to describe it as air traffic control. There are various planes in flight at the moment, but who is in charge of them? Disabled people, people on low incomes and carers need to know that there is an overarching strategy that can deliver positive outcomes for them in that space.

Another thing that we should be considering across the landscape is ensuring that people get free, confidential and impartial advice that allows them to get all of the payments that they are entitled to. One of the things that we have been observing across our network over the past 18

months is the rise of commercial advice providers, which are quite specifically targeting quite vulnerable individuals who might be considering claiming things like ADP or pension age disability payment and making quite sensational offers. They are sort of saying, “You can definitely get a positive outcome if you come with us”, while levelling quite significant charges. We have seen everything from fees of around £400 for the service right the way through to their claiming a percentage of the award, which has led to people losing thousands of pounds of their social security payments. I am quite sure that nobody around this table thinks that it is a good idea for social security payments to go on commercial advice.

In short, we should try to guarantee that the landscape for individuals is as easy to navigate as possible, so that they get the right advice and can retain as much of the payment as possible. That is really important. Finally, whether it be undertaken by this committee, the Scottish Government or someone else, we would recommend an inquiry being carried out into the provision of commercial advice, so that we can protect people better.

Kirsty McKechnie: We would be keen to see more data sharing between the agencies that are delivering benefits for people. We have talked about the complicated landscape that exists, and the need to know what to apply for and to whom to apply. Quite often, people think that because they have made an application or told somebody something, they do not need to tell somebody else. That means that people lose out—for example, somebody who makes a claim for universal credit but does not claim Scottish child payment until weeks or months later will lose out on money that they would otherwise have been entitled to.

We know that receipt of council tax reduction reduced massively when people stopped getting housing benefits and started getting universal credit instead, because the data was held somewhere else. The more we can allow the data to be shared between the different agencies and ensure that the information technology systems talk to each other so that data, when it is shared, is recognisable by the system that is receiving it, the more we will reduce the complexity for people and allow them to access the benefits that they are entitled to, without having to know exactly whom to talk to and when. So, we would like to see more data sharing between the agencies.

Dr Nolan: First, I agree with data sharing—with care, because there would probably be some complexity, for example with older IT systems where data sharing might not be possible. However, I agree that the matter needs to be looked at. The idea that people either miss out on benefits to which they are entitled or have to

constantly re-explain the hard things that they experience in life is anathema to what we want.

Secondly, it is about co-designing simpler systems that disabled people can access in simpler ways. As has been said, a really good approach was taken to co-designing Social Security Scotland and the benefits that people receive. That continuous focus on improvement needs to continue; outcomes need to be co-designed and take account of the diversity of disabled people's experiences, from that of disabled people from remote rural locations where other services and advice might not be available to that of disabled people with protected characteristics who might face other barriers to getting both their benefits and support.

Lastly, I want to reiterate the importance of free advice, advocacy and peer support, all of which are patchy. There is an advocacy service for Social Security Scotland, but I am not sure that everyone is aware that they can access it, so that needs to be pushed more. The advocacy to support decision making to allow people who might struggle with it to explore what they need, and the advice on what benefits people might be entitled to in this complex system are really important. As I said at the start of the meeting, some of those advice services—local advice and essential welfare advice services—are being cut exactly at a time where people are having more challenges with poverty and so on.

Fiona Collie: We worked with MSPs on an amendment on income maximisation and data sharing in the Care Reform (Scotland) Act 2025. Although there is no commencement date for the act, something is sitting in statute to look at how we better share data, particularly between the agencies in Scotland. I urge the committee and the Parliament as a whole to seize the opportunity of public sector reform to build in that tell-us-once approach, because it would make such a difference to carers.

The Convener: That is super. Do colleagues have any final, wrap-up questions?

Morven-May MacCallum: I want to come in on what you have said, Ms Jackson, on the commercialisation of advice, because I am quite concerned about that and I know that the Shetland bureau, with which I spoke, was quite concerned about it as well. Could you give us a bit of an overview as to how those companies operate? What detriment are they potentially causing, and what is the scale of the issue?

Emma Jackson: I am happy to offer some reflections—thank you for asking further questions on the issue. From evidence that we have seen across our network, it appears that aggressive social media marketing is being used by

companies that use the algorithm to get adverts in front of those audiences who would be most likely to potentially need the social security payments. We have seen some spurious claims to “guarantee” that people can get a benefit—but no advice organisation can guarantee that somebody will have an entitlement. It sets people up with a high level of expectation from the beginning that there is something that they will be entitled to. We have seen people being charged a flat fee or a percentage of the payment that is being made to them. As we have discussed at length, every pound of social security payment matters to individuals and the loss of that risks pushing people further into hardship and poverty.

The scale of the problem is something that we, across the citizens’ advice network, are simply not aware of. As you will appreciate, we see things when they go wrong or when people want to check them. We see it from the very beginning of the process, when someone says, “I saw this advert—is it too good to be true?” and the local CAB is a trusted voice that they can go to and get an answer to the question. At the other end of the process, for example, a family sought to some advice on behalf their father, who was elderly and who had used a commercial advice company to get a payment. Unfortunately, he had passed away before being awarded the full payment, but he had been awarded the payment and the commercial advice company was looking to reclaim the fee from the estate. His relatives were devastated, not only—obviously—at the loss of their relative but because the company was trying to make a charge.

That is some of what we have seen. However, as I have described, we do not know the extent or scale of the issue. We have had some constructive conversations with Social Security Scotland, to try to understand what it can see from its evidence. It would be good and useful to hear from other advice organisations. I know that Age Scotland also has some concerns about the prevalence of the issue.

Morven-May MacCallum: That is very helpful.

Kate Campbell: I have a final, wrap-up question. The committee has a huge remit. Can you give us one thing that would be your top priority for us to keep in our minds when we are thinking about social security? When we are scrutinising or thinking about doing an inquiry or going into an area in more depth, is there anything that we should be prioritising?

Tressa Burke: That is a great question, but there is never an easy answer to a “one thing” question. I reflect on what I have heard about data sharing and the parallel with other things, such as health and social care, in which we have been looking at similar issues.

We have spoken about the adequacy of benefits. If we could do one thing right now for social security, it would be to focus efforts on investment in providing people with advocacy support. I do not mean independent advocacy; I mean advocacy to apply for benefits and understand their rights to benefits; and to get advice, information and representation all the way through the process.

The other thing that the committee should focus on is the interrelationship of benefits and poverty with other things that we have already spoken about, such as employment and caring. It is important to keep that focus on how those interrelate.

However, if we were to do one thing right now, it should be to increase investment in advice and representation—if not adequacy.

Kate Campbell: Those are all the things.

Emma Jackson: I will not repeat anything that colleagues have said. You have heard my discussion of commercial advice—I urge the committee to think about undertaking an inquiry in that space.

If I could choose to focus on one thing that I think is urgent, it would relate to the Parliament’s 2030 child poverty targets that are looming. Kirsty McKechnie and I described a range of changes that could be made to the Scottish child payment in relation to earnings tapering, a work allowance and age tapering from ages 16 through 19. Those are practical things that could be put in place to enable more people to access that payment and, potentially, to bridge on from that payment into work and other things. Given the urgency of the targets, I urge the committee to look at that.

11:30

Dr Nolan: It is really hard to answer that. Adequacy of benefits for disabled people and unpaid carers would be one thing that I would focus on. The flipside of that is investment. You have heard about the additional costs, which can be more than £1,000 a week for an individual disabled person and which are getting worse. Costs are rising, so it is important to look at the adequacy of the current payments.

Paul Traynor: I will cheat by going for an umbrella approach: the committee should be looking at carer benefits through a commonsense approach. By that, I mean looking at the inequalities that exist within carer benefits that do not make a huge amount of sense. For example, why cannot two young carers get young carer grants if they are caring for the same person, when the grant is a recognition payment, not an income replacement payment? Why are 16 to 19-year-

olds who are not in advanced education the only group that cannot get the carer support payment? Those things create meaningful barriers for carers to access vital support and, when you think about it, they do not make a huge amount of sense.

Fiona Collie: You can tell that we are all great at saying just one thing.

Paul Traynor talked about carers. The committee should look at the consultations with carers and the areas that they want to see improvements in—be those about older carer recognition, combining hours or earning thresholds—to see how we can make it easier for carers to claim benefits.

Kirsty McKechnie: I have one message, which is to ensure year-on-year progress in reducing child poverty. I also have a plea, which is to find out what is causing all the delays in the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service. How can those delays be reduced?

The Convener: That has been very helpful. I thank everybody around the table for what has been a productive two hours.

The committee will not meet next week. We will be back on 28 October, when we will be looking further into the issue of child poverty.

I thank witnesses again for joining us. As always, if there is anything that we discussed that you want to elaborate on, or something that we did not discuss, the committee would welcome your correspondence and suggestions.

11:32

Meeting continued in private until 11:52.

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