

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Digital Exclusion and Pensioner Poverty

COSLA Response

COSLA welcomes the opportunity to provide views in response to the specific questions set out below by the Social Justice and Social Security Committee - Pensioner Poverty and Digital Exclusion

Whilst the work and functions of Pensioner Poverty and Digital Exclusion are familiar to COSLA – through various levels of engagement – the details of councils’ individual Digital Inclusion strategies and responses to their local challenges are not held centrally by us as we do not have the resources or capacity for that. As such we have provided an officer response where we can, and we hope the following comments and observations are useful. The Improvement Service provide a variety of online services and therefore is perhaps another avenue to pursue in relation to Digital Services being designed to include the digitally excluded. Should this consultation lead to further recommendations, then we would expect the opportunity for COSLA politicians to comment formally on those.

Please find our responses to your questions below

The measures that local authorities have in place to provide a clear ‘offline’ alternative for their services, such as accessing council tax reduction information and applications for the Scottish Welfare Fund.

- Many councils provide offline alternatives for accessing essential services. This includes offering telephone support lines where council staff assist individuals with information and guidance on services such as the mentioned council tax reduction and the Scottish Welfare Fund. These helplines often operate during business hours to allow residents to complete applications or request forms through a simple phone call.
- In addition to telephone-based assistance, local councils frequently maintain accessible customer service centres or “one-stop shops” where individuals can receive face-to-face support. These centres are designed to offer a welcoming environment for those who prefer or require in-person interaction. At these venues, staff members help residents complete paper-based applications, provide printed information leaflets, and offer translation or interpretation services where necessary.
- Moreover, many local authorities collaborate with third-party organizations, such as Citizens Advice Scotland, or utilise local libraries, and community hubs, to further broaden offline access points.

Whether the Blue Badge application is only available online and if so, whether accessible alternatives have been considered or are to be introduced.

- There is an online route for residents to apply for themselves, for someone else, or for an organisation that meets the criteria.
- All 32 local authorities also provide offline application routes, where paper applications can be submitted directly to councils.
- The link provides some useful information on the application routes for Blue Badge: <https://www.mygov.scot/apply-blue-badge>

COSLA's role in ensuring there is a consistent accessibility approach to accessing services across all local authorities.

- The detail of council's individual digital inclusion strategies and responses to their local challenges is not held by COSLA.
- However, as part of the Scottish Digital Strategy ("A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world) and its current undergoing refresh, COSLA, along with the Local Government Digital Office and Scottish Government, have been working on the "Connecting Scotland" programme which aims to tackle digital exclusion across Scotland.
- A delivery model is currently under development to look at how we can collaborate across public, private and third sectors to respond to the challenge.
- The data collated through this collaboration is also intended to help inform policy and strategy decisions.

COSLA

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