



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Andrew Latto
Deputy Director
Devolution, Pensioner Benefits & Carer's Allowance
Department for Work and Pensions

25 March 2025

Dear Mr Latto,

Pensioner Poverty and Digital Exclusion

On [6 February 2025](#), the Social Justice and Social Security Committee held a roundtable discussion on the reasons for pensioner poverty and how they might be addressed. The Committee decided to consider the links between pensioner poverty and digital exclusion at an evidence session on [13 March 2025](#).

The Committee understands that the UK Government's Digital Inclusion Action Plan is currently being consulted on. We welcome its aim to tackle digital exclusion and to deliver systemic change.

During the evidence session on 13 March, Members heard about the need for pensioners to be provided with continued support to manage benefit claims online. Citizens Advice Scotland told the Committee that "the majority of people who visit a bureau do so in relation to welfare, and a significant portion of them do so because they are digitally excluded. One of the main drivers of that is Universal Credit."¹

Citizens Advice Scotland added that their officers receive many repeat clients seeking support in setting up an account to apply for Universal Credit, to maintain a journal on the online portal and to provide ongoing support with accessing the appropriate parts of the online benefits system.

Witnesses also emphasised the importance, in addition to supporting people to access necessary online information, of providing genuine 'channel choice', and that rather than 'digital by default', the right approach should be 'digital where appropriate'. Social Security Scotland told the Committee that its approach to digital services is about using digital options only when that is appropriate and giving

¹ [Official Report](#), Social Justice and Social Security Committee meeting, 13 March 2025, Col 17

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consideration as to other methods, as well as the client's communication preferences.

Could you please confirm the measures that DWP has in place to ensure that people have a choice in how to access applications to benefits, such as Universal Credit? It would also be helpful to understand the technical support that is provided to people who have difficulty in accessing online information.

The Committee welcomes that pension credit can be applied for over the phone. However, during the evidence session, Members heard about issues with the complexity of using phone lines to access services.

Describing the experience some of her constituents have encountered when contacting energy companies, Liz Smith MSP explained that—

“When people make the call, they are referred on several times through various options, and each time they get another referral. Sometimes that requires a password, and sometimes it requires them to answer all kinds of personal questions. That goes on and on—in fact, there is a real frustration not just for older people, but for some of us who are not quite so old. As a result of having to be referred on for everything, they get less confident about whether they are providing the right information and getting the right person to answer their question.”²

In order to better inform its scrutiny of the links between pensioner poverty and digital exclusion, could you please confirm:

- how the Department for Work and Pensions took account of digital exclusion in their recent campaign to promote Pension Credit take-up; and
- whether the complexity of phone line services is being considered as part of the consultation on the Digital Inclusion Action Plan.

A response by Friday, 11 April 2025 would be much appreciated to inform consideration of the Committee's next steps.

Correspondence on digital inclusion strategies and practices has also been sent to the Scottish Government and COSLA.

Yours sincerely,



Collette Stevenson MSP
Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee

² [Official Report](#), Social Justice and Social Security Committee meeting, 13 March 2025, Col 24