



To Social Justice and Social Security Committee

By email: SJSS.committee@parliament.scot

Dear Convenor,

Thank you for your letter of 28 March where you sought information in relation to the extra cost of disability. I am responding in my capacity as COSLA's Health and Social Care Spokesperson.

As you will know, COSLA is a Councillor-led, cross-party organisation, representing all 32 Councils in Scotland, which champions Councils' vital work to secure the resources and powers they need to build better and more equal local communities. It is within this context that I will set out our responses to your queries in relation to unmet need.

What data does COSLA currently collect on unmet needs in social care of disabled people?

As a membership organisation COSLA does not collect data, instead we work in partnership with Local Authorities, the Improvement Service, Public Health Scotland (PHS) and Scottish Government to ensure that the data collected provides as much meaningful information on levels of unmet need as possible.

Local Authorities are required to submit a range of data returns on social care to organisations such as Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland which reflects social care usage. Much of this is not broken down into different user groups but rather reflects the number of people using social care and social work services.

What data gaps does COSLA recognise exist to adequately inform the extra cost of disability and improvements needed to address the issue?

COSLA recognises the impact that disability related expenses can place on people using services. COSLA publishes annual guidance for non-residential social care charging. This guidance defines a set of principles to underpin the development of local authority charging policies for social care support for people at home. The guidance is subject to ongoing revision as appropriate, on an annual basis or as policy develops. It is informed and overseen by the COSLA Charging Guidance

Working Group. Any change to the guidance requires approval by the political leadership of COSLA through its Health and Social Care Board.

A key focus since the start of the cost-of-living crisis has been the impact of charging on people using services. The last 2 annual guidance documents have strengthened reference to the cost of living of living and the impact of charges on people using services. This includes specific reference to disability related expenses.

Local Government recognises the important role that data plays to inform policy and service delivery. The Local Government Data Platform (LGDP) represents an ambitious transformation programme to deliver improvements in the way Local Government manages and uses data. This ground-breaking initiative represents a collaboration between the Improvement Service, COSLA, SOLACE, COSLA's Digital Office, Public Health Scotland, and Scottish Government.

As part of Phase 1 work, The Improvement Service worked with Local Authorities, COSLA, the Scottish Government and PHS to map out and characterise all existing data returns local authorities are required to produce. This work has shown that the current data reporting reveals a lack of focus on outcome improvement. The volume of reporting that Councils are required to provide is growing at an accelerated rate, driven in part by the increasing proportion of Local Government funding which is ringfenced or provided with the expectation it will be spent on specific services. The scale of reporting, alongside a lack of co-ordination and lack of automation in the return process creates a significant burden for Local Authorities. The Verity House Agreement allows us to think differently about how we can work together to make better use of data to drive the desired improvement in outcomes.

Phase 2 of the LGDP aims to improve and streamline the management of data returns and to provide enhanced value from the process by providing greater insight and intelligence to Local Government itself. The LGDP will also provide improved data quality, improved timeliness of data, and greater assurance for stakeholders such as Scottish Government.

More broadly, is COSLA currently undertaking or planning to undertake research on unmet needs and the extra cost of disability?

While COSLA is not planning on undertaking research we are working with Local Government professional associations, Scottish Government and PHS to explore how we continue to improve the use of data to improve outcomes for people.

A key piece of work to support this is the wider use of the Community Health Index number (CHI).

Through the agreement made at the Data Board for Health & Social Care in June 2023, COSLA and the Scottish Government have made a commitment to use the CHI platform as a central point for storing and linking protected characteristics data. While the initial focus will be on race & ethnicity data, this use of CHI will support us to evidence inequalities in access, experience and outcomes experienced by people with protected characteristics in Scotland. It will enable us to measure progress in reducing inequalities, and support emergency preparedness and response.

In February 2023, COSLA and the Scottish Government published the first data strategy for health and social care, [Greater access, better insight, improved outcomes](#). The strategy set out our joint vision for making the best use of data in the design and delivery of health, social work and social care services. Driving data excellence is a key part of this strategy. To support this the Health & Social Care Data Standards Sub Board was established. The sub board's purpose is to: identify, assure, and recommend preferred data standards; manage implementation and resolve challenges; and provide guidance and enhance interoperability.

I trust you will find this information useful in your ongoing scrutiny. Should you have any further questions, please contact my officers at health@cosla.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Paul Kelly

Health and Social Care Spokesperson