

Your Say: Long-term Conditions

About a year ago, the Welfare Reform Committee began an initiative, 'Your Say', to hear directly from those who have been directly affected by welfare reform. Let me say, people didn't hold back!

Over the last year we have heard the stories of people from Glasgow, Annan, Kirkcaldy, Dunoon, Stirling, Coatbridge, Hamilton, Dundee, Edinburgh, Biggar... the list goes on.

Some of these personal stories are extraordinary, moving, shocking and often painful. Some of you may remember the evidence our blind witness, Henry Sherlock, who was asked to raise an empty cardboard box in his Work Capability Assessment, but not take it anywhere. He couldn't, he would need to be holding his white stick in one hand.

More recently we heard from Scott Wilson, who suffers from Parkinson's and is separated from his partner, requiring an 'extra' room to look after his disabled son for part of the week. He is being charged the 'bedroom tax' and is threatened with having to move.

I bow my head to the courage of these men and women who have come before us and shared the sometimes intimate details of their lives with the hope that this will help to make things better for others. I also firmly believe that this process of exposing the impacts of welfare reform on people's lives every-day is slowly having an effect on the way people feel about this process.

I am happy to say that my Committee - most of them - share this view and we will be continuing with the Your Say initiative. We would like to run an evidence session - late this year, or early next - looking at the impact of welfare reform on those with long-term conditions, generally health conditions that last a year or longer, impact on a person's life, and may require on-going care and support. Many of those who have given evidence to us have had long-term conditions, but we would like to focus a session on this issue.

We have an additional reason for wanting to do this. Many people are saying to us that one of the emerging issues with welfare reform is the *cumulative* impact of the different measures. That people who are

losing income through Work Capability Assessments are also being hit by the 'bedroom tax', and may well struggle with PIP assessments etc. etc.

This was an issue that was flagged up to us by Professor Steve Fothergill of Sheffield-Hallam University in the research we commissioned from him on the impact of welfare reform on Scotland and we would like to examine how this is turning out in practice.

So we would like to hear from those with, or caring for those with, long-term conditions about how welfare reform - any aspect of it - is impacting on them. The day to day reality of life as well as hopes and fears. And we would particularly like to hear from those who have been affected, or think they will be, by several aspects of it. However, even if you have only been affected by one measure, we would still like to hear from you.

Our Committee is here to help you find your voice in the Scottish Parliament. Send us your experiences and we will do the rest.

Michael McMahon MSP, Convener

Welfare Reform Committee

Please send your experiences to the following email address:
welfarereform-yoursay@scottish.parliament.uk

Further details are available on our webpage at - <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/68298.aspx>

and on our facebook page - <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=485040918261006&set=a.328212350610531.69616.105414346223667&type=1&theater>