

## Review Urges Scottish Government to Preserve and Simplify Disability Benefit System

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A newly published independent review has urged the Scottish Government to safeguard and simplify access to the Adult Disability Payment (ADP), warning that any move to restrict eligibility could negatively impact the lives of disabled Scots. The ADP, which replaced the

United Kingdom's Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in Scotland, currently supports nearly 476,300 people, amounting to almost nine percent of the national population.

The review, led by Edel Harris OBE, emphasises that while the Scottish approach to disability benefits is widely regarded as more compassionate than Westminster's, the existing process still places unnecessary burdens on applicants. According to the findings, the system remains "inaccessible, complex and burdensome" for many, despite its more respectful tone. This complexity has led to stress and anxiety among claimants, counteracting the intended goal of providing supportive and dignified assistance.

Launched in August 2022, ADP marked a shift in how Scotland delivers disability support. Most current recipients were transferred from the former PIP system, with the Scottish Government emphasising a more person-centred and humane approach. Nevertheless, the report concludes that for this promise to be fully realised, administrative processes must be streamlined and eligibility criteria revisited to better reflect the needs of those seeking help.

Harris noted: "Adult Disability Payment has been described by many as a step change, kinder in tone and more dignified in approach. But too often, disabled people still find the system difficult to navigate, time-consuming and anxiety-inducing. If we are to realise social security as an investment in people, it is important to ensure that the eligibility criteria fulfil this goal."

The report also presents a broader economic argument, stating that investing in the well-being of disabled individuals can yield long-term value for society that surpasses the administrative cost of the benefit.

The findings come in the wake of controversy over the UK Government's proposed reforms to PIP, which were initially presented as a cost-cutting measure. Facing backlash from within his party, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak ultimately scaled back the plan. In contrast, Scotland's social justice secretary, Shirley-Anne Somerville, has reaffirmed that the devolved government will not follow suit in limiting support.

"While the UK Government seeks to make cuts to the vital support disabled people rely on, I want to make clear that we will not cut Adult Disability Payment," Somerville stated. "Instead, we will work to protect and enhance Scotland's social security system, improving on what we have achieved so far."

The Scottish Government has pledged to review all 49 recommendations in the report, with an initial response expected by January 2026.

However, critics remain sceptical about the administration's track record. Alexander Stewart, the Scottish Conservative spokesperson for social security, said: "As usual, this SNP boast that they would run things better continues to ring hollow. Social Security Scotland has been plagued with issues since its inception, and it's clear the current system is satisfying no one. The most vulnerable disabled Scots feel let down, there's a lack of support for those who can, and want to, get into work, and hard-pressed taxpayers are forking out a fortune on a ballooning benefits bill."

The review ultimately calls for a system that balances compassion with clarity and efficiency, emphasising that real reform means not only treating applicants with dignity, but also ensuring they can access the support they need without unnecessary stress.