



Cuts to council services: disabled people's experiences



Our voices ■ Our choices

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From social care support and day centres to swimming pools and libraries, council services are a vital lifeline for many disabled people. However, we are aware of reports that council services used by disabled people are being cut. This is particularly concerning at a time when disabled people are dealing with the cost of living crisis and many are struggling to meet basic needs.

We ran an online survey between 30 January and 8 February 2023 to find out more about disabled people's experiences of accessing council services. We received 42 responses from people who wanted to tell us about their lived experience.

This report is a short summary of what those respondents told us.

1. Respondents are experiencing problems accessing council services.

71% of respondents¹ said that they are experiencing problems accessing services from their local council that support them as a disabled person.

Respondents said there were various services that they were struggling to access including:

- **Support services**

“I’ve been fighting cuts to my SDS support for months now with legal support.”

“Personal Care under Franks Law”

¹ Number of respondents - 30

- **Day centres, swimming pools and libraries**

“Access to day centre”

“Library services in our area are too far away and not well served with parking.”

“The Peak Swimming Pool in Stirling. No longer heats the pool sufficiently although they will tell you they do. This means that the water is too cold. I have respiratory problems and also have mobility issue.”

- **Advice and advocacy**

“Could not get any help, or advice, regarding PIP Benefits in challenging decisions.”

“My family have been waiting two years for the Advocacy Service. They do not have staff or money to meet demand so cannot support us.”

2. Respondents² said there are a number of barriers to accessing council services.

Service has shut down – 5 respondents

Service has reduced operating hours – 7 respondents

Not able to get transport to the service – 5 respondents

Not able to get in contact with the service – 10 respondents

Something else – 22 respondents

² Number of respondents - 29

Other barriers noted by respondents:

- **Cuts to services**

“The current waiting times to be seen by a Community OT (occupational therapist) are over 1 year. I cannot get adaptations in my flat without an assessment and report from an OT - this is a lifeline service from which accessible housing stems, and Glasgow East residents must wait in excess of 1 year just for an appointment (let alone the time it takes for putting the adaptations in place).”

“Brilliant staff, especially the Late Diagnosis group, but understaffed.”

“Social Work backlog”

“Insufficient staff to provide the support. It is often cancelled because they have staff to cover holidays, sickness and staff on training courses.”

“They have cut face to face appointments to a few hours once a week in Troon. Then you have to make an appointment before hand. They used to be open for face to face stuff 5 days a week and you could just "walk in" without making an appointment.”

“Very slow at responding. Irrelevant or misunderstanding of the problem when they do. Quick to cut you off the waiting list, by using dubious methods, such as if you don't respond within five working days, you were automatically taken off the list, which is buried in the response letter.”

- **Lack of knowledge amongst service providers**

“I don’t think social work know what SDS is. I think they think it means personal care. I want so much more than that. I want to live. I want to be able to take part in the world. I want to contribute. I want to do things I love.”

- **Inaccessibility of services**

“All services are now online and most people cannot access them as they do not use any online service.”

“Rural area does only 30 minutes slots, allowed 15, so nothing. 6 miles away In Peterhead I would get it.”

“Not deaf friendly or aware making service inaccessible”

“they only think about online and not face to face which means accessing these services is not possible.”

- **Staff attitudes**

“Nothing much other than to say accessing council services can be made more difficult by council workers failing to meet the needs of disabled people.”

“You married him in sickness and in health” said to wife/enabler. Heard said in other areas.

“I feel I cannot rely on the Council for anything as a disabled person.”

“I feel that disabled people are being penalised for existing. There is a cold response when ever I ask about these things. Of course along with cut backs there is a poor disability awareness.”

“In Edinburgh I have been screamed at in shops because I don't hear very well. People from Edinburgh council will not wear a mask safely for me -I am immunosuppressed and cannot ,for that reason ,go out for 6-7 months a year. I had an emergency the other day The woman on the phone was screaming at me because I asked her to repeat as its difficult to hear.”

3. Respondents³ said the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on access to council services.

Most respondents said that barriers to accessing council services had been made worse by the pandemic, but were generally not caused by it. Some respondents said that the pandemic is being used as an excuse for cutting services.

“Made worse as I feel a lot of the time Covid is made as an excuse for people not to do anything for you or to provide a satisfactory service.”

“Social care as delivered now is in itself a barrier to independent living. It may have got worse in the pandemic but the barriers weren't caused by it. They - social work- assess me as needing x amount to stay alive. Life and limb support. I want, need and

³ Number of respondents - 29

believe I have the right to more. I'm lucky to get some additional funding from ILF. This is a Godsend that I simply couldn't do without. At least they understand that there is life beyond feeding, medicating and personal care."

"They have continued to decline pre and post pandemic."

"Essential Council services have been declining for years, every year it is something else gone - the Pandemic is just an excuse!"

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