# Fife councillor’s harrowing assessment sparks call to rethink disability benefit reforms



Louise Kennedy-Dalby, a Fife SNP councillor, has shared her harrowing experience with disability benefit assessments, which left her in an ambulance after an excruciating evaluation. Diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, a connective tissue disorder characterised by severe joint dislocations and pain, she found herself having to leave her job as a sports events manager due to her deteriorating health. This condition, which affects approximately one in 10,000 individuals, causes significant issues for those suffering from it, such as dislocated joints up to several times a week.

Speaking in council, Louise recounted her 2017 experience of undergoing a work capability assessment, which directly resulted in a dislocated knee and immense distress. “They ended up having to phone an ambulance for me,” she said. To her disbelief, after enduring this ordeal, she received a letter declining her application for benefits. “It was completely degrading,” she added, highlighting the emotional and physical toll such assessments can impose on vulnerable individuals.

Her story has resonated widely, prompting a unanimous, cross-party agreement within Fife Council to write to Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, voicing concerns over recent proposed reforms to disability benefits. The Labour Government aims to implement significant changes to Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments (PIP), which have sparked fears that these reforms will disproportionately affect those grappling with severe and chronic conditions, making it harder for them to access vital financial support. The reforms are intended to save the government approximately £5 billion by 2030, while also aiming to incentivise greater workforce participation.

Despite being a strong advocate for work, Louise questioned how reducing benefits for those with debilitating conditions would aid their prospects of employment. “There are thousands of people like me and the vast majority do want to work,” she stated. Yet, the limitations imposed by their disabilities often mean that many struggle with daily tasks, let alone maintaining employment. Louise, a mother of three, emphasised the challenges she faces, such as being unable to lift her toddler and relying on a stick to walk.

The implications of the proposed benefits shake-up extend to Scotland, despite the devolution of certain welfare aspects. Social Justice Secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville has warned that these changes could lead to a £408 million reduction in funding from Westminster, potentially pushing an additional 250,000 people into poverty across the nation. As discussions unfold, the exact impact on affected individuals in Fife remains uncertain, though the local council has now committed to investigating how these reforms could strain their services and resources.

At the heart of this debate lies the vision of a fair and respectful social security system, as the Scottish Government strives to reform disability benefit assessments. Current proposals aim to eliminate the cycle of repeated assessments for those with chronic conditions, ensuring that assessments are conducted with dignity and respect. This new approach contrasts sharply with the concerns raised by individuals like Louise, who have experienced the system’s failings firsthand, often enduring humiliating evaluations simply to access support intended to assist them.

Louise's determination to advocate for individuals with disabilities is reflected in her ongoing role as a councillor, where she engages in various committees aimed at improving services in her community. Her experience underscores the urgent need for systemic reforms that recognise the real-life challenges facing those with disabilities, ensuring that financial assistance genuinely meets their needs and promotes independence rather than stigmatization. The situation calls for a critical reassessment of how disability benefits are allocated—one that prioritises empathy and understanding over bureaucratic efficiency.

As the UK Government contemplates these sweeping reforms, the voices of affected individuals like Louise serve as a crucial reminder of the human cost behind policy decisions. Their stories underscore the need for a compassionate approach towards disability benefits, affirming that no one should endure degradation in their pursuit of necessary support.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
2. Paragraph 1
3. Paragraph 1, 4
4. Paragraph 5
5. Paragraph 5
6. Paragraph 3
7. Paragraph 5

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/5240955/fife-councillor-louise-kennedy-dalby-disability-benefit-assessment/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.fifetoday.co.uk/news/people/fife-councillor-on-living-with-daily-joint-dislocations-caused-by-ehlers-danlos-syndrome-4648396> - Fife councillor Louise Kennedy-Dalby has opened up about living with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, a debilitating condition causing daily joint dislocations. She experiences her knee dislocating three times a week and her shoulder four times a week. The condition, a connective tissue disorder, leads to faulty collagen production, affecting the body's structural integrity. Despite the challenges, she emphasizes the importance of raising awareness and understanding of the condition, noting that it's more common than people think, affecting roughly one in 10,000 individuals.
3. <https://www.fife.gov.uk/kb/docs/articles/about-your-council2/politicians-and-committees/your-local-councillors/councillor/tay-bridgehead/cllr.-louise-kennedy-dalby> - Louise Kennedy-Dalby is a Scottish National Party councillor representing the Tay Bridgehead ward (Ward 17) in Fife. Her contact details include an address at Fife House, Glenrothes, KY7 5LT, and a telephone number. She serves on several committees, including the Fife Council, Appointments Sub-Committee, Education Scrutiny Committee, Fife Educational Trust Scheme 1958 – East Fife Committee, Fife Licensing Board, North East Fife Area Committee, and North East Planning Committee. Her latest update was on 24th May 2024.
4. <https://www.fife.gov.uk/kb/docs/articles/council-and-democracy/politicians-and-committees/your-local-councillors/councillor> - This page provides information on local councillors in Fife, including their party affiliations, wards, and contact details. For example, in the Tay Bridgehead ward (Ward 17), the councillors are Louise Kennedy-Dalby (Scottish National Party), Allan Knox (Scottish Liberal Democrat Party), and Jonny Tepp (Scottish Liberal Democrat Party). The page is regularly updated, with the latest update on 15th May 2024.
5. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/dignity-fairness-respect-disability-benefits/> - The Scottish Government is committed to reforming disability benefit assessments to ensure they are fair and respectful. Plans include setting clear time frames for assessments, decisions, and appeals, ensuring accessible information, and stopping the cycle of repeated assessments for those with long-term conditions. The goal is to provide more certainty and reduce stress for families during the transfer of benefits, with any child in receipt of disability living allowance continuing to receive that award until the age of 18 if they wish.
6. <https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/petitions/619481/end-assessments-and-consider-disability-benefit-claims-on-medical-advice-alone> - A petition has been closed that called for ending assessments and considering disability benefit claims based solely on medical advice. The petition highlighted that the Scottish Government has removed the burden from individuals to provide supporting information, with Social Security Scotland collecting the necessary information. It also emphasized the end of undignified physical and mental assessments, private sector involvement, and unnecessary reassessments, introducing indefinite awards for people on the highest level of Adult Disability Payment who have needs unlikely to change.
7. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/24624998.devolution-disability-benefits-scotland-hits-major-milestone/> - The transfer of disability benefits to Scotland's social security system has reached a significant milestone, with 63% of adults in Scotland who were previously receiving the Personal Independence Payment from the Department for Work and Pensions now receiving the Adult Disability Payment. This marks a key stage in devolving disability and carer benefit awards, allowing Scotland to implement a system based on dignity, fairness, and respect. A notable improvement is the end of time-consuming and demanding reassessments previously carried out by the DWP.