



Disabled Households and Lone Parent Families and the impact of Public Debt and Arrears

Key Statistics

- 47% of British households receiving Universal Credit have had a deduction due to debt
- **£17.4 million** per month is being deducted from claimants' Universal Credit across Scotland
- When annualised that amounts to almost **£210 million** being deducted from claimants' Universal Credit across Scotland each year.
- These figures indicate that over **£1 billion** will be lost by low income households in Scotland over the next Parliamentary term due to deductions
- Families with a disability and lone parent families are at a greater risk of having public debts/arrears

Aberlour Children's Charity, One Parent Families Scotland and Trussell's joint research report builds on previous public debt research. This report specifically focuses on disability and lone parenthood, individually and in combination.¹ This focus has been taken in response to the UK Government's recent *Pathways to Work* Green Paper published on 18 March 2025.² There is an open consultation on the Green Paper that closes on 30 June 2025 that the report aims to inform.³

The report focuses on disability and lone parenthood, individually and in combination, in relation to public debt (or debt to public bodies, such as council tax, rent arrears and even school meal debt), and the breakdown of types and amounts of public debt, held in [Citizens Advice Scotland's data](#).

“

“Public debt pulls families deeper into poverty and holds them there.”

Professor Morag Treanor
University of Glasgow

1 [Households with a Disability and Lone Parent Families and the impact of Public Debt and Arrears](#) (Full Report)
2 [Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper](#), Published 18 March 2025
3 [Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper](#), Published 18 March 2025

The Public Debt Crisis

Low-income families in Scotland and across the UK are in the midst of an ever-worsening debt crisis. The cumulative effects of multiple social and economic crises, including the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis affecting the UK, have disproportionately impacted on low-income families, reducing household incomes, increasing everyday costs and diminishing the effectiveness of social security and the wider welfare system. As a result, more and more low-income families are finding it harder to make ends meet and are being pushed into poverty as they struggle to pay bills or afford the costs of day-to-day essentials.



★ Key Messages

Proposed reforms to UK disability benefits risk further disadvantaging households with a disabled child and lone parent families in particular.

Households with a Disabled Child and Lone Parent Families

- 55% of disabled children are in a lone parent family.
- Lone parents and lone parents with a disabled child/ren in the house are at nearly 40% more at risk of Council Tax arrears.
- Lone parents with a disabled child/ren in the house are at most risk of accruing public debt/arrears.
- Disabled adults with no children are at high risk of public debt arrears and are most likely to be seeking advice/support on adult disability benefits.
- Lone parents are more likely than couple parents to seek advice about adult and child disability payments.
- Those with a disability and children are most likely to seek or receive a referral to a food bank. All disabled households were at least twice as likely to be referred to a food bank.
- All identified families, except couple parents, are at high risk of fuel/energy debts/arrears, with the highest risk being lone parents with a disabled child/ren in the house.

Protective Factors of Disability Benefits

- Lone parents and lone parents with disabled children owe the least overall in monetary terms which suggests a protective factor of disability benefits.
- Similarly, couples with disabled children have the lowest debts/arrears on the housing and benefit variables which suggest a protective factor of disability benefits.
- Those households with children and a disability in the household (adult or child) and those with a disabled child in the house have higher benefit arrears.
- Housing association debts/arrears are lower for those with a disability in the family, a disabled child, or a lone parent, suggesting that there is a protection that comes with that type of tenancy.

Risk of Having Public Debts

- Lone parents and lone parents with a disabled child/ren have the greatest risk of having public debts/arrears.

Council Tax & Benefit Arrears

- Those with the highest levels of council tax debt/arrears are those with a disability and no children, those with a disability and children, couple families and a couple family with a disabled child/ren
- The value of benefits debts/arrears is highest for lone parents with a disabled child/ren.
- Disabled households are most likely to have benefits debt/arrears and are 27% more likely to have benefit debt/arrears.

Fuel Debt

- Disabled households are 16% more likely to have fuel/energy debt/arrears.



We are calling for:

- UK and Scottish Governments to respond to the public debt crisis by reforming public debt recovery processes to prevent public debt trapping children and families in poverty, including targeted action to help and support households with a disabled child and lone parent families.
- UK Government not to implement any changes to Universal Credit or disability support that will result in vulnerable and disadvantaged families being pushed, often deeper, into poverty and for the Scottish Government to commit to protecting the budget for devolved disability support.
- An end to the rules which mean the design of Universal Credit pushes households into public debt, including the two-child limit and the five week wait.
- Reform of Universal Credit to ensure benefits adequately support low-income families to help them provide for their children and align with both UK and Scottish Government actions to reduce child poverty.
- Adequacy of disability benefits and a reassessment of the conditionality rules within Universal Credit, for families with disabled children, to ensure they reflect the true pressures families face as a result of caring for a disabled child.
- Expansion of council tax exemptions to all families living with a disability and lone parent families in receipt of means tested benefits.
- Extension of means tested winter fuel payment to households with a disabled child and lone parent families.



**For more information, please contact:
Martin Canavan (Head of Policy and Participation)**

Email: Martin.Canavan@aberlour.org.uk

Phone: 07714 271700

Aberlour Children's Charity

Registered Head Office
Kintail House, Forthside Way, Stirling
FK8 1QZ

www.aberlour.org.uk

 /aberlourCC  /aberlourCCT

 /aberlourCC  /company/aberlourcc

 /aberlourcharity.bsky.social

Scottish Charity no: SC007991
Company Reg no: SC312912


aberlour
scotland's children's charity

 **One Parent
Families Scotland**

 **Trussell**
Ending hunger together