

Call for MP to take cuts stance

Seven councillors have signed a letter calling on Edinburgh South West's Labour MP to oppose proposed cuts to disability benefits being considered at Westminster.

The letter says that Scott Arthur, an Edinburgh councillor until 2024, has previously voted for cuts that 'impoverish constituents', with all seven councillors representing wards in Arthur's constituency.

Ross McKenzie, an independent councillor for Sighthill/Gorgie, said: "Scott Arthur is a very visible constituency MP – you'll see photos of him all over social media attending events and meeting with people, but he doesn't like to talk about how he votes when he goes down to London.

"He voted to remove the Winter Fuel Allowance and he voted to keep the 'two-child cap'. These policies have a real impact on our constituents and we have all seen examples of people being pushed into poverty as a result.

"We're calling on Scott Arthur to stop voting for these cruel policies – he has a choice and he can take a stand like Brian Leishman has done if he wants to."

Leishman, the Labour MP for Alloa and Grangemouth, told Holyrood Magazine on Sunday that the proposed disability benefit cuts would "impoverish vulnerable people".

He continued to say that "we cannot claim there is no

austerity under Labour if we are going to cut that much from welfare”.

The benefit cuts set to be voted on at Westminster involve the Personal Independence Payment (PIP), which provides financial support for those with a disability in or out of work.

Under the proposed changes, only people who experience very high levels of disruption to their life will be eligible for the payment, with those unable to shower or wash independently not meeting the new bar.

Not many Scots receive PIP, as the Scottish Government has transitioned many claimants to the Scotland-only Adult Disability Payment benefit.

However, cuts to PIP would lead to less money coming to Holyrood from Westminster to deliver benefits.

It is unclear how changes to other benefits, including shifts to the rules on how Universal Credit payments are assessed, will affect Scotland.

Fiona Glasgow, an SNP councillor for Pentland Hills, said: “Labour went around my area before the general election promising to improve people’s lives, but in just a few months, they have already made things worse.

“I represent people who have been scared to turn the heating on this winter. Their bills are going up, while their income is reducing – it can’t go on like this.

“We’re asking Scott Arthur politely to speak up for the people he is supposed to be serving.”

The remaining councillors are Green Dan Heap and the SNP’s Cathy Fullerton and Denis Dixon, all representing Sighthill/Gorgie, Neil Gardiner, a SNP councillor for Pentland Hills, and David Key, a SNP councillor for Fountainbridge/Craiglockhart.

Asked about the letter, Dr Arthur said: "An unsigned letter was left at my office on Friday, and I was disappointed that the authors didn't have the time to discuss its content with me directly.

"I'm particularly keen to hear their thoughts on how we can better support the growing number of economically inactive young people into education, employment, or training. The SNP and Tories have failed these young people, but I firmly believe that those who are able should be empowered and supported to do so.

"My office is already writing to Edinburgh South West residents explaining how we will engage with them as part of this process, and will ensure their views are reflected in the consultation."

By Joseph Sullivan Local Democracy Reporter