

Stirling Carers Hustings 2026

Summary of Proceedings

This document is intended as an overview of the event on Tuesday 14th April and notes the points made by each candidate. The full, unabridged transcript and audio recording are available on request from Stirling Carers Centre.

Introduction

The hustings was opened by Keri Moore, Chief Executive of Stirling Carers Centre, who welcomed attendees and explained that this was the Centre's first time hosting a hustings ahead of the Scottish elections. She outlined the aim of the event as providing a politically neutral space for discussion, questions and engagement on issues affecting unpaid carers and the wider community. Keri thanked staff and organisers, particularly Carley for leading on the event, and thanked attendees for taking part in the democratic process.

Gina Alexander, Vice Chair of Stirling Carers Centre, then took on the role of Chair. She welcomed the candidates and audience, introduced the candidates, and outlined how the session would run. Gina explained that the event was a structured discussion focused on unpaid carers, with clear time limits and expectations of respect and fairness. She noted the large number of questions submitted, confirmed that candidates would respond to an equal number of questions, and explained that audience questions would be taken at the end if time allowed.

Opening Statements

Stephen Kerr – Conservative and Unionist Party

- Thanked Stirling Carers Centre for organising the hustings and for creating one of the few opportunities in the campaign for local candidates to come together.
- Reflected on how campaigning has changed since COVID, including fewer chances for candidates to share and debate differing views in person.
- Thanked fellow candidates for standing for election, noting the personal courage involved in putting oneself forward. Emphasised mutual respect between candidates, despite political disagreements.
- Stated that all candidates want to improve people's lives and make Scotland the best it can be, even if they differ on how to achieve this.
- Acknowledged that political disagreement can be off-putting to the public, but framed it as stemming from a shared desire to serve communities and families, including unpaid carers.
- Closed by thanking attendees, questioners, and fellow candidates.

Amanda Clark – Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Introduced herself as the Scottish Liberal Democrat candidate for Perthshire South and Kinross-shire and a candidate on the Mid Scotland and Fife regional list.
- Stated that she is an unpaid carer, a trustee of Shared Care Scotland, and explained that she cares for her 23-year-old learning disabled son, alongside her campaigning.
- Spoke about the scale of unpaid carers' contribution, stating that carers save the Scottish Government around £16 billion a year. Acknowledged that carers are often overlooked and that their health and wellbeing needs are not taken seriously.
- Set out the Scottish Liberal Democrats' track record on carers highlighting: the party's emphasis on supporting carers; The Carer's Leave Act, introduced through a Liberal Democrat MP; changes secured in the Scottish Budget 2025–26 allowing carers to earn more before financial support is reduced; and a manifesto pledge to increase the Carer Support Payment by £400.
- Shared personal experience of having a daughter who was a young carer and described the impact this had on her early years.

- Called for a named young carers lead in all schools, colleges and universities, and mandatory training for teachers and education staff to better support young carers. Mentioned a pilot programme in Fife, supported by Liberal Democrat councillors, to develop young carers' roles in schools.
- Spoke about the importance of paid carers in enabling her family to continue caring for her son at home.
- Concluded by stating her belief that the Scottish Liberal Democrats have a strong record of action on carers and by thanking unpaid carers for their work.

Kainde Manji – Scottish Labour

- Introduced herself and thanked attendees for the opportunity to listen to carers and respond to questions.
- Stated that she is not a career politician, with a professional background in the voluntary sector and academia. Described eight years working in dementia, first at the University of Stirling and later as Head of Dementia at Age Scotland. Emphasised that her candidacy is rooted in lived experience rather than politics.
- Spoke about having direct conversations with hundreds of carers, including during the pandemic, and said these experiences highlighted the gap between policy commitments and carers' lived realities, which motivated her to stand for election.
- Shared that she is an unpaid carer, and that it took time for her to recognise herself as such despite her professional experience. Explained that she cares for her eight-year-old son, who is undiagnosed autistic and has been on a waiting list for an autism diagnosis for three and a half years. Noted that her ten-year-old child is a young carer for their sibling.
- Stated that both she and her family are registered with Stirling Carers Centre, and paid tribute to the support they have received.
- Said her priority, if elected, would be to deliver meaningful change for unpaid carers in Scotland, reflecting commitments that carers have been promised but not yet seen realised.

Rachel Wright – Reform UK

- Introduced herself as the Reform UK candidate for the Stirling seat and thanked organisers for the invitation to attend.
- Stated openly that she is not a career politician and not an unpaid carer.
- Said that carers' issues are important to her and that she had recently met with Stirling Carers Centre to better understand carers' experiences. Described the hustings as primarily a listening exercise, recognising unpaid carers as the experts.
- Described unpaid carers as the backbone of society and acknowledged the scale of what carers do, often without recognition and at personal cost.
- Said that many carers feel the system works against them, including being financially penalised for trying to earn more, gaps between health and social care services, and carrying responsibilities that she believes should be more evenly shared.
- Set out Reform UK's approach, including: a focus on ensuring that work always pays, so carers are not worse off by working more; decentralising power and funding so local services better reflect local needs; and addressing blockages in the NHS and social care system that increase pressure on unpaid carers.
- Framed Reform UK's position as centred on fairness, dignity and respect for carers.

Andrew Adam – Scottish Greens

- Introduced himself as a Scottish Greens candidate, stated that he is seventh on the regional list and opened with a light-hearted remark about electoral prospects.
- Reflected on the idea of care as coming from love and duty, while also acknowledging the significant strain caring can place on relationships.
- Noted that caring is something many people will experience at different points in their lives, sometimes caring and being cared for at the same time.
- Spoke about the changing and unpredictable nature of caring responsibilities, including fluctuating needs linked to disability and long-term conditions.

- Shared that he struggles with the label of unpaid carer, despite identifying as one, due to how responsibilities can change suddenly.
- Recognised the exhaustion and emotional impact of caring, and the need for strong support. Described caring as emotionally exhausting and acknowledged the cumulative mental load.
- Highlighted the mental burden of caring, alongside physical tasks, including managing ongoing administration, healthcare appointments and systems such as Motability and Access to Work.
- Thanked organisers for holding the event and said he welcomed engagement with the National Carers Organisations' joint manifesto.
- Stated that many of the carers' priorities are reflected within the Scottish Greens' manifesto, and that the Scottish Greens will seek to support carers if elected.

Alyn Smith - SNP

- Thanked attendees for taking part in the democratic process and choosing to attend the hustings.
- Emphasised the importance of political representation and decision-making, particularly in light of lessons from COVID.
- Referred to recent global events to underline how international issues can affect daily life in Scotland, including costs of living.
- Introduced himself as the SNP candidate and said he is proud to stand for the party.
- Stated that he lives in Stirling, in St Ninians, and shares the same local environment and concerns as residents.
- Said that the SNP Government has placed carers at the centre of policy-making, highlighting measures introduced by the SNP, including: the Carer Support Payment, while acknowledging it is still developing; the Carer's Allowance Supplement, which he said makes carers in Scotland £577 better off than elsewhere; the Young Carer Grant, which he said has distributed £1.6 million to 16–18 year olds; and an £8 million annual Short Breaks Fund.
- Referred to recent legislation giving carers a legal right to respite care and to a break
- Framed these policies as using public funds to support those who need it and as part of a wider sense of community responsibility.
- Noted the limits of devolution and said Scotland is a wealthy country whose resources should be used to support the whole community.
- Concluded by stressing the importance of voting in the election.

Questions

Question 1: Funding for local carer support organisations

The National Carer Organisations of Scotland want at least 25% of Carers Act funding to go to local support carer organisations in addition to the funding that they currently receive. At Stirling Carers Centre, we're never sure how much of the total budget that we are receiving to deliver our services.

How will you ensure that 25% is reached and how will you ensure that there is transparency about how that funding is spent locally?

Gina Alexander – Chair

Stephen Kerr - Conservative and Unionist Party

- Spoke about what he described as a significant public finance challenge in Scotland. Referred to warnings from Audit Scotland and the Auditor General about difficult spending decisions facing the next government.
- Set out what he described as choices for Scotland, including focusing on economic growth to increase tax revenues, decisions around raising or lowering taxes and the impact on growth, and whether public spending should increase or be reprioritised.

- Said Scotland is already facing difficulties funding existing commitments. Stated that he could not promise additional funding, describing that as unrealistic in the current financial context.
- Framed the challenge as one of prioritisation rather than new spending.

Kainde Manji – Scottish Labour

- Drew on her experience working in the third sector and described the challenges of operating with static, year-to-year budgets, including uncertainty over future funding and difficulty supporting staff through cost of living pressures.
- Said this approach undermines the work of organisations such as carers centres and stated that Scottish Labour wants to fundamentally change the relationship with the third sector.
- Highlighted a commitment to multi-year funding arrangements, with a minimum of three-year funding terms and greater predictability and stability for local organisations.
- Said Scottish Labour supports a National Care Service focused on improving social care delivery and ensuring dignity for people receiving care.
- Criticised the current system, saying it has not delivered despite long-term SNP control of social care.

Alyn Smith – SNP

- Agreed that funding insecurity for carers centres is a symptom of wider governance and funding structures. Expressed support for longer-term funding settlements, citing examples of multi-year funding in other sectors.
- Explained that the Scottish Government's budget is constrained by dependence on UK Government spending decisions, annual budget cycles and limited borrowing powers.
- Said these constraints are passed down through local authorities to the third sector. Noted that carers centres are often at the end of the funding chain and have least certainty.
- Stated that the Scottish Government has allocated £88.4 million to carer support organisations, but acknowledged that there may be better ways to structure funding.
- Said carers centres need longer-term financial certainty and more funding in the system.
- Argued that money exists within the system but is not reaching frontline services to the extent needed and said this imbalance is what needs to change.

Question 2: Lived experience of caring and how it shapes priorities

Do you have lived experience of being a carer or working closely with unpaid carers, and how has that shaped your priorities for supporting carers locally?

Moira Carmichael – Carer & IJB Carer Representative for Stirling

Andrew Adam – Scottish Greens

- Said he did not have much experience of being an unpaid carer until entering a relationship with a partner who has multiple, overlapping conditions. Described how this experience highlighted the complexity of caring and the way different conditions interact.
- Spoke about how services and systems often treat needs in isolation rather than recognising overlapping and fluctuating circumstances. Gave examples of how treatment for one condition can negatively affect other aspects of health and daily life.
- Said this lived experience reinforced the importance of joined-up services and better communication between different parts of the health and care system.

Rachel Wright – Reform UK

- Said she does not have lived experience of being an unpaid carer but stated that she does not believe direct experience is essential to designing effective support systems.
- Highlighted that politicians often work on issues where they do not have personal experience and this does not prevent her from contributing to workable structures and being an effective

partner within the care sector.

Amanda Clark – Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Stated that she is an unpaid carer.
- Spoke about listening to her daughter's reflections on growing up with a sibling with a learning disability and autism.
- Described the impact on family life of having to repeatedly advocate for diagnoses and appropriate education.
- Said that understanding carers' day-to-day reality is crucial. Gave a personal example of being given a late-afternoon medical appointment despite explaining her caring responsibilities. Explained why this was unmanageable due to her son's care needs at that time of day.
- Said carers often want professionals to listen, understand the practical realities of caring and show flexibility when arranging appointments and services. Described frustration that carers' lived experience is not always recognised or accommodated.

Question 3: Supporting young carers to reach their full potential

Young carers face risks to their education, their mental health, and future opportunities.

How will you ensure young carers are identified early, supported properly, and able to reach their full potential?

Gina Alexander – Chair (on behalf of several Carers)

Kainde Manji – Scottish Labour

- Spoke about misunderstanding around young carers, including those who appear to be coping well but are under strain. Shared personal experience of her older child becoming distressed after "flying under the radar" while attention was focused on his sibling. Described the impact on her child's mental health and her own feelings of guilt as a parent.
- Praised the support provided by Stirling Carers Centre, including regular one-to-one support in school. Explained how consistent, trusted support helped her child open up and improve his wellbeing.
- Emphasised the value of one-to-one support for young people, having a safe, trusted person to talk to and support that is independent of both school and parents. Said this kind of early, relational support is crucial for young carers' resilience and development.

Stephen Kerr – Conservative and Unionist Party

- Responded positively to the previous answer and agreed that adults have a responsibility to look out for young people experiencing stress and anxiety.
- Acknowledged the role of teachers, classroom assistants and school leaders in identifying young people who may need support.
- Said that access to support can be difficult, based on his wider experience of families with caring responsibilities.
- Noted that signposting to available help can be confusing due to the number of different services and lack of clarity about where to go for support.
- Argues that support systems need to be simplified to make help more visible and accessible.
- Shared an example of a family member's caring experience to illustrate how challenging caring situations can be.

Amanda Clark – Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Described herself as a former teacher with 31 years' experience.
- Said she has actively contributed to Liberal Democrat policy development on young carers. Confirmed that a named young carers lead in every school is party policy and she is advocating for similar roles in universities.

- Shared personal experience of her daughter growing up as a young carer and the impact on her childhood. Described challenges including lack of sleep, limited parental attention, and social restrictions at home.
- Recounted her daughter describing herself as a “glass child”, meaning overlooked due to focus on her sibling. Said this reinforced the need for dedicated young carers leads, advocates within education settings and everyday access to someone who understands young carers’ experiences.
- Argued that these roles would reduce the need for parents to repeatedly explain caring situations to schools.

Question 4: Improving coordination across services

Carers often act as the glue holding services together. What will you do to improve coordination between the NHS, social care and local counsellors councils, so carers aren’t left to navigate everything alone?

Sylvia Heggie – Carer

Alyn Smith – SNP

- Described the question as a key challenge for the next Parliament.
- Said record levels of funding are going into the system, driven by increased and better-identified needs, and recognised issues around attempts to dismiss or stigmatise people’s need for support.
- Acknowledged gaps between health services, integration joint boards and local authorities and said he has seen examples locally where systems are poorly joined up.
- Recognised the role that carers and organisations such as carers centres play in bridging these gaps and said coordination and information sharing need to improve both locally and nationally.
- Stated that while many committed staff work within the system, outcomes are not yet good enough for those relying on services.

Andrew Adam – Scottish Greens

- Agreed with much of what had been said and said there were no simple solutions.
- Described coordination between large organisations as inherently difficult and said these processes often shift work and stress onto unpaid carers.
- Criticised the increasing use of means-testing and administrative hurdles and argued that this approach may appear efficient but creates hidden costs for carers.
- Emphasised that carers are people, not figures in a budget.
- Said meaningful coordination requires honest discussion about funding levels and reducing barriers to accessing support.
- Accepted this as a long-term challenge that requires sustained focus.

Rachel Wright – Reform UK

- Said unpaid carers are too often doing the work that systems should be doing.
- Argued that fixing NHS and social care systems would directly reduce pressure on carers
- Highlighted delayed hospital discharge as a key issue affecting carers and said Reform UK wants to address NHS bottlenecks to relieve that pressure.
- Called for breaking down silos between health and care services.
- Advocated for decentralising decision-making from Holyrood to local councils and said localised control would allow care systems to better reflect community needs.
- Highlighted expansion of community care, GP services and integrated adult social care.

Kainde Manji – Scottish Labour

- Spoke critically about the pace of progress on coordination.
- Referred to work she did five years earlier on carers and dementia policy, including proposals for a legal right to care breaks and shared records across health and social care. Said legal rights have since been introduced, but not with sufficient funding.
- Highlighted delays in developing systems to help coordinate care.
- Referred to digital tools that could support joined-up care being available elsewhere in the UK but not yet implemented in Scotland.
- Proposed a return to a family doctor model where individuals are known by a consistent GP and carers do not need to repeatedly explain their circumstances.
- Said coordination should be led by GPs and services, not by carers, and stated that carers should not be responsible for managing complex systems on their own.

Question 5: Improving carers' financial security

Unpaid carers often feel forced to choose between staying in work and accessing very limited financial support. What will you do to improve carers' financial security and support those trying to remain in employment?

Kirsty Hall - Carer

Amanda Clark - Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Highlighted the Carer's Leave Act, brought forward through a Liberal Democrat MP, which gives carers a legal right to one week of unpaid leave. Said the party had sought to extend this to paid leave but that this did not progress at Westminster.
- Highlighted Liberal Democrat influence in increasing the earnings threshold before Carer Support Payment is withdrawn, and criticised the previous overpayment system, where carers could lose a full week's payment for earning slightly over the limit.
- Referred to existing workplace rights, including time off for dependants and employer recognition schemes, and said the party continues to push for fairer treatment of carers in work.
- Shared her own experience of being unable to take short-term supply teaching work without losing entitlement to carer support.

Stephen Kerr - Conservative and Unionist Party

- Focused on what he described as "cliff edges" in the benefits system.
- Said current arrangements can actively discourage carers from working or increasing hours. Described this as a punitive system that needs reform.
- Set out the Conservative position of prioritising employment and economic participation, and argued that work is a key route to financial security.
- Criticised the Scottish Government's approach to benefits and funding.
- Said local authorities and integration joint boards have faced sustained funding pressures.
- Challenged SNP claims that record funding levels have translated into adequate local resourcing.

Alyn Smith - SNP

- Described benefits design and budget flows as shaped by the limits of devolution. Said many employment rights, tax rules and benefit interactions are reserved to Westminster.
- Said the Scottish Government lacks long-term borrowing and budget flexibility and argued this affects funding passed to local authorities and the third sector. Said independence would allow different fiscal and social security choices.
- Highlighted that carers in Scotland receive additional financial support compared to elsewhere.
- Expressed support for more flexible working arrangements and greater recognition of carers in the workplace.
- Argued that expanded flexible working would benefit carers and the wider workforce.

Rachel Wright – Reform UK

- Strongly challenged the view that responsibility for cliff edges lies outside devolved powers. Said income tax and tapering decisions are within the Scottish Government's control and rejected explanations that placed responsibility primarily on Westminster.
- Argued that carers can lose significant financial support following small pay increases and described income tapering as essential to prevent carers being worse off in work.

Question 6: Wellbeing support and respite

Many unpaid carers experience poor mental and physical health. How will you ensure carers can access timely wellbeing support and meaningful short breaks and how will you deliver?

Gina Alexander – Chair (on behalf of several Carers)

Andrew Adam – Scottish Greens

- Referred to the Scottish Greens' manifesto commitment to expand free, walk-in mental health support hubs. Gave examples of existing models, such as community mental health hubs in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and said these hubs allow people to access support without long waits for diagnosis.
- Emphasised that access to support should not depend on receiving a formal diagnosis, which can take years. Spoke about the difficulty of long diagnostic waiting times, drawing on personal experience.
- Stated that mental health should be treated with the same priority as physical health and acknowledged that progress in this area has been limited so far.
- Said the Scottish Greens support year-on-year real-terms increases in mental health funding.
- Expressed hope that other parties would also back increased mental health investment.

Amanda Clark – Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Said respite and short breaks need to be person-centred and highlighted the wide range of caring situations, from caring for older adults with dementia to children with additional support needs. Focused particularly on the lack of suitable overnight respite provision.
- Shared personal experience as a parent carer, describing the long-term nature of caring into adulthood and the difficulty of accessing short breaks that allow parents to rest at home
- Explained that what carers sometimes need is a short break without leaving home and time to rest and recover without caring responsibilities.
- Said existing respite options do not offer enough choice or flexibility and called for a wider range of overnight short-break options to reflect different needs and levels of support.
- Emphasised the importance of tailored provision that matches the needs of both carers and the people they care for.

Stephen Kerr – Conservative and Unionist Party

- Highlighted the anxiety carers experience when trying to negotiate respite, particularly where paid care is involved. Linked carers' anxiety to wider problems with service coordination.
- Said arranging breaks can be stressful in itself due to lack of flexibility and poor communication between services.
- Described the burden of having to speak to multiple agencies and acting as an intermediary between different parts of the public sector. Said this process can worsen mental health pressures rather than relieve them. Drew on experiences shared by constituents, friends and family.
- Raised concerns about difficulties accessing mental health diagnoses and said diagnosis remains particularly challenging for adults. Described delays and lack of diagnosis as deeply distressing and a barrier to accessing support and said these issues need urgent improvement.

Question 7: Cross-party collaboration on carers' issues

Over the past three years, we have been lucky enough to attend the Scottish Parliament for Young Carers' Day of Action and to observe First Minister's Questions. What has been deeply concerning is the pattern we see on those days. Regardless of which party has brought forward a motion, once FMQs conclude, around 60-70% of MSPs leave the chamber. This means that only a small proportion remain to take part in discussions on carers and carers' rights. This creates the impression that support for carers can sometimes feel like a "flavour of the month", raised to score political points rather than addressed as a sustained priority.

Can we not move towards genuine cross-party collaboration, instead of point-scoring, when it comes to improving outcomes for unpaid carers and young carers? How do you and your party intend to address this?

Robert Cairney – Carer & Young Carers Service Volunteer

Alyn Smith – SNP

- Said he is opposed to adversarial or performative politics.
- Emphasised that common ground exists across parties, even where there are disagreements about how to achieve shared goals.
- Pointed to recent care reform legislation which created a legal right to respite breaks. Acknowledged that securing adequate funding for these rights remains challenging and ongoing.
- Said that legislation was passed with support from multiple parties. Highlighted that the Scottish Parliament's electoral system is designed to encourage cooperation. Referred to past periods of cooperation, including between the SNP and the Greens.
- Said carers' issues are too important for party political point-scoring.

Kainde Manji – Scottish Labour

- Said the Scottish Parliament was originally intended to operate on consensus and referred to earlier parliamentary sessions where cross-party cooperation delivered major policy changes.
- Said that level of cooperation has not been evident in recent years. Highlighted the recent the Assisted Dying Bill as an example of non-whipped votes with moments of more constructive debate.
- Argued that prolonged single-party dominance has reduced collaboration and said she wants to see parties working together to deliver tangible improvements for carers.
- Emphasised the importance of moving beyond adversarial political culture.

Stephen Kerr – Conservative and Unionist Party

- Acknowledged the passion involved in politics and the reality of disagreement, but criticised what he described as an increasingly confrontational and tribal parliamentary culture and said this approach does not always lead to the best outcomes.
- Agreed that beyond formal parliamentary exchanges, there is often significant common ground between parties.
- Said cross-party working has been possible in the past and argued that sustainable change depends on cooperation across parties.
- Said government legislation should be brought forward in a way that enables consensus.

Amanda Clark – Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Described the Liberal Democrats as willing to work constructively with other parties and gave examples of recent negotiations with the Scottish Government during the budget process
- Highlighted funding secured to help speed up autism and ADHD assessments and said these measures have direct benefits for families with caring responsibilities.
- Referred to changes allowing carers to earn more before losing financial support.

- Emphasised a case-by-case approach to legislation.
- Said the Liberal Democrats will engage in negotiation and collaboration where it benefits carers.

Question 8: Access to specialist support

My husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's four years ago. He was diagnosed by a consultant psychiatrist who then put him on medication. Since then, we have had no review of the medication and he has not seen any medical professional who can help. In that time, he has deteriorated quite a lot with lots of other symptoms that he didn't have originally. So it would be very useful to have the psychiatrist a look at him.

So what would you do for me to be able to see a psychiatrist with my husband?

Irene Raine - Carer

Andrew Adam - Scottish Greens

- Acknowledged how difficult it can be to access the right professional support.
- Described the NHS as overstretched and under pressure, which can result in limited follow-up once someone has been initially seen. Said people are sometimes told they cannot be re-seen, even when circumstances change
- Suggested that, in practice, contacting a local MSP can sometimes help unblock access to services and explained that intervention from elected representatives can prompt action within the system. Emphasised that this should not be how the system operates.
- Said NHS staff are under significant pressure and are often constrained by resources and targets, but argued that people should be able to be re-referred when needs change.
- Highlighted wider issues with systems not being joined up, including situations where services fail to account for multiple or overlapping conditions.
- Said current systems can unintentionally trap people and need reform.

Rachel Wright - Reform UK

- Argued that devolution has led to increased centralisation rather than local responsiveness.
- Referred to earlier models of community-based healthcare with greater continuity and familiarity. Described a preference for stronger family doctor and community health models and said care should be organised first around families and communities.
- Argued that community-level services would be better placed to identify changes in need and make referrals. Suggested that under earlier systems, appropriate reviews and follow-up would have been more likely.

Kainde Manji - Scottish Labour

- Thanked the questioner for sharing her experience and said it was not uncommon.
- Referred to the entitlement in Scotland to a year of post-diagnostic support following a dementia diagnosis. Shared an example of extended waiting times undermining this entitlement.
- Highlighted dementia as a progressive condition where delays have serious consequences.
- Criticised the lack of joined-up working between services and set out Scottish Labour's support for a family doctor model, where a GP acts as an advocate and coordinator. Said similar continuity is needed in social care.
- Shared examples of carers being unable to access reassessment when circumstances change due to staff turnover or lack of contact and said carers are often forced to repeatedly explain their situation.
- Argued for genuine integration of health and social care to ensure appropriate follow-up and support.

Rachel Wright – Reform UK

- Responded to a comment made during the discussion. Stated that Reform UK supports the NHS remaining free at the point of delivery and said claims that her party seeks to abolish or privatise the NHS were incorrect.

Question 9: Financial support for carers beyond pension age

Carer support payment stops at pension age, even when caring responsibilities continue. What changes would you make to ensure older carers are financially supported?

Gina Alexander – Chair (on behalf of several Carers)

Stephen Kerr – Conservative and Unionist Party

- Said it is Conservative policy to support older carers.
- Stated that carers' needs do not end at pension age and should be recognised.
- Argued that Scotland is a wealthy country with high levels of taxation. Said shortages in public services should not exist at current funding levels and framed the issue as one of government priorities rather than lack of resources.
- Criticised the SNP Government's record over the past decade.
- Said people, including carers, should be at the centre of spending decisions.

Alyn Smith – SNP

- Said he does not believe Carer Support Payment should stop at pension age and emphasised that caring responsibilities continue regardless of age.
- Proposed assessing support based on household income rather than age alone.
- Said financial support should recognise the emotional and practical demands of caring.
- Defended the SNP Government's use of public funds and investment in frontline services and highlighted policies such as free travel and NHS investment.
- Acknowledged that gaps in care and follow-up remain and need improvement. Said addressing wider system pressures would help free up capacity and resources.
- Stated he does not support cutting taxes at the expense of public services.

Andrew Adam – Scottish Greens

- Said there appears to be cross-party agreement on extending support beyond pension age, and confirmed this change is included in the Scottish Greens' manifesto.
- Defined pension age as another "cliff edge" that should be removed.
- Argued that benefit design needs to be smarter and more consistent, but acknowledged wider public funding constraints.
- Emphasised the need for faster progress and collaborative working.
- Said the Greens would continue to work cross-party to deliver changes for carers

Amanda Clark – Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Spoke from personal experience as a carer approaching pension age.
- Explained her intention to continue caring for her adult son beyond retirement age, and said keeping family members at home saves public money.
- Stated she would raise ending the pension-age cut-off through Liberal Democrat policy processes.
- Committed to bringing a motion to future party conferences and aimed to secure inclusion of this issue in a future manifesto.

Question 10: Delivering the legal right to a break

This is something that our Carer Support Officers are asked about on a daily basis when we speak to unpaid carers – The Care Reform Bill passed in June 2025 gave unpaid carers the legal right to a break from caring. With implementation still being developed nationally, what will you do to ensure that it is delivered effectively in this local authority?

Carley O'Hare – Operations Manager, Stirling Carers Centre

Kainde Manji – Scottish Labour

- Said that rights to care breaks should have been delivered earlier.
- Argued that long-term reductions in local government funding have undermined delivery. Cited significant cuts to local authority budgets, including reductions affecting Stirling.
- Described local health and social care services as having been under severe financial strain, and criticised delays in delivering a promised National Care Service.
- Said Scottish Labour supports a National Care Service with consistent national standards, decision-making and delivery remaining at a local level, and proper funding for local authorities.
- Emphasised the essential role of third-sector organisations in delivering care and support.
- Said Labour supports implementing the legal right to care breaks as part of a properly resourced National Care Service.

Alyn Smith – SNP

- Said passing the legislation was only the first step and emphasised that legal rights must be matched by sufficient funding.
- Acknowledged that current funding levels for respite are not sufficient. Referred to existing national funding for respite but said it needs to be expanded.
- Stated that decisions about contribution should consider individual circumstances.
- Highlighted ongoing problems with poor coordination and information-sharing across services and said carers are often left to bridge gaps between organisations.
- Argued that health and social care systems need significant reform.
- Defended the SNP's approach to protecting local services, including decisions made at council level.
- Said funding decisions involve difficult trade-offs and accountability to voters.
- Expressed pride in the SNP's record of protecting frontline services.

Rachel Wright – Reform UK

- Welcomed acknowledgment of gaps in care provision, and questioned why shortfalls remain after long-term SNP government.
- Argued that sufficient funding exists but is poorly allocated.
- Criticised centralised decision-making from Holyrood.
- Advocated pushing control of funding and spending decisions down to local authorities, and said local communities should play a greater role in setting priorities.
- Emphasised the contribution of unpaid carers to public finances and argued for greater investment in local infrastructure to support carers.
- Framed effective delivery as dependent on local control and prioritisation.

Audience Question: Building skills for caring

Given the growing pressures on families caring for people with conditions such as Alzheimer's, cancer or autism, should we be doing more to start earlier by embedding an understanding of care, empathy and mutual support into education? How would you work to normalise caring from a young age, so that people grow up better prepared to support one another and their families, rather than relying on a system that often feels broken and unaffordable later in life?

Nicole Leavitt – Carer

Stephen Kerr – Conservative and Unionist Party

- Said he agreed with the core principle of building understanding and resilience from an early age.
- Emphasised the importance of teaching children skills such as resilience, self-reliance and independence. Linked this to an active lifestyle, physical activity and sport.
- Argued that young people need to be better prepared to cope with life's pressures and challenges.
- Said current levels of investment in young people, both in and out of school, are insufficient.
- Framed early education and wider youth support as essential to long-term wellbeing and independence.
- Disputed comments made earlier about local council tax decisions.

Andrew Adam – Scottish Greens

- Framed the contribution as highlighting the importance of strong, compassionate communities.
- Spoke about the value of grassroots support and people caring for one another, and said government has a role in enabling stronger, more resilient communities.
- Supported intergenerational approaches that allow children to interact with and understand care, illness and disability.
- Argued that early exposure helps build empathy and life experience.
- Noted that people who have not faced hardship may struggle to understand others' experiences.
- Emphasised the need for greater compassion and fairness in how society views care and vulnerability.
- Concluded that normalising care from a young age would benefit individuals and communities.

Closing Statements

Alyn Smith – SNP

- Thanked the Chair and attendees for the discussion.
- Said he is proud to be the SNP candidate for Stirling and to live in the local area, and stated his intention to see Scotland's resources used to improve people's lives.
- Acknowledged that no government gets everything right. Referred to challenges including COVID, long-term austerity and constrained budgets.
- Argued that independence would allow greater control over budgets, economic policy and public services.
- Said he would continue to work for unpaid carers locally.
- Described carers as essential to keeping systems functioning.
- Thanked carers for their contribution.

Andrew Adam – Scottish Greens

- Thanked attendees for coming and for holding candidates to account.

- Reiterated concerns about people being defined only by one aspect of their lives.
- Encouraged voters to consider the wider values and leadership of the parties represented.
- Asked people to think carefully about who they want representing them and invited voters to consider giving their list vote to the Scottish Greens.

Rachel Wright - Reform UK

- Thanked organisers and attendees for the opportunity to speak.
- Said Reform UK's aim is to ensure carers are not worse off financially, not left unsupported and are not left feeling invisible.
- Acknowledged the scale of carers' contribution in time, effort and care and said carers give much and ask for little in return.
- Argued that the problem lies with systems rather than lack of money or people. Called for fundamental reform of care systems.
- Asked voters to trust Reform UK to help deliver that change.

Kainde Manji - Scottish Labour

- Said the issue is not teaching people how to care, but valuing care work properly.
- Emphasised that unpaid care is skilled work carried out without financial recognition.
- Said people care because of commitment and compassion, not financial incentive.
- Argued that care work across society, paid and unpaid, needs greater value.
- Emphasised the importance of properly funding local government and sustained, predictable funding for the third sector.
- Said unpaid carers and care delivery should be central to public policy.
- Reiterated support for a genuinely effective National Care Service.

Amanda Clark - Scottish Liberal Democrats

- Described the Scottish Liberal Democrats as the party of care.
- Highlighted past Liberal Democrat achievements, including free personal care for older people, measures to support the care workforce and opposition to social care centralisation proposals.
- Referred to securing changes allowing carers to earn more before support is withdrawn.
- Highlighted the Carer's Leave Act.
- Said carers reduce pressure on the NHS by providing care at home. Described the party's approach as investing early to reduce later costs.
- Framed Liberal Democrat priorities around fairness and reform and encouraged voters to support the party on the regional ballot.

Stephen Kerr - Conservative and Unionist Party

- Asked voters to consider supporting him based on his commitment to Stirling.
- Spoke about his long-standing personal connection to the area and described representing Stirling as a significant responsibility and privilege.
- Said he would work daily to represent local people's interests and stated he would challenge decisions where necessary on behalf of constituents.
- Framed his political priorities around fairness of opportunity.
- Thanked the audience for their engagement and thanked the Chair for leading the event.