



Grampian Advice Forum

Thurs 19th March 2026
By Microsoft Teams

10:00 – 12:00

The forum brings together advisers: to share information and experiences, exchange ideas, offer informal peer support, share good practice, explore training needs, discuss welfare developments/approaches and explore networking opportunities.

STANDING AGENDA

1. Attendees
2. Minute of previous meeting & matters arising
3. Speakers and updates
 - Craig Tobin Head of Partnerships, Advice Direct Scotland
john.baird@advice.scot
 - Rod Smith – Training Lead @ Women's Pathway [GamCare - Founder of the National Gambling Helpline](#)
 - Windrush Engagement Team – Home Office
 - Complex Needs
4. Information exchange:
5. Policy & Legislation Updates
6. Diary/calendar dates
7. AOB
8. Date and time of next meeting

MINUTES

1. Attendees

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 40 Attended | 9:51 AM - 12:07 PM Start and end time |
| 2h 16m 36s Meeting duration | 1h 48m 55s Average attendance time |

Numerous organisations were represented, including Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council, Citizens Advice, Shelter, Hillcrest Homes, Maggie's, ACVO, Grampian Housing, Langstane Housing, Housing associations, Windrush Engagement Team, GamCare, Advice Direct Scotland, and others.

2. Minute of previous meeting & matters arising
Stuart opened the meeting, welcomed attendees and explained that the session would be recorded for minute taking purposes.

3. Speakers and updates

Presentation 1 – Advice Direct Scotland / advocacy.scot
Speaker: Craig Tobin (Head of Impact, Advice Direct Scotland)
Craig.Tobin@advice.scot

Key Points

- Advice Direct Scotland (ADS) has taken over delivery of the Independent Advocacy Service formerly provided by VoiceAbility.
- The service operates under advocacy.scot to maintain strict separation between advocacy and advice.
- Statutory right to advocacy arises under the Social Security (Scotland) Act.
- Demand for advocacy support is rising as Social Security Scotland services mature.
- Partnership approach includes:
 - Collaboration with Scottish Library Information Council to support face to face access across Scotland.

- Digital tools and accessible service development.
- Priorities include co design, integration with wider advice services, technological accessibility, and expanding face to face support.

Referral routes

- [Self-referral via website](#)
- Referral portal for organisations
- Telephone referral line
- Craig to send full referral details and named local contact to Stuart for circulation.

Q&A Highlights

- Supports people with disabilities (diagnosed or self-identified) and people lacking capacity.
- Broader remit now extends beyond ADP to multiple Social Security Scotland benefits.
- ADS can provide home visits across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire.
- Commitment to partnership work with local third sector organisations.
- Advocacy is available up to and including tribunal support, aligned with national standards.

Presentation - [Stakeholder Slides](#)

Presentation 2 – GamCare (Women’s Gambling Harms Awareness)

Speaker: Rod Smith, GamCare rod.smith@gamcare.org.uk

Key Points

- GamCare provides support to anyone affected by gambling harms, including affected family members.
- Gambling harms are often hidden, especially among women, who may use gambling to cope with stress, trauma, loneliness or boredom.
- 2.7% of adults meet criteria for harmful gambling; approx. 10% of the population is affected directly or indirectly.
- Online gambling and competition style websites (e.g., prize draws, social media competitions) are growing issues.

Training & Support Available

- Free CPD accredited training, including:
 - Women’s Gambling Harms Awareness
 - Gambling & Domestic Abuse
 - Lived Experience sessions
 - Brief Intervention training (new)
- National Gambling Helpline and multiple digital/WhatsApp/webchat access routes.
- “Way Forward” – online support group for women affected by someone else’s gambling (7 week structured programme).

Q&A Highlights

- Online gambling trends and advertising discussed.
- Impact of cost of living pressures on gambling behaviour.
- Neurodivergent individuals may be at greater risk due to impulsivity.
- Concerns raised about competition websites and normalisation of gambling.

Presentation - [Women-and-Gambling-Harm.pdf](#)

Presentation 3 – Windrush Engagement Team (Home Office)

Speakers: Sharron, Pauletta, and Lloyd

Key Points

- Windrush Engagement Team provides national outreach relating to the Windrush Status Scheme and Windrush Compensation Scheme.
- Many community members remain unaware they qualify—team focusing on increasing engagement in Scotland, including events in Aberdeen in May.
- Status Scheme
- Free service helping people prove their lawful right to live and work in the UK. [Apply to the Windrush Compensation Scheme: Overview - GOV.UK](#)
- Applies to:

- o Commonwealth citizens settled before 1 January 1973 and their children.
- o Individuals arriving in the UK between 1973–1988 who are now settled.

Compensation Scheme

- Launched April 2019.
- Three types of claims:
 - o Primary Claim
 - o Close Family Member Claim
 - o Deceased Estate Claim
- 13 compensable categories (employment, education, housing, banking, detention, legal fees, etc.).
- Claims must establish eligibility and loss—being eligible does not guarantee entitlement.

Key Statistics (Dec 2025)

- Over £130 million paid
- More than 11,300 applications received
- £1.1 million paid in December alone

Q&A Highlights

- Discussion on challenges with digital E-Visas and risk of errors affecting legal status checks.
- Team acknowledged difficulties, especially for older applicants, though E Visa policy sits outside their remit.

Presentation 4 – Complex Needs and Universal Credit

Speaker: Stuart Reid

Summary of Key Content

- Explained importance of recording complex needs on UC to protect vulnerable claimants.
- Benefits include:
 - o Protection from sanctions
 - o Access to reasonable adjustments
 - o Safeguarding considerations
 - o Consistency across DWP staff

Common Complex Need Categories

- Mental health conditions
- Learning difficulties
- Homelessness
- Domestic abuse
- Addiction
- Physical health conditions
- Language barriers
- Digital exclusion
- Care leavers / Refugees

Where DWP Records Complex Needs

- Additional Support tab
- Claimant profile notes
- Pinned notes for risk (suicide, DA, safeguarding)

How Advisers Can Support Clients

- Submit clear written requests (journal, letter, or in person)
- Provide supporting evidence (fit notes, reports)
- Use template forms (Stuart shared the Advice Forum template)
- Request opening of Additional Needs tab
- Ask DWP to contact professionals before adverse decisions

Case Studies Covered

- Homeless claimant
- Mental health crisis
- Learning difficulty claimant
- Domestic abuse survivor

Additional Practitioner Insights (from discussion)

- For phone only claimants, always follow up with written evidence.

- DWP often condenses wording if dictated by phone—sending a letter helps ensure accuracy.
- Issues raised regarding UC migration decisions and recurring administrative errors

Presentation - [Supporting-Vulnerable-Claimants-Complex-Needs.pdf](#)

Example request - [Additional-Needs-Status-Request-Form.pdf](#)

4. Information exchange

Website & Newsletter

- Advice Forum website updated regularly
- Search indexing currently inconsistent on Google., so best to bookmark site – [Home - Grampian Advice Forum](#)
- Weekly newsletter sent to 90+ subscribers.

Local Updates

- Maggie's Benefits Advice Service - Jamie Stephen now in post; referrals welcome for clients affected by cancer. [Maggie's, Aberdeen | Maggie's](#)

5. Policy & Legislation Updates

Debt Advice Handbook

- CPAG's 16th edition available free online. [Debt Advice Handbook 16th edition](#)

Two-Child Limit

- The **two child limit** will be lifted for assessment periods that start on or after April 6th 2026. Due to assessment periods, the increase will be different for different claimants.
- There are **no special rules on benefit cap or erosion of transitional protection** - so some won't benefit fully from the increases. For those already on UC, they will only get the increase from the assessment period that starts on or after April 6th (ending 5th May) - so earliest date for a higher payment would be 12th May 2026 which could confuse some people or make them think they have been missed if they were expecting their April payment to be higher!

Advisers should:

- Ensure all children are listed on UC claims.
- Manage expectations—payments may not increase until May or June depending on AP dates.
- Benefit cap and transitional protection rules still apply.

Scot Gov

- Changes to Scotland's carer benefits system came into force on 15 March 2026. The new Scottish Carer Supplement (SCS) will replace Carer's Allowance Supplement. Carer Additional Person Payment (CAPP) – Support for Multiple Caring Roles. Extended Bereavement Support (increase from 8 – 12 weeks)
- Introduction of £2,000 one-off grant for care leavers in Scotland coming into force on 1 April 2026, delivered by the local authority which last looked after the person and without an application.

Recent HMCTS Tribunal User Group meeting

- **Expect increase in WCA/LCWRA appeals due to upcoming legal changes.**
- The LCWRA payment for new claimants will be almost halved from April 2026, any decision not awarding LCWRA—or placing a claimant outside the protected group—now carries far greater financial impact. Combined with stricter evidence rules, new Severe Conditions Criteria, and complex transitional deadlines, these reforms increase the likelihood of errors and disputed outcomes, meaning advisers should expect a rise in WCA/LCWRA appeals.
- Representatives encouraged to ensure appellants join remote hearings from quiet, private spaces with stable connections.

- Highlighted concerns about the use of AI:
 - AI generated submissions must be fact checked.
 - False citations or invented case law may constitute professional misconduct.
- Noted ongoing research projects on tribunals, disadvantage, and remote hearings, with Glasgow University heavily involved.

6. Diary/calendar dates

- [Review of Scotland's Statutory Debt Solutions - Review team webinar Tickets, Wednesday, Apr 1, 2026 from 10 am to 11:30 am](#)

7. AOB

CPAG adviser helpline details shared.

Scotland

By phone 0141 552 0552

Monday to Friday, 10 am-12 pm and 2 pm-4 pm

By email advice@cpagscotland.org.uk

The Scotland email service covers all benefits

8. Date and time of next meeting

Thurs 18th June 2026 10:00 – 12:00