



# **Waiting for care:**

## **Is Scotland meeting its commitment to older people?**

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## Executive Summary

In 2018 Age Scotland asked Local Authorities in Scotland how long older people were waiting to be assessed for social care and how long it took for people with critical or substantial care needs to receive it.

Our aim was to get a full picture of the situation facing vulnerable older people and their families in Scotland, identify the challenges facing councils and look for solutions.

**This new research outlines that too many older people in Scotland are waiting too long to access the social care that they need.**

In 2018, 43% of older people assessed as having critical or substantial needs **did not** receive the services they required within the six week period outlined in the National Eligibility Criteria<sup>1</sup>.

With a rapidly ageing population and one which is increasing at a faster rate than the rest of the United Kingdom, it is vital that Scotland is able to deliver on its social care commitment.

The projected 50% increase in the number of people living with dementia over the next 20 years, to over 120,000, and the welcome introduction of “Frank’s Law” in April 2019 will mean that the number of people seeking access to social care in the future is likely to increase.

We know through calls to our free information and advice helpline that waiting times to receive the required social care are still a considerable issue. Our helpline, which receives around 1,000 calls a month, offers information, friendship and advice to Scotland’s older people and their families through its freephone service on **0800 12 44 222**.

In July and December of 2018 we submitted Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to each Scottish Local Authority, asking about their provision of social care to older people. A note about our methodology, including the questions we asked can be found in Appendix 1.

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<sup>1</sup> [Guidance on National Standard Eligibility Criteria and Waiting Time for Free Personal and Nursing Care for Older People](#)

## Key Findings

- Of the 14 Local Authorities who provided answers to questions we asked we found **that 43% of older people** assessed as having critical or substantial needs **did not** receive the services they required within the recommended six weeks in 2018. **This means that over 6,000 people have waited longer** than six weeks to get the care they need
- Out of the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland, **only six were able to give a full response to our FOI request**
- From the Local Authorities who responded to our requests, we found that **nearly 14,200 people were assessed as having care needs classed as 'critical' or 'substantial' in 2018**
- When asked about the most common reasons for delays, **most Local Authorities were unable to provide further information as they didn't hold this centrally**. Local Authorities who could respond reported the pressure services face, such as **increased demand and limited resources**.

## Our Recommendations

- More effective data recording by Local Authorities to help identify trend and patterns, allowing them to better respond and plan for increased demand in their services
- More regular public reporting of waiting time figures by Local Authority
- Better signposting for families to information and advice services if Local Authorities are unable to provide care due to high demand. This will help families to assess their options and find out about any financial assistance they may be entitled to
- Stakeholders including the Scottish Government and Local Authorities should raise awareness about the importance of planning for future care needs
- The Scottish Government and Local Authority efforts to attract and employ more social care workers must be sustained
- The Scottish Government must ensure that social care is properly resourced to meet the increased demand in the timescales it has set out.

# Introduction

## Social care in Scotland and why it matters

Social care helps disabled people, people with long term conditions, and older people to live independently. As our population continues to age, it is widely recognised that more people will need access to these vital services which can help with intimate tasks such as washing and dressing as well as help with medicines. The fastest growing age group in Scotland is projected to be those aged 75 and over, increasing by 79% over the 25 year period between 2016 and 2041.<sup>2</sup>

In Scotland free personal care and nursing is available for everyone aged 65 and over who have been given a community care assessment by their Local Authority and are assessed as requiring extra help. In April 2019 this was expanded to people under 65 with the roll out of ‘Frank’s Law’.

Introduced in Scotland in 2002, it is often described as a ‘flagship policy’, **and over 76,000 older people in Scotland benefited from free personal and nursing care in 2016/17**, either in a care home or whilst living in their own home. 45,780 older people received a personal care service in their own home, with Local Authorities spending £379 million on providing this service. There were 9,870 self-funding care home residents who received free personal care, and 5,940 self-funding care home residents who received free nursing care which Local Authorities paid £123 million towards.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly this policy has made a profound difference to the quality of life of older people, but beyond that, free personal and nursing care also makes good economic sense. Social care has an important preventative element, which can help reduce people relying on more intensive and expensive forms of care.

For example, free personal care will mean an older person receives help at home which allows them to live independently and can reduce the risk of

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<sup>2</sup> National Records of Scotland, [Scotland’s Population 2017](#), August 2018

<sup>3</sup> [Scottish Government: Free personal and nursing care, Scotland, 2016-2017](#)

falls, undernutrition or malnutrition. Limited mobility or problems eating could lead to a hospital admission if a person doesn't receive any support, which may last for several weeks or months.

**Care in a hospital is much more expensive than care at home and can lead to delayed discharges, which cost the NHS an average of £234 per day or £1,638 per week. This compares to Local Authority payments of only £253 per week for personal and nursing care.<sup>4</sup>**

This means it is absolutely vital that people who require free personal and nursing care receive it without delay. We have received regular calls to our freephone helpline about the delays older people have faced in receiving the care they need and are entitled to.

### **Case Study 1**

Our helpline heard from a concerned daughter, who works full time but tries her best to care for her dad aged 86, who has complex care needs.

Despite living with Alzheimer's disease, being doubly incontinent, and lacking the ability to make decisions for himself, he has not been able to get a community care assessment despite his daughter requesting one from the local council.

The family have been advised that the council are only to provide care to people who require end of life services. His daughter has taken two weeks off of work, but she knows this is merely a short term fix, and faces the dilemma of how to ensure her dad gets the care he needs when she has to go back to work.

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<sup>4</sup> Age Scotland, Delayed Discharge Press Release, August 2018.

## What we found

Out of the 32 Local Authorities in Scotland, only six gave a full response to our FOI request. Below is a table detailing how Local Authorities responded:

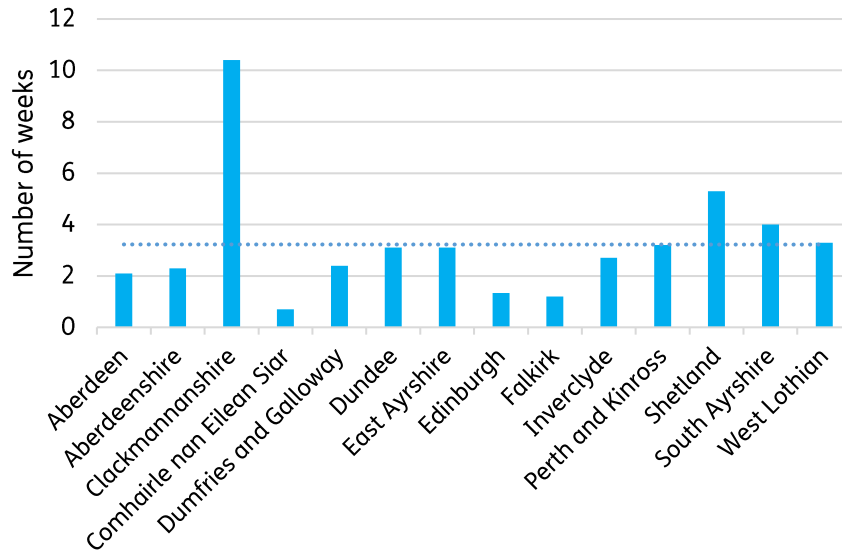
<b>Response by Local Authority</b>	<b>Number of Local Authorities</b>
<b>Local Authorities who had no record of the data we requested</b>	1
<b>Local Authorities who claimed it would be too expensive to respond</b>	6
<b>Local Authorities who gave some answers, but didn't respond to every question</b>	17
<b>Local Authorities who answered in full</b>	6
<b>Local Authorities who answers based on the Scottish Government's Quarterly Survey</b>	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	32

## Assessments

On average, older people had to wait three weeks for an assessment after requesting one from their Local Authority in 2017 and 2018. Falkirk had the longest delay in 2018, with people waiting on average 6.2 weeks, and both Clackmannanshire and Renfrewshire had the shortest wait, of less than a week in that same year.

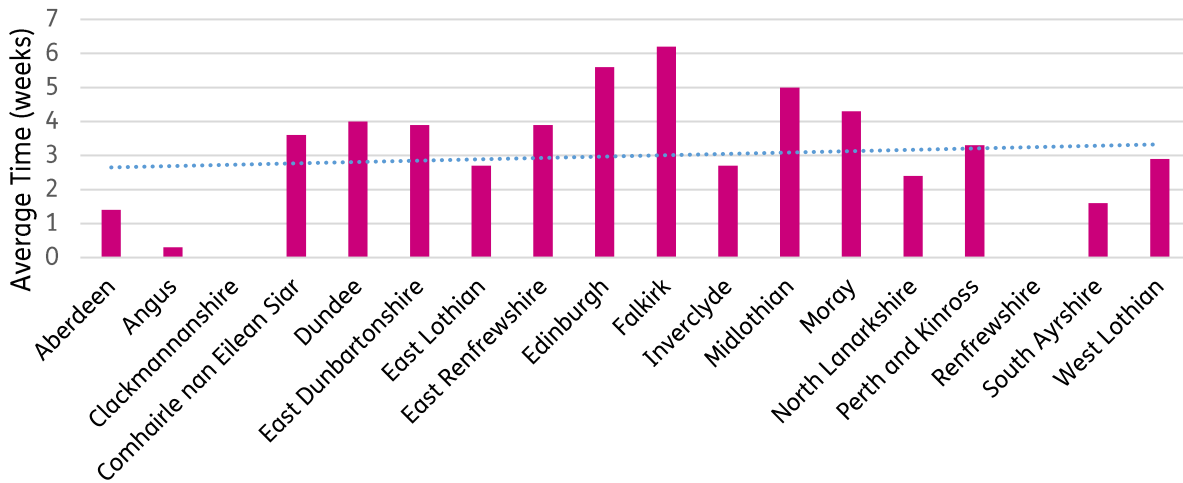


### Average time (weeks) to get an assessment after requesting one in 2017



Local Authorities who responded to our request

### Average time (weeks) to get an assessment after requesting one in 2018



Local Authority

We also asked about the longest time it took to conduct an assessment after requesting one and found in 2017 the national average was 29.6 weeks and in 2018 is 23.3 weeks.

Year	2017-18	2018-19
Longest time to conduct an assessment (weeks)	29.59	23.28
Average time to conduct an assessment (weeks)	3.01	2.99

## What does this tell us?

When we first conducted this research, we found that the majority of assessments were conducted and carried out within two and half weeks in 2015. What we've found now is that **the average wait went up to three weeks in 2017**, and that in 2018 the average wait essentially had not improved.

**This suggests that older people who need help with personal care and nursing care are waiting longer to get the assessment they need. This can result in incredibly challenging scenarios for vulnerable older people and their families.**

**These stories are frequently heard by the advisers in the Age Scotland helpline.**

## Case Study 2

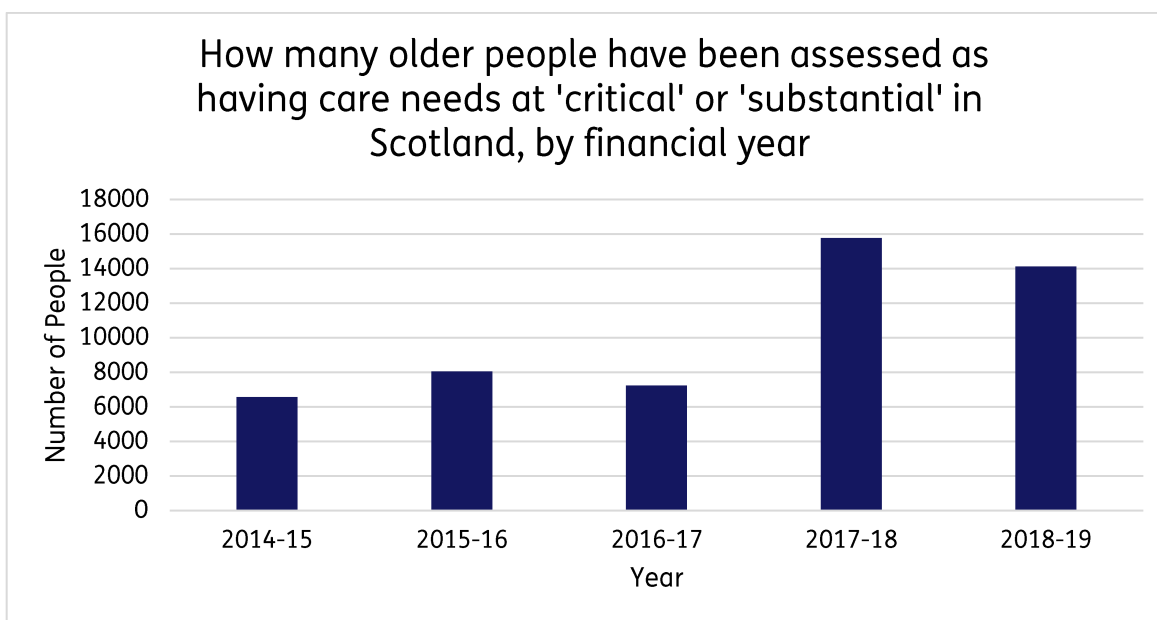
Dorothy, aged 90, has dementia and lived at home alone. After a couple of incidents where she had fallen at home and was later found wandering and shouting for help in the road at night, her daughter Carol decided to contact her local social services with a view of getting her mum the support she needs in a care home.

After requesting an assessment, Carol was told a social worker would contact them in three or four days. After five days of not hearing anything, the family decided to arrange a place for her in a care home as they felt she needed support now as they don't live close by. When social services eventually got in touch and found she had a place in a care home, they stated they would no longer assess her as a priority as the family had already arranged for her to be cared for.

Understandably Carol and her family felt they could no longer wait for social services to intervene as they feared for her mum's safety. Since then, Carol was told that her mother may have to wait up to a year to be assessed, following her privately arranged admission into a care home, as her needs are now being met. In the end, she waited six months to be assessed and funds allocated after much effort and perseverance from Carol and her husband Richard who reached out to organisations, councillors and politicians for support. During these six months that she was not assessed, she didn't receive any financial help or access to free personal care meaning Carol and Richard had to self-fund her care privately.

## Provision of service

From the Local Authorities who responded to our questions, we found that 15,782 people were assessed as having care needs classed as 'critical' or 'substantial' in 2017 and in 2018 this number was 14,129. A significant increase from previous years as reported by Local Authorities.



Care services should be provided to those assessed as needing them within a six week period under the National Eligibility criteria.<sup>5</sup> There is no equivalent guidance when it comes to waiting times for requesting assessments.

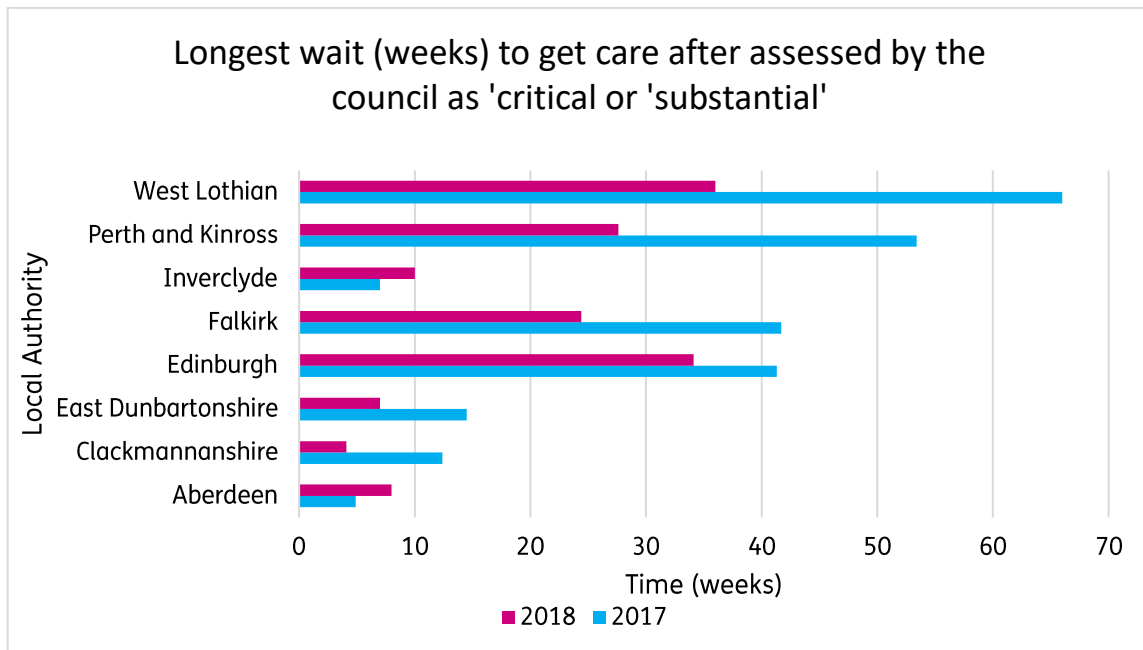
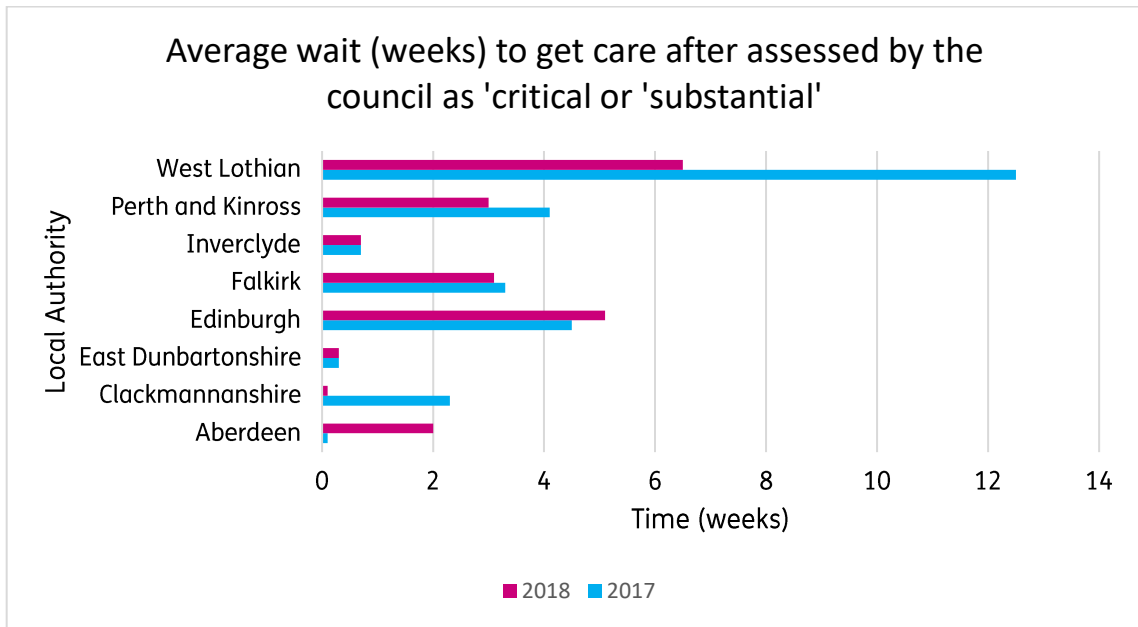
Despite this guidance we've found that this doesn't always work in practice.

Of the fourteen Local Authorities who provided the information we asked for, we found **that 43% of older people** assessed as having critical or substantial needs **did not** receive the services they required within the six week period in 2018. This means that over **6,000 older people** have waited longer than six weeks to get the care they need.

<sup>5</sup> [Guidance on National Standard Eligibility Criteria and Waiting Time for Free Personal and Nursing Care for Older People](#)

**That's too many older people waiting too long for care they are eligible for, entitled to and need.**

However, on average, we found it took just over two and half weeks for people to receive the care they needed after their assessment in 2018.



As the graphs highlight, waiting times vary wildly between each Local Authority. West Lothian consistently has the longest waiting times, and Aberdeen City Council one of the shortest.

### **Case Study 3**

Lisa, aged 73, was discharged from hospital without an assessment of need. Since leaving hospital Lisa's family have been providing care where they can, but they will need to return to work. Her husband also recently had a heart attack, and is now in hospital himself.

Lisa has mobility issues, no feeling in her feet, a stoma and needs help to go to the toilet.

However, despite these complex care needs, the response from their council has been less than helpful. They have merely stated they have limited resources.

\*The names in this case study have been changed.

Delays in receiving support and care put older people at risk. It can put immeasurable strain on families and unpaid carers to fill in the gap and intervene in what can be a very distressing situation. This strain may also be financial, with people paying for care themselves, having a knock on effect on their savings and result in them being forced to the back of the queue in terms of qualifying for support.

## Why the delay?

We asked Local Authorities what they recorded as reasons for delay in providing services and found this often was not collated centrally, so in most cases we did not receive a response from the Local Authority.

Of those who did reply the reasons cited were:

- Pressure on Local Authority services such as increased demand and limited resources
- The care service not immediately required, for example a person is admitted to hospital or has planned future respite
- Lack of space in care homes
- Family intervention

Local Authorities told us that delays were often due to complex reasons and varied due to the individual nature of each case. This partly explains why Local Authorities would not necessarily hold information held centrally; however, we felt this lack of recording was a missed opportunity.

By recording the reasons for delays in a central database, Local Authorities would have more invaluable information which could help them improve the services they provide. It would help to identify trends and allow them to take more effective action to address issues.

This information could also be fed into their Health and Social Care Partnership, helping to improve the commissioning, and crucially, the delivery of services.

**Lack of spaces in care homes is symptomatic of a social care system that is under immense pressure.** Figures from the latest Care Home Census for Adults in Scotland have found that there has been a steady decline of care homes, despite the fact the number of older people in care homes has remained the same, or even increased in certain instances.

	<b>Number of Care Homes for Older People, Registered Places, and Residents, in Scotland</b>						
	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>
Total Number of Care Homes for Older People	920	916	911	902	892	873	854
Total Number of Registered Places	38,341	38,465	38,508	38,441	38,164	37,746	37,278
Total Number of Residents	33,645	33,636	32,888	33,187	32,771	33,301	32,691

Source: table 2, Care Home Census for Adults in Scotland, Information Services Division

The challenges facing the social care sector need to be fully realised by all levels of Government. Significant funding and staffing issues are a constant pressure point on services, which makes the level of social care older people deserve more difficult to provide.



## Conclusions

Our research has outlined that the provision of social care often struggles to meet demand, with some areas of Scotland coping better than others. We also found that record keeping varies from each Local Authority, which raises the question of how Local Authorities are able to monitor and evaluate their service, spot trends, as well as provide fuller accountability to the public.

There is an increase in the number of people being assessed and receiving free personal and nursing care. While it's been a flagship policy ever since it was first introduced in Scotland, it's clear there are significant challenges ahead due to increased demand as well as difficulties with the recruitment and retention of social care staff.

We regularly hear of instances from our helpline about callers struggling with the wait for social care assessments, putting immense pressure on families struggling to cope. Free Personal and Nursing Care helps older people to live independently in their own home, or in a care home. **It is a policy to be celebrated, but also in desperate need of extra support.**

## Our recommendations:

- More effective data recording by Local Authorities to help identify trend and patterns, allowing them to better respond and plan for increased demand in their services
- More regular public reporting of waiting time figures by Local Authority
- Better signposting for families to information and advice services if Local Authorities are unable to provide care due to high demand. This will help families to assess their options and find out about any financial assistance they may be entitled to
- Stakeholders including the Scottish Government and Local Authorities should raise awareness about the importance of planning for future care needs

- The Scottish Government and Local Authority efforts to attract and employ more social care workers must be sustained
- The Scottish Government must ensure that social care is properly resourced to meet the increased demand in the timescales it has set out.

## About Age Scotland

Age Scotland is the leading charity representing older people in Scotland and supporting their rights and interests.

Our vision is a Scotland where everyone can love later life.

Our strategic aims are to promote positive views of ageing and later life; help older people to be as well as they can be; and to tackle loneliness and isolation.

**[www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)**

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## Appendix:

Below are the questions we asked each Local Authority:

We refer to [the Guidance on National Standard Eligibility Criteria and Waiting Time for Free Personal and Nursing Care for Older People](#), and section 1 of, and Schedule 1 to, the [Community Care and Health \(Scotland\) Act 2002](#). In particular, we refer to paras. 9.1-9.8 of the Guidance which relate to waiting times for delivery of social care services to those older people assessed at critical or substantial risk, and to a maximum waiting period of six weeks.

With these in mind, we submit the following requests for information in terms of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002:

1. What was the (a) average, and (b) longest, period of time which older people (aged 65 and over) had to wait for a care assessment after requesting one from the council during the financial year of 2017-18, and 2018-2019 (to the nearest available date)?
2. How many older people during the financial year of 2017-18, and 2018-19, have been assessed as having care needs at 'critical' or 'substantial' risk level for which the council is responsible for?
3. How many of the people identified in question 2 received the service (such as the council providing their care directly, paying them the prescribed weekly free personal care and/or free nursing care payments) within the period of six weeks?
4. What was the (a) average, and (b) longest, period of time during the financial year of 2017-18, and 2018-19 that the people identified in question 2 had to wait between the completion of their assessment and receiving the service?
5. What were the reasons recorded for delays in providing the service?

## Details of how Local Authorities responded

Local Authority	Response
Aberdeen	Full
Aberdeenshire	Partial
Angus	Partial
Argyll and Bute	Partial
Clackmannanshire	Full
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	Partial
Dumfries and Galloway	Partial
Dundee	Partial
East Ayrshire	Reference to Quarterly Survey only
East Dunbartonshire	Partial
East Lothian	Partial
East Renfrewshire	Partial
Edinburgh	Partial
Falkirk	Full
Fife	Reference to Quarterly Survey only
Glasgow	Refused on Cost
Highland	Refused on Cost
Inverclyde	Full
Midlothian	Partial
Moray	Partial
North Ayrshire	Refused on Cost
North Lanarkshire	Partial
Orkney	Refused on Cost
Perth and Kinross	Full
Renfrewshire	Partial
Scottish Borders	Refused on Cost
Shetland	Partial
South Ayrshire	Partial
South Lanarkshire	No data available
Stirling	Refused on Cost
West Dunbartonshire	Refused on Cost
West Lothian	Full