Control of a number of existing social security benefits is being passed from the UK Government to the Scottish Government. The Parliament would like your views on the Scottish Government's plans before they become law. The Social Security Bill is the proposed law.

- The Bill aims to provide a framework for the creation of the Scottish social security system. In addition the Scottish Government has chosen to put most of the rules about the new benefits in Regulations. It believes that putting the rules in Regulations will make things clearer and less confusing. Parliament cannot change Regulations, only approve or reject them. The Scottish Government intends to develop Regulations with external help.

Q. Do you have any views on this approach?

This is a fair approach providing that the regulations do not punish people for being disabled, unemployed or otherwise in need of financial help, are simple to understand by the least intelligent person and are free from manipulation by those administering the system including the staff’s employers.

I hope the Scottish government will move in time from demeaning means tested benefits to taxable universal benefits and a citizens wage.

- The Bill proposes that the Scottish social security system will be based on the following seven principles:
  - Social security is an investment in the people of Scotland.
  - Social security is a human right. It is essential to accessing other human rights.
  - Respect for the dignity of individuals is at the heart of the Scottish social security system.
  - The Scottish Government has a role in making sure that people are given the social security assistance they are eligible for.
  - The Scottish social security system will be designed with the people of Scotland, and based on evidence.
  - The Scottish social security system should always be trying to improve. Any changes should put the needs of those who require social security first.
  - The Scottish social security system is efficient and delivers value for money.
Q. What are your views on these principles and this approach?

This is an improvement on the current management of social security as practiced by the UK government. It begins to value the clients it serves rather than treating them as 3rd class citizens or worst. However I would like to see need rather than eligibility being part of the 4th principle.

Q. Are there other principles you would like to see included?

I would add a further principle. This would be that no one would be left destitute, without means to feed themselves and their dependants and pay for their accommodation whatever the circumstances. We should be aiming to eliminate poverty not feeding it.

- The Bill proposes that there will be a publicly available social security ‘charter’. This will say how the Scottish Government will put the seven principles above into practice. It will also say what is expected from people claiming benefits. A report on the charter will be produced by the Scottish Government each year.

Q. Do you agree with the idea of the charter?

Is this the hand of big brother? If breaking the charter imposes sanctions then I would rather not see it imposed. No one asks to be dependant on the state. Where is compassion?

Q. Is there anything specific you would like to see in this charter?

Even handedness, understanding of the individuals circumstances, empathy with their feelings and recognition of their humanity.

- The Bill proposes rules for social security which say:
  - how decisions are made and when they can be changed
  - how to apply and what information people have to provide
  - how decisions can be challenged
  - when overpayments must be repaid
  - what criminal offences will be created relating to benefits.

Q. Do you have any comments on these rules?

I am not in favour of administrators being able to play God. This is an abusive relationship and should not be contemplated. Slavery is supposed to have been abolished.

- The Scottish Government will take over responsibility for some current benefits.
The Bill does not explain how they will work in detail. This will be set out in Regulations at a later date. The current benefits which will be run by the Scottish Government are:

- disability assistance (including disability living allowance, personal independence payment, attendance allowance and severe disablement allowance)
- carer’s allowance
- winter fuel payments
- industrial injuries disablement benefit
- cold weather payments
- funeral payments
- sure start maternity grants

Q. What are your thoughts on the schedules in the bill in regard to these benefits?

Disability should be decided by doctors who know the patient not by administrators who have other priorities.

Carer’s allowance should be part of social work and should include respite care.

- The Bill proposes that a new type of short-term assistance will be introduced. This will be for someone who is challenging a decision to stop or reduce a Scottish benefit.

Q. What are your views on this proposal?

Anything to stop destitution and discourage the downward spiral of poverty is welcome.

- The Bill includes the power for the Scottish Government to be able to top up ‘reserved’ benefits (ones controlled by the UK Government), but does not say how these will be used. The Scottish Government also has the power to create new benefits. This is not included in the bill.

Q. Do you agree with these proposals?

Yes very much but I would like to see the power to create new benefits and a citizen’s wage also in the bill. I do not understand why it is being left out?

- The Bill proposes that carer’s allowance should be increased as soon as possible to the level of jobseeker’s allowance (from £62.10 to £73.10 a week).

Q. What are your thoughts on this proposal?
It is a move in the right direction.

- The Bill proposes that discretionary housing payments continue as they are. They will still be paid by local authorities. The Bill does not require any local authority to have a discretionary housing payments scheme but if they do, they must follow Scottish Government guidance on running it.

Q. Do you agree that discretionary housing payments should continue largely as they are?

I think every local Authority should have to have such a scheme. Why should it depend on where you live?

Q. Do you have any other views on the proposals for discretionary housing payments?

If the present system is to continue the Scottish Government should set up and administer a scheme where it is absent in a local Authority.

- Q. Is there anything else you want to tell us about this Bill?

It does not go far enough towards ending poverty and creating a more equal society.