



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Finance and Public Administration Committee

David Wallace  
Chief Executive  
Social Security Scotland

By email

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Dear Mr Wallace

The Finance and Public Administration Committee this week took evidence from the Scottish Fiscal Commission (SFC) in relation to four new reports it published on 30 August 2022. This includes the SFC's fourth [Statement of Data Needs](#), which sets out that improvements from Social Security Scotland are required in the collection, publication and continuity of data. The Official Report of that discussion can be found online here:

[archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=13874](https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=13874)

As noted by the SFC in its Statement, the quality and availability of the data it requires directly affects its ability to support parliamentary scrutiny of the Scottish Budget by both producing and then evaluating its forecasts. We are therefore keen to understand the progress that Social Security Scotland is making in response to each of the SFC's concerns relating to the collection and dissemination of Social Security data, along with any barriers it faces in doing so. As you will recognise, Social Security payments account for a large proportion of the Scottish Budget spending. Ensuring that forecasts of Social Security spending are as accurate as possible is important in determining the size of the Scottish Budget both through the SFC's forecasts and subsequent reconciliations.

We recognise that Social Security Scotland is a relatively new organisation which requires to develop new processes to deliver and administer devolved social security

benefits as and when they are introduced. However, we are concerned that the SFC is no longer receiving the same level of detail in the data provided by you as it previously received from the Department for Work and Pensions and we seek an explanation as to this change in approach. One specific example noted by the Committee was the inability of the SFC to access information from Social Security Scotland regarding people who were receiving a payment due to terminal illness, when it had previously been able to see from DWP data “whether somebody is a new client on Personal Independence Payment, whether they are under special rules for terminal illness or whether they were reassessed from disability living allowance”. Continuity in the quality and availability of data as payments transition from DWP to Social Security Scotland is important to the SFC in ensuring that its forecasts are as robust as possible.

We also have concerns at the suggestion that you are not collecting certain data that has been collected by DWP historically, which the SFC highlighted has “long-term implications for data analysis [as] this information is lost and cannot be recovered or published at a later date” and which could have potentially significant consequences on the quality of the SFC’s forecasts over the next few years. We further ask how Social Security Scotland plans to resolve this position, including how it will ensure that data collection is backdated to enable the SFC to identify trends in its forecasts and evaluation.

Given the importance and collective benefit of ensuring that new systems are designed in a way that meets the data needs of both the SFC and other users, the Committee supports the SFC’s recommendation that an open user group forum be created.

While we understand that the SFC does not intend to produce its next Statement of Data Needs until 2024, it has confirmed to the Committee that it would provide an update in the intervening period, which we plan to return to in due course.

In the meantime, we look forward to receiving your response by the end of September.

I am copying in the Social Justice and Social Security Committee to this letter for their information.

Yours sincerely

**Kenneth Gibson MSP**  
**Convener**  
**Finance and Public Administration Committee**