



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Ben Macpherson MSP,
Minister for Social Security
and Local Government
Scottish Government

Social Justice and Social Security
Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Via email only

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3 November 2022

Dear Minister,

Devolved social security – Statement of Data Needs

On 6 September 2022, some members of the Committee met informally with the Scottish Fiscal Commission (the Commission) to discuss the Commission's recent publications:

[Forecast Evaluation Report](#)

[Statement of Data Needs](#)

[Approach to Fiscal Sustainability Consultation Paper](#)

[Trends in Scotland's population and effects on the economy and income tax](#)

At that meeting members were made aware of issues raised by the Commission about the continuity of social security data as benefits transition from delivery by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to Social Security Scotland. We note the Commission wrote on 30 August 2022 to David Wallace, the Chief Executive of [Social Security Scotland](#) (SSS) and [Scotland's Chief Statistician](#) about its Statement of Data Needs and associated social security data issues. The following responses were received from the Chief Statistician, on [5 September](#) and from the Chief Executive, SSS, on [9 September](#).

Further to these exchanges, we are also aware the Finance and Public Administration (FPA) Committee took evidence on [6 September](#) from the SFC and agreed to [write](#) to the Chief Executive of SSS regarding issues raised in the Commission's Statement of Data Needs. The FPA Committee received a response on [7 October](#).

On [3 October](#), the Committee heard from Stephen Boyle, the Auditor General for Scotland on Audit Scotland's report on the implementation of the social security programme and the need for robust data to inform evaluation of the implementation of the social security programme. Stephen Boyle emphasised—

“Robust data is needed not only to support the implementation of policies, but to support evaluation over the course of implementation and many years from now. If we consider the complexity of the social security programme, it is no surprise that it will take different turns during its course. Policy makers and officials who implement policy need high-quality data in order to make that assessment. There is now an opportunity to get that right, given the Fiscal Commission's recommendations, and to get the right relationships with the DWP.”
(Official Report Col 15)

We are pleased to note from the responses there now looks to be some closer working with the Scottish Fiscal Commission around these particular data issues. As the Committee with lead responsibility for scrutiny of social security policy, we would like to stress that the Committee will be monitoring progress in this area. It is essential that social security data is collected and made publicly available in a way that allows for robust scrutiny. Without access to necessary, comparable data it would be difficult for this Committee to scrutinise social security in Scotland effectively. For example, we would find it difficult to fully examine whether the Scottish Government's policies are delivering an increase in benefit take-up or if future policy changes to benefits delivery are effective. It would also be difficult to track future budget implications.

As such, we would urge the Scottish Government to ensure that the data required by the Scottish Fiscal Commission is prioritised by Social Security Scotland and ask the Government to provide the requisite resources and financial support to make this happen as a priority.

This letter is copied to David Wallace, Chief Executive, Social Security Scotland and Professor Graeme Roy, Chair, Scottish Fiscal Commission.

Yours sincerely,



Natalie Don

**Deputy Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee**