



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Social Security Scotland
Agnes Husband House
17 South Union Street
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14 February 2025

Dear Convener,

Thank you for your letter of 21 January 2025 setting out the additional information Members requested following the Social Security Scotland evidence session on 16 January 2025.

I have provided answers to the questions below – if you would like any further information, please do let me know.

Question 1 - Figures on the level of overpayments of benefits due to official error and the progress being made in debt recovery.

We identified and corrected £897,398 official error overpayments in 2023/24, broken down by benefit as below.

Benefit	2023/24
Best Start Grant	£153,759
Funeral Support Payment	£3,582
Scottish Child Payment	£248,408
Child Disability Payment	£29,250
Adult Disability Payment	£301,753
Child Winter Heating Assistance	£50
Young Carer Grant	£667
Total	£897,398

We have increased our resource and improved processes. In 2023/24 we recovered £290,364 in benefit overpayments. So far in 2024/25 we have collected £654,705.

Progress is being made in debt recovery including the introduction of online payments and direct debits in 2025/26. The Scottish Government Social Security Programme is developing the automation of administrative tasks associated with overpayment write-off with implementation planned for quarter three 2025/26, allowing us to focus on engaging and supporting clients with recoverable debts.

In addition, process design and development for Civil Recovery through Sheriff Courts is almost complete with procurement of the necessary Legal Services contract underway, while the completed recovery by enforced deduction processes can commence once the associated re-determination and appeals is in place.

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Our Debt Management Strategy, published in 2023, ensures we meet our statutory obligations whilst keeping the client at the heart of what we do. We will ensure we recover payments with dignity, fairness and respect, by always considering the financial circumstances and individual needs of the client.

Question 2 - Examples of what Social Security Scotland is doing to support staff to ensure they have the necessary tools and information to do their jobs, and what is being done to increase staff confidence in both referring to advocacy support and signposting to advice.

All colleagues who work with our clients attend a comprehensive induction programme aligned to their role. Colleagues have access to a library of guidance to support them delivering our benefits, which has been designed to be as accessible and inclusive and is regularly updated with new information following updates and improvements. We recently implemented a new feedback route for colleagues to ensure we are capturing and acting on suggestions for improvements to this information.

Colleagues, as part of their training for disability benefits, learn about the Social Security Independent Advocacy Service. There is specific detail on VoiceAbility and how colleagues can request an advocate for clients, including the full referral process. This learning is also available as an eLearning module for colleagues to access when they require to refresh their learning.

Guidance is available for colleagues on signposting clients to other organisations that can support their individual needs, including services for young people, people with disabilities, and carers, along with support for people who need help with energy costs and money matters. Advisors use ALISS (A Local Information System for Scotland), a directory run by the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government, to signpost clients to support where they live.

Question 3 - The reasons for the increase in Social Security Scotland's annual accounts provision from £5.5m to £33.2m.

The provisions reported in our Annual Report and Accounts relate largely to benefit underpayments, specifically the estimated costs of correcting awards of Personal Independence Payment under a Legal Entitlement Administrative Exercise being conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The provision, which is an accounting adjustment, was therefore increased to reflect the revised estimated liability of correcting client awards.

More information on the review and the Supreme Court judgement can be found on the UK Government website: [PIP administrative exercise for MM: progress report to 31 August 2023 - GOV.UK.](#)

Question 4 - An update on the progress being made in resolving IT issues encountered when sending information to the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS).

I can confirm sharing appeal papers electronically with SCTS has been resolved.

The issue was highlighted in late December 2024 and was resolved on 24 January 2025. I would like to reassure the Committee that during the short period electronic transfer was affected, our agreed business continuity arrangements with SCTS were followed and during

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that time we continued to process appeals to SCTS within our statutory commitment. The timetable for setting appeals is the responsibility of SCTS.

We will continue to work closely with SCTS to discuss any lessons learned.

Question 5 - Reflecting on the discussion about KPIs, members would be interested in details of any trends and themes emerging from qualitative data gathered from discussions with staff that provide information on organisational performance and the actions taken.

As part of our work to monitor performance against Our Charter commitments, every year we send a survey to all colleagues. This includes questions, online manager support, experience of accessibility requirements, receiving and delivering inclusive communication, delivering Our Charter, views on their skills and knowledge, and experiences of feedback and improvement.

A variety of key themes emerged in the analysis of the qualitative data and tend to be positive about the culture of dignity, fairness and respect, and less often positive about processes and communication of change. We have identified several areas where we have made improvements, including improving Scottish Child Payment guidance when parental responsibility has changed, and expanding training and guidance on soft skills for calls.

We publish the results of this survey, which can be accessed at: [Social Security Scotland Charter Research 2023-2024](#).

Question 6 - Details of any trends identified in relation to staff absences, beyond the headline measure.

Average working days lost data is not yet available for year ending December 2024. We are working closely with Scottish Government, following the introduction of a new HR system, to develop these reports.

Whilst we have seen increases in average working days lost, this is a trend which is mirrored across the economy as a whole, with [research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#) in 2023 showing an average of 7.8 working day lost per employee across all sectors, with the public sector figure sitting at 10.6.

[Research by the Institute for Fiscal Studies](#) also shows a rise in sickness absence in the population, across age groups and conditions.

We continue to work with line managers to support colleagues back to work wherever possible, including making adjustments to allow this to happen.

Question 7 - Details of the statistical information, both qualitative and quantitative, that Social Security Scotland gathers to enable an understanding of the levels of satisfaction of clients and staff.

The Client Survey offers our clients the chance to tell us their views and experiences of the service they received. The most recent publication includes responses from clients who interacted with Social Security Scotland between April 2023 and March 2024: [Social Security Scotland - Client Survey 2023-2024](#). Clients' views are summarised both qualitatively and quantitatively, with various sections focusing on levels of satisfaction with various aspects of interacting with, and receiving benefits from, Social Security Scotland.

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There are also bi-annual publications which focus on specific experiences with Social Security Scotland: [Disability Payments applications](#) and [Five Family Payments](#).

The Civil Service People Survey is one of our main tools for colleague feedback in Social Security Scotland. It is organised by the Cabinet Office and results for each Civil Service organisation that takes part are published online: [GOV.UK](#).

Both client and colleague experiences are also reported in the Charter Measurement Framework: [Social Security Scotland - Measuring Our Charter 2023-2024](#).

The Scottish Government has a programme of evaluation of social security policy. These evaluations provide evidence on how the people of Scotland are experiencing the impacts of the devolved benefits, and of the changes to how they are delivered, and help assess the impact against set goals and on achieving the key principles governing our social security system: [Social security policy research and evaluation: publications - gov.scot](#).

Question 8 - Further details about the £60m and £42m overpayments in DWP benefits, in the years to March 2023 and March 2024 respectively, broken down into the amounts due to client error, official error and fraud.

The DWP publish Fraud and Error Rates annually to estimate the level of fraud and error in the UK benefits system and more information can be found here: [Fraud and error in the benefit system, Financial Year Ending \(FYE\) 2024 - GOV.UK](#).

As the DWP continues to administer six benefits on behalf of Scottish Ministers under Agency Agreements in the same way that they administer benefits in the rest of the UK, it is deemed reasonable that these rates are applied to Scottish benefit expenditure to arrive at the estimated Monetary Value of Fraud and Error in the Scottish caseload. The decline in the monetary value year on year is due to the level of expenditure being administered by DWP falling as cases transfer onto Scottish benefits.

The breakdown of estimated Fraud and Error in the Scottish caseload using the DWP estimates are included in [Annex A](#).

Question 9 - Details of the systems that are in place to ensure that there are not any incorrectly addressed communications. For example, data for mail sent to the wrong recipient shows an increase from 246 in 2022-23 to 598 in 2023-24.

Each year the number of reported incidents of incorrectly addressed communications represents an extremely small proportion of the amount of letters we send. In 2024, we sent nearly 3 million letters to our clients. However, I do recognise that the numbers of incidents of this nature is a concern, especially to our clients.

Each of these incidents are individually investigated to mitigate impact on individuals, to learn lessons - including through training and awareness for colleagues - and circulating regular advice on trends and preventative measures.

Question 10 - Details of the amendments that Social Security Scotland has made to its established process for requesting information from GPs, which is to send an initial request through the Scottish Care Information Gateway system, in light of reports that some GPs do not use this system.

There have been no amendments made to the established process in light of reports that some GPs do not use the Scottish Care Information (SCI) Gateway system. We have

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guidance in place on gathering supporting information from GPs who do not respond via the SCI Gateway and we are engaging with GPs to share the importance of the Gateway and understand why we use it.

I hope this information is helpful and I look forward to welcoming Members to our High Street office in the coming months.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DW', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David Wallace

Chief Executive
Social Security Scotland

2022-23	Fraud		Client Error		Official Error		Total	
	%	£m	%	£m	%	£m	%	£m
Carers Allowance	3.0	9.4	2.0	6.3	0.2	0.6	5.2	16.3
Attendance Allowance	-	-	1.9	10.5	0.3	1.7	2.2	12.2
Disability Living Allowance	0.5	2.6	0.6	3.1	0.8	4.2	1.9	9.9
Personal Independence Payment	0.2	3.9	0.8	15.4	0.1	0.1	1.1	21.2
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit	0.2	0.2	0.8	0.6	0.1	0.1	1.1	0.9
Sever Disablement Allowance	1.5	0.1	1.5	0.1	0.4	0.0	3.4	0.2
Total		16.1		36.1		8.5		60.7

2023-24	Fraud		Client Error		Official Error		Total	
	%	£m	%	£m	%	£m	%	£m
Carers Allowance	3.0	10.7	2.0	7.1	0.2	0.7	5.2	18.6
Attendance Allowance	-	-	1.9	12.5	0.3	2.0	2.2	14.5
Disability Living Allowance	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.9	0.2	0.9	0.5	2.2
Personal Independence Payment	-	-	0.3	5.1	0.1	1.7	0.4	6.8
Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit	-	-	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.3
Severe Disablement Allowance*	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.8	-
Total		11.2		25.9		5.4		42.4

*no split available as DWP proxy rate used.