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Convener
Social Security Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Dear Convener

DISABILITY ASSISTANCE

Child Disability Payment Pilot Areas

As set out in my statement to Parliament on 17 November 2020, I indicated that the Scottish Government intends to launch a pilot of Child Disability Payment (CDP) from summer 2021, and I am pleased to be able to provide further details on our plans.

Whilst the impact of Covid-19 on both the Scottish Government and our public sector partners meant that I had to take the difficult decision to postpone our plans to launch CDP, work has progressed at pace to build the necessary infrastructure to deliver the pilot. I am delighted to confirm that we will begin the pilot by accepting applications for CDP in three local authority areas: Perth and Kinross, Dundee City and Western Isles, from next summer.

These three areas will provide us with the opportunity to ensure that delivery of this new benefit will work for disabled children and young people in a mixture of urban, rural and island communities. Social Security Scotland's local delivery staff will provide people with one-to-one support and help them understand which devolved benefits they may be entitled to. They can help clients complete their application forms, support them practically with the process, and take forward any follow up actions relating to the application.

As part of our ambition to offer a service that ensures clients have access to the full range of support that they need, local delivery staff will be able to signpost clients to a range of services, taking account of their individual circumstances. This pilot will help us to make sure that the processes and systems that we have designed and tested work for disabled children and young people. We've built this system with input from those who will use it and this is a further check that it meets their expectations, so that we can meet our ambition to roll out CDP nationally from Autumn 2021.

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Conducting a pilot will also allow applications to be made in a safe and secure manner, and will ensure that disabled children and young people get the financial support they need. Social Security Scotland will also be delivering face-to-face support in local communities for the first time, providing pre-application advice and support, as well as offering a range of inclusive communication channels.

Provisions for the pilot have been made in the CDP regulations that I intend to bring forward in January 2021. This will involve permanently switching off the ability to apply for Disability Living Allowance for children (DLAC) in pilot areas for new applications.

Children and young people in Scotland who are presently entitled to DLAC from DWP will continue to receive their payments, subject to continuing to meet the conditions of entitlement. We are refining our plans and processes to prepare to transfer individuals from DWP to Social Security Scotland, and plan to transfer individuals safely and securely in stages after our new benefits are introduced.

We continue to learn from the delivery of wave one devolved benefits and utilise the lessons learned. Our overriding priority is ensuring that applications are protected and will move through the service smoothly, whilst internally we check, review and evaluate performance of the service components.

The pilot of CDP marks a major milestone in the devolution of social security powers, and will be the first of three complex disability benefits that Social Security Scotland will deliver. I remain committed to making meaningful improvements for disabled people, and doing so in a way that is consistent with our core values of fairness, dignity and respect.

Adult Disability Payment – consultation launch

I am pleased to also inform the Committee that the public consultation on Adult Disability Payment (ADP) will commence in the coming weeks. The consultation will seek feedback on the draft Disability Assistance for Working Age People (Scotland) Regulations and overarching ADP policy intent. Running for 12 weeks, virtual stakeholder events will be held in the New Year to enable disabled people an accessible opportunity to engage. Once the consultation responses have been analysed the draft Regulations will be amended where required before being scrutinised by the Scottish Commission on Social Security.

Independent Review of ADP

Since publishing our response to the Consultation on Disability Assistance in October 2019, we have undertaken extensive consultation on the existing Personal Independence Payment framework. Stakeholders and individuals have told us that there are many improvements that could be made to the existing activities, descriptors and scoring criteria.

We have considered carefully whether we should implement changes to the framework when we begin delivery of ADP. However, there are a number of challenges at present associated with this that would risk safe and secure transition and could result in a poor experience for clients.

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As I indicated during the Consultation on Disability Assistance and the subsequent Parliamentary debate in October 2019, I do not propose to make any significant changes to the current PIP descriptors and activities when we begin delivery of ADP. I am committed to devolving Disability Assistance safely and securely, ensuring that people's payments are protected during this transition period and making significant changes would risk this approach.

Advice provided to me by the Disability and Care Benefits Expert Advisory Group (DACBEAG) confirms that a cautious approach to eligibility rule changes in the short term is required until the Scottish Government has transferred all individuals in receipt of PIP from DWP to Social Security Scotland. This will help to avoid unfairness, confusion and disruption for clients by not creating a two-tier systems, with two different sets of eligibility criteria and rules, whilst undertaking a very complicated transfer process.

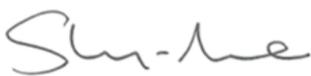
Detailed discussions between the Scottish Government and DWP are on-going in relation to passported benefits, such as the carer's element within Universal Credit, to ensure ADP clients continue to be able to access such payments. Insufficient parity between the PIP and ADP criteria would risk obtaining DWP's agreement to treat ADP in the same way as PIP for passporting.

For these reasons, I do not consider it safe to make any significant changes to the activities, descriptors and eligibility criteria at this time. In the longer term, in order to address the many reported concerns with the existing framework, subject to being re-elected, we plan to commence a substantial independent review of ADP in summer 2023, a year after ADP is rolled out nationwide. This will provide the opportunity for Social Security Scotland to obtain data and gather feedback from individuals to inform the recommendations.

The review will be undertaken by an independent working group and will receive input from people with lived experience of accessing disability benefits. I am keen to enable the review to be broad in scope in order to take full advantage of the opportunity to make meaningful change, whilst balancing this with the urgency with which stakeholders want to see reforms implemented.

I would be happy to provide any additional information the Committee may require and look forward to further engagement in the future.

Yours sincerely



SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

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