

**Social Justice and Social Security Committee**

**Thursday 22 January 2026**

**3rd Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)**

## **Social Security Scotland**

The Committee will hear from:

- David Wallace, Chief Executive, Social Security Scotland
- Karyn Dunning, interim Chief Operating Officer
- Gerry O'Donnell, interim Deputy Director for Finance and Corporate Services

### **Introduction**

This paper draws on a range of publications related to the performance of Social Security Scotland in addition to the [Scottish Budget](#), [spending review](#) and [SFC forecasts](#):

- Social Security Scotland's [Annual Report 2024-25](#)
- Audit Scotland [Annual Audit of Social Security Scotland 2024-25](#)
- [Client Satisfaction Survey 2024-25](#)
- [Charter Research 2024-25](#)
- [Measuring Our Charter 2024-25](#)
- [Business Plan 2025-26](#)
- [Audit Scotland report on ADP](#)
- [Independent Review of ADP](#)
- [Social Security Scotland response to SCOSS report on people with additional communication needs](#)
- Updated [disability benefit client survey April to September 2025](#)
- [Administrative statistics](#)

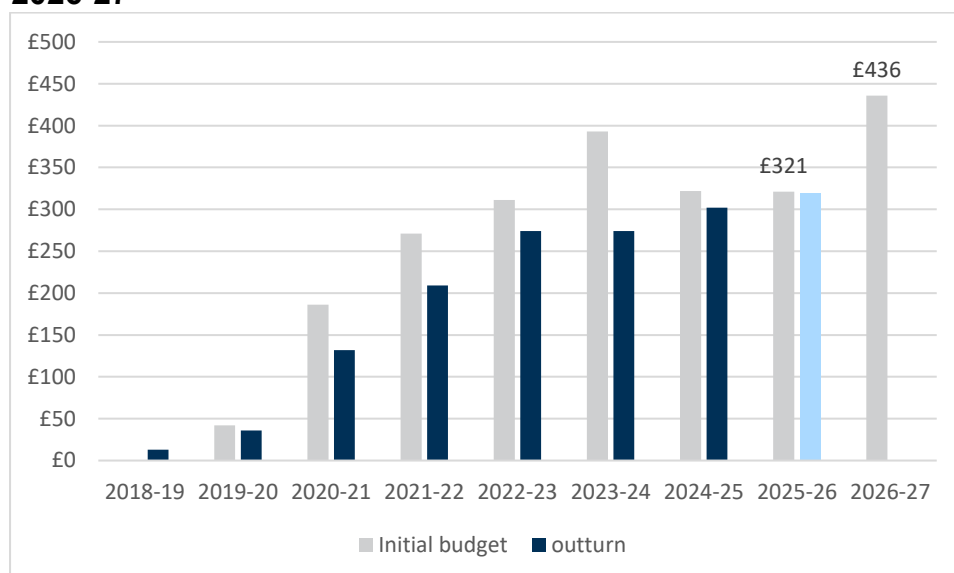
## Background

Social Security Scotland was established as an executive agency in September 2018 to administer devolved social security benefits. It now employs around 4,000 staff with an operating budget of £436m resource and £40m capital for 2026-27.

### Operating budget and outturn.

The chart below shows how Social Security Scotland's operating budget grew substantially between the creation of the agency in 2018 and 2022. The next three years saw much slower growth in spending. There is a large increase in budget in 2026-27 to reflect the transfer of functions and staff from the social security programme.

**Chart 1: Social Security Scotland operating budget and outturn, 2018-19 to 2026-27**



Sources: Social Security Scotland annual reports except: 2025-26 shows initial budget and [autumn budget revision](#). Sch 3.4, 2026-27 is initial budget from Scottish Government budget, January 2026. Does not include capital.

Table 1 below gives a breakdown of selected administrative costs from 2020 to 2025. This shows the increase in staff costs and decrease in payments to DWP for agency agreements. IT costs have increased, reaching £19.8 m in 2025-26 (budget). Also notable is the reserving of £9.9m for 'corporate priorities' in 2025-26.

**Table 1: Selected administrative costs: 2020 to 2026. £m**

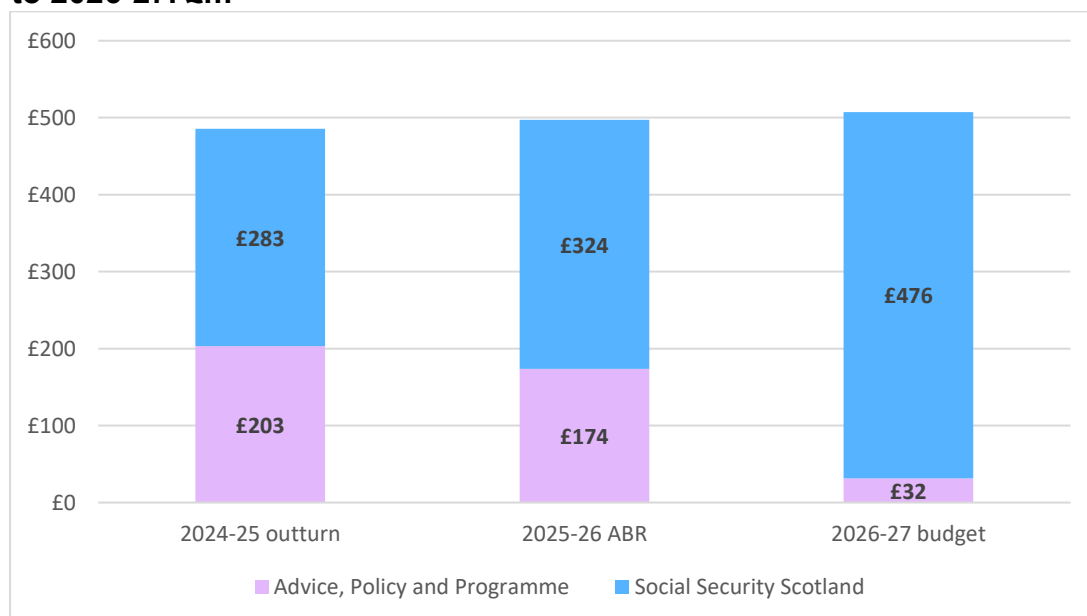
£m	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
staff costs	42.3	91.7	172.6	196.5	218	237.7
DWP formal agreements	75.4	76.5	59.1	26.1	17	4.9
IT costs	0.2	5.0	6.6	13.3	18.7	19.8
shared services re-charge	2.3	4.0	7.5	8.6	9.3	9.8
accommodation	3.8	4.6	3.8	4.2	5.1	4.5
Corporate priorities	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	9.9

Source: Social Security Scotland annual reports 2021-22, 2022-23, 2023-24, 2024-25. [Business plan 2025-26](#).

### Budget changes reflecting programme closure

With the closure of the Social Security Programme in March 2026, the function of developing new benefits passes from the Scottish Government to the agency. Policy remains with the Scottish Government. This transfer of functions makes it difficult to compare the 2026-27 budget with previous budgets. The chart below therefore shows combined outturn and budgets since 2024-25 for:

- Social Security Scotland administration, and
- Advice, Policy and Programme (renamed Social Security Policy and Delivery)

**Chart 2: Social Security Scotland and Advice Policy and Programme, 2024-25 to 2026-27. £m**

Source: Scottish Budget 2026-27, table 5.07. Includes capital.

The chart shows that the large increase in Social Security Scotland budget in 2026-27 is matched by a large decrease in the budget for Advice, Policy and Programme (now renamed Social Security Policy and Delivery).

The Scottish Government will publish a report when the Programme is completed, which will include an update on total implementation costs. ([FOI published 7 January 2026](#))

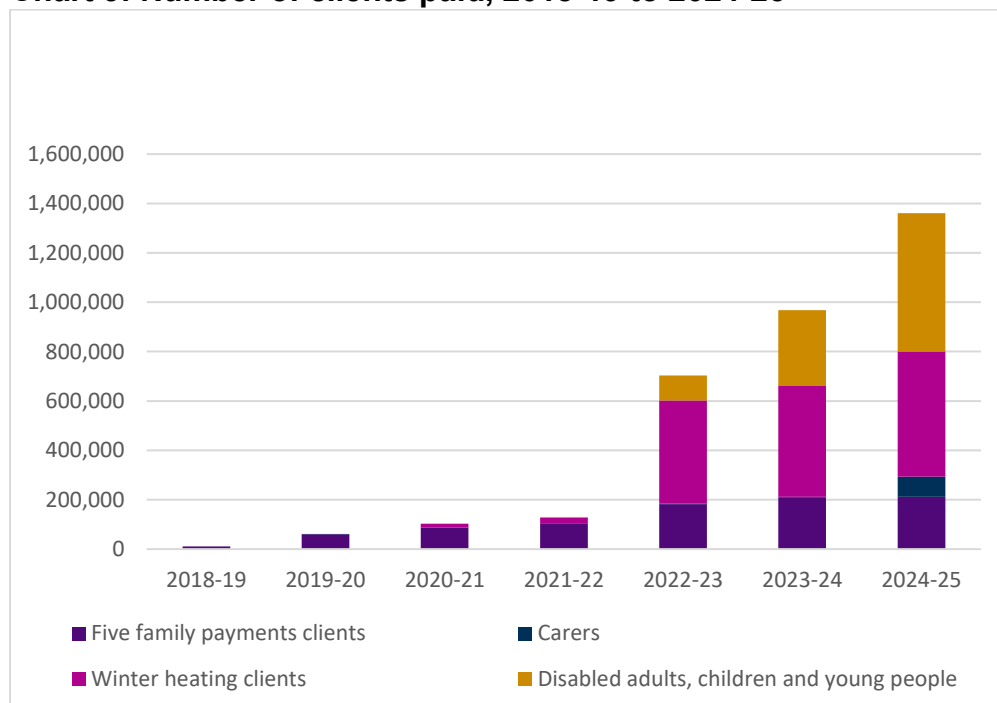
## Benefits administered

The current programme of social security devolution that started with the Smith Commission in 2016 is now drawing to an end. The level 4 workbook published with the Scottish Budget describes how, in 2026-27:

“Social Security Scotland will be delivering 19 benefits and maintaining its largest caseload (up to 2 million people) after the formal SG social security devolution Programme closes in March 2026.”

The chart below shows the rapid growth in the number of clients paid benefits by Social Security Scotland – from around 10,000 in 2018-19 to over 1 million in 2024-25. As noted above, this has now increased to around 2 million people reflecting the introduction of Pension Age Winter Heating Payment from November 2025. Updated statistics will be published in June.

**Chart 3: Number of clients paid, 2018-19 to 2024-25**



Source: Social Security Scotland, [Individual Clients paid to 2024-25](#). N.B due to issues with data matching the chart does not include Carer's Allowance Supplement. Does not include devolved benefits paid by DWP.

The current benefits administered by Social Security Scotland are listed in table 2 below. Additional benefits planned are:

- **Carer Additional Person Payment** regulations passed in October 2025 and due to start March 2026.
- **Scottish Carer Supplement** replacing the Carer Allowance Supplement with a payment made alongside Carer Support Payment instead of twice a year. Carer Additional Person Payment, Scottish Carer Supplement and Carer Support Payment will be paid together as 'Carer Support'.
- **Scottish Child Payment baby premium**, due to start in 2026/27, taking the SCP for babies under one to £40 per week.
- **Employment Injury Assistance** will eventually replace Industrial Injuries Disablement benefits but is still at the very early consultation phase, with no date for introduction.

Case transfer of carer and disability benefits [completed in December 2025](#). Under this programme, clients living in Scotland who were in receipt of disability and carer benefits were transferred to the equivalent benefit administered by Social Security Scotland. Case transfer from [PIP to ADP completed in August](#) and [from Carer's Allowance to Carer Support Payment in October](#). By the end of December, 28 people remained to be transferred from Attendance Allowance to Pension Age Disability Payment.

Table 2 below lists current benefits, the forecast number of clients in 2026-27 and the % of people in the 2024-25 client survey who agreed or agreed strongly that their experience of Social Security Scotland was good or very good.

**Table 2: Current Social Security Scotland benefits**

Category	Benefit (year launched)	Clients 2026-27 000s	% rating as 'good or very good'
<b>Disability Benefits</b>	Child Disability Payment (2021)	109	85%
	Adult Disability Payment (2022)	550	70%
	Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance (2025)	58	n/a
	Pension Age Disability Payment (2025)	175	n/a
<b>Carer Benefits</b>	Carer's Allowance Supplement (2018)	107	85%
	Young Carer Grant (2019)	4	87%
	Carer Support Payment (2024)	107	80%
<b>Five Family Payments</b>	Best Start Grants (3 grants) (2018-19)	53	
	Best Start Foods (2019)	51	87%
	Scottish Child Payment (2021)	330	
<b>Winter Heating</b>	Child Winter Heating Payment (2020)	48	91%
	Winter Heating Payment (2023)	487	84%
	Pension Age Winter Heating (2025)	1,059	n/a
<b>Other</b>	Funeral Support Payment (2019)	6	87%
	Job Start Payment (2022)	1	68%

Source; Social Security Scotland client survey 2024-25, table 3.2. Scottish Fiscal Commission forecasts January 2026 for 26-27. NB: Scottish Adult Disability Payment and Pension Age Winter Heating Payment were introduced after the 2024-25 client survey was undertaken. SFC do not forecast JSP or YCP. Figures for number of clients are taken from latest administrative statistics for each benefit and rounded to nearest 1,000.

## Client and partner surveys 2024-25

The [client survey for 2024-25](#) shows a very positive view of Social Security Scotland, as illustrated in table 2 above. Where views were less positive, they tended to relate to disability benefits. Views in the much smaller 'partner survey' were less positive.

Overall, 77% of 36,184 clients responding to the 2024-25 survey rated their overall experience with Social Security Scotland as good or very good. Only 8% said it was poor or very poor.

In contrast, of 194 partner respondents, only 47% rated the overall experience with Social Security Scotland as good or very good, and 19% said it was poor or very poor. (Charter Research table 26).

## Charter Research

[Charter Research](#) combines information from the client, partner and staff surveys, administrative statistics and management information. There are some common themes in the Charter research, around staff attitude, application forms and communication.

## **Staff ethos**

Almost all clients said they were treated with kindness and felt listened to. Most said they did not feel discriminated against (range from 85% in ADP to 96% in Carers Allowance Supplement), but those that did were unlikely to challenge it (e.g. 20% of ADP clients who experienced discrimination felt able to challenge it). (Table 5 and 6, Charter research).

## **Communication**

84% of ADP clients in 2024/25 said they could get information in a form that was accessible to them. (Table 19, Charter Research).

The issues most often cited as a barrier to communicating with Social Security Scotland were the call wait times, and lack of response to written communication. Many clients felt the agency wasn't communicating enough after applications were submitted (Charter Research p. 54). As in previous years, an online portal was again identified by some as a means to overcome this. (Charter Research p. 40).

More recent results for [April to September 2025](#) found that 66% of ADP clients said they got the right level of communication from Social Security Scotland, compared to 78% of CDP clients and 88% of Pension Age Disability Payment clients.

Only 19% of partner respondents in 2024/25 said it was easy to make contact with Social Security Staff on behalf of their clients. (Charter research p. 44). As highlighted in previous years, there were calls to make it easier for advisers to act on behalf of clients. (Charter Research, p.46).

## **Making applications**

60% of ADP clients said the application process was clear, compared to 88% of those applying for the 'Five Family Payments'. (Charter Research p.53).

Recent results for ADP show some improvement, with 67% of clients [surveyed between April and September 2025](#) saying the application process was clear. At the same time, only 60% of ADP clients agreed/agreed strongly that the application form enabled them to fully explain their circumstances, compared to 84% of CDP clients and 87% of Pension Age Disability Payment clients.

Only 30% of partner respondents in 2024-25 said it was easy to go through the application process with clients. Issues raised included the length of the paper form and technical issues with applying online. However, "comments said online applications worked well on the whole despite technical issues." (Charter Research p.47).

62% of ADP clients in 2024/25 felt their application was dealt with in a reasonable timeframe. This was an improvement on 42% the previous year. Figures for CDP

and Carer Support Payment were similar at 65% and 63% respectively for 2024-25 (Charter research p.61).

Only 57% of ADP applicants agreed with the decision received, compared to 79% for Child Disability Payment.

There were very positive views of ADP consultations – with 88% of clients experiencing them rating consultations as “good” or “very good”. (Charter Research p.69).

## **Suggested themes for discussion**

### **Programme Closure**

The Social Security Programme was set up within the Scottish Government in 2017 to develop the systems needed to deliver the newly devolved benefits. It is closing in March 2026. From now on, the agency will take on responsibility for systems development as well as the ‘live running’ of benefits that it currently does. Policy advice and development will remain with the Scottish Government.

Programme closure requires a new organisational structure in the agency. Staff and systems will move across from Scottish Government to the agency. It might be expected however that development work will be at a smaller scale in future compared to the creation of 19 Social Security Scotland benefits between 2018 and 2025 (17 current benefits, plus Carers Additional Person Payment and Scottish Carer Supplement).

The Spending Review reflects this in lower annual budgets. Although Social Security Scotland’s budget is increasing, total social security administration, policy and development is expected to fall £48m (11%) from £432m to £384m over the spending review period.

The social security administration spending plans are set out in table 6.01 in the Spending Review as:

2026-27	£431.6m
2027-28	£415.4m
2028-29	£384.4m

Figures for 2025-26 and 2026-27 are available in more detail in the Scottish Budget ‘level 4’ figures as shown in table 3 below. This shows the shift in both resource and capital from ‘policy and delivery’ to Social Security Scotland in 2026-27.



**Table 3: Social Security administration, policy and development. 2025 to 2028.**

£m	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
<b>Social Security Scotland</b>				
fiscal resource	312.1	354.6	n/a	n/a
capital	4.1	40.0	n/a	n/a
<b>Policy and Delivery</b>			n/a	n/a
fiscal resource	70.6	31.5	n/a	n/a
capital	39.9	0.0	n/a	n/a
<b>Scottish Welfare Fund administration - initial budget</b>	5.5	5.5	n/a	n/a
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>432.1</b>	<b>431.6</b>	<b>415.4</b>	<b>384.4</b>

Source: Scottish Budget 2026-27 'level 4' figures, Spending Review table 6.01.

NB: to allow comparison between budget and spending review, the table only includes fiscal resource and capital. For 2025-26 it also adds back in the Scottish Welfare Fund administration budget, which is moved to local government at the autumn budget revision.

[Audit Scotland's Annual Audit 2024-25](#) discussed the risks involved around Programme Closure and the need to clarify resource requirements.

“Social Security Scotland recognises Programme closure as its highest rated risk. [...] Without the necessary funding and resources it risks being unable to sustain current service levels over time.” (Annual Audit p.28)

As members discussed on their visit to the agency in December, Social Security Scotland has set up a 'future operating model' which restructures the agency to be able to take on the staff, assets and functions of the Programme.

Despite this work the annual audit noted that 'further work was needed' and recommended:

**Recommendation 6:** Social Security Scotland should work with the Scottish Government to agree and secure adequate funding to support its staffing and operational needs before March 2026. This should include a detailed assessment of the resources required to implement the Future Operating Model and deliver its strategic objectives (Annual Audit, p.29)

The Spending Review discusses how the Scottish Government Programme will be replaced by a Digital Delivery and Change function in Social Security Scotland employing around 820 staff FTE.

“Overall headcount underpinning Social Security Programme delivery peaked at 1,120 FTE in 2022-23. By 2026-27, a consolidated and streamlined Digital Delivery and Change function established in Social Security Scotland will operate with around 820 FTE – a reduction of 300 roles (27 per cent). Directly employed and contractor staff costs have been reduced year on year since 2022-23. After the programme closes, digital staff costs are expected to be

about £70 million in 2026–27, down £31 million from a peak of £101 million in 2022–23.” (Spending Review p.48).

**Members may wish to discuss:**

- 1. How will the Agency change as result of Programme closure? Can you clarify what systems and capabilities are being transferred, what is staying with the Scottish Government and what is not being continued?**
- 2. Audit Scotland’s Annual Audit found ‘limited evidence that the necessary resources would be in place from 2026/27’ for Programme closure. How has this been addressed?**
- 3. The Spending Review describes how the Digital Delivery and Change function will have around 820 full time equivalent staff. Can you explain the need for such a high level of resource, given that the only new social security payment in development in 2026/27 is the Scottish Child Payment baby premium? What other roles are undertaken by that team?**

**Fraud, Error and Managing Debt**

In 2024-25 Social Security Scotland administered £3.7 billion of benefits (Annual Report p.61). The monetary value of errors detected in 2024-25 was £14m overpayment and £0.5m underpayment (Annual Report 24-25, p.64).

With the completion of case transfer, the agency is forecast to be administering around £9 billion of benefit payments by 2030 (SFC January forecasts, fig 5.7). The monetary value of fraud and error are therefore likely to increase considerably over the next few years, simply reflecting the increased value of payments made.

In the visit to Social Security Scotland members discussed progress with:

- Estimating the level of fraud and error
- Identifying actual instances of fraud and error
- Recovering overpayments

**Estimating the level of fraud and error**

As in previous years, the annual audit emphasises the importance of being able to estimate the level of fraud and error.

Error can be official error or client error.

The agency is developing estimates of official error. Estimates for [Scottish Child Payment](#) and Best Start Foods have been completed. These estimated official error of 1.1% over payment in SCP (£2.4m) and 2% in BSF (£0.1m). The next official error exercise will focus on ADP with a report expected in May 2026. (Annual Audit p.26)

Systems to estimate client error are at an earlier stage. [Legislation was passed last year](#) that will require clients to comply with requests for information. This will enable the agency to develop statistical estimates of the rate of client fraud and error. Social Security Scotland is developing operational systems and processes, but further regulations are needed before these new legal powers can come into effect.

Audit Scotland's annual audit recognises progress is being made on fraud and error but concludes that further work is required, making the following recommendation (para 60):

“Social Security Scotland should work at pace to ensure the necessary resources and systems are in place to carry out fraud and error estimation exercises once the new regulations are in place.” (Recommendation 5)

### **Overpayment Recovery**

Social Security Scotland is developing additional processes for recovering overpayments including:

- Civil recovery in the Sheriff Court, and
- Enforced deductions from benefit payments.

At the visit in December Social Security Scotland said that they hoped to have the ability to do civil recovery and enforced deductions in place in early 2026/27.

Social Security Scotland's annual report describes the current limitations in the ability to recover debt, stating:

“Currently, debt recovery is limited to voluntary repayment arrangements. There are plans to support deductions from ongoing benefit awards when clients have failed to agree repayments. We cannot introduce a policy of enforced deductions until the appropriate service design and process for redeterminations and appeals have been finalised. Similarly, provisions to recover debt through the Sheriff Court system are not yet in place. As such, the debt recovery service is limited in its effectiveness.” (p.45)

In 2024-25 Social Security Scotland wrote off £5.4m client debt and is working to recover £4m (Annual Report p.67). There is a policy of not recovering debt due to official error and of writing off small debts (below £65). The agency's [Debt Management Strategy](#) states that enforced deductions to repay overpayments would be at a maximum of 10% of benefit entitlement if due to error and 15% if due to fraud, although as noted above, the Agency does not yet have systems in place for enforced deductions.

### **Fraud prevention and prosecutions**

If Social Security Scotland suspects fraud, then this information is passed to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service. The Annual Report 2024-25 stated that:

“During 2024-25, 13 crime reports have been submitted with one having an outcome recorded – a Fiscal Warning. Other cases are still in progress.”  
(Annual Report p.66)

The Annual Report also described developments in counter fraud activities:

“we have enhanced our data capabilities, improved our fraud detection systems, and continued to invest in staff training. These efforts help ensure that decisions on benefit applications are accurate and robust, reducing the potential for fraud and error.

[...]

we will continue to develop targeted, high-value fraud prevention activities and are seeking to invest in technology improvements to support this work.”

(Annual Report p.16)

**Members may wish to discuss:**

- 4. What progress has been made in response to Audit Scotland’s recommendation to ‘work at pace to ensure the necessary resources and systems are in place to carry out fraud and error estimation exercises once the new regulations are in place’?**
- 5. What further progress has been made towards starting enforced deductions and civil recovery since the Committee visited the agency in early December?**
- 6. Can you give examples of how systems and processes are designed to minimise the potential for fraud?**

## **Reports on Adult Disability Payment**

In 2025 two independent reports were published recommending changes to Adult Disability Payment (ADP).

- The [Independent Review of ADP](#) by Edel Harris, made 58 recommendations ranging from detailed operational matters to broader policy considerations. The Scottish Government is expected to respond by the end of January.
- [Audit Scotland’s review of the implementation of ADP](#) concluded that it had been implemented well, and made five recommendations around demonstrating effectiveness and value for money.

Both of these reports were discussed by this Committee on [27 November](#) and were referred to in the Committee’s [pre-budget report](#) published on 18 November. Relevant recommendations made by the Committee included:

- The Committee asks the Scottish Government to confirm the metrics that Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government use to assess value for money of particular policies such as the approach to reviews, the operating

costs of individual benefits or individual processes within each benefit. (para 71)

- The Committee asks the Scottish Government for details of how it will improve the information gathered on the number of disabled people in Scotland and the impact of ADP on their lives (para 161)
- The Committee asks the Scottish Government to provide details of the research it has undertaken regarding how ADP fits within the wider support available for disabled people (para 163)

Also relevant is the Scottish Commission on Social Security's report on people with communication needs, to which [Social Security Scotland replied on 5 December](#).

The following gives a very brief summary of the recommendations in the Independent Review, Audit Scotland report and the SCOSS report on communication needs.

### Independent review

Most of the independent review's recommendations are operational matters for Social Security Scotland. The following gives a very brief overview of the recommendations on operational matters.

- **Client voice** - consider take-up amongst seldom-heard groups (rec 2, 3)
- **Trauma informed approach** – embed this in all work (rec 4), improve signposting and referrals from the Local Delivery Service (rec 5)
- **Local delivery service** – promote independent advice services (rec 6) and the local delivery service (rec 7), introduce a dedicated route to making appointments for the local delivery service (rec 8) and improve staff training (rec 9)
- **Applications** – review the application form for ADP (rec 10)
- **Processing times** – do everything possible to improve these (rec 11), provide regular updates on wait times (rec 12), develop a 'Track Your Application' online portal (rec 13)
- **Third party representatives** – consider a 'third party escalation route', ensure the way mandates are obtained reflects published policy (rec 14)
- **Decision making** – assess how to balance the need for fairness and equity with the discretion inherent in the determination process (rec 15), review decision making training and guidance (rec 16), put the date of correspondence on each page of letters (rec 17)
- **Reliability criteria** – ensure rigorous application of these (rec 18), explain them clearly (rec 19), clarify guidance and training (rec 20), make explicit

reference to reliability criteria in all correspondence (rec 21), ensure guidance reflects caselaw (rec 22)

- **Case discussions:** review training and guidance (rec 23), clarify the approach to engaging charities and specialist organisations in providing training for case managers (rec 24)
- **Consultations:** give the client a choice about whether to have a consultation (rec 25), and about the format of that consultation (rec 26)
- **Redeterminations and appeals:** allow case managers to focus only on the areas in dispute (current policy is to remake the whole decision) (rec 27), improve timescales (rec 28), make information on redeterminations and appeals more prominent in decision letters (rec 29)
- **Short term assistance:** more detailed guidance on what qualifies as a 'change of circumstances'(rec 31)
- **Award periods and reviews:** review a selection of determination letters or use the client survey to assess effectiveness of communication on the award duration. (rec 34)
- **Communication:** update guidance (rec 35), review inclusive communications practice (rec 36), consider a 'point of contact' for clients throughout the application and redetermination process (rec 37), give more prominence to option to request written translations of award letters (rec 38), staff training on stigma (rec 39)
- **Application form:** making the activities, descriptors and associated points more prominent (rec 40)
- **Fluctuating needs and 50% rule:** improve the questions asked of applicants to account for variability, triggers and actions taken to manage conditions (rec 43), regularly refresh training materials (rec 44)
- **Mobility component:** Review guidance and training to ensure improved understanding of issues such as delayed impact, exhaustion, pain and anxiety (rec 57)

In Committee discussion on 27 November Ms Harris highlighted that most people gave positive feedback about ADP. She described her intention in making her recommendations was to:

- build on good foundations,
- improve the client experience, promote timely decision making, and
- ensure a modern, outcomes-focused approach to eligibility

While the last point is primarily for policy decisions by the Scottish Government, many of the issues around client experience and timely decision-making are for Social Security Scotland.

She commented that “The amount of time that people were waiting for decisions and the lack of communication in that time were among the biggest frustrations” of people she spoke to in the course of her review. (Official Report, 27 November, col 8).

This is reflected in the client and partner surveys discussed in the background section above.

Social Security Scotland’s Annual Report stated that:

‘it was not technically and financially possible to deliver an online portal for ADP and CDP for 2024-25. [...] Further evaluation, including user research, is underway to inform future improvements’ (p.24)

### **SCOSS report on people with communication needs**

Also relevant is the Scottish Commission on Social Security report on communications to which [Social Security Scotland responded on 5 December](#). This wasn’t specifically on ADP, but there is some overlap with the Edel Harris’s findings, particularly on client voice, communications and third-party representation.

The report made [seven recommendations](#), summarised very briefly below together with some key points from Social Security Scotland’s response.

1. Keep **accurate records** of communication and access requirements.

The agency response included that: “we cannot currently undertake the steps required to meet the recommendation in full, but it will remain under consideration.”

2. Regularly **review the types of support** clients may require

The agency response included that: “Social Security Scotland is working on how to improve communication options and interactions for all clients, including those with communication needs.”

3. Consider if there are ways to improve the way it obtains **third party consent**

The agency response referred to: “a pilot with third party organisations, including Local Authorities, Citizens Advice Bureaus and other charities who can contact us directly on behalf of clients with complex or challenging circumstances. To date, this pilot has involved 13 organisations, and a further expansion is under consideration.”

4. **Review inclusive communications** practices

The agency response included: “While Social Security Scotland is not currently planning to undertake a full, separate review of its inclusive

communications practices [...], we continue to take steps to improve how we communicate with our diverse range of clients and regularly monitor the effectiveness of our inclusive communications practices through our Mainstreaming Equality reporting.”

5. Do further research on barriers to **benefit take-up**

The agency response included that: “Benefit take-up is a key priority in the 2025-26 Business Plan,” and outlined work in preparation for the next take-up strategy due in October 2026.

6. Identify causes of **delays** and address them

The agency response referred to a: “pilot project underway exploring providing an escalation route for external organisations to highlight complex cases, including identifying and addressing causes of delays.”

7. Include awareness and use of **advocacy** services in the client survey.

The response stated that the agency would: “explore the feasibility of including a question on advocacy in a future iteration of the Client Survey.”

### **Audit Scotland report**

The [report on ADP from Audit Scotland](#) included the following recommendations for Social Security Scotland and Scottish Government:

- For 2025-26 annual performance reporting publications:
  - Define acceptable levels of satisfaction and build them into evaluation reporting
  - Include analysis of client satisfaction
  - Add dignity, fairness and respect indicators more clearly into performance frameworks
- Over 2026-27, use this improved performance information to produce cost/benefit analyses of the cost drivers of benefit delivery and benefit expenditure.

The report emphasised the need to show added value of the Scottish system compared to the Department for Work and Pensions saying:

“Given existing and future budgetary challenges, the Scottish Government’s ability to understand and justify the added value of a different approach to social security is critical.” (para 40)

Processing times, redeterminations and appeals are discussed in later themes. The following suggests questions on these reports as a whole.



**Members may wish to discuss:**

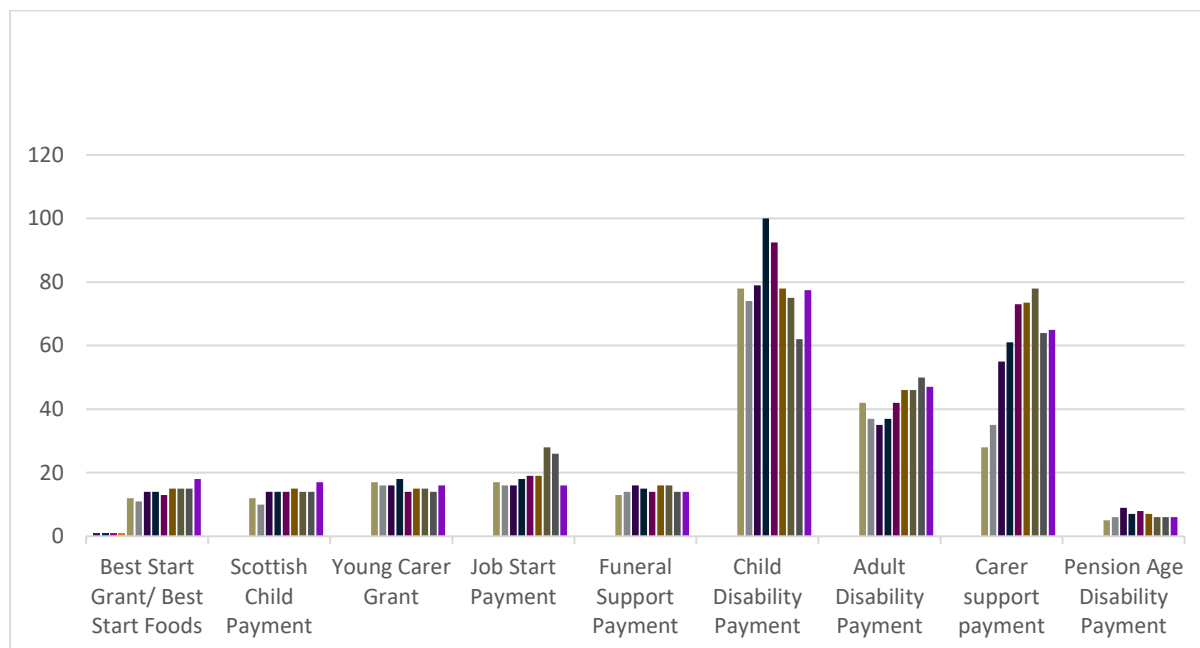
- 7. Has Social Security Scotland identified common themes in the findings of the reports from Audit Scotland, Edel Harris and the Scottish Commission on Social Security?**
- 8. What work is already in progress that would address some of the recommendations made by Edel Harris? In particular on developing a web portal and improving the way third party advisers work with the agency on behalf of clients?**
- 9. Edel Harris recommended reviewing the application form, and the client survey suggests ADP clients can find it difficult to fully explain their situation using the current form. What plans do you have to address this?**
- 10. Audit Scotland's report argued that Social Security Scotland should be able to show the 'added value' of Adult Disability Payment, including when compared to PIP. How is the agency demonstrating that added value?**

**Processing times and call waiting**

Slow processing times and lack of updates were a key frustration amongst people contributing to Edel Harris's review of ADP. This can also be seen in partner and client surveys.

Chart 4 shows the far longer processing times for disability benefits compared to 'low-income' benefits such as Scottish Child Payment. Child Disability Payment applications take the longest to process. CDP decisions made in September 2025 took 77 working days on average to process. In comparison, ADP applications took 46 working days on average. (This has since risen to 51 working days for decisions made in October). Also notable is the steep rise in processing times for Carer Support Payment which took an average of 73 working days in June 2025, although in August and September this had fallen to 65 working days.

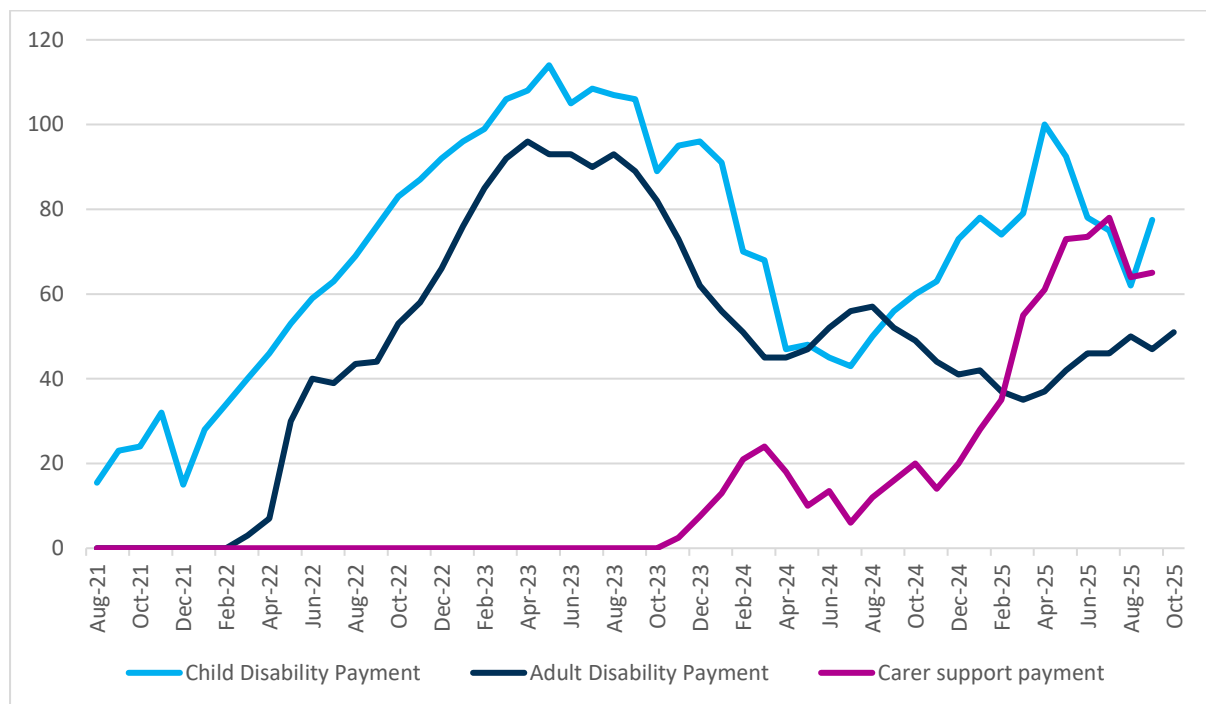
**Chart 4: Average processing times by benefit (working days) January to September 2025**



Source: Social Security Scotland administrative statistics. Monthly median processing times in working days.

Chart 5 below gives processing times over a longer time frame for the three benefits that take the longest to get decisions – CSP, ADP and CDP. It shows that ADP processing times have increased since March, reaching 51 working days for decisions made in October 2025. However, this is considerably below the peak of 96 working days in April 2023.

**Chart 5: ADP, CDP and CSP median processing times (working days). March 2022 to October 2025**



Source: Social Security Scotland administrative statistics. ADP was phased in from February 2022, with national launch in August 2022. CSP was phased in from November 2023, with national launch in November 2024.

### Call and webchat waiting times

The latest statistics on telephony and webchat show that between 1 April 2025 and 30 September 2025, Social Security Scotland handled a total of 393,458 calls. Most (40%) calls were about Adult Disability Payment. Over the same period, the agency handled 107,798 webchats, 37% of which were about ADP. ADP had the longest average call waiting time at 31 minutes and longest web-chat waiting time at 22 minutes.

**Table 4: Average call and web chat waiting times, April to September 2025 (minutes:seconds)**

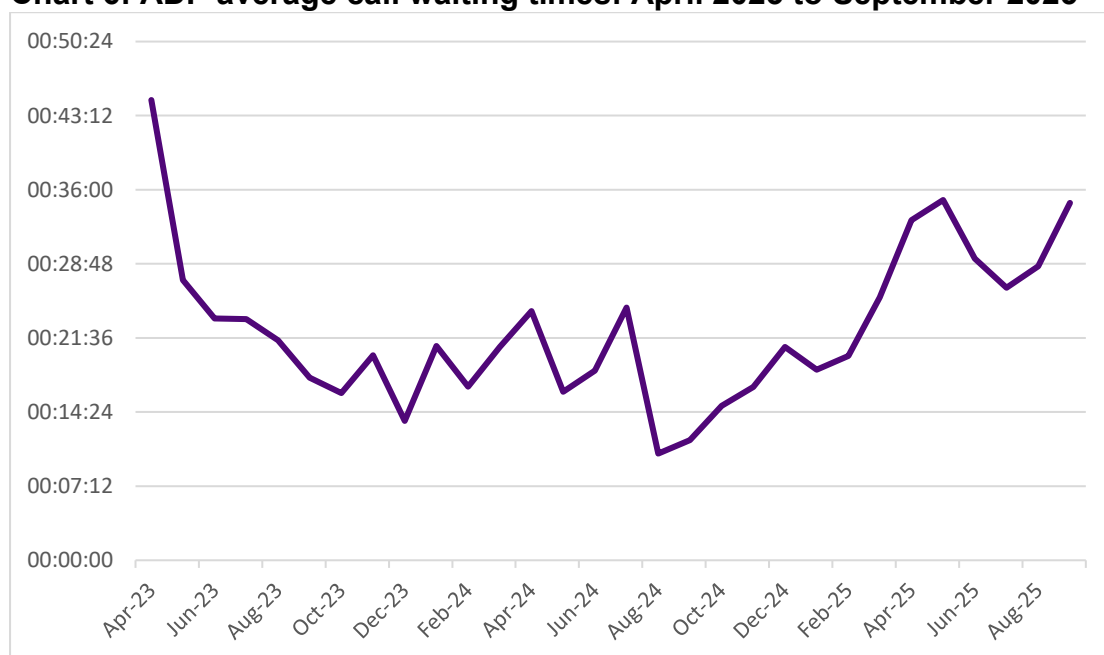
Phone Line/ webchat	Phonecalls	Webchat
Adult Disability Payment Case Transfer (PIP)	30:28	21:45
Adult Disability Payment Case Transfer (Working Age DLA)	05:50	08:16
Adult Disability Payment	31:09	22:11
Bereavement Voice	03:47	n/a
Best Start Grant / Foods	17:21	06:27
Carer's Allowance Supplement	18:45	13:56
Child Disability Payment General	10:52	08:20
Carer Support Payment (Case Transfer)	19:13	20:13
Carer Support Payment	19:03	13:51

Child Winter Heating Payment	10:37	20:46
Funeral Support Payment	03:28	04:37
General Enquiries Voice	08:39	n/a
Job Start Payment	03:25	03:09
Local Delivery Bookings Team	02:56	n/a
Pension Age Disability Payment (Case Transfer)	00:34	02:13
Pension Age Disability Payment	05:14	06:11
Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance	23:56	20:35
Scottish Child Payment	17:24	06:44
Winter Heating Payment	17:17	06:20
Young Carer Grant	03:46	04:22
<b>All Phone Lines</b>	<b>19:55</b>	<b>14:11</b>

Source: [Social Security Scotland management information](#). Shows average for the period April to September.

The chart below shows how ADP call waiting times reduced during 2023 and 2024 but have since been rising again, reaching an average of 34 minutes in September 2025.

**Chart 6: ADP average call waiting times: April 2023 to September 2025**



Source: Social Security Scotland management information.

## Decision making: authorisation rates and reviews

The [Scottish Fiscal Commission forecasts](#) note that the authorisation rate for ADP has decreased. The proportion of ADP applications that are authorised has dropped from over 50 percent in 2023 to below 35 per cent in July 2025 (SFC, para 5.6).

SFC also report that 5% of people exit ADP or get a lower award after review (SFC, para 5.10). This is higher than previous estimates but is still lower than the 13% of people whose awards are reduced or ended after a PIP review. SFC state:

“Latest data is consistent with our assumption that Social Security Scotland’s approach to reviews leads to fewer people having their ADP awards ended at review than would have been the case had PIP continued in Scotland.” (SFC para 5.11).

To some extent, this reflects the intended policy approach of ‘dignity and respect’ and maximising take-up. As announced in the [Fiscal Sustainability Delivery Plan](#) in June, the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland are currently assessing whether the approach to reviews is working as intended and if any changes may be required. This is part of the approach to identifying efficiencies and savings in the public sector. On 16 September David Wallace informed the Finance and Public Administration Committee that Social Security Scotland had looked at decision making in reviews and was satisfied that the right decisions were being made:

“We have been doing a joint bit of work with our policy colleagues to look quite carefully at our reviews—what we might call a review of reviews. We are currently seeing nothing that would cause us concern about the quality of those reviews.” [FPAC Committee Official Report, 16 September 2025, col 66](#)

**Members may wish to discuss:**

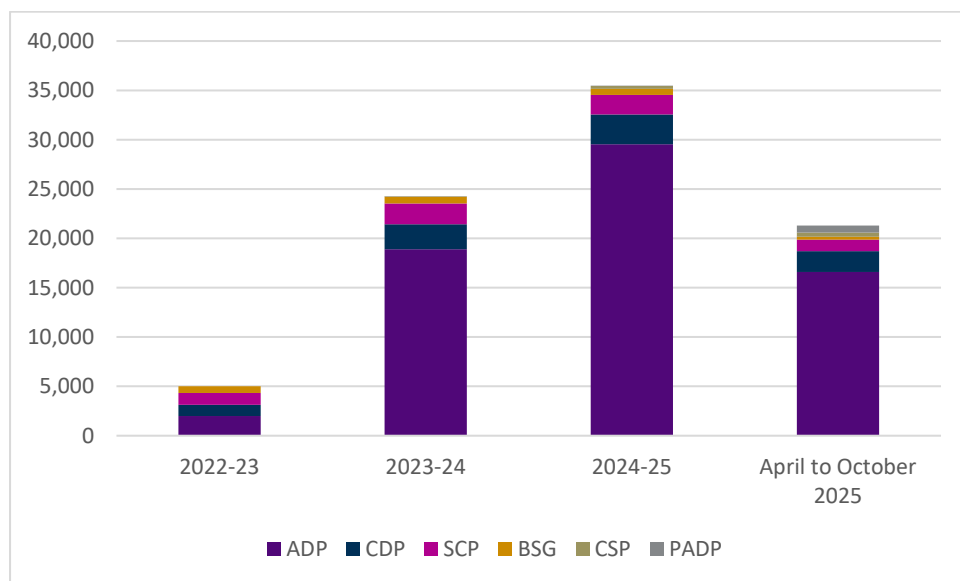
- 11. ADP processing times and call waiting times are rising again. What is causing this? What measures are in place to bring them back down?**
- 12. What are witnesses’ views on why the authorisation rate for ADP is declining?**
- 13. In June David Wallace told the Finance and Public Administration Committee that he was satisfied with the quality of ADP reviews. Does that mean he sees little scope for financial savings in this area?**
- 14. To what extent does completion of case transfer free up resources? Do you expect to see average call waiting and benefit processing times fall in the coming year?**

**Redetermination and appeals**

If a client disagrees with a decision they can ask for a redetermination. This must be completed by Social Security Scotland within 56 working days. A redetermination is conducted by a different decision maker, who looks at the whole decision afresh – not just the issue that is challenged. If a client disagrees with a redetermination, they can appeal to the Social Security Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal.

As the total number of Social Security Scotland clients increases, so has the number of redeterminations and appeals.

Chart 7 below shows how the number of redetermination requests have increased since 2022-23 and that most are for ADP. NB: 2025-26 is part year only, covering the five months from April to end September and October.

**Chart 7: Redetermination requests, by benefit. 2022-23 to October 2025.**

Source: Social Security Scotland administrative statistics.

In 2025-26 the time taken for redeterminations ranged from 12 working days on average for Scottish Child Payment to 46 working days on average for ADP. The table below shows the average time taken for redeterminations of the main benefits, showing that disability benefits took longer.

**Table 5: Time taken to make a redetermination decision**

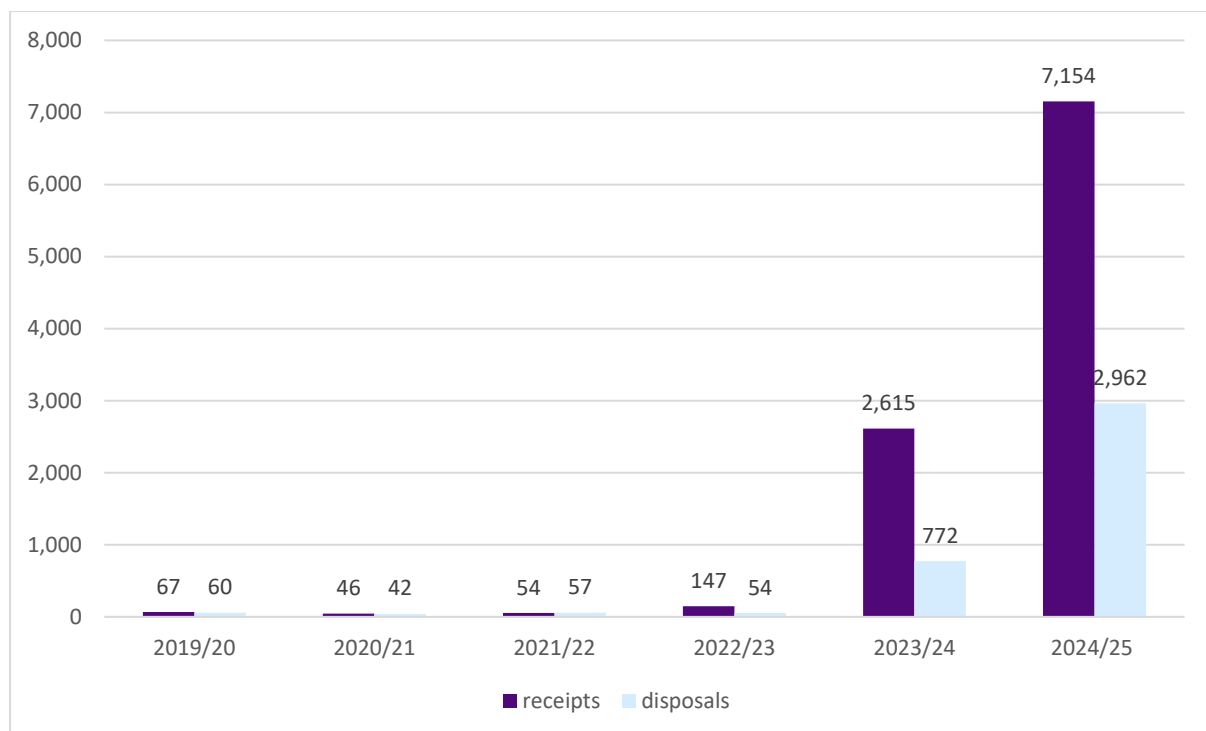
Benefit	Average working days for redetermination, 2025-26
Adult Disability Payment	46
Carer Support Payment	19
Child Disability Payment	43
Scottish Child Payment	12
Best Start Grant	11
Pension Age Disability Payment	37

Source: Social Security Scotland administrative statistics

While there isn't data on the average length of time taken for appeals, there is data on the proportion of appeals submitted that have been decided. Chart 8 below shows data from the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service showing both the increasing number of appeals, and that only a minority of appeals submitted have been decided. Of the 10,083 appeals submitted between 2019/20 and 2024-25 only 3,947 (39%) were decided by the end of 2024-25.

Most appeals are for ADP. Social Security Scotland statistics show 6,045 appeals received for ADP in 2024-25. In the period from April to October 2025 a further 3,950 appeals were submitted and 1,550 decided on ADP.

**Chart 8: Social Security Appeals: receipts and disposals**



Source: [SCTS courts and tribunal data Scotland. 2025](#).

In 2025-26, 56% of ADP appeals were allowed, as were 41% of ADP redeterminations.

The Committee took evidence on redeterminations and appeals on [25 April 2024](#), from Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service. Clerks wrote to stakeholders in November 2025 to ask about any ongoing issues and received replies from Citizens Advice Scotland and Child Poverty Action Group.

The issues raised in replies relate to legislation and matters for the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service as well as issues for Social Security Scotland. Citizens Advice Scotland noted that

- Legislation passed in 2025 that would allow appeals to ‘lapse’ is not yet in force. ‘Lapsing’ would allow appeals to be withdrawn if Social Security Scotland and the client agree. (s.8 Social Security (Scotland) Amendment Act 2025). The Committee has written to the Scottish Government on this issue.
- Appeal bundles can arrive late or incomplete (A client applies to Social Security Scotland for an appeal, who then send information on to the Tribunal).

- Delays in hearing appeals, mean it can be difficult to recall the detail of the circumstances at the time of submission.
- It is CAS's view that redeterminations "should only be carried out when an appeal against an original decision is lodged." They also support Edel Harris's recommendations.

The reply from CPAG confirmed that the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service is now offering clients a choice of how they wish their appeal to be heard. CPAG also raised their continued concerns that policy on how Short Term Assistance affects Carer benefits is at odds with the regulations. If a client's disability benefit is reduced, then they can apply for Short Term Assistance to 'top up' their benefit while they challenge that decision. CPAG have [written to the Committee previously setting out their concerns](#) that receiving Short Term Assistance for a disability benefit can prevent a person's carer qualifying for Carer Support Payment for that period. In their latest reply CPAG state:

"In the absence of clear information for claimants or published decision-making guidance for carer support payment, it will be difficult for individuals to understand the impact that claiming short term assistance may have on benefits received by their carer."

As mentioned above, Edel Harris's review of ADP included three recommendations on redeterminations and appeals, specifically that:

- Recommendation 27: To consider how to mitigate the risk of removing an award, for example, by empowering case managers only to focus on the areas in dispute raised by the client if a new decision is likely to be disadvantageous and adopting the previous rationale for making a decision in those areas not in dispute.
- Recommendation 28: For Social Security Scotland to improve re-determination timescales.
- Recommendation 29: For information about appeals, and re-determinations to be given more prominence on the front page of the determination letter

**Members may wish to discuss:**

**15. What is Social Security Scotland doing to improve the timescales for making redetermination decisions?**

**16. Citizens Advice Scotland have written to this Committee about delays to appeals. While appeals are managed by the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service, Social Security Scotland has a role in providing documents and in providing a response to the issues raised. What is the agency doing to ensure it completes its responsibilities on appeals timeously?**

**17. The Child Poverty Action Group have raised their concerns that if a disabled person has an award of Short Term Assistance, this could**



**affect their carer's benefits. Will Social Security Scotland publish clear decision-making guidance on the interaction between carer benefits and Short Term Assistance?**

## **New benefits**

Recent and future benefits are:

- Pension Age Winter Heating payment launched as a Social Security Scotland benefit in November 2025
- Carer Additional Person Payment due in March/April 2026
- SCP increase for babies under one due in 2026/27

The Scottish Fiscal Commission forecast that over one million Pension Age Winter Heating Payments are due to be issued this winter (SFC January 2026 forecast of 1,053,212 clients paid in 2025/26). [A news release on 14 December](#) stated that, by that point, over 568,000 Pension Age Winter Heating Payments had been made.

In early 2026 carer benefits are being re-organised into '[Carer Support](#)' comprising:

- Scottish Carer Supplement to replace Carer's Allowance Supplement
- Carer's Additional Person Payment, and
- Carer Support Payment.

An additional SCP payment for babies under 1 was announced in the Scottish Budget. Around 12,000 children are forecast to be eligible and it is due to start in 2026/27.

## **Members may wish to discuss:**

**18. Can you update the Committee on progress with making payments for Pension Age Winter Heating Payment? How many clients have yet to be paid for this winter?**

**19. How complex is it to create the new SCP payment for babies? Will this require significant changes to existing systems?**

## **Public Sector Reform**

[Audit Scotland's annual audit of Social Security Scotland](#) set out the need for additional resource as a result of Programme Closure but also described pressure to find savings to operating expenses. It stated:

"Similar to other public bodies Social Security Scotland faces increasing pressure to reduce non-essential spending." (para 76)

[...]

Developments in financial and workforce planning is ongoing to ensure future operations are affordable. This will need to include the identification of recurring savings. (para 79)

The Spending Review sets out the plan for efficiencies across the public sector of £1.5 billion. The introduction explains:

“Building on our Public Service Reform Strategy, we will prioritise prevention, join up services locally, and drive efficiency across the system – protecting frontline delivery while reducing duplication and corporate costs. Portfolio  
“Efficiency and Reform Plans set out actions to deliver cumulative, recurring savings of £1.5 billion over the spending review period.”

In the social justice portfolio, most of the planned savings will be from Social Security Scotland, given its size. Total savings in the Social Justice portfolio are £27m across the spending review period. Table 6 below shows how these savings comprise workforce savings, reduction in benefit expenditure, digital improvements and savings from developing a new data hub.

**Table 6: Social Justice Portfolio Efficiency and Reform Plan**

£m	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
<b>Efficiencies and Productivity, of which</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>8.0</b>
Workforce savings	6.0	4.0	5.0
Reduction in benefit expenditure	2.0	2.0	2.0
Digital improvements	3.0	1.0	1.0
<b>Service reform, of which:</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1.0</b>
Social Security Data Hub with Partner organisation	-	-	1.0

All savings reported are new recurring savings. Source: Spending Review table B.03

The Spending Review states that the workforce savings will be from natural attrition and that non-staff savings from process improvements will:

“support an improvement in the quality of processing, reduction in errors and improvement in clients experience, which will lead to benefit expenditure savings of £6m per annum by 2028-29.” (Spending Review p.48).

As discussed above, the Agency has a significant programme of work in developing error and fraud capabilities, taking on functions from the Programme, continuing to improve digital infrastructure, responding to reports by Audit Scotland and Edel Harris as well as addressing issues consistently raised in client surveys such as developing a digital portal and improving communications with third party representatives.

The Spending Review (p.49) also describes further activity aimed at reducing expenditure. This includes:

- A review of whether ADP reviews are operating as intended.
- A first principles review of the Social Security (Scotland) Act ‘with a view to reducing the cost of administration – for example, the transition between CDP and ADP, and the requirement to provide certain information in writing
- Improving referrals to advice and advocacy
- Creating a ‘Social Security Data Hub, to share data across the public sector
- Developing new Payment and Accounting Services

**Members may wish to discuss:**

**20. Given the programme of work discussed this morning, to what extent will Social Security Scotland be able to contribute to public sector reform and the need to reduce the size of the public sector?**

**Camilla Kidner,**

**Senior Researcher, SPICe**

**Date: 16 January 2026**

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