

Social Security Scotland and delivery of the Scottish Government benefits

Briefing for Social Justice and Social Security Committee ahead of appearance by Social Security Officials, 29 June 2023

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Introduction

1. Social Security in Scotland is the largest delivery programme and transfer of powers under devolution. It will see Social Security Scotland deliver 16.5 million payments per year, worth £6 billion by 2024/25 to an estimated two million people.
2. Social Security Scotland was established in September 2018. We are now delivering 13 benefits, seven of which are entirely new forms of financial support available only in Scotland. We are providing support to families on low incomes, people who need help paying for a funeral, disabled people, young carers, young people entering the workplace and to help people heat their homes.

Social Security Scotland – who we are

3. Social Security Scotland is an Executive Agency of the Scottish Government, and its purpose is to administer part of the Scottish Social Security system, in accordance with the principles in the Act and Charter. Once all benefits have been implemented, Social Security Scotland will administer the Scottish Government benefits. Social Security Scotland is creating job opportunities as it expands its operations to deliver more benefits for the people of Scotland.
4. Once all the benefits have been introduced, it is estimated that it will have a permanent workforce of around 3,500 people with headquarters in Dundee, an office in Glasgow and people located in communities across Scotland delivering face-to-face support to those who need it. Actual numbers will fluctuate in line with seasonal and other demands. Social Security Scotland made the decision to recruit a team of in-house health and social care professionals, removing the need for third-party assessments.
5. We have grown at pace over the past year to support the Scottish Government's programme of social security delivery and enable the launch of major benefits like Adult Disability Payment and the extension of Scottish Child Payment to those under 16.
6. We work to the principles in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 and Our Charter, which sets out what people in Scotland can expect from their new social security system.

What we do

7. We have a key role in creating the social security system for Scotland alongside our colleagues in the Scottish Government who are responsible for the policy, process and systems that we will use to deliver it.
8. We are not responsible for making the rules about who can be paid benefits in Scotland, or how much money people should get. This is decided by Scottish Ministers and set out in law, including the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018.
9. As we take on more benefits, either from the UK Government or any newly created Scottish benefits, Scottish Ministers will introduce new regulations and approaches. These are undertaken by policy colleagues within the Scottish Government's Social Security Directorate.
10. The Social Security Directorate Programme helps get the benefits ready for us to deliver. The programme is a separate part of the Scottish Government and has its own management and structure. It is responsible for managing when benefits will be introduced and deciding how we will transfer clients from the DWP to our new system.
11. We work closely with the Social Security Programme to make sure we are ready to start managing the benefits, and we will continue to manage the benefits once they have been launched.

Scottish Government Disability benefits

12. Child Disability Payment and Adult Disability Payment are our flagship Scottish disability benefits, launched nationally in November 2021 and August 2022 respectively, and which replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for Children and Personal Independence Payment (PIP). Both improve significantly on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) benefits which they replace. Their launch was the first time that people anywhere in the UK could apply for disability benefits in the way that suited them best – online, by telephone, on paper or face-to-face in their local community.
13. We have also reformed the entire system which assesses the degree of an individual's disability and ended DWP-style assessments by private sector providers. Instead, we make decisions on applications starting from a position of trust in the person applying, drawing where needed on advice from in-house health and social care experts, and asking clients to take part in a consultation (usually via telephone or video call) only where this is necessary to make a decision on the case. Disability benefits are not income dependant but can be long-term recurring benefits with verification required around a person's conditions and their impact.

Processing times

14. We are committed to giving people decisions as quickly as possible, while allowing time to make sure they have the information required to get decisions right first time.
15. Since the introduction of Adult Disability Payment most people have had a decision within four months. However, this can vary, and will be quicker where clients support their application with evidence up-front. We know that some people are waiting an unacceptably long time for Adult Disability Payment. This is often due to the complexity of their case or the time it takes for us to gather the information it needs to make a decision.
16. It was always expected that processing times would need a settling in period, where they will initially be high, while staff gain experience and new systems are introduced.
17. We are seeing continued demand for disability benefits, a trend that is happening across the UK, and volumes of application for Adult Disability Payment are beyond original forecast. The increase in processing times is in line with the launch of a new benefit, which was also seen with the launch of Personal Independent Payment (PIP).

Improvement actions

18. We are taking a comprehensive look at every step in the journey, from people applying for a disability benefit to getting paid.
19. We are already taking actions to reduce the time it takes for people to get a decision.
20. We have quickly introduced an initial set of changes to the CDP and ADP application forms to change the wording and encourage clients to providing supporting information alongside their application form if they can.
21. And we are also drawing more on the expertise of our in-house health and social care practitioners to support case discussions earlier, allowing staff to reach decisions more quickly.
22. A number of changes have been made to the way in which we handle calls, including better real-time monitoring of call volumes and smarter resource deployment, all of which aim to reducing call-waiting times which improves the overall client experience.
23. In any client contact, we are re-enforcing the role that clients can play in helping us reach timely decision in their case but also making sure information which clients already have is provided as soon as possible.
24. Staff who can be deployed from elsewhere in the organisation to help with the work to reduce processing times are being moved into new roles.

25. We are working hard with stakeholder groups on raising their understanding of what supporting information is required to make a decision and how they can support clients to provide this.
26. As a result of these measures, we are already reaching decisions on more cases per week than ever before. This is demonstrated by the fact we have made more decisions in the last quarter than any other quarter. We have introduced a payment to third sector organisations who provide us with supporting information on our request and are also making it easier for professionals to submit supporting information to us.

Supporting information

27. Many clients welcome Social Security Scotland collecting material on their behalf because it is easier for them - and this is not a service available in England and Wales, a key example of our different approach in Scotland.
28. We have introduced an additional measure to ensure there is a quick phone call back to a client when an application has come if there is extra information needed so that delays can be avoided.
29. Supporting information can come from a wide range of professionals, such as teachers, support workers, or medical professionals. Case managers are trained to understand which professional would be best placed to provide the information needed to make a decision on the case at hand.

Re-determinations

30. An extremely low number of re-determinations are carried out in comparison to the volume of decisions made by Social Security Scotland
31. In the last month for which figures are available, just 5% of Child Disability Payment decisions resulted in a request for a re-determination, indicating 95% of clients are content with the decision.
32. Up to the end of April 2023, figures show that for Adult Disability Payment only 6% of new applications resulted in a redetermination, compared to around 25% mandatory reconsiderations for Personal Independence Payment.
33. While we always want to make the right decision first time, the re-determination process is vital as it allows us to look again at a decision if, for example, a client supplies further supporting information.
34. Our priority is getting decisions right first time so that people are paid their benefits without having to put in a time-consuming request for a re-determinations and appeals.

Our three most impactful benefits

Adult Disability Payment

44. Once fully operational, we will manage 17 benefits. These benefits will be introduced by the Scottish Government in stages:



Note: We currently provide Carer's Allowance through the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). We also provide an additional payment of Carer's Allowance Supplement that will be in place until the replacement for Carer's Allowance is introduced.

How we've done this

45. The Scottish Government has undertaken extensive consultation in developing policy for each of the Scottish benefits, and put clients' needs at the heart of the design and improvement of all our social security systems and services. As part of the work to develop and implement Scottish Government social security powers, over 2000 people with lived experience of the social security system – the Social Security Experience Panels – have helped us design every aspect of the new system through an extensive Scottish Government research programme.

46. We promote our benefits and provide information to make sure that everyone who is entitled to help knows about it and can apply to receive it. We help people apply in the way that is best for them, whether by post, phone, online or face-to-face in communities across Scotland.

47. We process people's applications efficiently and accurately and let them know the outcome as quickly and clearly as possible. We also help people to challenge these decisions if they think we've got them wrong. Once all benefits are in place, we will manage around £4 billion in payments each year.

48. Officials continually engage with stakeholders, such as third sector organisations, local authorities, and NHS staff to raise awareness of our new approach and to gather feedback on the delivery of our benefits. Together with other sources,

such as the client survey, this input is used to continually improve how we provide disability assistance to the people of Scotland.

What we're going to do

49. In February 2019, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People set out a timetable for benefits delivery whereby all the remaining devolved benefits would be delivered, and the transfer of existing cases from DWP completed, by 2024.
50. In June 2019, the timetable was extended to 2025 to make room for the substantial work involved in delivering the new Scottish Child Payment in 2020. At the beginning of the pandemic, key work including the delivery of SCP and the safe payment of benefits was prioritised, with other delivery necessarily paused.
51. The benefits we have delivered since May 2021, including Child and Adult Disability Payment, represent a step-change in complexity compared to the more straightforward one-off grants which formed the bulk of our earlier delivery. The launch of the disability benefits in particular has been a challenge unlike any we have faced before, but we are working hard to ensure eligible clients receive their benefits as soon as possible.

Policy development and legislation

52. Delivering new benefits is a partnership between officials across the Social Security Directorate and Social Security Scotland, who work together in multi-disciplinary teams that bring together Policy, Analysis, Legal, Programme, Communications, Technology and Operational Delivery professionals, as well as colleagues from the UK Government.
53. The Scottish Government's devolved powers under the Scotland Act 2016 and Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 allow it to top-up existing benefits, create devolved forms of UK-wide benefits, or create brand new benefits in areas of devolved responsibility.
54. Teams in the Policy Division set the parameters for each new benefit, providing advice to Ministers to agree its structure, rates, and eligibility criteria. In doing so they will draw on advice from stakeholder organisations and people with lived experience of the current system, through public consultations and work with the Social Security Experience Panels. They also ensure the necessary legislation is put in place to enable the benefit to be delivered within the law, working closely from the outset with Programme and Social Security Scotland officials to ensure that the policy intent can be designed and delivered in practice.

The Social Security Programme

55. The Programme developed and implemented the initial capability required by Social Security Scotland is being delivered by the Social Security Directorate within the Scottish Government, with a range of additional organisations involved, reflecting the complex nature of Social Security delivery and the scale of work

required to establish the structures and capabilities to deliver the Scottish Government benefits.

Agile delivery

56. Social Security in Scotland is being delivered using an Agile methodology, building a new system from the ground up and delivering benefits iteratively – starting with the comparatively simple Low-Income Benefits and building on our experience to inform the design and delivery of the more complex disability benefits.
57. This approach has allowed us to successfully deliver 13 benefits to date, including new benefits like Scottish Child Payment (SCP) and our largest and most complex disability benefit, Adult Disability Payment. Agile operates with a set of key principles that include putting clients at the heart of service design, supporting our commitment to design the new Scottish social security system with the people who use it.
58. Audit Scotland recognised our successful use of Agile in its recent report on implementation of the Scottish Government benefits: *“The Agile approach to implementing the social security powers is being well managed by the programme. Systems, processes, and staff expertise have been established to support the scale and complexity of development activity. The Agile approach is supporting fast-paced delivery, with real-time learning and improvement.”* Nowhere else has such a comprehensive programme of activity – with benefit launches every 3 to 4 months – been undertaken successfully by a national government.

Resource

59. We have been through a period of rapid growth to support the introduction of new benefits and work to transfer the disability and carer benefit awards of 700,000 people from the DWP to our Scottish system and our Agency is fully staffed. The staff who have joined us are learning and being trained in new benefits and in a way of working that embeds dignity, fairness and respect in everything they do.
60. Our staffing forecasts, which are published quarterly, are subject to policy and service design decisions, client needs and a range of external factors that could impact demand for Scottish benefits.

Administration costs

61. Our current administration costs include costs for benefit delivery supporting £4 billion in payments for 2022-23 to one million people; preparing for benefits due to be delivered, the transfer of people’s disability and carer benefits and recharges for services delivered by the DWP under Agency Agreements.
62. Once all benefits have been introduced and people’s awards transferred, we are aiming for Social Security Scotland’s operating costs to be in line with the DWP administration costs as a proportion of benefit spend. Our estimate of the DWP’s

operating expenditure as a percentage of benefit value administered is 6.3%. We will manage staffing numbers within that budget.

Our Charter

63. The purpose of Our Charter is to set out what people should expect from the social security system.
64. It explains in clearer terms how we will uphold the Principles in the Act, how we will make sure that we are taking a human rights-based approach to what we do and how we will demonstrate dignity, fairness and respect in all our actions.
65. Our Charter was created with people and not for them.

Client Survey Results

66. As part of upholding the commitments in the Charter, we regularly survey our clients to understand more about their experience of our service. The latest survey of people who have applied for Disability Payments shows:
- 41% of Adult Disability Payment clients said they received help to complete the application. Of that group 32% received the help from Social Security Scotland.
 - 93% of Adult Disability Payment clients said it was easy to get support from Social Security Scotland to complete the application.
 - 30% of Child Disability Payment clients said they received help to complete the application. Of that group 42% received the help from Social Security Scotland.
 - 96% said it was easy to get support from Social Security Scotland to complete the application⁴.

⁴ [Social Security Scotland - Client Survey: Disability Payments](#)