

The logo for SPICe, featuring the text 'SPICe' in white on a dark blue background.The text 'The Information Centre' and 'An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh' in white on a dark blue background.

## Social Justice and Social Security Committee

**18<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Thursday, 29 June**

### **Social Security Scotland: disability benefit processing times**

#### **Introduction**

Social Security Scotland launched Child Disability Payment (CDP) across all of Scotland in November 2021 and Adult Disability Payment (ADP) in August 2022. The average processing time for these benefits has been increasing.

The Committee will hear from:

- David Wallace, Chief Executive, Social Security Scotland
- Ally MacPhail, Deputy Director for Strategy, Change, Data and Engagement, Social Security Scotland
- Sue Scotland, Deputy Director, Social Security Programme Management and Delivery Division, Social Security Directorate, Scottish Government

A written submission from Social Security Scotland is included in Committee papers.

This paper provides background on both CDP and ADP before suggesting **six themes for discussion from p.6 onwards.**

#### **Context**

Social Security Scotland was established in 2018 to administer Scottish social security. It has expanded rapidly and now [employs around 4,000 staff](#). It currently delivers 13 benefits and is due to start delivering a further four over the next couple of years. These four are: Carer Support Payment, Pension Age Disability Payment, Older People's Winter Heating Payment and Employment Injury Assistance. They

are also in the process of transferring over 300,000 clients from Personal Independent Payment (PIP) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

## Adult Disability Payment

Adult Disability Payment (ADP) is an extra-costs payment for those of working age with a long-term health condition or disability. It is not means tested and is available to people both in and out of work.

The application is made in two parts. The first part asks for basic information. The second part is far more detailed, requiring a lengthy application form and one piece of formal supporting evidence. Informal evidence from friends and family is also considered. Processing times are measured from the date this second part is received by Social Security Scotland.

The eligibility rules and payments rates for ADP are very similar to Personal Independent Payment. There are two components: mobility and daily living. They can be paid at a higher or lower rate. The components and rates paid are decided based on the number of points scored on various 'descriptors', organised under different 'activities.' Each descriptor has a certain number of points. A person scores the points for the descriptor that best matches their needs. Eight points are needed to get the lower rate and 12 points for the higher rate.

For example: Daily living activity 7 is "communicating verbally." One of the descriptors under this activity is "needs communication support to be able to express or understand basic verbal information." This scores 8 points. Eight points entitles the client to the lower rate of the daily living component.

Processing an ADP application requires deciding which descriptors best reflect a client's needs, based on the information available to the decision maker.

- Social Security Scotland can provide support with filling in the application form.
- Once submitted, case managers will first try to make a decision based on the written information provided by the client (the application form plus supporting information).
- Social Security Scotland can gather that supporting information on behalf of a client and may need to gather further information or ask for clarification.
- Case managers can consult with in-house health and care practitioners to help them make a decision.
- If written information is not sufficient, clients can be invited to a consultation, but this is not expected to be often needed.

### ADP application volumes and processing times

Chart 1 below shows the number of 'Part 2' applications that are received each month, the number of claims processed and the median processing time. Between March 2022 and end April 2023 Social Security Scotland received:

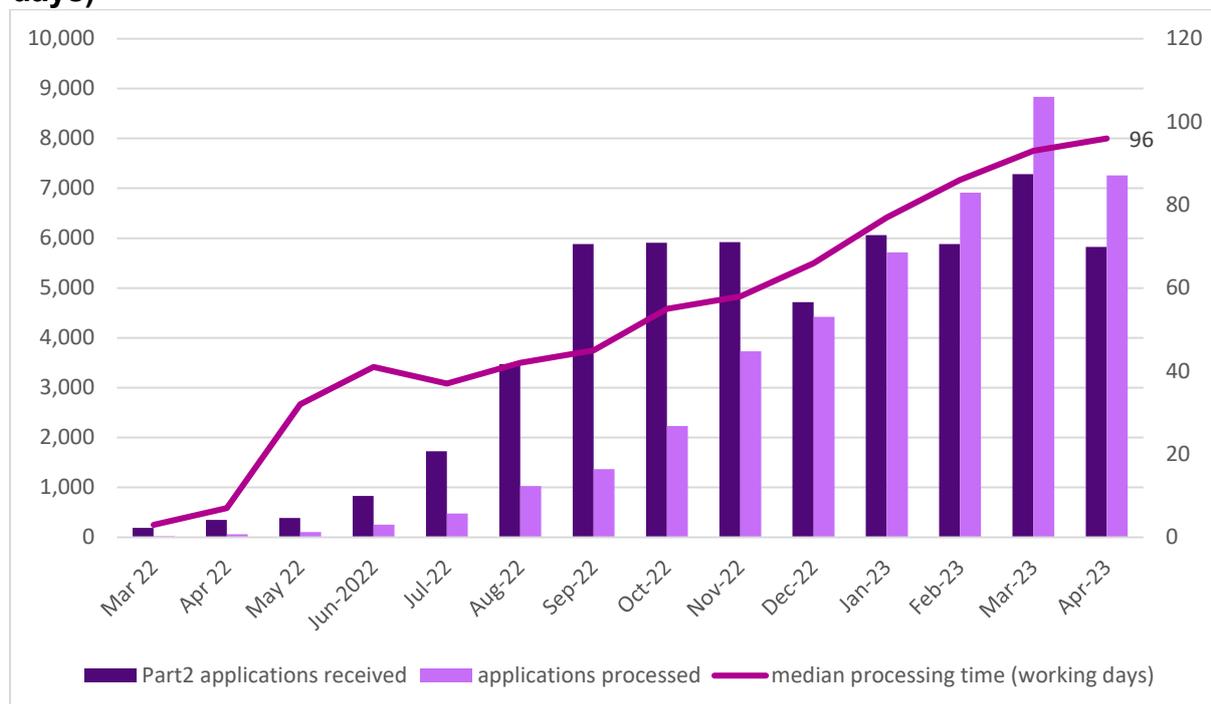
- 95,555 part one applications

- 54,445 part two applications, of which 42,425 have been processed.

The number of part 2 applications received since September 2022 has normally been around 6,000 a month. (Application volumes were lower in December 2022 at 4,720, and higher in March 2023 at 7,285).

Since the start of 2023, Social Security Scotland has processed more applications than it has had new claims made – meaning it is making progress with the backlog. However median processing times are still rising – reaching 96 working days in April 2023.

**Chart 1: ADP applications, decisions and median processing time (working days)**



Source: [ADP high level statistics to end April 2023](#). Applications (left hand axis), and median processing time (right hand axis)

The [latest client survey](#) results cover September to December 2022. It includes a large amount of information, some of which is discussed later in the briefing, but overall,

- 85% of ADP clients agreed they were treated fairly and respectfully throughout the application process.
- 59% agreed that filling in and submitting the application did not take too long.

The survey didn't ask about the time taken to process submitted applications.

## Child Disability Payment

Child Disability Payment (CDP) is an extra-costs payment for children with long-term health conditions or disability. It can be claimed up to age 16 and paid up to age 18.

It has the same eligibility criteria and payment amounts as Disability Living Allowance (DLA), i.e., a Care Component paid at a lower, middle or higher rate and a mobility component paid at a lower or higher rate. Unlike ADP, it's not based on points, but it's still based on deciding whether a client's needs match the legislative criteria. For example, the type of things considered include:

- Care needs during the day and during the night
- Mobility – does the client need more supervision than other children of the same age
- Level of mobility – for example, being virtually unable to walk

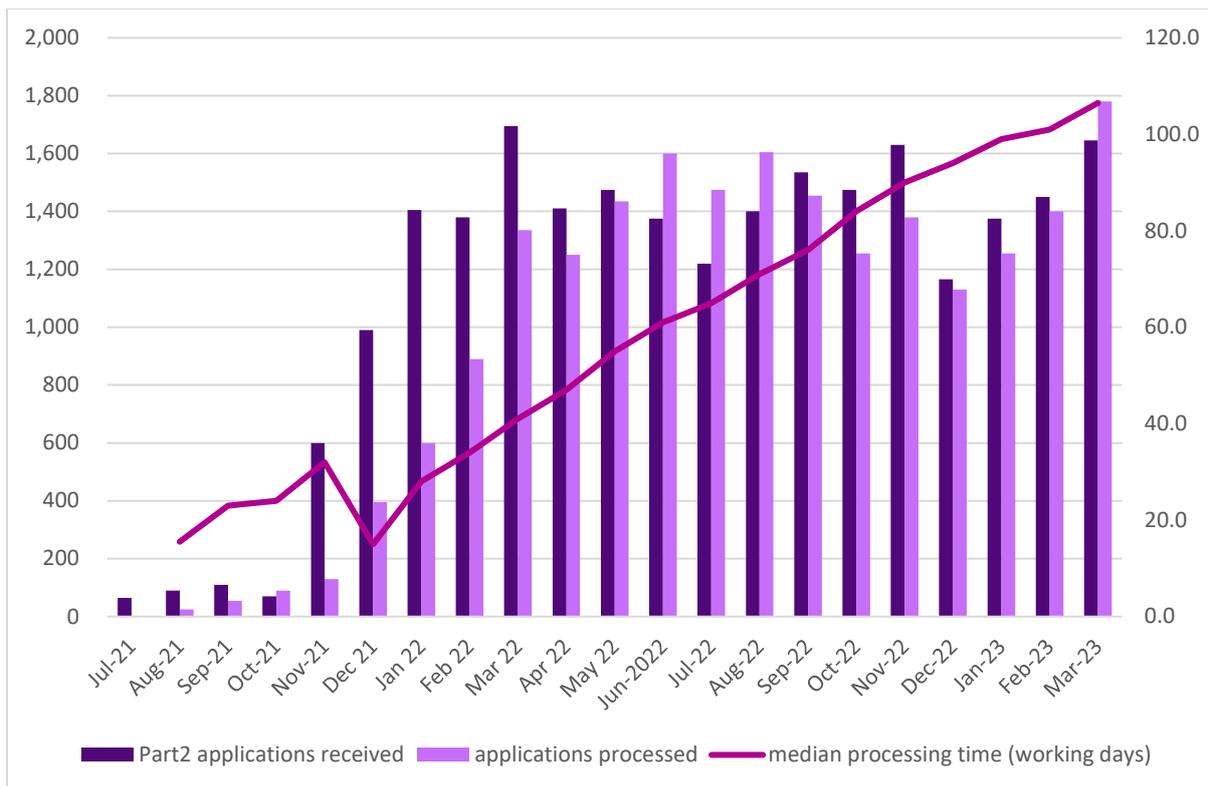
As with ADP, decisions are made on the basis of application forms and supporting information. There is no face-to-face assessment and Social Security Scotland can collect supporting information on a client's behalf.

Both CDP and ADP therefore require a complex set of decisions to be made in order to decide whether, and at what rate, to award the benefit. Social Security Scotland publishes its [decision-making guidance](#).

### **CDP application volumes and processing times**

CDP has been going for almost a year longer than ADP. Application volumes are much smaller – generally between 1,100 and 1,500 each month. Median processing times have risen steadily, reaching 106.5 working days by the end of March 2023. In total, there have been 30,975 part 1 applications, 23,570 part 2 applications received, and 20,535 applications processed. Leaving around 3,000 applications awaiting decision at end March 2023.

### **Chart 2: CDP applications, decisions and median processing time (working days)**



Source: [CDP high level statistics to end March 2023](#). Applications (left hand axis), and median processing time (right hand axis)

In the most recent client survey:

- 83% of CDP clients agreed they were treated fairly and respectfully throughout the application process
- 57% agreed that filling in and submitting the application did not take too long

## Previous Committee Consideration

The Committee discussed processing [times with Social Security Scotland in December 2022](#). At that meeting discussion on processing disability benefits included:

- There had been a large volume of staff recruitment, some of whom had still to be fully trained. Many staff are very new. They will become more efficient as they get more experience. Janet Richardson (Deputy Director of Client Services Delivery) said: “We will start to see things progress and ramp up from the new year.”
- The high success rate for redeterminations in CDP is often related to additional information being available. (David Wallace)
- Social Security Scotland now “contact the client for both adult and child disability payments when they make that claim to talk to them about whether there is anything else they can tell us. A good example of that is the fact that we can spend weeks waiting for a general practice surgery to send us a list of the medication that a client is on, whereas a client often has that to hand because they have their repeat prescription and could upload that information and send it to us.” (Janet Richardson).

- On ADP processing times which, at that point, were 77 working days: “We expect that to stabilise and ideally come down.” (David Wallace)

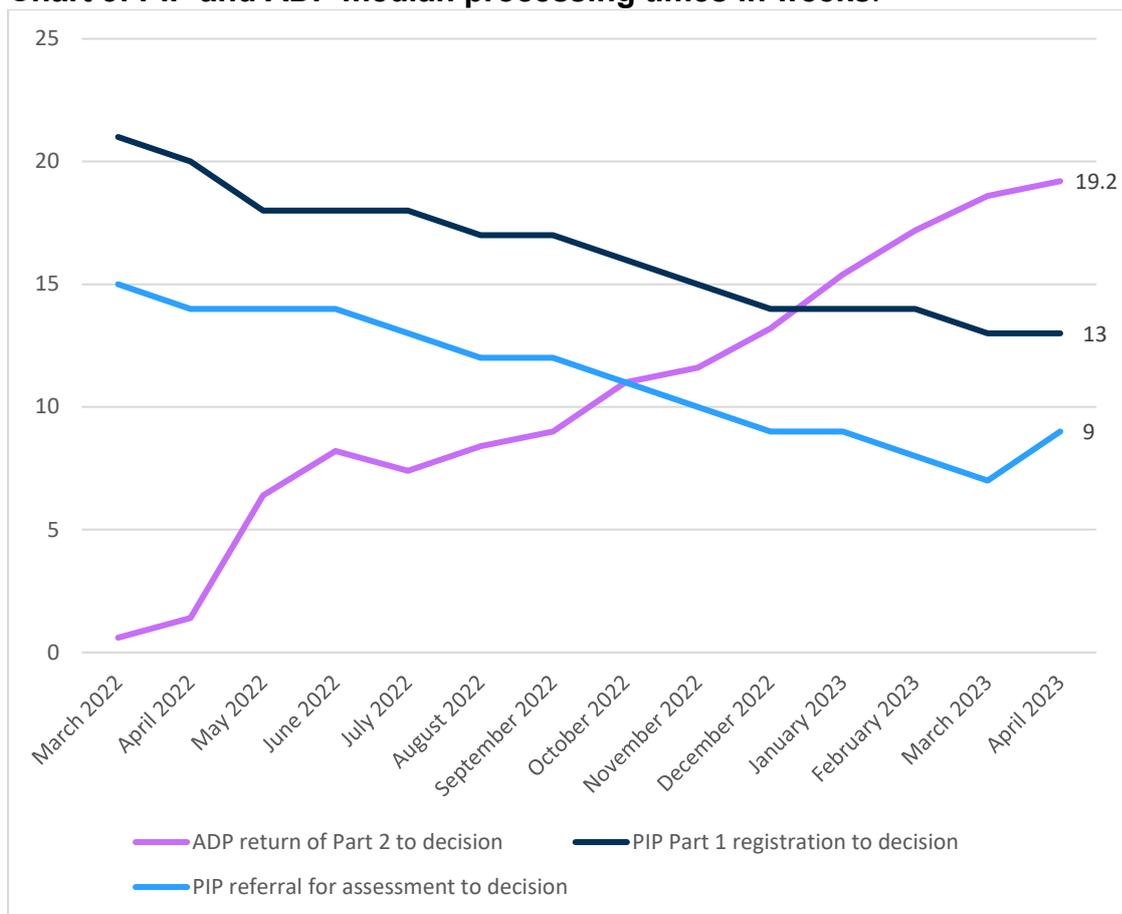
### Comparing processing times: PIP and ADP

Despite not having data that is exactly comparable, it is still clear that in early 2023 ADP was taking longer to process than PIP.

The processing time for PIP from registration of Part 1 to DWP decision was 13 weeks in April. We don’t have an equivalent figure for ADP. However, we do have a figure from the later point of returning Part 2. That was 96 working days or 19.2 weeks in April 2023.

Chart 3 below shows PIP processing times are on a downward trend compared to the upward trend for ADP.

**Chart 3: PIP and ADP median processing times in weeks.**



**Sources:** [Social Security Scotland ADP statistics](#), [DWP PIP Statistics](#). NB: ADP working days converted into weeks by dividing by five.

Although PIP processing times are now reducing, when PIP was first introduced processing times were very slow - reaching a peak of 41 weeks in mid-2014, largely due to lack of capacity for doing assessments (see chart 5 under Theme 4).

## Suggested themes

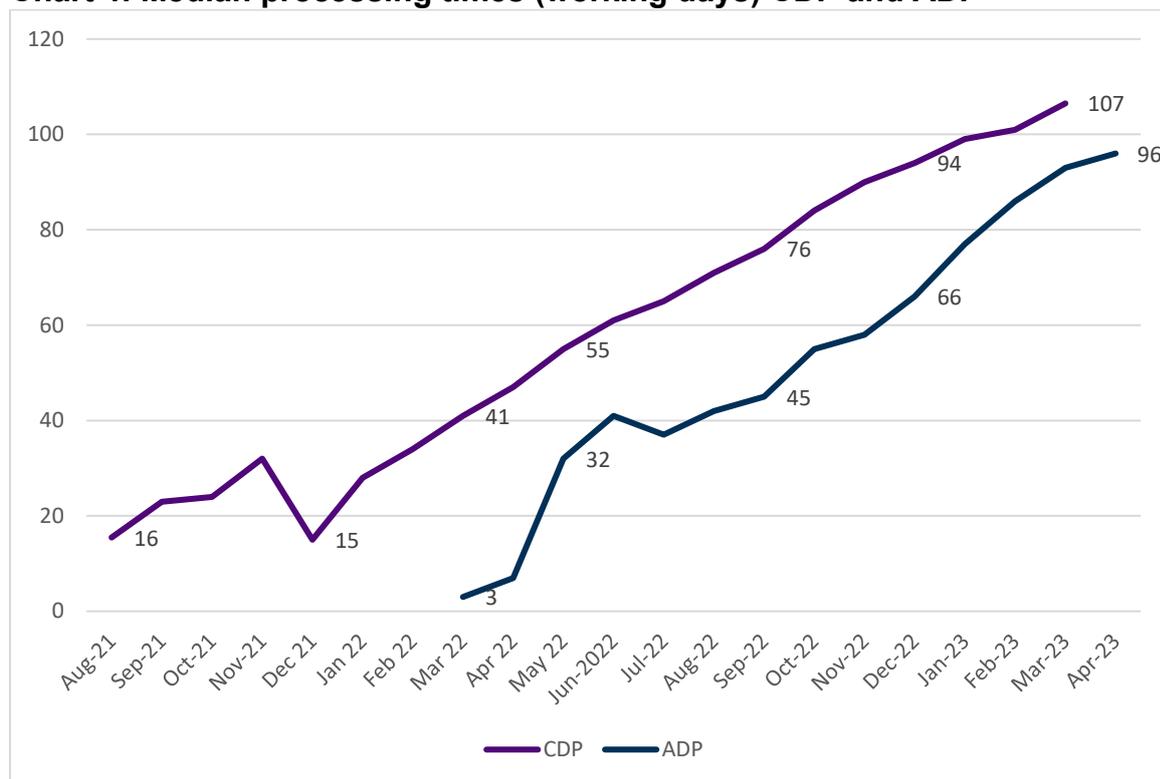
### Theme 1: Reasons for slowing processing times

Initially, Social Security Scotland had expected that disability benefit applications would take 8 to 10 weeks to process – so around two to two and a half months or 40 to 50 working days. This was the initial information on the website which has since been removed. The latest statistics show that average processing times were:

- 96 working days for CDP for decisions made in March (around 4 ½ months)
- 106.5 working days for ADP for decisions made in April (over 5 months)

In other words, around twice as long has had initially been envisaged.

**Chart 4: Median processing times (working days) CDP and ADP**



Sources: [ADP statistics to April 2023](#), [CDP statistics to March 2023](#).

Social Security Scotland's submission states that,

“since the introduction of ADP, most people have had a decision within four months [...] we know that some people are waiting an unacceptably long time

for ADP. This is often due to the complexity of their case or the time it takes us to gather the information needed to make a decision.”

#### Members may wish to discuss:

1. Which particular parts of the process are contributing to long processing times? Are there differences between ADP and CDP?
2. To what extent do slower processing times relate to capacity within the organisation – i.e is it a budget and resourcing issue?

## Theme 2: Gathering Supporting Information

A key policy difference between DWP and Social Security Scotland is that Social Security Scotland will routinely gather supporting information on a client’s behalf.

Although clients can ask Social Security Scotland to collect information, the submission from Social Security Scotland states they seek to:

“encourage clients to provide supporting information alongside their application form if they can.”

[...]

“in any client contact, we are re-enforcing the role that clients can play in helping us reach a timely decision”

Most clients do provide supporting information with their application, but around a half are also later contacted asking for more information. Around a third of clients asked Social Security Scotland to collect information for them. (36% of ADP clients and 30% of CDP clients).

**Table 1: Clients providing supporting information**

	CDP	ADP
Client provided supporting information	82%	76%
With the application	62%	68%
When asked by Social Security Scotland	14%	11%
Both with application and again when asked	19%	18%
Got a phone call asking for more information	48%	57%

Source: [Client Survey](#) Table 37.1 and 38.1

Of those who provided supporting information themselves, 71% said it was easy to get, and 78% said it was easy to provide.

**Table 2: Ease of providing supporting information**

	Clear what information to supply	Easy to get the information	Easy to provide the information
Strongly agree/agree	81%	71%	78%
Neither agree nor disagree	13%	17%	14%
Disagree or strongly disagree	6%	12%	8%

Source: [Client survey table 41.1](#).

In their 2022 report on the regulations that created ADP, the Scottish Commission on Social Security had had some concerns about collecting supporting information:

“Eliciting timely and detailed supporting information from busy professionals, which is focused on daily living and mobility activities, will be challenging. The evidential value will likely be variable, and Social Security Scotland decision makers will need good skills in weighing evidence to handle this appropriately. How effective formal and informal supporting information is in aiding decision making will be an important area for delivery, learning and improvement.” [Disability Assistance for Working Age People \(Scotland\) draft regulations: scrutiny report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

In response, the Scottish Government had said:

“we will collect data on the time between requesting supporting information and receiving it. This information will allow us to identify where issues in this process arise. The Scottish Government is in regular contact with Health Boards and Local Authorities in order to collect information on the process for gathering supporting information and how information, feedback and learning is shared.” [Scottish Government response to SCoSS ADP scrutiny report - Scottish Commission on Social Security \(socialsecuritycommission.scot\)](#)

Third sector organisations are to be paid a [fee of £33.50](#) for providing supporting information, the same as that [provided to GPs](#).

**Members may wish to discuss:**

- 3. How is Social Security Scotland seeking to reduce the time taken to gather supporting information?**
- 4. Once information is gathered, are there any blockages around the time taken to assess it and make a decision? If so, what is being done to address this?**

### **Theme 3: Minimal use of consultations**

One of the most publicised differences between ADP and PIP is the different approach to assessment. In PIP, an assessment is carried out by a private contractor. Until 2020 this was generally face to face, but as the [Westminster Work and Pensions Committee](#) pointed out: “Covid-19 forced the Department’s hand in making greater use of remote and paper assessments.”<sup>1</sup>

The policy intention with ADP, as set out on the Scottish Government website is that:

“We are significantly reducing the number of face-to-face assessments and will only ask someone to undertake a face-to-face assessment when it is the only practicable way to make a decision.”

<sup>1</sup> See [PQ 26035, tabled 27 June 2022](#). for numbers of paper based, remote and face to face PIP assessments.

The client survey shows that around a quarter of ADP clients need a consultation in order to decide their application. For almost all (90%) this is over the phone.

A lot of the antipathy towards assessments was based on those who had had poor experience of PIP assessments. However, in ADP 98% rated their consultation as very good or good. Only 1% (7 cases) rated it poor or very poor.)

- 90% agreed the practitioner understood me
- 96% agreed they were treated with dignity and respect
- 92% agreed they felt listened to
- 93% agreed their practitioner communicated with them in a way that was clear and I could understand.

**Members may wish to discuss:**

5. **There is a policy expectation that consultations will not be the norm. Are staff spending a lot of time trying to make a decision without a consultation, when a consultation is in fact what is needed?**
6. **The client survey found very high satisfaction ratings by clients who had had consultations. Would speeding things up jeopardise this?**

## **Theme 4: Settling in period**

Social Security Scotland's submission states that:

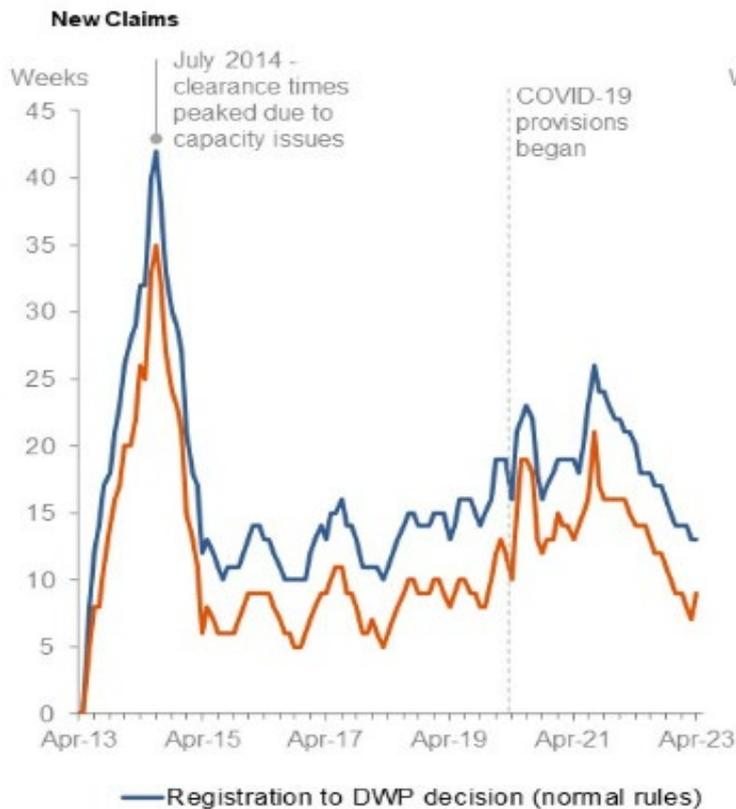
“it was always expected that processing times would need a settling in period, where they will initially be high, while staff gain experience and new systems are introduced.”

### **Adult Disability Payment**

ADP was launched in phases from March 2022 with national roll-out in August. It therefore has only been available nationally for less than a year. Since September 2022 the agency has received around 6,000 Part 2 applications each month. The number processed has been increasing, from 1,000 in September 2022 to 8,835 in March 2023 and 7,260 in April 2023. The median processing times continue to rise.

When PIP was first launched there was a period of very lengthy clearance times, peaking at 41 weeks in mid 2014 (over 200 working days). There was a smaller spike in 2021 (chart 5, below).

### **Chart 5: PIP Processing Times 2013 - 2023**



Source: [DWP PIP statistics April 2013 to April 2023](#) (blue: registration to DWP decision (normal rules), orange: Assessment Provider referral to DWP decision (normal rules))

### Child Disability Payment

CDP was launched as a pilot in July 2021, and nationally in November 2021. It therefore has been available nationally for over a year and a half. The median processing times are not yet showing signs of reducing. Since March 2022 the agency has received around 1,450 Part 2 applications per month on average and processed, on average, 1,400 per month.

DWP state that [Child DLA normally takes around eight weeks to process](#), (around 40 working days) but could take longer if additional information is needed.

In [December 2022](#), Janet Richardson (Social Security Scotland) told the Committee that:

“probably the key thing for us is that processing time—in the disability benefit space, in particular— as much as anything. It is important to note that, among all the case managers we have recruited and trained and are delivering, we still have some who are not fully in that live service yet—and they will not be until the end of January. We will start to see things progress and ramp up from the new year. In addition to that, we have talked about how it is better for us to keep people informed and updated while we are still working through their claims.” ([SJSS Committee Official Report 22 December 2022 col 32](#))

**Members may wish to discuss:**

7. CDP has been available nationally since November 2021. Is it still in a 'settling in' period?
8. PIP decisions are currently being made more quickly than ADP decisions. Over time, do you expect this gap will narrow, or are there elements to the ADP decision making process that mean it's likely to often be a longer process than for PIP?

**Theme 5: Communicating with and supporting clients**

Clients can get assistance from Social Security Scotland with filling in application forms. [Local delivery advisors are available in all local authorities](#). Clients can also get independent advocacy support. The client survey found that 41% of ADP applicants and 29% of CDP applicants got help with their application. The table below sets out the sources of help – showing marked differences between ADP and CDP. Social Security Scotland supported around a third of ADP clients and 42% of CDP clients. Only 3 to 4% of clients used advocacy services.

**Table 3: Who helped you with your application?**

	<b>ADP</b>	<b>CDP</b>
Friend or family	45%	17%
<b>Social Security Scotland</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>42%</b>
Citizens Advice Scotland	10%	13%
Welfare rights (for example, your local council)	7%	10%
Money help (for example, Money Advice Service)	3%	5%
Housing support	1%	#
Health services	7%	11%
<b>Advocacy services</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>4%</b>

Source: [Client survey](#). Base – those getting support with their application.

**After submitting the application**

Last December, Janet Richardson explained the importance of keeping clients updated.

“we have talked about how it is better for us to keep people informed and updated while we are still working through their claims.” (Official Report 22 December col 32)

In their written submission, Social Security Scotland states that:

“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 reduce call-waiting times”

**Members may wish to discuss:**

9. How are long processing times affecting clients? How does Social Security Scotland support them and keep them updated through the process?
10. Are processing times faster when Social Security Scotland have provided support in making the application? For example, are clients more likely to be able to provide sufficient information with the initial application?

## Theme 6: Right first time

A policy priority for disability benefits is to get decisions 'right first time' and so reduce the need for redeterminations and appeals. If a client is unhappy with a decision they can ask for a [redetermination](#). A different decision maker in Social Security Scotland will make a new decision, taking into account any new information. If the client is still unhappy, they can appeal to the [Social Security Chamber of the first-tier Tribunal](#).

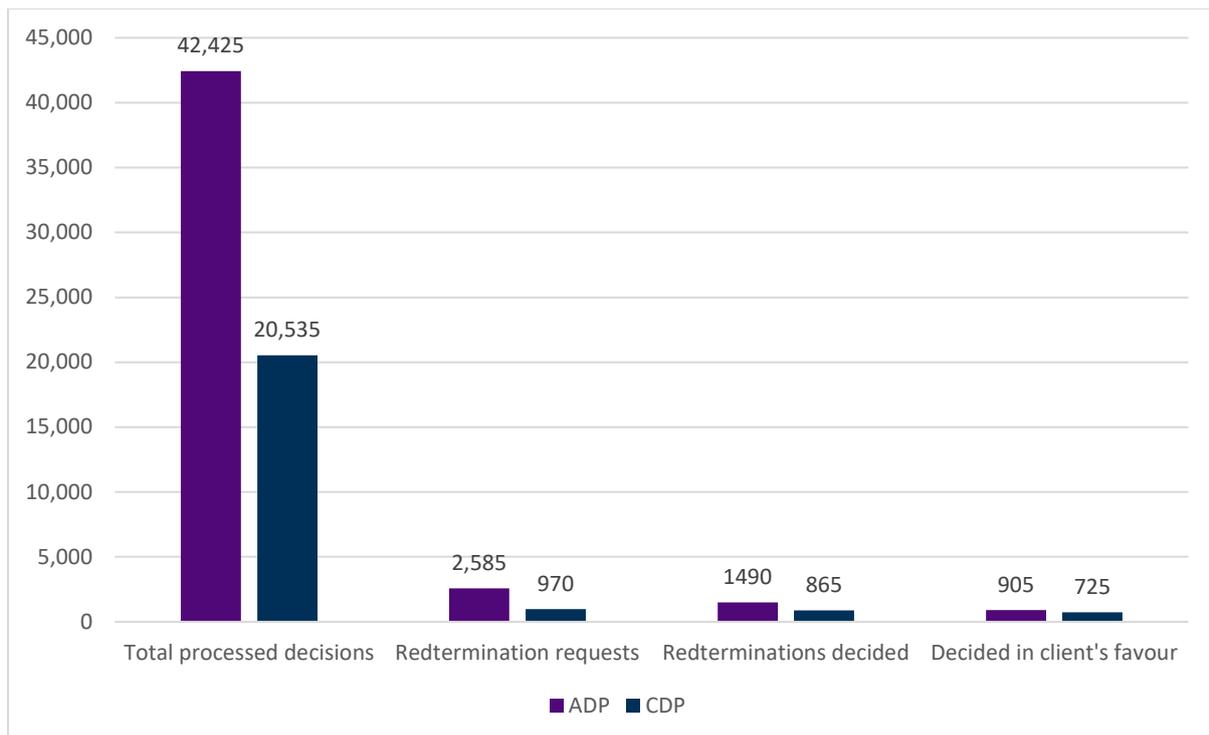
In their submission, Social Security Scotland point out the low proportion of redetermination requests for ADP compared to request for the equivalent process in PIP (known as mandatory reconsideration).

Around 5% CDP decisions and 6% of ADP decisions lead to a request for redetermination. Redeterminations generally find in favour of the client:

- 61% of ADP redeterminations find in the client's favour
- 83% of CDP redeterminations find in the client's favour

The client survey findings suggest that only a minority of clients who disagree with the decision on their benefit go on to request a redetermination. That survey found that 16% of ADP applicants and 13% of CDP applicants disagreed with the decision on their application. (Client survey table 55.1 and 55.2) This is a much higher proportion than the 5% or 6% that request a redetermination. Chart 6 below compares the large number of decisions with the small number of redeterminations.

### Chart 6: Processed applications and redeterminations. ADP and CDP



Sources: [ADP statistics to April 2023](#), [CDP statistics to March 2023](#)

## Appeals

There are very few appeals compared to the number of applications processed. However, only a very small proportion of appeals requested had proceeded to a hearing by end March (CDP) or end April (ADP) which is the date of the latest published statistics.

- In CDP, by end March, there had been 40 appeals received and 15 hearings. Of those, 10 found in favour of the client.
- In ADP, by end April, there had been 105 appeals received, and only 5 hearings. 95 of those appeals had been received since January.

## Members may wish to discuss:

### 11. Is the desire to avoid redeterminations and appeals contributing to longer processing times?

Camilla Kidner  
SPICe  
22 June 2023