



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Collette Stevenson
Convener
Social Justice and Social Security Committee
Sent via e-mail

Social Security Scotland
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Dear Convener,

Thank you for inviting members of the Social Security Scotland Executive Team to attend your evidence session on 1 February 2024. I am sorry I could not attend the session and thank Members for their best wishes.

As requested, I would like to address the points Members raised, in the order they were discussed during the meeting.

Office occupancy

Social Security Scotland's estate comprises of three buildings with accommodation for around 1,500 people – and we currently have around 3,800 staff, with the majority of people based in our Dundee and Glasgow offices as well as Local Delivery teams based across each local authority in Scotland.

Working in partnership with our Trade Unions, we have adapted the Scottish Government's approved flexible, hybrid working model to agree arrangements that we believe provide the best possible service to clients while allowing colleagues some flexibility. As discussed during the session, there is an expectation that all staff will work from an office at least two days per week which makes best use of our available office space.

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We do not publish official statistics on office occupancy but as with any modern hybrid working arrangement our offices are not just designed for traditional desk occupancy and are used in a variety of ways, including collaborative spaces where we can meet with clients and stakeholders in person.

Timeframe of receipt of supporting information from GPs

Our system does not record the time between supporting information being requested and received. Information can be received from a wide range of health and social care providers and as such we don't capture within that which supporting information has come from GPs specifically.

As part of our work to improve processing times, we are working with stakeholders to improve awareness of responding timeously to supporting information requests and the impact this has on clients' waiting times and have highlighted the payment to third party organisations to encourage responses to our requests.

Consultations

One of the fundamental differences between Adult Disability Payment and the Department for Work and Pensions' Personal Independence Payment is that there are no private sector medical assessments which were widely reported to be a negative experience for those applying for disability benefits under the UK system.

In Social Security Scotland, where required, there are consultations with our in-house professionals to gather additional information from the client. This will normally take place over the telephone; however, the client can request to meet face-to-face with a Health and Social Care Practitioner to support their application. 93% of people who had a consultation said they were treated with dignity and respect.

We do not publish official statistics on consultations. A recent Freedom of Information request provided management information highlighting that around 5% of all the Adult Disability Payment applications processed by 25 March 2023 had a consultation with an in-house practitioner.

Call wait times

People call our helpline to access support and apply for our benefits. We have made a number of changes to the way we handle calls, including improved real-time monitoring of call volumes and responsive deployment of staff to deal with queues.

This has improved the experience clients have when calling our helpline and means they are able to get through to a client advisor quicker. A recently published Freedom of Information request provided management information to show in February 2023 the average call wait time was 21 minutes and 46 seconds and in February 2024 the average wait time had reduced to 11 minutes and 38 seconds.

However, we know we need to do more and are exploring further action to get waiting times down even further.

Case transfer

Our ambitious case transfer project remains on track. We are working closely with Scottish Government colleagues and the DWP to ensure that the organisations are doing all they can to accelerate payment, while also ensuring transfer is safe and secure. We aim to complete transferring the disability and carer benefit awards of around 700,000 people by the end of 2025.

All clients are invited to give feedback and the experience of our case transfer clients has been positive. When people with experience of case transfer were asked in our client survey about the communication they received from Social Security Scotland about the process, over 80% agreed “the tone was friendly” and “it was clear and easy to understand.” One person told us: “Everything went smoothly, and I was treated with the utmost respect and kindness.”

We are currently on track to complete all case transfers by the end of 2025, meeting our commitments.

In the next 12 months, we will continue to transfer Personal Independence Payment and some Disability Living Allowance for Adult awards to Adult Disability Payment. From September last year, we increased the number of cases selected for transfer to Adult Disability Payment each month to 15,000, as agreed with the DWP. We have been able to increase volumes for case transfer over time due to improvements in automation in our

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systems. 85% of cases need no intervention from Social Security Scotland staff during the transfer, compared to the 60% average seen during transfer to Child Disability Payment.

Transfer from Carer's Allowance to Carer Support Payment began last month. We will start with fewer cases to make sure our systems and processes, and those of the DWP, are working as intended, with clients continuing to receive payments safely and securely.

In early 2025, we will begin selecting cases for transfer from Attendance Allowance to Pension Age Disability Payment again with lower volumes initially to ensure the safe and secure transfer.

Pension Age Winter Heating Payment

One of the core intentions behind Pension Age Winter Heating Payment is the overwhelming majority of eligible clients should not need to submit an application to receive their benefit award wherever possible.

Preparations are being made to facilitate the timely transfer of client data from the DWP and the Ministry of Defence, as well as an internal scan of our own systems to obtain the required information which will enable our clients to be paid automatically without application.

We recognise, however, there may be occasions when a client who is potentially eligible is not known to any of the noted organisations, and a manual application form has therefore been developed if required – although we anticipate the number of clients falling into this category will be extremely low.

Terminal Illness cases

We have simplified the application form for clients who are applying for Adult Disability Payment with a terminal illness, we fast-track these applications and seek to make payments within seven days. Our most recently published statistics confirm that we're currently processing these cases, on average, within three days.

In relation to transferring cases, if someone in receipt of Personal Independence Payment notifies the DWP about a diagnosis of terminal illness, we will prioritise transferring their benefit to us and issue them an indefinite Adult Disability Payment award at the highest level under special rules. This is done automatically, with no action required from the client.

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Under normal rules for case transfer, it originally took approximately up to eight weeks to transfer from Personal Independence Payment to Adult Disability Payment, depending on the client's payment cycle. In May 2023, this timescale was reduced to four to five weeks. During the case transfer process there is no disruption to clients' payments.

This timescale is necessary to transfer the data, forms and evidence safely and securely, while also ensuring the case is set up properly on our systems.

Contacting Social Security Scotland

We operate a Parliamentary Enquiry Line for MSPs and constituency staff: 01382 931600. The line is open 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays).

Members can also write to us with constituency casework at ce@socialsecurity.gov.scot. We aim to respond to written enquiries within 20 working days.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours sincerely

David Wallace

Chief Executive
Social Security Scotland

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