

The logo for SPICe, featuring the text 'SPICe' in white on a purple-to-blue gradient background.

The Information Centre
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

3rd Meeting, 2024 (Session 6), Thursday, 1 February

Social Security Scotland

Introduction

The Committee will hear from Social Security Scotland on the administration of Scottish social security.

- **Alastair Macphail**, Deputy Director for Organisational Strategy and Performance
- **James Wallace**, Deputy Director for Finance and Corporate Services,
- **Gayle Devlin**, Deputy Director of Health and Social Care

Background

Social Security Scotland is the executive agency established in 2018 to administer Scottish social security. It is responsible for day-to-day operation. Policy and development of new benefits is the responsibility for the Social Security Programme within Scottish Government. The themes below therefore focus on operational issues rather than policy.

Committee members visited Social Security Scotland's Dundee office in January. The visit included a demonstration of systems and decision making processes for Adult Disability Benefit applications.

The themes are taken from a variety of recent publications related to budget, expenditure and performance:

- [Scottish Budget 2024-25](#)
- [Social Security Scotland Annual Report 2022-23](#)

- [Audit Scotland Annual Audit 2022-23](#)
- [Social Security Scotland – measuring our charter 2022-23](#): The Charter was published in 2019 with over 60 individual measures organised across four themes. The measures are assessed against data from the above charter research, client survey, statistics and management information.
- [Social Security Scotland – charter research 2022-23](#): research with clients, staff and partners from February to June 2023. It involved interviews with 40 clients and 6 staff, a staff survey (1,568 responses) and a partner survey (101 responses).
- [Social Security Scotland – client survey 2022-23](#), based on 34,070 responses. 88% of respondents said their overall experience was ‘good’ or ‘very good’
- [Administrative statistics on Social Security Scotland benefits](#) which includes data on applications, payments, processing times, re-determinations and appeals.

In 2023 Social Security Scotland has:

- Launched Winter Heating Payment, paid automatically to eligible clients with [91% of payments made in March 2023](#),
- Almost completed case transfer from Disability Living Allowance to Child Disability Payment ([99% complete by end of September](#)),
- Continued case transfer to Adult Disability Payment – with nearly [75,000 transferred](#) from the Department of Work and Pensions to Social Security Scotland by the end of October 2023,
- Launched Carer Support Payment in three pilot areas in November 2023.

In 2024 Social Security Scotland will:

- Expand the Carer Support Payment pilot until its available nationally in October 2024,
- Start case transfer in February from Carer’s Allowance to Carer Support Payment,
- Continue case transfer onto Adult Disability Payment,
- Launch the pilot of Pension Age Disability Payment in autumn 2024 to replace [Attendance Allowance](#),
- Introduce Pension Age Winter Heating Payment during winter 2024/25 to replace the [Winter Fuel Payment](#).

Previous Committee consideration

The Committee last heard from Social Security Scotland on [29 June 2023](#) specifically on disability benefit processing times and had a more general discussion on [22 December 2022](#). Key themes discussed included:

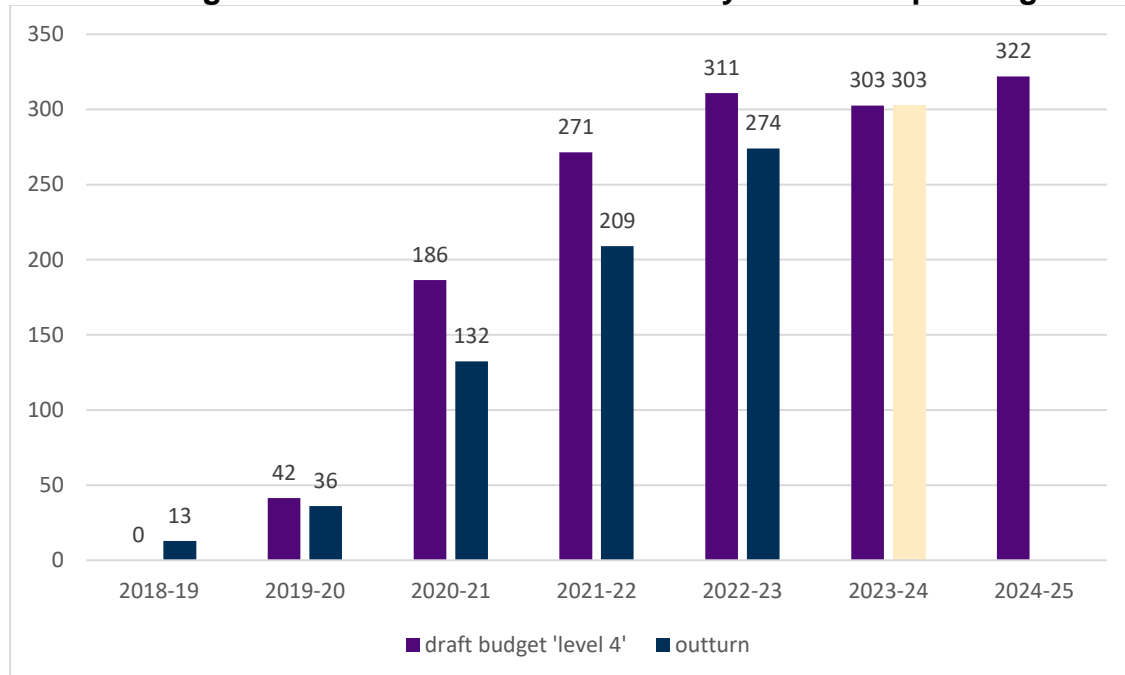
- Processing times
- Call-waiting times
- Implications of ‘agile’ approach delivering ‘minimal viable products’
- Extension to Scottish Child Payment in November 2022 and launch of Winter Heating Payment in February 2023
- Voiceability advocacy support
- Error and fraud.

The following suggests seven themes for discussion.

THEME 1: Operational expenditure

Social Security Scotland has grown rapidly over the past few years. Its operating budget of £322 million for 2024-25 is 130% higher than the £132 million it spent in 2020-21. Chart 1 below shows the trend since it was established in September 2018. The chart shows rapid growth but also that generally outturn has been less than the initial budget allocation. That is not expected to be the case for 2023-24.

Chart 1: Budget and outturn £m. Social Security Scotland operating costs



Sources and notes: Scottish Government draft budget for each year, Social Security Scotland annual reports. 2023-24 shows initial budget and budget at Autumn Budget Revision. Initial budget in 2018-19 is £0 because the agency was established part way through that year. Figures rounded to nearest £m.

Benefit spend

Increasing operating costs need to be seen in the context of increased activity. The value of benefits delivered by Social Security Scotland is expected to more than double between 2023-24 and 2024-25 and is forecast to increase to c£7.8 billion in 2028-29. The figures below show the increasing amount spent on benefits

administered directly by Social Security Scotland. It does not include devolved spend administered by local authorities or by DWP under agency agreements.

2020-21	£97.3m (outturn)
2021-22	£163.6m (outturn)
2022-23	£641m (outturn)
2023-24	£1,928m (forecast)
2024-25	£4,207m (forecast)

Breakdown of operating costs

The main cost is staff. The staff team tripled in size over the two years to June 2022. Since December 2022 it has settled at around 3,800 full time equivalent, with [latest figures](#) showing 3,852 FTE in September 2023.

Table 1 below sets out further detail on outturn for operating costs from 2021-22 to 2022-23, and budget for 2023-24. This level of detail is not yet available for 2024-25.

Table 1: Outturn 2021-22 , 2022-23 and budget 2023-24

£m	2021-22 (outturn)	2022-23 (outturn)	2023-24 (budget)
staff	91.7	172.6	199.5
accommodation	4.6	3.8	4.1
other operating costs	12.0	12.0	35.3
shared services	4.0	7.5	8.5
IT	5.0	6.6	11.2
agency agreements	76.5	59.1	33.1

Sources; 2022-23 shows budget in [Annex A to the June 2023 Finance Report](#), previous years from [table 11, annual report 2022-23](#)..

A clear trend is the reducing costs of DWP agency agreements as clients are transferred to Social Security Scotland. These will continue to reduce as case transfer progresses.

Other notable changes include the increase in IT and ‘other operating costs’ in 2023-24. The bulk of these ‘other costs’ is £24.4m, described as: “funds held for priority investment” in the [finance report to Social Security Scotland’s Executive Advisory Body in September 2023](#). The following explanation was provided to SPICe by Social Security Scotland:

“During the 2023-24 budget setting process, Social Security Scotland expected to fund Continuous Improvement to our systems and processes. As Social Security delivers using an Agile methodology, while we knew we would require to continue to invest in our systems, we were not able to define exactly the improvements to be delivered during the 23-24 budget process. We released funding throughout the year, subject to appropriate governance, to progress work identified through the ‘Single Prioritised Backlog’, which is the shared way Social Security Scotland and the Social Security Programme take forward requirements for systems and processes, to deliver all the requirements of our part of Social Security in Scotland. This budget also

funded the adjustments required as a result of the adoption of IFRS 16. The transfer of the majority of this budget between Social Security Scotland and Social Security Directorate is visible through Spring Budget Revision documentation.”

Improvement to systems is discussed under theme 7.

In-year changes

As noted above, until this year Social Security Scotland has spent less on operating costs than initially budgeted for.

In 2021-22 expenditure was below budget partly due to the on-going impact of Covid-19 and revised recruitment plans. For further detail see [Audit Scotland's annual audit 2021-22](#).

In 2022-23, expenditure was also below the initial budget. At £274.1m, it was nearly £37m below the initial budget of £310.9m (see [exhibit 5, p.17 Audit Scotland](#)). The reasons given were:

“This relates to lower than anticipated staff costs and a reduction in the cost of formal agreements with DWP. The underspend identified is aligned with the level of savings committed as part of the Scottish Government savings exercise.” ([Audit Scotland, annual audit 2021-22 para 70](#)).

Social Security Scotland's annual report 2022-23 describes how they:

“were able to release money back to the Scottish Government to support the emergency budget review.” ([Annual Report 2022-23 p.34](#))

Less movement is expected in 2023-24. In their annual audit of 2022-23, published in December 2023, Audit Scotland comment that:

“Social Security Scotland currently expects operating costs to be delivered on budget in 2023-24.” ([Audit Scotland, annual audit 2022-23](#))

Transition from Programme to Agency

Currently, the Programme in the Scottish Government develops new benefits which Social Security Scotland then delivers. Over the next few years, as the Programme starts to complete its work in creating new benefits, functions will start to transfer across to Social Security Scotland. Audit Scotland describe how:

“Social Security Scotland depends on the programme for the processes and digital systems it needs to deliver its part of the Scottish social security system in the way intended by the Scottish Government. Over time these systems will transition to Social Security Scotland.” [Audit Scotland annual audit 2022-23](#)

Audit Scotland describe uncertainty in future funding:

“From 2023/24 onwards, capabilities and services will be transitioning from the programme to Social Security Scotland and other parts of the Scottish Government.

There is a risk that the programme does not fund all costs for services expected to transfer, including staff. This uncertainty will impact Social Security Scotland’s financial plans as clear funding solutions will need to be identified. The overall cost of transition will need to be managed between the programme and Social Security Scotland. ([Audit Scotland annual audit 2022-23, para 62, 64](#))

They recommended that:

“Funding for the capabilities and services that will transition from the Social Security Programme to Social Security Scotland need to be agreed and managed effectively.” (Recommendation 5)

Members may wish to discuss:

- 1. In recent years Social Security Scotland has spent less than was initially allocated in the Scottish Government budget. In 2023-24 spending is expected to be closer to that initial budget. What has changed?**
- 2. Audit Scotland highlighted uncertainty around the transition from the Programme to Social Security Scotland. What does that transition mean for the agency in terms of taking on additional responsibilities and costs? What is the expected timescale for that transition?**

THEME 2: Processing Times

This Committee [took evidence in June 2023](#) on processing times for disability benefits. At that meeting David Wallace, Chief Executive, said:

“I want to be absolutely clear that I know that some of the benefit processing times are far longer than is acceptable.” [Committee Official Report 21 June 2023 \(Col 21\)](#)

He explained that:

- ADP is a relatively new benefit, and there is a large number of new staff. It can take a year for staff to “become fully effective” (col 23). “We are still, overall, in a period in which we are settling in.” (col 29)
- Getting the supporting information has been “a bit of a blocker”, and the agency is encouraging clients to provide information and also working with others such as health practitioners to get supporting information on the client’s behalf. (col 26)

Sue Scotland (Scottish Government) explained that they have made changes to the application form and are “looking to interact more regularly with clients as their application progresses.” (col 24)

Audit Scotland summed up action taken:

“Action being taken to improve processing times includes moving resources to support recovery, improvements to the telephony systems, SPM system enhancements, and drawing on the in-house health and social care practitioners to make early decisions based on their expertise. This will remain a key priority in 2023/24 and Social Security Scotland will need to demonstrate that the action taken is effective.” [Audit Scotland annual audit 2022-23, para 105.](#)

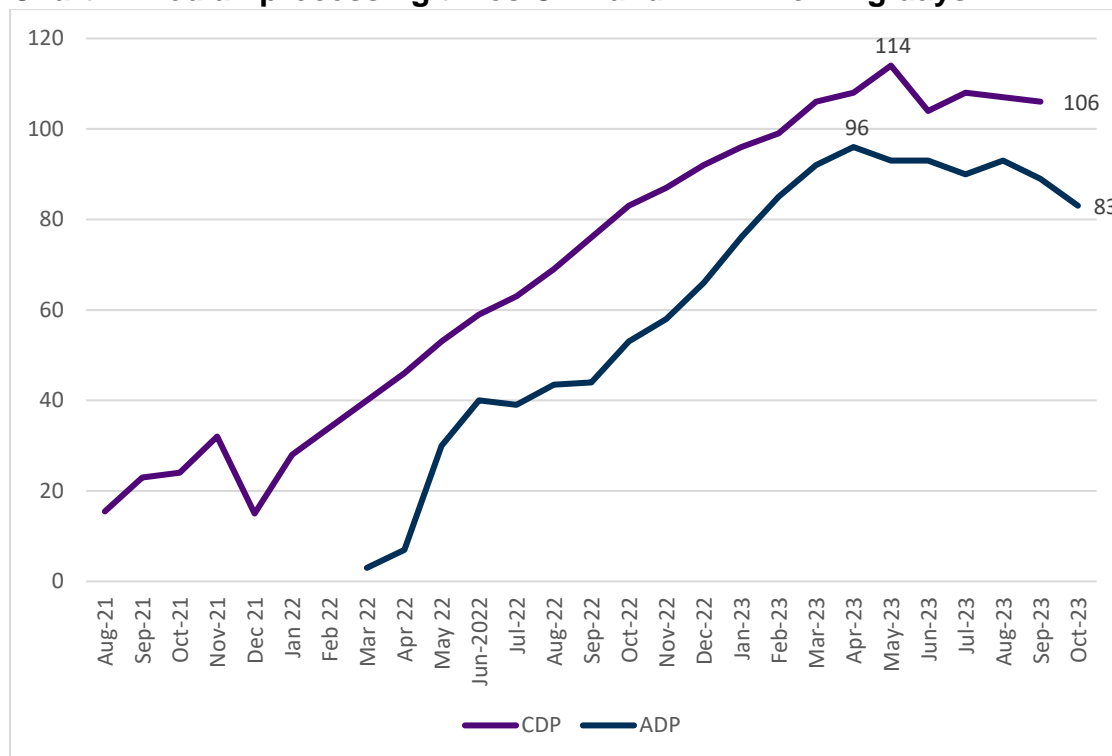
In June, David Wallace told the Committee that for Child Disability Payment (CDP):

“We are hoping, by the end of the summer, to bring that average time under the 80 mark” (col 30)

The two charts below show processing times for Adult Disability Payment (ADP) and CDP. These show that after a steep rise, average processing times for both benefits are starting to fall. Median processing times were:

- 106 days for CDP in September 2023
- 83 days for ADP in October 2023

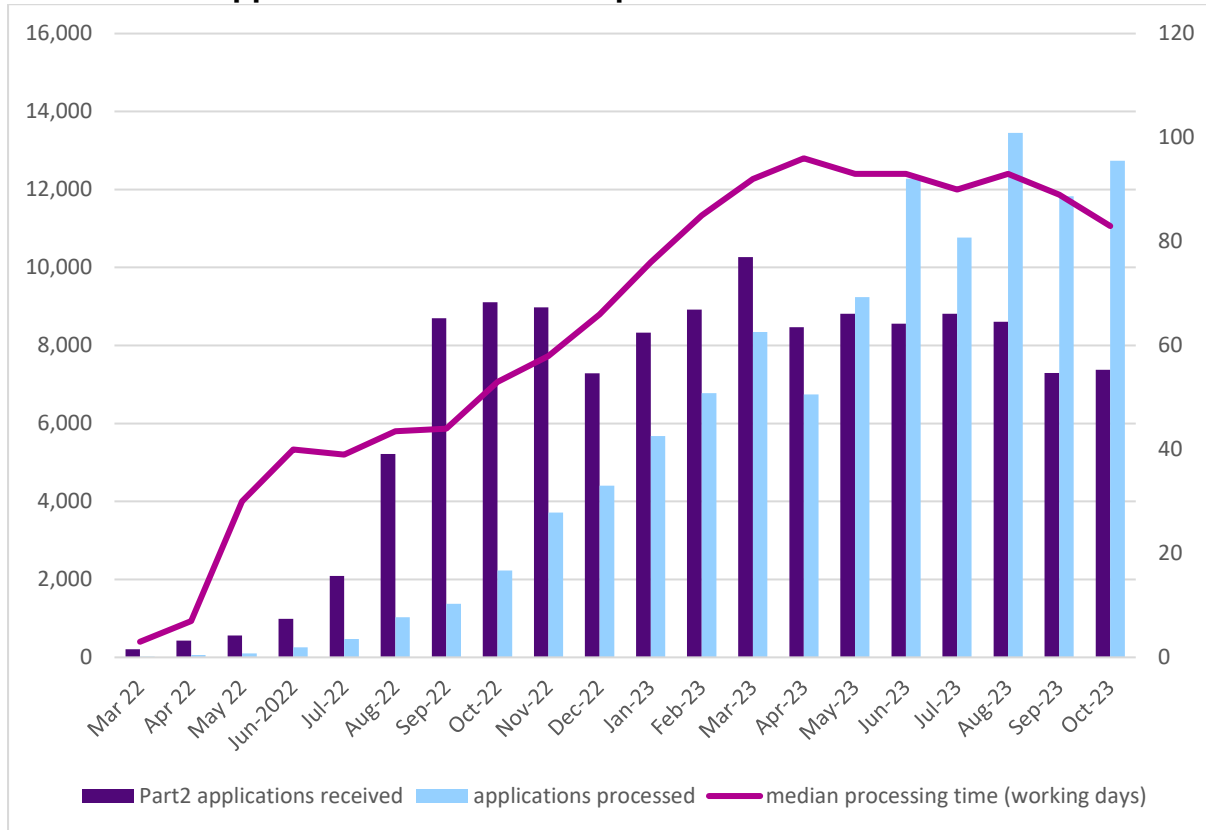
Chart 2: Median processing times CDP and ADP. Working days



Source: [Scottish Government social security statistics.](#)

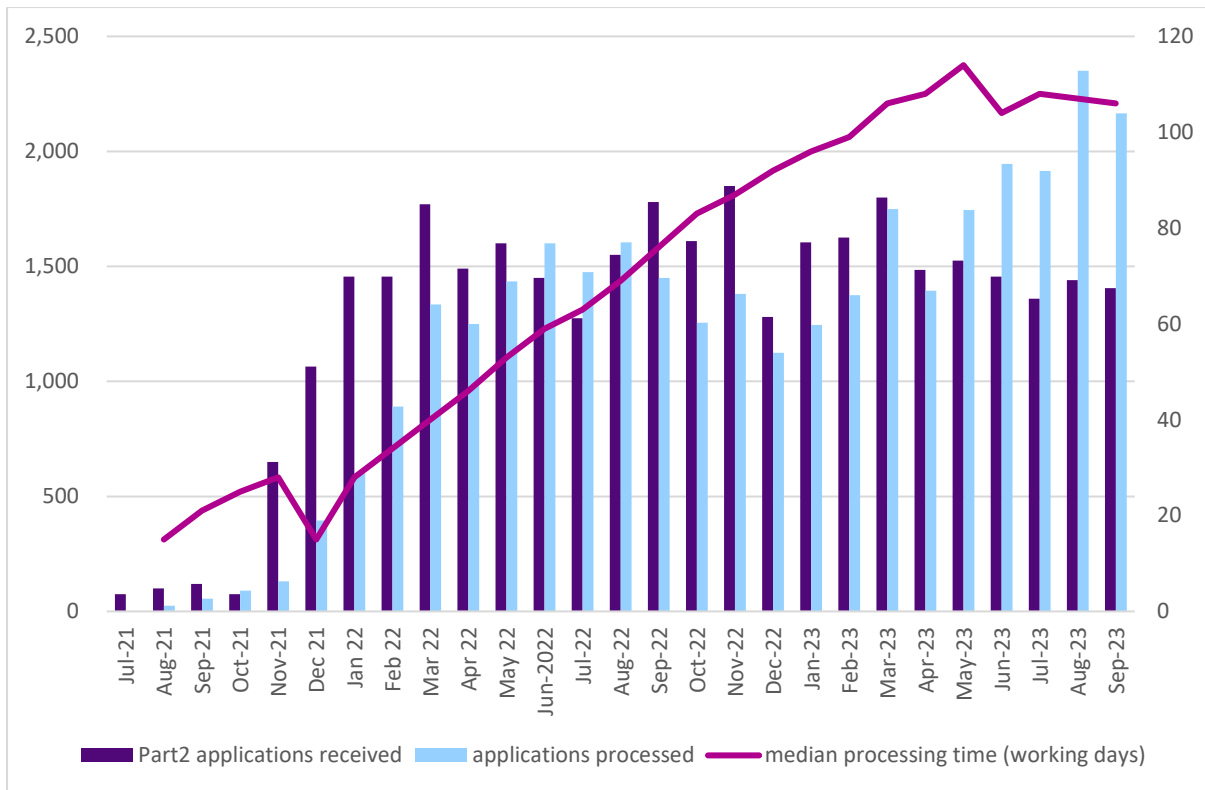
Chart 3 below shows how, since May 2023 more ADP applications have been processed each month than have been received, resulting in the average processing time falling, reaching 83 days by the end of October from a peak of 96 days in April. There is a similar pattern for CDP (chart 4).

Chart 3: ADP applications received and processed



Source: Scottish Government ADP statistics to end October 2023. Applications on right axis, median processing time in working days on left axis.

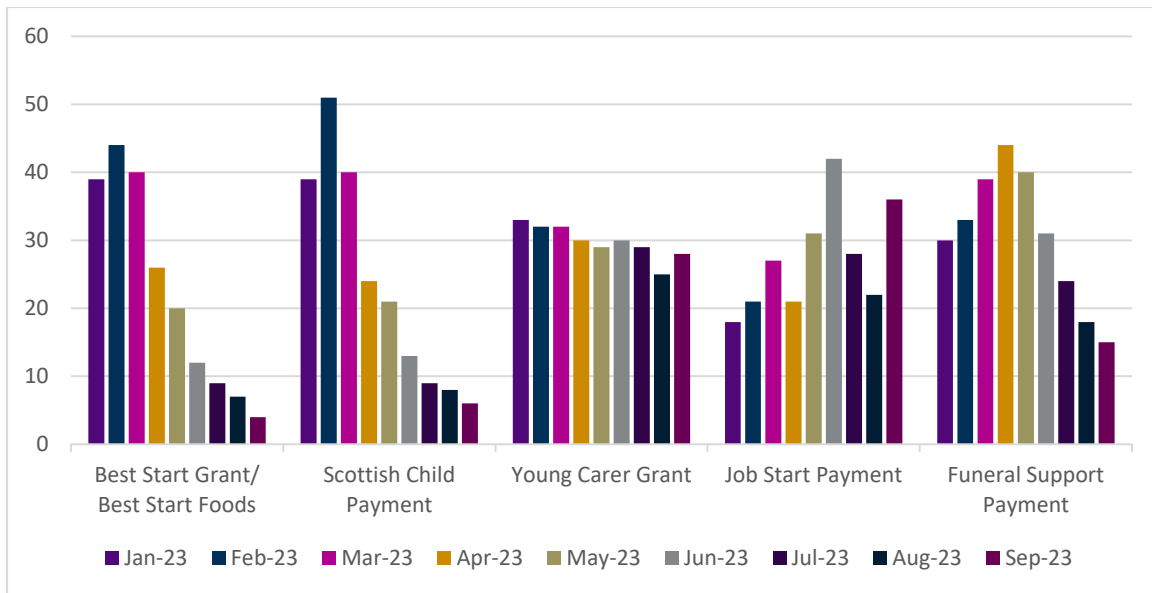
Chart 4: CDP applications received and processed



Source: Scottish Government CDP statistics to end September 2023.

Chart 5 below shows the trend in processing times this year for other benefits. This shows the increasing speed in processing the ‘five family payments’ (Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, Scottish Child Payment). This coincides with the use of ‘straight through’ automated processing for many applications. By September, processing times were down to around 4 to 6 days. Processing times for Funeral Support Payment have also fallen – reaching 15 working days by September. There has been less clear improvement in Young Carer Grant and Job Start Payment, latest figures being 28 days and 36 days respectively. Carer Support Payment launched as a pilot in November and the first statistics are [due in February](#).

Chart 5: Median processing times in 2023. Working days



Source: [Scottish Government social security statistics](#).

Three benefit payments are made automatically and do not require an application. These are:

- Child Winter Heating Payment
- Carer's Allowance Supplement
- Winter Heating Payment.

For Winter Heating Payment, the qualification date was the week beginning 7 November. 91% of payments were made the following March. In contrast, 84% of Child Winter Heating Assistance payments were made in the month following the qualifying week, with the remainder paid by the following March.

When members visited Social Security Scotland, they heard how the agency uses the NHS [SCI Gateway](#) to request supporting information from GPs for disability benefits. SCI Gateway is the national product in NHS Scotland for the electronic exchange of clinical information – such as referral letters and discharge documents – between Primary and Secondary Care. Social Security Scotland has [published guidance](#) on how health staff should use SCI Gateway to send and receive information from the agency.

Members may wish to discuss:

- 3. What have been the most effective actions contributing to the recent reduction in processing times? What further improvement is achievable?**
- 4. To what extent does Social Security Scotland rely on SCI Gateway to get supporting information from GPs and has this reliance caused any difficulties?**

5. **Why does it take longer to process Child Disability Payment than it does to process Adult Disability Payment?**
6. **Are you able to share any initial reflections on processing Carer Support Payment applications?**

THEME 3: Communications with clients

Overall, as in the previous year, the [Client Survey](#) for 2022-23 reported very positive findings:

- 93% 'agreed or agreed strongly' that they were treated with kindness
- 86% felt trusted by staff
- 90% felt staff listened to them
- 89% said staff made them feel comfortable.

In relation to the application process the survey found that:

- 67% agreed it is easy to contact Social Security Scotland
- 76% agreed they received the right level of communication
- 90% said their experience of the application process overall was 'very good' or 'good'. Just 2% said it was 'poor' or 'very poor'.

Although most responses were very positive, some people had issues with getting information and updates:

"Staff were often described as helpful, empathetic and respectful. However, some respondents received conflicting information from different members of staff, while others did not receive promised updates or follow-up calls. A significant proportion voiced frustration at not receiving, or being able to get updates or information on, applications and decisions from staff." (Client Survey 2022-23 pp.7-8)

For example one client said:

"My only downside was, and I'm sure that's been ironed out now, was just the length of time. Because it was great the money was backdated but I was homeless, I could've done with it in my pocket. But I think that's just the same when you have any new system." ([Charter Research 2022-23 p.45](#))

There were some issues persisting from the previous year – particularly around call waiting times, updates with applications and processing times. For example, in 2021-22:

"Around three-in-ten respondents who had made an application did not agree that they had received enough updates on the progress of their application(s),

and around one-in-four did not agree that their application was handled within a reasonable time frame. ([Client Survey 2021-22 p.5](#))

Similarly in 2022-23:

“Around one-in-five respondents who had made an application did not agree that they had received enough updates on the progress of their application(s). A similar proportion did not agree that their application was handled within a reasonable time frame.” ([Client Survey 2022-23 p.5](#))

Call waiting times

In 2022-23 the average call waiting time was 22 minutes and 17 seconds. This varied by phone line from 1 minute 35 seconds for ADP case transfer to 46 minutes 40 seconds for Accessible vehicles and equipment for ADP. ([Insights Research Findings 2022-23 table 5.2](#))

In June 2023 David Wallace told this Committee that:

“One thing that we have done internally is to be far more actively engaged in moving resource directly on to the phone lines. Rather than try to have a fixed resource based on what we think will be the volume of calls coming in, we now have performance managers inside the organisation who actively manage every individual call queue and move resource as required. We are already seeing the numbers come down quite significantly” ([Committee Official Report, 29 June, Col 32](#))

The [Client Survey insight research](#) gives a great deal of detail on call waiting times in 2022-23. There is considerable variation across benefits and across the year. There were particularly lengthy waiting times for some benefits in summer 2022 and early 2023. For example, average waiting times were over 30 minutes for:

- Best Start Grant/Foods in June to August 2022 and January to March 2023
- Carer’s Allowance Supplement in June and July 2022 and January to March 2023
- Child Disability Payment from November 2022 to February 2023
- Scottish Child Payment from June to August 2022 and January to March 2023.

The longest average wait time was 57 minutes for Child Disability Payment in January 2023. However this had dropped to 1 minute by March.

Long waiting times don’t affect every benefit. For example, waiting times for Job Start Payment and Funeral Support Payment were never more than 7 ½ minutes.

The Charter research reports that: “many said call wait times were too long.” One woman commented that:

“Call waiting times are ridiculous. each time I'm waiting well over an hour to speak with someone”. Woman, aged 25-34, experience of Joint application for Best Start Grant, Best Start Foods, and Scottish Child Payment.

Updates on applications

Another issue raised by clients was lack of updates. 66% of clients said they received enough updates on the progress of their application. Views varied by benefit being more positive for Scottish Child Payment (77% said they had enough updates) and least positive for Adult Disability Payment (45% said they had enough updates). ([Client survey figure 9.1](#)) One client said that:

“Communication was very poor. The only time I received any updates was when I made the contact to ask. The only communication I received was an initial email to say my application was received, then a letter about my consultation and then finally my award letter. There was no updates on progress of my application which I feel isn't good practice. An applicant shouldn't have to keep phoning or going on webchat to ask for updates”
Woman, experience of Adult Disability Payment ([Client Survey, p.91](#))

Views of partner organisations

Over half (55%) of partner respondents rated Social Security Scotland's overall service as good or very good. Many experienced long call waiting times and difficulty communicating on clients' behalf. Over half (53%) found it difficult or very difficult to contact Social Security Scotland on clients' behalf (Charter research p.6)

“There were suggestions for Social Security Scotland to set up a database of approved providers, similar to the Apollo List used by the Department for Work and Pensions, to allow partners to speak on clients' behalf after appropriate checks are made.” ([Charter research 2022-23 p.31](#))

Similar issues were raised the previous year:

“Partner participants mentioned problems like a lack of call backs and not being able to speak to an advisor as a third party without the client's presence.” ([Charter Research 2021-22](#))

Informing clients of advice and advocacy

The 2022-23 Charter Research found that 60% of client facing staff agreed that they knew how to refer clients to advice and advocacy services ([Table 3.3 Charter Research 2023-23](#)). This is similar to the 62% who said the same in 2021-2 ([Table 10 Charter Research 2021-22](#)).

The Committee has previously looked at the provision of advocacy services to Social Security Scotland's clients. On [24 November 2022](#), Jonathan Senker, (Chief Executive, Voiceability) told the Committee that there was “some way to go” to get referrals embedded in Social Security Scotland systems:

“It is relatively early days, so unfortunately, at this stage, we would not expect everyone in the redetermination process to have been informed about their

right to advocacy. We would like to get there, and we know that Social Security Scotland is keen to reach that point with us.” ([SJSS Committee Official Report 24 November 2022, col 10](#))

By June 2023 there had been 1,400 referrals to the service ([Cabinet Secretary letter, 8 June 2023](#)).

Complaints

In the first half of 2023-24 a total of 1,565 complaints were received. Over half (870) were about ADP. A further 360 were about CDP. The table below compares the number of complaints with the number of people in receipt of each of the three benefits that had the most complaints. The most common reasons for complaints were quality of service and timescales.

Table 2: Complaints in 2023-24

	Adult Disability Payment	Child Disability Payment	Scottish Child Payment
Complaints made	870	360	135
Reasons			
<i>Quality of service</i>	385	155	65
<i>Timescales</i>	315	145	40
<i>Other</i>	170	60	30
Complaints upheld or partially upheld (stage 1)	520	165	55
Complaints upheld or partially upheld (stage 2) ¹	220	100	20
Clients	129,745	72,005	192,485

Source: Scottish Government social security statistics.

Members may wish to discuss:

7. **Some issues seem to be persisting from year to year – including call waiting times, updates on progress with applications and the ability of partners to contact the agency on clients’ behalf. Does Social Security Scotland recognise these are persistent issues and if so, what is being done to address them?**
8. **What is Social Security Scotland doing to ensure that all client-facing staff know how to refer disabled clients to the Voiceability advocacy service?**

¹ There is a two stage complaints process. Stage 1 allows five days to resolve an issue. Stage 2 is a full investigation, with response after 20 working days.

THEME 4: Case Transfer

In [March 2022 the then Minister for Social Security and Local Government told this Committee](#) that around 700,000 people will have their disability and carer benefits transferred from DWP to Social Security Scotland by the end of 2025.

By September 2023, case transfer from child DLA to CDP was 99% complete.

The current focus is case transfer onto ADP. There are around 300,000 PIP clients and 50,000 working age DLA clients to be transferred to ADP by the end of 2025. By [end October 2023](#), 74,765 people had transferred from DLA and PIP to ADP.

Case transfer from Carer's Allowance to Carer Support Payment is due to start in February 2024 and be completed by the end of March 2025.

The Scottish Fiscal Commission assume that the 151,000 people in receipt of Attendance Allowance will transfer to Pension Age Disability Payment by the end of 2025.

The timetable for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit has yet to be announced.

The [internal audit report 2022-23](#) raised some issues around case transfer which were picked up in Audit Scotland's audit report. At that point, most of the case transfers were from DLA to CDP. Audit Scotland commented that:

"The report highlights challenges in the current risk, governance and control procedures. The systems and processes behind the delivery contain technical interface issues, defects and manual workarounds which have impacted the delivery of case transfers.

While these are transient issues which will end when the case transfer process concludes, they could exacerbate the risk of fraud and/or error in the caseload in future. Overall, limited assurance was provided with five high and two medium recommendations. Mitigations are in place to address the weaknesses and management actions were agreed in response to the recommendations." ([Audit Scotland, annual audit 2022-23](#), para 74 – 75).

Members may wish to discuss:

9. **Internal audit identified weaknesses in the case transfer process in 2022-23. How have these been addressed, and what assurances can be given that systems will cope with the increasing number of transfers over the next couple of years?**

THEME 5: Estimating levels of fraud and error

Social Security Scotland is working to understand levels of fraud and error in the benefits it administers directly. Currently, the estimated amounts are very low (£0.6m) but are likely to increase as the scale of benefit spending increases.

[Social Security Scotland has estimated](#) Scottish Child Payment official error at 1.1% overpayments (£1,120,000) and 0.1% underpayment (£140,000).

Audit Scotland state that:

“Significant work is required to measure the fraud and error that exists within the full range of benefits.” ([Annual Audit 2022-23, p.3](#))

They recommended that:

“Social Security Scotland must continue to develop processes to measure the level of fraud and error within the range of benefits being delivered. This includes working with the Scottish Government to remove the barriers that exist in assessing the level of client induced error and fraud.”
(Recommendation 4)

Although official error can be estimated, Social Security Scotland need additional legislative powers in order to use their chosen methodology to estimate client induced error.

Proposed Legislation

This spring, the Committee will be considering the [Social Security \(Amendment\) \(Scotland\) Bill](#). Part 6 of the Bill would require clients to comply with information requests from Social Security Scotland in order to audit levels of fraud and error. Persistent refusal could lead to benefits being suspended or ended. Audit Scotland state that:

“Social Security Scotland’s intention is that sample testing becomes a business-as-usual process. This means that testing to inform annual fraud and error rates would be carried out on an ongoing basis, rather than in a specific period.”

Members may wish to discuss:

- 10. This Committee will soon be considering legislation that would allow Social Security Scotland to require clients to provide information for audit purposes. How does the agency intend to use these new powers to help estimate client induced fraud and error?**

THEME 6: New benefits in 2024-25

There are two new benefits starting over the next year and one benefit moving from pilot stage to national roll-out:

- **Carer Support Payment** started as a pilot in November. It is being phased in and will be available across Scotland by October 2024. Once transfer is complete, caseload is forecast to be around 100,000. ([SFC forecasts fig S5.1](#))

- **Pension Age Disability Payment** will start to replace Attendance Allowance from autumn 2024. Around 150,000 people will be transferred from DWP to Social Security Scotland during 2025. (SFC forecasts fig A12)
- **Pension Age Winter Heating Payment** is due to start in winter 2024/25. This is an automatic annual payment with a caseload of over 1 million. (SFC forecasts fig S5.1)

Members may wish to discuss:

11. **How is Social Security Scotland preparing for the new benefits starting over the next year? In particular, the caseload for Pension Age Winter Heating Payment will be around 1 million people - far in excess of any other benefit. How will Social Security Scotland manage this increase in scale?**

THEME 7: Improving systems

Social Security Scotland's benefits have been developed using an 'agile delivery' approach. This means delivering a 'minimum viable product' which is then improved over time. The required improvements are known as 'technical debt.' In [2022 Audit Scotland](#) concluded that this Agile approach was being well managed but "will require long-term resources and investment."

Social Security Scotland has a "Social Programme Management (SPM) case management system. In their annual audit, Audit Scotland discussed the establishment of a 'Single Prioritised Backlog' and closer working between Programme and Social Security Scotland. The audit report commented that:

"As recognised in the Internal Audit follow up report, it is essential that the Single Prioritised Backlog provides a means to prioritise and track progress on technical debt. It is essential that management recognise the need to prioritise resource to ensure defects are also managed and addressed in a timely manner." ([Audit Scotland, annual audit 2022-32, para 47](#))

As mentioned above, Social Security Scotland has released funding throughout 2023-24 to progress work identified through the 'Single Prioritised Backlog.'

Members may wish to discuss:

12. **Does Social Security Scotland now have a clearer idea of the scale and nature of 'technical debt'?**
13. **Can Social Security Scotland give examples of the type of systems improvements that are being prioritised, particularly to the SPM case management system?**

Camilla Kidner
SPICe
23 January 2023