



## Executive Advisory Body

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 9 March 2021
Subject	Social Security Scotland Client Survey: 2018-2020
Agenda No.	Below the Line
Paper No.	2.7
Prepared By	Social Security Scotland: Insights and Analysis / SG: Social Security Operations and Delivery Analysis
Purpose	Note

### 1. Background

- 1.1. Following postponement due to Covid-19, the first Social Security Scotland Client Survey (previously known as the All Client Survey) ran from the 17 August to 25 September 2020.
- 1.2. The survey asked about various aspects of respondents' experience with Social Security Scotland and their views on the organisation. Its results are a key source for measuring how well Social Security Scotland is performing and where it can improve. In particular it provides data for many Charter Measurement Framework measures.
- 1.3. The survey invitation was sent to around 165,000 people who had reached a decision stage from the beginning of Social Security Scotland up to 31 July 2020 on an application for Best Start Grant and/or Foods, Young Carer Grant, and Funeral Support Payment. The invite was also issued to everyone who had received Carer's Allowance Supplement during this time.
- 1.4. The [report](#) outlining the survey's findings was published on 22 February 2021. The findings will constitute a main data source for measuring Our Charter commitments, and will appear in future Charter Measurement Framework and Annual Performance report publications.

### 2. Key points

- 2.1. The substantive paper attached provides an overview of the report, headline results and next steps.
- 2.2. We would be happy to discuss findings at a future Executive Advisory Body meeting or provide any additional information for members who have queries.

### 3. Conclusions

- 3.1. Members are asked to note that the Social Security Scotland Client Survey report was published on 22 February 2020.



## 4. GOVERNANCE CHECKLIST

Please ensure that you detail which Corporate Plan Strategic Objective the paper contributes to. These strategic considerations should be used to assist you with the content of your paper.

Strategic Objective	Contribution
<b>Dignity, fairness and respect</b>  Delivering a service with dignity, fairness and respect at its core.	The Client Survey gathered insights into client experiences of engaging with Social Security Scotland, including their experience of applying for and receiving benefits. It specifically asked questions related to our goals of delivering a service with dignity, fairness and respect at its core. The survey contained a range of closed questions asking clients to rate their experience and provide wider opinions, whilst a series of open-text comment boxes enabled respondents to make any other points they felt were relevant.
<b>Equality and tackling poverty</b>  Promoting equality and tackling poverty.	
<b>Efficiency and alignment</b>  Ensuring efficiency and aligning our activities with wider public sector for the benefit of the people we serve.	The insights gathered helps us measure how Social Security Scotland is tracking against a vast number of its Charter commitments, including those relevant to all four strategic objectives. It is a key source for the Charter Measurement Framework. The survey findings highlight areas of success and where there may be scope for improvement.
<b>Economy, society and environment</b>  Contributing to our economy, society and protection of our environment.	

State here how the paper considers these areas and any consultation undertaken in the agency. Only complete the section(s) relevant to your paper.

Strategic consideration	Impact
Environment	Not Applicable
Governance	Colleagues across both programme and Agency were involved in developing survey content, and results will be disseminated widely.



Strategic consideration	Impact
Data	The survey was issued according to client contact data, and the survey itself gathers data on clients and their experiences. We completed a Data Protection Impact Assessment and consulted extensively with data colleagues. We have followed the DPIA in storing and analysing the survey results. The report presents aggregate results to closed questions and results for very small groups are not provided. No individual respondents are identifiable in results or open-text comments included in the report.
Finance	Not Applicable
Staff	Not Applicable
Equalities	The Client Survey will be a key source of equalities data in terms of being able to analyse client experiences by protected groups
Estates	Not Applicable
Communications and Presentation	We are working with communications colleagues to publish the report on the Social Security Scotland website and disseminate the findings both internally and externally.

Impact Assessment
Not Applicable



## Social Security Scotland Client Survey: 2018-2020

### Background

1. The '[Social Security Scotland Client Survey: 2018-2020](#)' report was published on 22 February 2020. This report presents results from the first Client Survey ('All-Client Survey') we have run. The survey asked about various aspects of respondents' experience with Social Security Scotland and their views on the organisation. Its results are a key source for measuring how well Social Security Scotland is performing and where it can improve. In particular it provides data for many Charter Measurement Framework measures.
2. The Survey ran from 17 August to 25 September 2020. It was open to everyone who had received a decision on an application for at least one of Best Start Grant and/or Best Start Foods, Funeral Support Payment or Young Carer Grant, from the beginning of Social Security Scotland in September 2018 to 31 July 2020. The survey invite was also sent to anyone who had received Carer's Allowance Supplement during this time. Respondents could complete the survey online or over the phone. In future, a postal option will be available but was not possible this time due to Covid-19.

### Survey report

3. The results presented in the report and accompanying visual summary provide rich insight into some of the experiences of Social Security Scotland clients.
4. Amongst other matters, the report covers respondents':
  - overall rating of and views on their experience with Social Security Scotland, including whether they were treated with dignity, fairness and respect
  - views on the application process, experience of receiving benefit payments and interactions with staff
  - experiences of barriers and discrimination when dealing with Social Security Scotland
5. Results throughout the report are broken down by benefit experience. Key findings are also broken down by respondents' demographic characteristics, with headline results included in the report and further breakdowns on a wider set of measures and characteristics provided in supplementary tables to be published at the same time.
6. Participation in the survey was voluntary. Invites were issued to around 165,000 people (all clients defined as eligible using the criteria outlined in Paragraph 2). Around 3,250 responses were received, giving a response rate of about 2%. We



cannot assume that results represent the views of Social Security Scotland's clients as a whole. Instead, findings should be seen as representing the views of clients who responded only. Nonetheless, the findings are a valuable contribution to the evidence base which can help us understand performance and support continuous improvement.

## Findings

7. 3,253 responses were received – with the breakdown across benefit experience as follows: 76% Carer's Allowance Supplement, 21% Best Start Grant and/or Foods, 4% Funeral Support Payment, 2% Young Carer Grant (based on benefits respondents' had 'applied for').
8. Looking across the survey, respondents were largely positive about their experience with Social Security Scotland. For example, 90% rated their overall experience with Social Security Scotland as 'very good' or 'good'. Most were also positive about their interactions with staff and experience of applying for benefits. There were typically only small variations seen across benefit groups and other demographics.
9. However, there were specific areas where some respondents were negative. These included low awareness of how clients can challenge application decisions they disagree with, or report barriers or discrimination encountered when dealing with Social Security Scotland. Respondents also had low awareness of who Social Security Scotland are, whilst some felt that communication of benefit information and application updates could be improved.
10. The report's Executive Summary is attached at Annex A. It provides a more extensive overview of the key findings. Please note, findings should not be shared further until the report is published.

## Client Panels

11. Client Panels members are recruited exclusively through the Client Survey. Just over 1,000 people volunteered to take part in further research through this first round of the survey. The Survey report gives headline figures of the characteristics of who has joined to date. Our research programme with Client Panel members is now underway, with a project run jointly with Experience Panels on the impact of COVID-19 on panel member's communication needs and preferences. More information about Client Panels can be provided on request.



## Next steps

12. The report was published alongside a visual summary (providing headline results in a concise and accessible format), whilst supplementary tables provide additional breakdowns and results.
13. The results will be used alongside other evidence to populate the next publication of the Charter Measurement Framework (which is published alongside the Social Security Scotland Annual Report).
14. Researchers will also lead a programme of dissemination activity over the coming months to support colleagues across Social Security Scotland use the findings to inform continuous improvement.
15. Plans are being developed to run the survey on a rolling basis, with clients invited to take part at a specified interval following a decision. An update on this can be provided on request.



## ANNEX A: Executive Summary from Client Survey: 2018-2020 report

This report presents results from the first Social Security Scotland Client Survey. The survey ran from 17 August to 25 September 2020. It was open to everyone who had received a decision on an application for at least one of [Best Start Grant and/or Best Start Foods](#), [Funeral Support Payment](#) or [Young Carer Grant](#), from the beginning of Social Security Scotland in September 2018 to 31 July 2020. The survey invite was also sent to anyone who had received [Carer's Allowance Supplement](#) (which does not require an application) during this time.

The survey asked about key aspects of respondents' experience with Social Security Scotland. Its results are a key source for measuring how well Social Security Scotland is performing and where it can improve. In particular it gives data for the [Charter Measurement Framework](#).

3,253 people responded to the survey. This is around 2% of those who were sent invites. Of these respondents:

- 76% had experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement<sup>1</sup>, most of whom had no other Social Security Scotland benefit experience
- 21% had applied for Best Start Grant and/or Foods
- 4% had applied for Funeral Support Payment
- 2% had applied for Young Carer Grant

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the survey in a number of ways. The survey was postponed and completing it was limited to doing so online or by calling a telephone helpline. The results will also reflect some experiences influenced by the impact of Covid-19 on Social Security Scotland's services. For example, the temporary move to telephone call backs. The data does not allow us to compare experiences before and during the pandemic.

Looking across the survey, respondents were largely positive about their experience with Social Security Scotland. For example, 90% rated their overall experience with Social Security Scotland as 'very good' or 'good'. Most were also positive about their interactions with staff and experience of applying for benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> Respondents were asked: 'have you received or are you due to receive Carer's Allowance Supplement?'. The eligibility criteria for receiving a survey invite means that except in rare circumstances, all of those who said yes to this question should have received their benefit when they completed the survey.





However, there were specific areas where some respondents were negative. These included low awareness of how clients can challenge application decisions they disagree with, or report barriers or discrimination faced when dealing with Social Security Scotland. Respondents also had low awareness of who Social Security Scotland are. And some felt that communication of benefit information and application updates could be improved.

The sections below provide more information on the headline results from each part of the survey.

## **Overall Experience**

90% of respondents rated their overall experience with Social Security Scotland as very good or good. Only 3% described their experience as poor or very poor.

Most respondents believed that they had been treated with dignity (86%), fairly (87%) and with respect (87%). A similar proportion agreed that Social Security Scotland had not wasted their time (86%), whilst 81% said they understood what Social Security Scotland does.

Although the majority were still positive, fewer respondents said Social Security Scotland is an honest (77%) or open (66%) organisation. However, only 2% of respondents said they disagreed with each of these points. The rest said they 'neither agreed nor disagreed' or that they 'didn't know'.

Comments made about overall experience were mostly positive. Many respondents favourably compared their experience to that with the Department of Work and Pensions. Among suggestions for improvement, some respondents called for better publicity of Social Security Scotland and its benefits. Others asked for better communication in the application process, such as more updates and information.

## **Finding out about Social Security Scotland and Getting Information and Advice**

Respondents were asked how they first found out about Social Security Scotland. Two-fifths (41%) said by being contacted by Social Security Scotland. Around half (47%) of those with experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement said they found out about Social Security Scotland this way. However, this was only the case for a fifth (19%) of respondents who had applied for a Social Security Scotland benefit.

All survey respondents were asked if at any point they had looked up or made contact with Social Security Scotland to find out about benefits or services. Around two-fifths (43%) said they had. This was more common amongst respondents who had applied for a benefit (64%) than those who had experience of Carer's Allowance Supplement (38%).





Respondents' experience of looking up or making contact with Social Security Scotland to find out about benefits or services was generally positive. For example, 84% said they found doing so 'very easy' or 'easy'. Over four-in-five felt they had enough choices of communication to (86%) and from (84%) Social Security Scotland. Similar proportions said they got the support they needed (86%) and got it in the way they wanted (84%).

Many respondents who gave positive comments in this section mentioned the ease of communicating with and getting information from Social Security Scotland. Although negative comments were less common, respondents repeated several key issues. These issues included general lack of information and awareness about benefits and entitlements, and difficulty getting through to the phone helpline.

## **Experiences with staff**

Three-in-ten (31%) respondents said they had been in contact with a member of Social Security Scotland staff. 88% of these respondents said their experience with staff was very good or good.

The vast majority of respondents agreed that they were treated with kindness (90%) and that staff listened to them (88%). Most also reported that staff were able to help them, made them feel comfortable and were knowledgeable about benefits (all 86%). Finally, 85% said they trusted staff and a similar proportion felt like they were trusted by staff (82%).

Around three-in-ten (31%) respondents who had been in contact with staff said they would have liked to have been told about other benefits but were not. Around a quarter (26%) would have liked to have been told about other sources of additional help but were not. Respondents who did report being told about other benefits or other sources of help were more likely to give a higher overall rating of their experience with staff.

Respondents' also emphasised wanting more information and communication in comments for this section. Negative comments most commonly spoke of staff not being able to give the help respondents wanted, including enough information and updates. But overall, most comments were positive and complimented staff manner and the help provided.

## **Applying for benefits**

27% of respondents said they had applied for at least one Social Security Scotland benefit – Best Start Grant and/or Foods, Funeral Support Payment or Young Carer Grant.



Of these respondents, 87% rated their overall experience of applying for a benefit as 'very good' or 'good'. This measure was above 80% for all benefits and demographics.

Respondents most commonly reported applying for benefits online (84%). Fewer had applied by phone (16%) or by post (10%).

The vast majority of respondents considered the application process clear (90%). Many also felt that the application only asked relevant questions (87%). However, relatively fewer agreed their application was handled within a reasonable time frame (79%) or that they got enough updates (66%). Almost one-in-five respondents disagreed that they got enough updates on the progress of their application (19%). This issue was also prominent in respondent comments in this section.

## **Receiving payments from Social Security Scotland**

86% of respondents said they had received a benefit payment from Social Security Scotland. Most had received Carer's Allowance Supplement payments (80%), whilst 24% had received payment for a benefit requiring an application. Around one-in-five had received Best Start Grant (18%) whilst one-in-ten had received Best Start Foods payments (9%). Much smaller proportions had received payments for Funeral Support Payment (3%) and Young Carer Grant (1%).

The vast majority of respondents (93%) said their overall experience of receiving benefit payments was 'very good' or 'good'. Most respondents said they received their payment(s) when Social Security Scotland said they would (94%). A similar amount reported that they received the right amount on the first time (95%) and every time (94%).

On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'a lot', respondents gave the following average scores for how much benefit payments:

- Helped to make a difference to their life – 8.5
- Helped them to control their finances – 7.8
- Helped them to pay for what they needed – 8.2

Many respondents who provided comments were recipients of Carer's Allowance Supplement. Most were positive and expressed gratitude or saw the supplement as a sign of appreciation for the work of carers. Many of the negative comments saw the supplement or other benefit amounts as too low.



## Your application decision

Almost nine-in-ten respondents who had applied for a benefit agreed that the decision on their application was 'explained clearly' (87%). A similar proportion (89%) said that they 'understood the decision'. 92% said they agreed with the decision, with 8% disagreeing.

Of the 67 respondents who disagreed with the decision made on their application:

- 50% said they did not know how to challenge it
- 56% said they did not feel they could challenge it
- 24% said they challenged it

A number of respondents also brought up difficulties challenging decisions in their comments. However, most negative comments mentioned long waits and lack of updates on decisions.

## Barriers

7% of respondents said they had faced some sort of barrier getting help from Social Security Scotland.

Only two-in-five of those people who had faced barriers said they told Social Security Scotland (43%). Of those respondents, only around a quarter felt that the Social Security Scotland 'understood them' (26%). A similar proportion felt that Social Security Scotland 'supported [them] in overcoming them' (25%).

Many of the comments raised issues mentioned elsewhere. These included helpline and processing delays, lack of updates, eligibility requirements and not knowing enough about Social Security Scotland and its role. In addition to these, a number of respondents raised language and technology barriers.

## Discrimination

2% of respondents said they had been discriminated against during their experience with Social Security Scotland, and 3% preferred not to say.

Of the 74 respondents who said they had experienced discrimination, 43% said it related to processes, 41% said it related to policy, and 22% said it related to staff.

Of those who had experienced discrimination 64% didn't feel it was 'clear how to challenge it'. The same amount 'felt [they] couldn't challenge it.' Only 21% said they told Social Security Scotland about the discrimination.



Most negative comments highlighted disagreement with eligibility requirements. Several expressed feelings of mistreatment as a benefit claimant or by the process of applying.

## Next steps

The survey results provide rich insight into some of the experiences of Social Security Scotland clients. The results will be used alongside other evidence to populate the Charter Measurement Framework which reports on Social Security Scotland's performance. The findings will also support Social Security Scotland's continuous improvement. They have also highlighted areas where more research may be useful to further explore clients' experiences, views and expectations.

We're also planning for the future of the survey. The intention is for the survey to be issued on a rolling basis to all applicants following a decision on an application. Invites will also be sent annually to people receiving recurring benefits.

We will consider lessons learned from the initial round of the survey and whether any changes are required for future versions. [Please get in touch](#) with any feedback, comments or suggestions you have on this report or any aspect of the survey.