

Operational Reference Group Meeting

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 21 st March 2023
Time	14:30 – 16:00
Location	Virtual Meeting

Attendees

Present

- JR – Chair – Social Security Scotland
- HF – Social Security Scotland
- RE – Social Security Scotland
- TM – Social Security Scotland
- KC – Social Security Scotland
- YS – Social Security Scotland
- LM – Social Security Scotland
- TS – Social Security Scotland
- JM – Product Owner, Disability Benefits
- MG – MacMillan
- CK – People First
- SB – People First
- MK – Inclusion Scotland
- FH – Aberlour
- CJ – West Lothian Council

- EM – Department of Work and Pensions
- JT – Department of Work and Pensions
- LS – Public Health Scotland
- MK – Public Health Scotland
- JC – CoSLA
- AB – Citizens Advice Scotland
- LK – Social Work Scotland
- KM – Child Poverty Action Group
- HN – Scottish Refugee Council
- RG – Rights Advice Scotland
- LW – BLESMA
- AB – One Parent Family Scotland
- PC – Action on Asbestos
- AF – Alliance Scotland
- LC - Equality, Diversity & Human Rights (Midlothian Council)

Secretariat

- RO – Social Security Scotland

Apologies

- TG – Citizens Advice Scotland
- JW - Engender

1. Welcome and Update

1.1. The Chair, JR, Deputy Director Client Services Delivery, welcomed the group and introduced guest presenters and other attendees.

1.2. Update on Actions arising from previous meeting:

- A question was raised as to whether research on the 11% of clients who did not agree with their application decision will be conducted. AN, Client Experience Manager, advised that the 11% who disagreed with their decision would have put in a challenge, i.e. requested a re-determination or lodged an appeal. **ACTION:** The 2021/22 Client Survey contains a section concerning redeterminations and appeals. There are also plans to conduct more research on this particular demographic.
- A question was raised as to whether Council Tax Reduction could be considered as a qualifying benefit for low-income benefits. Examples were given of how this could avoid people who are paid every 4 weeks (and so would receive two salary payments in one month at least once a year) and/or those receiving backdated pay settlements who would become ineligible for Universal Credit, also becoming ineligible to linked low-income benefits from Social Security Scotland. **ACTION:** This question was taken away by the National Engagement Team. Colleagues in policy have advised that this is not currently due to the way top up powers are used to deliver Scottish Child Payment. However, Scottish Government colleagues are currently considering the analysis of responses in the independent consultation analysis report for the 'Scotland's social security system: enhanced administration and compensation recovery' consultation. This consultation was published last week. Stakeholder views on changing the legislative underpinning of Scottish Child Payment are contained therein.
- **ACTION:** Social Security Scotland to have further discussion on Special Rules for Terminal Illness with Action on Asbestos. – National Stakeholder Engagement colleagues have been in contact with Action on Asbestos to facilitate a meeting.

1.3. The Chair provided an update on Scottish Child Payment:

- 130,285 applications were received for Scottish Child Payment.
- Since 14 November 2022 – when Scottish Child Payment was extended to eligible families with children aged under 16 – 91,225 applications have been received. £96.4 million paid to clients by 31 December 2022.
- Total value issued to clients since the benefit launched on 15 February 2021 is £155.0 million.

1.4. The Chair provided an update on Funeral Support Payment:

- In the 2022/23 financial year to date, covering April to December 2022: 6,160 applications have been received for Funeral Support Payment.
- 5,695 processed, 71% authorised, 19% denied, and 10% withdrawn.
- £7.0 million paid out to clients and funeral directors by 31 December 2022

1.5. The Chair provided an update on Child Disability Payment:

- From 26 July 2021 to 31 December 2022, 25,460 part 1 applications were received for Child Disability Payment.
- 16,135 applications were processed with a decision made by 31 December 2022 - 82% authorised, 13% denied and 5% withdrawn.
- £132.5 million paid. £44 million issued to new applicants, £88.5 million issued to clients who have transferred to Child Disability Payment.

1.6. The Chair provided an update on the launch of Winter Heating Payment:

- More than £20 million will be paid out over the course of February and March in Winter Heating Payments. Winter Heating Payment will not be dependent on sustained cold weather to trigger a payment, and will instead be a reliable payment to those who qualify.
- All eligible households will automatically get an annual payment of £50, supporting around 400,000 people. This represents an investment of around £20 million each year to support people towards the costs of heating their homes in winter.

1.7. The Chair provided an update on Best Start Foods:

- Work has been done across the organisation to identify clients who's prepaid cards haven't been activated or have large balances. People with cards are being urged to check they aren't missing out on part of a total of £2.3 million in payments which have yet to be spent.
- National Engagement and Communications colleagues have collaborated to produce resources for stakeholders to share across their social media platforms. It became our third most shared post since the start of December last year. Twitter video was 2nd strongest tweet of month. The overall result was a 300% increase in Best Start Foods related Google searches compared to the previous Friday. A 25% increase in these searches has sustained since. The immediate impact in card activations saw 72 clients access an unspent total of £40,000.
- Social Security Scotland undertook partnerships with major retailers Iceland, Scotmid/Co-op and ASDA to drive awareness, produce more clarity and stimulate take-up. The ASDA activity in August 2022 saw the use field marketing in eight different

supermarkets across Scotland, allowing us to speak to clients and other interested shoppers direct in a relevant environment.

- Later this year Social Security Scotland will launch a major partnership with the Scottish Grocers Federation which will promote the use of the Best Start Foods card in 2500 smaller stores across the country. These include national chains like Spar and Keystore.

1.8. The Chair Provided an update on the introduction of Carer Support Payment:

- A consultation on proposals to improve support for Carers took place between February and May 2022. The response to this is due to be published in the coming weeks.
- Carer Support Payment will replace the Carer's Allowance for new applications. Social Security Scotland will begin a pilot by the end of this year followed by national launch in spring 2024. This will be the 14th benefit to be introduced since we were established in 2018.
- Currently, Scottish Government is working on developing the new carer's benefits in Scotland, and they are looking to speak to carers to help design the new benefits offering.

1.9. The Chair notified members of several events that the Social Security Scotland National Stakeholder Engagement team will be attending to raise awareness of benefits. These are:

- Scottish Federation of Housing Associations 2023
- Forth Valley Third Sector Conference 2023
- Share Housing Conference 2023
- National Bereavement Care Pathway, Scotland Event

1.10. The Chair notified members that the National Stakeholder Engagement Team will be running a series of [events](#) for stakeholders throughout April and May focusing on disability benefits:

- Supporting Information for Disability Benefits.
- Special Rules for Terminal Illness Update Events.
- Adult Disability Payment Case Transfers.

2. Client Services update

- 2.1. KC, Head of Client Services Operations, provided an update from Client Services with reference to Scottish Child Payment, Child Disability Payment, and Adult Disability Payment. Also provided an update on Local Delivery outreach events and a breakdown on communication channels used during appointments.
- 2.2. Some of the information included:
- A large volume of Child Disability Payment application were processed; numbers exceeding 16000. 82% were authorised, 5% were withdrawn, 13% were denied. £44 million has been paid to new applicants.
 - It has been one year since the launch of the Adult Disability Payment pilot launch. According to latest data accurate to 31 January 2023, the average processing time is increasing, as is the volume of applications. Waiting times have increased from 35 working days in September 2022 to 79 working days in January 2023. It is anticipated there will be improvement in processing times as case managers grow in experience and the volume of applications reduce.
 - A breakdown of appointments by type. 38% of appointments have been done via video call. 32.5% took place at home. 11.4% were out in the community. 10.1% were via telephone. Almost 60% have taken place to provide identity and verification documents.
- 2.3. Question was raised by RG, Rights Advice Council, about the effects of Scottish Child Payment eligibility on those who receive an early payment and thus do not qualify for Universal Credit. Asked about potential issues and how they could be solved. **ACTION:** This issue is currently being reviewed. KC will get update the group.
- 2.4. Question raised by KM, Child Poverty Action Group, over requirements for clients to show photographic identification. **ACTION:** KM was asked to share the circumstances concerning photographic identification with the National Engagement and Partnership team.
- 2.5. Question raised by JC, CoSLA, as to whether the lack of supporting information is a contributor to the length of waiting times for Adult Disability Payment applications. Asked more could be done to use sources of information from Local Government. TS, Operations Manager, said that an update to the Adult Disability Payment application form will hopefully improve clients thinking on potential sources of supporting information. YS, National Engagement and Partnership Lead, said to would be good to work in partnership with CoSLA and other groups who have good supporting information which would help make good decisions.

3. Child Disability Payment Update

- 3.1. JM, Product Owner, gave a presentation sharing user research, statistics and findings from Child Disability Payment.
- 3.2. Members were given a breakdown of some of the major themes to emerge from the research including:
 - The large majority of people have completed their form online.
 - The majority of clients have had a positive experience.
 - Interactions with staff were highlighted as a positive.
- 3.3. Members were informed that Social Security Scotland will strive to continually improve service with ongoing reviews and capturing feedback.

4. Inclusive Communications Action Plan

- 4.1. LM, Inclusive Communication Support Officer, gave a presentation on the Inclusive Communication Action Plan.
- 4.2. Members were given information on various aspects of the Action Plan including:
 - The creation of a Leaders and Champions Pack.
 - The involvement of those with lived experience in the development process.
 - The outcomes from a recent joint workshop with members of the Inclusive Communication External and Internal Stakeholder Groups.

5. Any Other Business

- 5.1 The Chair offered the group an opportunity to raise any other issues.

- 5.2 A question of was raised by PC, Action on Asbestos, over Special Rules for Terminal Illness applications and follow-ups. KC confirmed that two letters are sent by post to apply under Special Rules for Terminal Illness.
- 5.3 A question was also raised as to whether 3rd Sector organisations can apply using a BASRiS. It was confirmed that this was the case. **ACTION:** National Stakeholder Engagement Team to share information regarding third sector organisations applying under Special Rules for Terminal Illness

Date of next meeting: Friday 9 June 2023