Statistics Plan for 2026-2027

Foreword

This plan outlines Social Security Scotland's statistical work programme for the 2026-2027 reporting year. This includes plans to expand the scope of information routinely published, the continued development of our analytical processes, and detail on our plans for quality management and assurance.

The statistics plan is published to ensure we are open and transparent about the progress towards meeting our priorities and objectives. It also provides users and stakeholders an opportunity to contribute and help us shape this and future work programmes.

The plan also recognises longer-term planning, where Social Security Scotland statisticians will evaluate the ongoing compliance with the refreshed Code of Practice for Official Statistics (edition 3.0) whilst reflecting on the recommendations presented in the recently published Future Statistician Vision.

The Social Security Scotland latest publications page contains links to the most recent release of each Official Statistics and management information publications produced by the organisation. A statement of compliance outlining how these statistics are produced in line with the core principles of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value can be found on the main statistics page.

Reflection on 2025-2026

Across 2025-2026, new statistics and analysis were produced in addition to the breadth of information routinely published by the organisation. This included the expansion of the Carer Support Payment, Pension Age Disability Payment, and Winter Heating Benefits publications as well as the introduction of a new publication covering Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance.

Social Security Scotland also published official statistics in development of the monetary value of official error in Scottish Child Payment for the first time (after a previous pilot review publication), and included intersectionality analysis as part of the Social Security Scotland client and applicant equalities and diversity statistics publication.

Labelling our statistics as 'Official Statistics'

In June 2026, Social Security Scotland statisticians published a paper announcing the decision to remove the 'official statistics in development' label from statistical publications.

The change is being applied across the current reporting cycle, with all publications due to be labelled as 'official statistics' by December 2026, unless clearly stated otherwise.

Users of the statistics should continue to interpret and engage with them in the same way they have done to date. This change does not mean development activity has ended – statisticians will continue to review and improve methods and reporting in line with user need.

New statistics and developments being undertaken in 2026-2027

All upcoming statistics publications are pre-announced on the Social Security Scotland forthcoming publications lists. The data and methods which underpin Social Security Scotland statistics are routinely reviewed in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Carer Payment statistics

In March 2026, Social Security Scotland launched Scottish Carer Supplement and Carer's Additional Person Payment. Initial high-level reporting on the number of Carer Additional Person Payment applications received was included in the May 2026 Carer Support Payment publication.

In August 2026, a new table will be added to the Carer Support Payment Publication, reporting on the number of appeals by month. It will also include information on the final payments made for Carer's Allowance Supplement. The November 2026 publication will be expanded to include more detailed reporting on Scottish Carer Supplement and Carer's Additional Person Payment.

A review of the Carer Support Payment caseload methodology has commenced with a view to make incremental improvements over the 2026-2027 reporting year.

Pension Age Winter Heating Payment

Social Security Scotland began to administer Pension Age Winter Heating Payment from winter 2025-2026. In May 2026, the Winter Heating Benefits annual publication was expanded to include detailed reporting on this benefit alongside the other winter heating benefits.

Telephony and Webchat (management information)

A callback service was introduced in October 2025, allowing clients to request a return call instead of waiting in the call queue. In May 2026, management information on callbacks was added to the published telephony reporting for the first time.

Re-determinations and appeals

Re-determination rate measures previously reported across benefits were removed from publication tables from February 2025 onwards due to known limitations in the methodology. Following development work across the past year, rate measure started to be re-introduced to disability statistics releases from April 2026 onwards. This development work also led to the publication of a further breakdown of re-determinations, reporting whether it relates to an application first decision or a review.

Pension Age Disability Payment

In June 2026, the Pension Age Disability Payment Publication was expanded to include initial reporting on reviews. This reporting will be developed further over the 2026-2027 reporting year.

Pilot review of official error in Adult Disability Payment (research report)

In June 2026, the findings of a pilot review of official error in Adult Disability Payment were published. These findings were published as a research report rather than Official Statistics due to the pilot nature of the work, and results should be treated as indicative estimates only, due to the smaller sample size used compared to a full review.

The review also sets out information on future plans, including that Best Start Grant payments started being reviewed in April 2026, the first time one-off payments have been reviewed for official error, with results to be published as Official Statistics by May 2027. Longer term plans include a full annual review of official error in Adult Disability Payment to be reviewed in 2027, and statistical input into development of regulations, systems and processes to enable client contact to estimate monetary levels of client error and fraud.

Number of individual clients paid

In June 2026, the number of individual clients paid publication was developed to include information on Pension Age Winter Heating Payment and Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance for first time. Development work has also been undertaken to resolve a data linkage issue which has enabled Carer's Allowance Supplement to be included for all reported years. These improvements provide a more complete view of clients paid across 2025-2026 and all previous years.

Scottish Child Payment

In August 2026, a new table was added to the quarterly Scottish Child Payment official statistics release which reports the number of children per client actively in receipt of Scottish Child Payment.

Social Security Scotland client and applicant diversity and equalities analysis
In the annual publication released in August 2026:

- Pension Age Winter heating payment is included for the first time.
- There is a change in how benefit level tables are produced, ensuring that applicants who applied for multiple benefits are represented in each relevant table.
- Additional breakdowns of ethnicity categories are included, providing a more detailed breakdown of the various subcategories (subject to standard disclosure controls).
- The age band 45-64 is split into 45-54 and 55-64. The age band “65 and over” is split into 65-74 and “75 and over”. This improves insight into applications and outcomes by age, and is in response to interest from a range of users.

Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance
From September 2026 onwards Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance will be reported on biannually as part of the Pension Age Disability Payment statistics release. The September publication will include initial reporting of re-determinations, and data on appeals will be included later in the year, subject to statistical disclosure.

Coherence and comparability of Disability and Carers statistics
The Office for Statistics Regulation published correspondence detailing their findings following a compliance check of Social Security Scotland’s Adult Disability Payment and Child Disability Payment statistics in February 2025. In response to a recommendation to explain the coherence and comparability of Adult Disability Payment statistics with those published by other Official Statistics producers across the United Kingdom, development work continues to be undertaken. By the end of 2026-2027 we aim to provide users with information in statistics publications, or in a separate user guide, on how disability and carers benefits statistics should or should not be compared with those published by Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Communities, Northern Ireland.

Change to how payments statistics are reported
For some of our publications, due to the size and complexity of the underlying payments data, the time series will no longer be fully revised in payments tables following each publication. Only the latest three months of payments will be routinely updated in publications going forward, except when there is a methodological change in the calculation of payments metrics which could affect historical records. This change has already been implemented for publications on Adult Disability Payment (from March 2026 onwards) and Child Disability Payment and Scottish Child Payment (from May 2026 onwards). It is possible that other publications may take this approach in the future. If so, changes will be clearly communicated alongside the relevant statistical releases.

Investigating the possibility of producing client journey analysis
Investigative work has started on producing additional analysis looking at end-to-end authorisation rates, which consider the full client journey, and take account of the outcomes of any re-determinations or appeals. This is complex analysis, both in terms of producing the data, but also in terms of presentation of that data in a user friendly way. Any resulting outputs will be published in an easy to understand format, and in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics to ensure orderly release.

Investigating the possibility of producing inflow and outflow analysis
For each recurring benefit administered by Social Security Scotland there are multiple routes for clients to enter and leave the caseload. Any attempts to better understand the flow of clients in and out of the caseload for Social Security Scotland benefits would require complex analysis. Across 2026-2027 we aim to investigate the availability and quality of underlying data to have a greater understanding of the possibility to report on inflows and outflows in the future.

Continuous improvement in accessibility and communication of our statistics

Social Security Scotland will continue to make improvements to how statistics are communicated over the year. Improvements to the accessibility of publication tables, such as providing alternative text descriptions of charts have already been made for some publications, and these changes will be gradually rolled out across other publications.

As well as the incremental refinement of publications, statistics teams will also be considering a range of options to ensure the production and dissemination of statistics continue to evolve and improve in ways that create space for increasing public value. Consideration will be given to the content and frequency of reporting for each release to ensure available resource is focussed on what delivers the best value to users. Realising efficiency will allow teams to maximise the use of the data we hold, with users central to this decision making process.

Transition to a new web publishing platform provides the opportunity for statistics teams to consider publishing statistical releases in HTML format on the Social Security Scotland website. Across 2026-2027, we will look to publish at least one statistical release in HTML format and seek views from users on the change. This feedback will allow us to plan a timeline for making the change across all statistical reporting.

Considerations for producing more detailed analysis

Since January 2024, statistics showing the Scottish Child Payment caseload broken down by intermediate zone and child age-band have been published and can be found on the Scottish Government's public data platform. This was well received by a range of users

and in particular, local authorities in Scotland. The Social Security Scotland client and applicant diversity and equalities analysis published in August 2026 contains greater detail in age and ethnicity characteristic breakdowns.

We are now exploring options to improve the level of detail and range of geographies for which our data can be made available, although we need to ensure we balance the needs of users with the extra challenges of disclosure control and accessible output along with available resources. Learning from approaches used by other statistics providers will inform this work and we will investigate any potential partnerships that can bring efficiencies.

We have begun, with the support of Scottish Government colleagues and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), to explore opportunities of the DWP's Registration and Population Interaction Database (RAPID) dataset to produce greater insights, around combined Social Security Scotland and DWP benefits. We hope to explore both the working age and pension age populations.

Developing our analytical processes

Social Security Scotland have now converted all existing publication analysis from SAS statistical software to R programming language. This change was made in response to the Scottish Government Statistics Group's strategic priority to increase efficiency and transition to open source software by the end of 2026.

Whilst significant analytical resource has been invested to meet this requirement ahead of schedule, this is not the end point. Statistics teams are also undertaking development to implement Reproducible Analytical Pipelines across all statistical analysis. This is in keeping with the Government Statistical Service's Reproducible Analytical Pipeline strategy. This work will ensure improved efficiency of analysis, increased standardisation of common tasks, and greater business continuity. As analytical teams remain responsible for both ongoing production of publications and the development of improved processes, the timescales for this work are not fixed.

The move to open source and Reproducible Analytical Pipelines also provides opportunities to restructure and better document our quality assurance approaches. More information on this can be found in the section below.

Quality Management and Assurance

Social Security Scotland follows the broader Quality Management policy used across the Scottish Government. Our statistical work is aligned with the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics, and information on the quality of individual statistical products, including methods, strengths and limitations, is published in background notes

accompanying each release. We also publish a Data and Methodology Changes document to keep users informed on any changes made as our statistics continue to develop.

As outlined in the previous section, ongoing work to automate statistical production processes aims to improve the quality and consistency of our statistics. This includes embedding automated quality assurance checks within production pipelines and improving the documentation of these checks and their outcomes to complement expert review.

We are undertaking work across statistical teams to review existing quality assurance practices and identify opportunities for improvement and standardisation. This includes developing a standardised report describing the data sources used within our statistics and their appropriate uses. As part of this work, we will consider how the principles of the Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) framework is applied across our statistical outputs. This will improve consistency across publications, strengthen quality documentation, and help streamline background note content.

Social Security Scotland are committed to increasing transparency around our quality assurance processes as statistical production becomes increasingly automated. This aligns with recommendations made by the Office for Statistics Regulation following its compliance review of Social Security Scotland statistics and will help users better understand the checks and controls applied throughout the statistical production process.

Stakeholder Engagement

Having now launched 18 benefits, Social Security Scotland has entered the next phase of delivery following the closure Scottish Government's Social Security Programme at the end of March 2026. Statistics teams will undertake a period of review to ensure available resources are utilised to maximise public value. We will take stock of existing outputs, analytical processes, and dissemination practices, ensuring they continue to meet user needs and align with the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics.

As part of this work, we will engage with stakeholders across government, the third sector and wider user communities to better understand emerging priorities and opportunities for improvement. In the context of wider public sector reform, our focus will be on maximising the value of existing data and resources, streamlining production processes where appropriate, and ensuring our statistical outputs remain trustworthy, high quality and relevant to decision-makers and the people of Scotland. Plans will be guided by the Scottish Government Statistics Group's aim to create space for increasing public value.

Later in 2026-2027 we will publish a detailed User Public Involvement and Engagement Strategy, which will provide information on current engagement undertaken by statistics teams, as well as more detail on the future approach for user engagement.

Getting in touch with us

As statistics producers we are keen that public value is central to the work we undertake. We welcome feedback on the content, presentation and communication of our statistics as we look to introduce improvements consistently across publications.

Social Security Scotland statisticians will continue to work in an agile way, responding to user needs and emerging policy commitments. The publication of this work programme demonstrates our intention to be transparent with users in relation to the work that we do.

If you would like to get in touch with analysts at Social Security Scotland to provide feedback on this work programme or more generally on the statistical outputs we produce, please contact MI@socialsecurity.gov.scot.

We also welcome your views on how best we can communicate specific developments with users as the year progresses.