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Ill Health & Disability Stakeholder Reference Group

28 February 2019

Dear Ill Health and Disability Stakeholder Reference Group Members

In light of my statement to Parliament today, I am writing to update you on the Scottish Government's plans for delivery of the devolved benefits.

As you are aware, since the passage of the Social Security (Scotland) Act, our new agency Social Security Scotland is already delivering the Carer's Allowance Supplement and the Best Start Grant pregnancy and baby payment. This year we will deliver four new benefits: the Best Start Grant nursery age and school payments; Funeral Expenses Assistance to replace the UK Government's Funeral Expense Payments; and a new Young Carer Grant. We are also consulting on a new Job Grant for young people moving back into employment.

On 1 April 2020 the Scottish Government will take executive competence for the remaining devolved benefits. From that point Social Security Scotland will progressively take over administering these benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

As I set out in my statement to Parliament, I am determined to avoid the mistakes of previous major changes to social security which were planned insufficiently robustly and caused hardship for those affected. The Scottish Government's plans must be ambitious and challenging but deliverable, and prioritise, first and foremost, making sure that people who rely on the social security system continue to get the right payments at the right time. People with lived experience of the current system have repeatedly told us – most recently in response to our Experience Panel survey in January, which can be found at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-experience-panels-case-transfer-survey-findings/> – that this is their top priority.

I would like to take this opportunity thank you for your input into policy development to date. In particular, your significant input into the development of the award duration policy has informed how we will now progress this.

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Timetable for delivery of devolved benefits from 2020

After careful consideration and extensive discussion with my officials and people with lived experience of the current benefit system, I have determined on the following timetable for the delivery of devolved benefits from 2020:

- In summer 2020 – launch of our new claims service for Disability Assistance for Children and Young People, which replaces the UK Government’s Child Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in Scotland. We will also extend eligibility for Child DLA from age 16 to age 18 for anyone in receipt of Child DLA before their 16th birthday, to allow continuity for families during the crucial transition years when a child becomes an adult.

In addition, from winter 2020, people in receipt of the highest care component of Disability Assistance for Children and Young People will also be eligible for Winter Heating Assistance – meaning that from that winter, 16,000 children and their families will get a £200 lump sum to help towards their heating costs.

- In winter 2020 – launch of our new claims service for Disability Assistance for Older People, which replaces Attendance Allowance.
- In early 2021 – launch of our new claims service for Disability Assistance for Working Age People, which replaces Personal Independence Payment (PIP). This is the largest and most complex of the forms of Disability Assistance, which is why I have decided that we should deliver it last of the three.
- In early 2021 – introduction of an additional payment for carers of more than one disabled child, recognising the higher costs they face.
- By the end of 2021 – launch of our new claims service for Scottish Carer’s Allowance, replacing the UK Government’s Carer’s Allowance and folding together that benefit, Carer’s Allowance Supplement and additional money for carers of more than one disabled child in a way that meets the needs of Scottish carers.
- In winter 2021 – first payments by Social Security Scotland of Winter Heating Assistance to older people (which replaces Winter Fuel Payments), in its current form. We will initially make payments only to clients who are already in receipt of another type of payment from Social Security Scotland, with the agency making payments to more clients year on year as caseloads grow. We will reach an agreement with DWP to process payments for the remaining recipients in the meantime.
- Also in winter 2021 – first payments by the agency of Cold Spell Heating Assistance (which replaces Cold Weather Payments), again in its current form and to a subset of eligible recipients. We will reach an agreement with DWP to process payments for the remaining recipients in the meantime.

We expect to launch our new claims service for Employment Injury Assistance (which replaces Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefits) in autumn 2022.

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Rationale for timing of delivery of Scottish Carer's Allowance

As I set out in my statement to Parliament, I have carefully considered whether Scottish Carer's Allowance in particular could be delivered more quickly.

The Scottish Government recognises the immense contribution carers make to our society, caring for family, friends and neighbours. We have prioritised support for carers in our new Social Security system. Our first change when the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 was passed was to introduce Carer's Allowance Supplement (CAS), which improved the income of 75,000 Scottish carers. CAS increased the financial support to carers by 13% – from being the lowest benefit, to being in line with Jobseeker's Allowance through two additional payments a year. In 2018/19 this put an extra £442 a year in people's pockets, an investment in carers of over £33 million.

We will ensure that CAS keeps pace with inflation, increasing it by 2.4% for 2019/20. This means that next year carers in Scotland will receive an extra £452.40 compared with their counterparts south of the border.

CAS will be followed later this year by the Young Carer Grant, providing £300 to young carers who do not qualify for Carer's Allowance. We will also start delivery of additional payments to carers of more than one disabled child in early 2021.

I know that carers and their representatives are rightly keen that the Scottish Government should also take over full delivery of Scottish Carer's Allowance as soon as possible, so that we can continue to improve support.

I have considered when it will be safe to do so, and have concluded that Carer's Allowance, above all, is a form of assistance which we have to take the time to get right. It is arguably the most complex of the devolved benefits. As an income replacement benefit, it impacts on tax and other benefits. This means that prior to introducing current Carer's Allowance cases, we will need to develop complex data sharing arrangements with both DWP and HMRC, as well as build a range of information feeds between ourselves and the UK Government to ensure carers are protected in receiving all the support they are entitled to. It is imperative that we get this development work right, to ensure that people who rely on Carer's Allowance are not disadvantaged.

I have decided that we can safely deliver new claims for Carer's Allowance by the end of 2021. This will also allow us to focus in 2020 on introducing new claims for the three forms of Disability Assistance. By protecting people receiving disability benefits – the people for whom our carers care – we will further protect carers by ensuring that they continue to receive our replacement benefit for Carer's Allowance. This is particularly important given the scale of change we are proposing to the application process, the desk based decision making process and face-to-face assessments for Disability Assistance.

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Transfer of existing claims

In addition to launching new claims services, we also need to transfer people's existing claims from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to Social Security Scotland. This is a substantial undertaking, which requires us to move over 550,000 cases from DWP's systems to those of our agency. We will start this work next year, taking a principled approach to case transfer based on the priorities identified in our Experience Panel research: ensuring that people are transferred safely and securely from DWP to our agency, that they continue to get the payments they are entitled to in the interim, and that no one is subject to a DWP face-to-face reassessment for disability benefits from early 2021 when the Scottish Government launches new claims for our PIP replacement. I can also guarantee that – unlike for DWP's Universal Credit – people will not have to make a new claim as part of their transfer from UK benefits to their Scottish replacements.

Whilst with DWP's cooperation I expect the majority of people to be transferred by 2023, I expect it to take until 2024 for all cases to be fully transferred. If during the case transfer process we find we can complete it faster, then we will; similarly, if we find that a target date of 2024 creates unacceptable risks for clients then we will adjust the pace of transfer accordingly.

In relation to one benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), I have concluded that there would be no advantage in transferring recipients to Social Security Scotland, and that their cases should continue to be administered by DWP. This is because there is a small and declining caseload for SDA and there will be no new claims. The Scottish Government is not proposing to make changes to the benefit and this proposal is largely supported by stakeholders and individuals. I am also concerned that transferring SDA may cause unnecessary disruption to some recipients.

We will seek to conclude agency agreements with DWP to partially administer the devolving benefits until Social Security Scotland is delivering them in full. Agency agreements are a normal part of the machinery of devolution, and will ensure that people receive the regular payments which they have already been awarded, with minimal disruption and distress. This is an administrative function only and does not affect the date from which we assume executive competence.

Next steps

A great deal of activity is already well underway to make our current plans a reality. Today I have published a series of 11 policy papers, setting out the extensive work that has already gone into designing how these benefits will operate. Next week I will also be launching a consultation on Disability Assistance, to seek the views of the public on our proposed reforms.

In parallel we will continue to pursue our ambitious timetable for 2019. By the end of this year – just 18 months from Scotland's Social Security Act – we will have delivered three of the 11 devolved benefits and four brand new payments.

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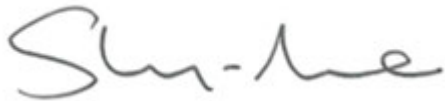
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And two years hence, Social Security Scotland will have made over £210 million in benefit payments; agency staff will have supported an estimated 200,000 people; and we will have brought a new culture of dignity, fairness and respect to Scottish social security.

I would be happy to attend a future meeting to discuss this timetable in more detail.

Yours sincerely



SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

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Council Convener James McGoldrick
Scottish Social Services Council
Compass House
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Dundee
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[REDACTED]

28 February 2019

Dear James

In light of my statement to Parliament today, I am writing to update you on the Scottish Government's plans for delivery of the devolved benefits, including the devolved disability and carer benefits.

As you are aware, since the passage of the Social Security (Scotland) Act, our new agency Social Security Scotland is already delivering the Carer's Allowance Supplement and the Best Start Grant pregnancy and baby payment. This year we will deliver four new benefits: the Best Start Grant nursery age and school payments; Funeral Expenses Assistance to replace the UK Government's Funeral Expense Payments; and a new Young Carer Grant. We are also consulting on a new Job Grant for young people moving back into employment.

On 1 April 2020 the Scottish Government will take executive competence for the remaining devolved benefits. From that point Social Security Scotland will progressively take over administering these benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

As I set out in my statement to Parliament, I am determined to avoid the mistakes of previous major changes to social security which were planned insufficiently robustly and caused hardship for those affected. The Scottish Government's plans must be ambitious and challenging but deliverable, and prioritise, first and foremost, making sure that people who rely on the social security system continue to get the right payments at the right time. People with lived experience of the current system have repeatedly told us – most recently in response to our Experience Panel survey in January, which can be found at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-experience-panels-case-transfer-survey-findings/> – that this is their top priority.

Timetable for delivery of devolved benefits from 2020

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Whilst with DWP's cooperation I expect the majority of people to be transferred by 2023, I expect it to take until 2024 for all cases to be fully transferred. If during the case transfer process we find we can complete it faster, then we will; similarly, if we find that a target date of 2024 creates unacceptable risks for clients then we will adjust the pace of transfer accordingly.

In relation to one benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), I have concluded that there would be no advantage in transferring recipients to Social Security Scotland, and that their cases should continue to be administered by DWP. This is because there is a small and declining caseload for SDA and there will be no new claims. The Scottish Government is not proposing to make changes to the benefit and this proposal is largely supported by stakeholders and individuals. I am also concerned that transferring SDA may cause unnecessary disruption to some recipients.

We will seek to conclude agency agreements with DWP to partially administer the devolving benefits until Social Security Scotland is delivering them in full. Agency agreements are a normal part of the machinery of devolution, and will ensure that people receive the regular payments which they have already been awarded, with minimal disruption and distress. This is an administrative function only and does not affect the date from which we assume executive competence.

Next steps

A great deal of activity is already well underway to make our current plans a reality. Today I have published a series of 11 policy papers, setting out the extensive work that has already gone into designing how these benefits will operate. Next week I will also be launching a consultation on Disability Assistance, to seek the views of the public on our proposed reforms.

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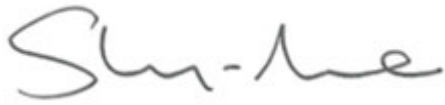
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Yours sincerely



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Dr Jim McCormick
Chair of Disability & Carers Benefits Expert
Advisory Group
C/o Scottish Government



28 February 2019

Dear Jim

In light of my statement to Parliament today, I am writing to update you on the Scottish Government's plans for delivery of the devolved benefits and express my sincere appreciation to the Group for your valuable contributions to the development of Scotland's social security system.

As you are aware, since the passage of the Social Security (Scotland) Act, our new agency Social Security Scotland is already delivering the Carer's Allowance Supplement and the Best Start Grant pregnancy and baby payment. This year we will deliver four new benefits: the Best Start Grant nursery age and school payments; Funeral Expenses Assistance to replace the UK Government's Funeral Expense Payments; and a new Young Carer Grant. We are also consulting on a new Job Grant for young people moving back into employment.

On 1 April 2020 the Scottish Government will take executive competence for the remaining devolved benefits. From that point Social Security Scotland will progressively take over administering these benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

As I set out in my statement to Parliament, I am determined to avoid the mistakes of previous major changes to social security which were planned insufficiently robustly and caused hardship for those affected – notably DWP's migration of people onto Universal Credit. The Scottish Government's plans must be ambitious and challenging but deliverable. I know you fully appreciate the need to prioritise making sure that people who rely on the social security system continue to get the right payments at the right time.

Timetable for delivery of devolved benefits from 2020

On that basis I have determined on the following timetable for the delivery of devolved benefits from 2020:

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In addition, from winter 2020, people in receipt of the highest care component of Disability Assistance for Children and Young People will also be eligible for Winter Heating Assistance – meaning that from that winter, 16,000 children and their families will get a £200 lump sum to help towards their heating costs.

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We expect to launch our new claims service for Employment Injury Assistance (replacing Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefits) in autumn 2022.

Rationale for timing of delivery of Scottish Carer’s Allowance

As I set out in my statement to Parliament, I have carefully considered whether Scottish Carer’s Allowance in particular could be delivered more quickly.

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I know that carers and their representatives are rightly keen that the Scottish Government should also take over full delivery of Scottish Carer's Allowance as soon as possible, so that we can continue to improve support.

I have considered when it will be safe to do so, and have concluded that Carer's Allowance, above all, is a form of assistance which we have to take the time to get right. It is arguably the most complex of the devolved benefits. As an income replacement benefit, it impacts on tax and other benefits. This means that prior to introducing Scottish Carer's Allowance, we will need to develop complex data sharing arrangements with both DWP and HMRC, as well as build a range of information feeds between ourselves and the UK Government to ensure carers are protected in receiving all the support they are entitled to. It is imperative that we get this development work right, to ensure that people who rely on Carer's Allowance are not disadvantaged.

I have decided that we can safely deliver new claims for Carer's Allowance by the end of 2021. This will also allow us to focus in 2020 on introducing new claims for the three forms of Disability Assistance. By protecting people receiving disability benefits – the people for whom our carers care – we will further protect carers by ensuring that they continue to receive our replacement benefit for Carer's Allowance. This is particularly important given the scale of change we are proposing to the application process, the desk-based decision making process and face-to-face assessments for Disability Assistance.

Transfer of existing claims

In addition to launching new claims services, we also need to transfer people's existing claims from DWP to Social Security Scotland. This is a substantial undertaking, which requires us to move over 550,000 cases from DWP's systems to those of our agency. We will start this work next year, taking a principled approach to case transfer based on the priorities identified in our Experience Panel research: ensuring that people are transferred safely and securely from DWP to our agency, that they continue to get the payments they are entitled to in the interim, and that no one is subject to a DWP face-to-face reassessment for disability benefits from the point where the Scottish Government launches our new claims

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Whilst with DWP’s cooperation I expect the majority of people to be transferred by 2023, I expect it to take until 2024 for all cases to be fully transferred. If during the case transfer process we find we can complete it faster, then we will; similarly, if we find that a target date of 2024 creates unacceptable risks for clients then we will adjust the pace of transfer accordingly.

In relation to one benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), I have concluded that there would be no advantage in transferring recipients to Social Security Scotland, and that their cases should continue to be administered by DWP. This is because there is a small and declining caseload for SDA and there will be no new claims. The Scottish Government is not proposing to make changes to the benefit and this proposal is largely supported by stakeholders and individuals. I am also concerned that transferring SDA may cause unnecessary disruption to some recipients.

We will seek to conclude agency agreements with DWP to partially administer the devolving benefits until Social Security Scotland is delivering them in full. Agency agreements are a normal part of the machinery of devolution, and will ensure that people receive the regular payments which they have already been awarded, with minimal disruption and distress. This is an administrative function only and does not affect the date from which we assume executive competence.

Response to the Group’s advice

The advice provided by the Group to date has been instrumental in shaping my decisions relating to Disability Assistance and Carer’s Assistance policy development. I would like to take this opportunity to set out my approach to each of the outstanding pieces of advice provided by the Group during the past three months.

Suitably qualified assessors

I welcome the recommendations submitted in relation to these provisions. While the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, provides that Scottish Ministers ‘may’ make regulations setting out how this provision should operate, I think it is right that these requirements are set out in statute. I note that your recommendations go further to cover all individuals involved in the decision making process: I wholeheartedly agree with these recommendations. It is in line with the development of the social security charter and the principles and ethos of Social Security Scotland that all staff are appropriately trained in understanding the impact of conditions on an individual, and are also able to treat clients with empathy, dignity and respect.

I agree that we should seek to widen the roles of those involved in undertaking assessments and providing advice beyond medical professionals to social care professionals, and I see no reason why this should not include the same professionals who have experience in the third sector. It is my view that the approach you have set out to ensuring staff at all levels hold the appropriate experience and training will allow Social Security Scotland to provide a holistic and flexible service for clients, and at the same time address the inadequacies with the

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current system – particularly in relation to ensuring that those involved in decision making and assessments understand the impact of mental health conditions and learning disabilities.

Duration of awards

I am pleased to agree with your recommendation that entitlement to Disability Assistance should be provided on a rolling basis with a date for review set at initial decision, and agree that this should be set out in secondary legislation. In line with our person centred approach to social security I absolutely agree that the review date set should take account of the individual's needs and the likelihood that their needs may have changed. In the interests of transparency and fostering trust I have accepted your recommendation that if the agency decides to review an award prior to the review date they should be required to provide a justification for that decision. I also agree that the numbers of individuals who are subject to a review that occurs earlier than the date set at initial decision will be published by Social Security Scotland. I very much agree that reviews should be "light touch" in order to minimise stress and that individuals should continue to receive their usual rate of assistance while the review is being carried out. I can assure you that we will consult with the Experience Panels and others to ensure that this approach reflects the needs and views of those with lived experience of disability benefits.

In order to avoid a confusing process I do not think individuals should be able to request a review outside of either a change of circumstance or a redetermination request, where an individual did not agree with a decision. I am of the view that through these two routes, clients will have mechanisms sufficient to enable them to instigate review processes that would take account of any changes to their condition or disability.

I understand the rationale for the recommendation relating to a 'buffer' period, where an individual's Disability Assistance is reduced or stopped, between the decision and the reduction in payment being instigated. I am awaiting further information on the cost implications of such a policy in order to inform my decision. In relation to the removal of the past period required to establish entitlement to Disability Assistance for Working Age People, I am not minded to put your recommendation into practice at this time as I believe it may fundamentally change the nature of the benefit and cause a risk to safe and secure transition due to the impact of such a change on the DWP provision of passported benefits and premiums to recipients of Scottish Disability Assistance.

Young carer grant

I am currently considering your advice on this policy area and will return to you with my views once I have taken into account the findings from the upcoming consultation.

Next steps

As referred to in my statement, today I have published a series of 11 policy papers setting out the extensive work that has already gone into designing how the various forms of assistance will operate. I made particular reference in the statement to our policies on duration of awards and suitably qualified assessors – which will significantly contribute to the fundamentally different experience Scotland's social security system will provide to individuals. The launch of the consultation on Disability Assistance next week will be a key milestone providing an opportunity for widespread public comment on our proposed reforms.

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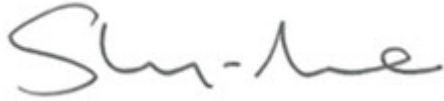
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I greatly appreciate the DACBEAG's work in helping to bring disability and carer benefits policies to life.

I understand the DACBEAG has a challenging programme of work ahead and greatly look forward to our continued collaboration as we move towards delivering a system of social security of which Scotland can be proud.

Yours sincerely



SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

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28 February 2019

Dear Carer Benefit Advisory Group members,

In light of my statement to Parliament today, I am writing to update you on the Scottish Government's plans for delivery of the devolved benefits.

As you are aware, since the passage of the Social Security (Scotland) Act, our new agency Social Security Scotland is already delivering the Carer's Allowance Supplement and the Best Start Grant pregnancy and baby payment. This year we will deliver four new benefits: the Best Start Grant nursery age and school payments; Funeral Expenses Assistance to replace the UK Government's Funeral Expense Payments; and a new Young Carer Grant. We are also consulting on a new Job Grant for young people moving back into employment.

On 1 April 2020 the Scottish Government will take executive competence for the remaining devolved benefits. From that point Social Security Scotland will progressively take over administering these benefits from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

As I set out in my statement to Parliament, I am determined to avoid the mistakes of previous major changes to social security which were planned insufficiently robustly and caused hardship for those affected. The Scottish Government's plans must be ambitious and challenging but deliverable, and prioritise, first and foremost, making sure that people who rely on the social security system continue to get the right payments at the right time. People with lived experience of the current system have repeatedly told us – most recently in response to our Experience Panel survey in January, which can be found at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-experience-panels-case-transfer-survey-findings/> - that this is their top priority.

Timetable for delivery of devolved benefits from 2020

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After careful consideration and extensive discussion with my officials and people with lived experience of the current benefit system, I have determined on the following timetable for the delivery of devolved benefits from 2020:

- In summer 2020 – launch of our new claims service for Disability Assistance for Children and Young People, which replaces the UK Government’s Child Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in Scotland. We will also extend eligibility for Child DLA from age 16 to age 18 for anyone in receipt of Child DLA before their 16th birthday, to allow continuity for families during the crucial transition years when a child becomes an adult.

In addition, from winter 2020, people in receipt of the highest care component of Disability Assistance for Children and Young People will also be eligible for Winter Heating Assistance – meaning that from that winter, 16,000 children and their families will get a £200 lump sum to help towards their heating costs.

- In winter 2020 – launch of our new claims service for Disability Assistance for Older People, which replaces Attendance Allowance.
- In early 2021 – launch of our new claims service for Disability Assistance for Working Age People, which replaces Personal Independence Payment (PIP). This is the largest and most complex of the forms of Disability Assistance, which is why I have decided that we should deliver it last of the three.
- In early 2021 – introduction of an additional payment for carers of more than one disabled child, recognising the higher costs they face.
- By the end of 2021 – launch of our new claims service for Scottish Carer’s Allowance, replacing the UK Government’s Carer’s Allowance and folding together that benefit, Carer’s Allowance Supplement and additional money for carers of more than one disabled child in a way that meets the needs of Scottish carers.
- In winter 2021 – first payments by Social Security Scotland of Winter Heating Assistance to older people (which replaces Winter Fuel Payments), in its current form. We will initially make payments only to clients who are already in receipt of another type of payment from Social Security Scotland, with the agency making payments to more clients year on year as caseloads grow. We will reach an agreement with DWP to process payments for the remaining recipients in the meantime.
- Also in winter 2021 – first payments by the agency of Cold Spell Heating Assistance (which replaces Cold Weather Payments), again in its current form and to a subset of eligible recipients. We will reach an agreement with DWP to process payments for the remaining recipients in the meantime.

We expect to launch our new claims service for Employment Injury Assistance (which replaces Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefits) in autumn 2022.

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Rationale for timing of delivery of Scottish Carer's Allowance

As I set out in my statement to Parliament, I have carefully considered whether Scottish Carer's Allowance in particular could be delivered more quickly.

The Scottish Government recognises the immense contribution carers make to our society, caring for family, friends and neighbours. We have prioritised support for carers in our new Social Security system. Our first change when the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 was passed was to introduce Carer's Allowance Supplement (CAS), which improved the income of 75,000 Scottish carers. CAS increased the financial support to carers by 13% – from being the lowest benefit, to being in line with Jobseeker's Allowance through two additional payments a year. In 2018/19 this put an extra £442 a year in people's pockets, an investment in carers of over £33 million.

We will ensure that CAS keeps pace with inflation, increasing it by 2.4% for 2019/20. This means that next year carers in Scotland will receive an extra £452.40 compared with their counterparts south of the border.

CAS will be followed later this year by the Young Carer Grant, providing £300 to young carers who do not qualify for Carer's Allowance. We will also start delivery of additional payments to carers of more than one disabled child in early 2021.

I know that carers and their representatives are rightly keen that the Scottish Government should also take over full delivery of Scottish Carer's Allowance as soon as possible, so that we can continue to improve support.

I have considered when it will be safe to do so, and have concluded that Carer's Allowance, above all, is a form of assistance which we have to take the time to get right. It is arguably the most complex of the devolved benefits. As an income replacement benefit, it impacts on tax and other benefits. This means that prior to introducing current Carer's Allowance cases, we will need to develop complex data sharing arrangements with both DWP and HMRC, as well as build a range of information feeds between ourselves and the UK Government to ensure carers are protected in receiving all the support they are entitled to. It is imperative that we get this development work right, to ensure that people who rely on Carer's Allowance are not disadvantaged.

I have decided that we can safely deliver new claims for Carer's Allowance by the end of 2021. This will also allow us to focus in 2020 on introducing new claims for the three forms of Disability Assistance. By protecting people receiving disability benefits – the people for whom our carers care – we will further protect carers by ensuring that they continue to receive our replacement benefit for Carer's Allowance. This is particularly important given the scale of change we are proposing to the application process, the desk based decision making process and face-to-face assessments for Disability Assistance.

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Transfer of existing claims

In addition to launching new claims services, we also need to transfer people's existing claims from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to Social Security Scotland. This is a substantial undertaking, which requires us to move over 550,000 cases from DWP's systems to those of our agency. We will start this work next year, taking a principled approach to case transfer based on the priorities identified in our Experience Panel research: ensuring that people are transferred safely and securely from DWP to our agency, that they continue to get the payments they are entitled to in the interim, and that no one is subject to a DWP face-to-face reassessment for disability benefits from early 2021 when the Scottish Government launches new claims for our PIP replacement. I can also guarantee that – unlike for DWP's Universal Credit – people will not have to make a new claim as part of their transfer from UK benefits to their Scottish replacements.

Whilst with DWP's cooperation I expect the majority of people to be transferred by 2023, I expect it to take until 2024 for all cases to be fully transferred. If during the case transfer process we find we can complete it faster, then we will; similarly, if we find that a target date of 2024 creates unacceptable risks for clients then we will adjust the pace of transfer accordingly.

In relation to one benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA), I have concluded that there would be no advantage in transferring recipients to Social Security Scotland, and that their cases should continue to be administered by DWP. This is because there is a small and declining caseload for SDA and there will be no new claims. The Scottish Government is not proposing to make changes to the benefit and this proposal is largely supported by stakeholders and individuals. I am also concerned that transferring SDA may cause unnecessary disruption to some recipients.

We will seek to conclude agency agreements with DWP to partially administer the devolving benefits until Social Security Scotland is delivering them in full. Agency agreements are a normal part of the machinery of devolution, and will ensure that people receive the regular payments which they have already been awarded, with minimal disruption and distress. This is an administrative function only and does not affect the date from which we assume executive competence.

Next steps

A great deal of activity is already well underway to make our current plans a reality. Today I have published a series of 11 policy papers, setting out the extensive work that has already gone into designing how these benefits will operate. Next week I will also be launching a consultation on Disability Assistance, to seek the views of the public on our proposed reforms.

In parallel we will continue to pursue our ambitious timetable for 2019. By the end of this year – just 18 months from Scotland's Social Security Act – we will have delivered three of the 11 devolved benefits and four brand new payments.

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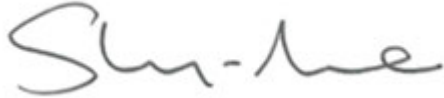
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And two years hence, Social Security Scotland will have made over £210 million in benefit payments; agency staff will have supported an estimated 200,000 people; and we will have brought a new culture of dignity, fairness and respect to Scottish social security.

I would be happy to attend a future meeting to discuss this timetable in more detail.

Yours sincerely



SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

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