

Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare, 10th Meeting

Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh

Thursday 14 June 2018

Chair: Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities

Attending: Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Minister for Social Security
Minister for Employability and Training
Officials from the Scottish Government, Department for Work and Pensions and Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland

Apologies: Secretary of State for Scotland

Items 1&2: Welcome and Introductions, and Minutes and Actions from the previous meeting

1. Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities (Cab Sec CSSE), Angela Constance MSP, welcomed all to the meeting and passed on the apologies from the Secretary of State for Scotland (SoSS), Rt. Hon. David Mundell MP. Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (SoS DWP), Rt. Hon. Esther McVey MP, said she was pleased to be at the meeting and that constant dialogue is important. Gillian McGregor (GM), Director, Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland, also passed on the apologies from SoSS. Cab Sec CSSE acknowledged the commitment from Ministers to meet quarterly.
2. All present noted the minutes of the previous meeting had been agreed and published, and that all actions from that meeting were either complete or included in the agenda of this meeting.

Item 3: Social Security (Scotland) Act and Scottish social security agency

3. Cab Sec CSSE noted this was the first meeting since the Social Security (Scotland) Act had been passed, which is a landmark piece of legislation, laying the foundation so further layers can be put into place to support their next steps. Minister for Social Security (MfSS), Jeane Freeman MSP, provided an update on the Act, stating that it had passed unanimously. She reported that Audit Scotland had said that the Scottish Government (SG) were on track for delivery on Wave 1, and commented that the critical focus is now on the relationship between the SG and UK Government (UKG) and efforts to meet the timetable.
4. SoS DWP welcomed the Act and responded that it would be important to have a shared understanding of the SG's delivery timetable. Cab Sec CSSE said she thought that officials from both Departments were working to an agreed timetable.
5. MfSS raised the issue of housing support in Universal Credit (UC) and the means of dis-applying the provisions relating to spare rooms in Scotland. She also sought notice of any changes to reserved benefits which might have an effect on SG policies, or on the timescales for delivery of agreed changes to the social security

system in Scotland. SoS DWP responded that her Department had agreed no dates regarding the incorporation of the spare room provisions into UC itself, although there was agreement that this would be done in due course. In the interim, she noted that Discretionary Housing Payments would remain available to achieve SG's aims. MfSS noted disparity of opinions regarding dates of implementation of these measures.

Item 4: Employability Programmes

6. Minister for Employability and Training (MfET), Jamie Hepburn MSP, gave an update on the figures from the two transitional employability programmes; both were above target for people participating. He also reported good early referral numbers for Fair Start Scotland, and praised the Joint Operational Framework for Employability and the good work between officials in SG and in Jobcentre Plus, and especially with Work Coaches.
7. MfET mentioned the No One Left Behind publication, on joining employability and other services, which he had discussed recently with UKG ministers. SoS DWP said she was happy for her Department to work with SG on this.

Item 5: Wave 1 update

8. MfSS acknowledged the progress on data sharing with regard to Carer's Allowance, reported that work on Wave 1 is proceeding on time, and underlined the importance of collaboration and joint working given the joint nature of the programme of devolution. MfSS also asked whether the implementation of GB-level policy changes to UC – such as for young people with housing costs, and for people to whom transitional protection would apply – would take priority in the revised UC work programme over changes requested by SG, including the spare room subsidy one already requested and future changes to accommodate split payments.
9. SoS DWP hoped that Scottish Ministers welcomed the policy changes she had announced. MfSS asked when these policy changes would be implemented. SoS DWP indicated that the changes to housing support for 18-21 year olds would be made as soon as possible.
10. MfSS raised a concern around payment and rent cycles which had been highlighted by the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations which she has written on. Officials responded that this was a matter known to the Department, and was not unique to Scotland.
11. MfSS thanked the UKG for the commitment in-principle to take forward a Scotland Act Order necessary for future agency agreements and would respond in due course.

Item 6: Wave 2 update

12. MfSS commented on positive recent conversations with the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work on concerns surrounding the current assessment

process for Personal Independence Payments and said it would be helpful for the SG to be kept up to date on this work.

13. SoS DWP asked about the political status of the next phase high-level plans, i.e. the next phase of replacement by the Scottish Government of Carer's Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, Severe Disablement Allowance, Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit, Winter Fuel Payments and Cold Weather Payments, and for further underpinning detail to allow for detailed planning by the two Governments. MfSS confirmed that work should continue according to the timeline shared with DWP.
14. SoS DWP stated that where agency agreements were necessary for the interim delivery of payments by her Department on behalf of SG, these would need to be time-limited. Cab Sec CSSE explained the SG wanted to minimise the need for agency agreements entirely and that nothing in the Wave 2 plans suggested the SG would need agency agreements for longer than had originally been anticipated. SoS DWP expressed a view that the information that had been shared implied a longer time in the case of existing claims. This was not a view which the MfSS shared and Ministers asked officials to check this point. The deadline for the transfer of executive competence of certain welfare powers in the Scotland Act 2016 was raised; MfSS advised that she thought any change to that date would be a matter for UKG, and the SG did not intend to propose moving this date.

Item 7: Any other business

15. MfET also referenced the recent positive discussion with Sarah Newton MP, Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, on the need for more clarity on the future of Specialist Employment Support which has been raised at previous meetings. He also outlined discussions to set up a working group with BASE and UKG to look at the Supported Places scheme.

ENDS