

Maximising Take-up of the Scottish Child Payment:

Position Paper

October 2020

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Introduction

On 26 June 2019, the Scottish Government announced our intention to introduce a new benefit to provide additional support for low income families, and help tackle child poverty – the Scottish Child Payment. This payment will provide the equivalent of £10 a week per child to families with eligible children who are in receipt of existing low income benefits.

Early payments of the Scottish Child Payment will be made to families with children under the age of 6 – recognising that, of all children in poverty, almost 60% live in a household where the youngest child is aged under 6, and the early years are key to improving long-term outcomes. The latest Scottish Fiscal Commission (SFC) forecast suggests that the Scottish Child Payment could support up to 194,000 children this year – a significant investment in our children and families and an increase of 14% since last year's Scottish Government's forecast. This increase is due to increased numbers receiving Universal Credit as a result of the pandemic. Forecast costs for the first full year of the Scottish Child Payment's roll-out to under 6s stands at £77 million in 2021/22 compared to £65 million in the previous SFC forecast of February 2020.

We have so far published three position papers on the Scottish Child Payment: the [first in June 2019](#), setting out the process of its development; the [second in October 2019](#), setting out further developments undertaken over summer 2019; and the [third in January 2020](#), setting out delivery aspects of the payment.

Since the last position paper was published, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced us to make difficult decisions in all areas of government. Social Security Scotland, too, are continuing to work and plan in a context of ongoing uncertainty. With staff still working from home in line with Scottish Government guidelines, this continues to have an impact on our service delivery. Despite significant challenges, delivery of the Scottish Child Payment will only be 2 months later than originally planned – opening to applications for under 6s in November, with the first payments made to eligible families from the end of February 2021. Even with this slight delay, the pace of development – from announcement to implementation – has been unprecedented.

We are committed to maximising the take-up of all Scottish benefits. This is a moral imperative, and a fundamental priority, which feeds into our wider commitments around tackling poverty and inequalities in all forms. The Scottish Government's first [Benefit Take-up Strategy](#) – published in October 2019 – set out our commitment and approach to maximising the take-up of all Scottish benefits. This position paper shows how we plan to maximise the take-up of the Scottish Child Payment.

Pre-application – communications and engagement

Maximising take-up begins before individuals access Social Security Scotland to make an application. How we engage with and support clients and stakeholders is integral to our approach to ensuring people are aware of, and able to access, their entitlements.

Communications

Our communications approach to the Scottish Child Payment deploys a range of tactics – including: running general and targeted marketing campaigns, ensuring communications target seldom-heard groups, and writing directly to clients inviting them to apply for the payment.

Marketing and promotion

Marketing will be an important tool in raising awareness of the Scottish Child Payment. In the first instance, we will use radio, local print and digital advertising to clarify the detail of the early roll-out process. Once payment starts in February 2021, there will be a simpler message and call to action. At this point we will launch a campaign to promote all of the benefits available to families through Social Security Scotland.

We will evaluate our marketing activity during the early application period (between November 2020 and February 2021), and will use this learning, along with what we know so far from promoting Best Start payments, to refine our marketing plan for the payment starting. It is likely that this campaign will target placement of outdoor advertising within areas of multiple deprivation and within a set radius of schools and healthcare provision, as well as continued use of television and radio marketing.

We also have a number of collaborative promotional approaches in place, such as:

- Mobilising the Scottish Government’s Parent Club brand to take advantage of its growing familiarity among parents through the Covid-19 crisis;
- Writing directly to head teachers of nurseries and primary schools - both local authority and independent - across Scotland to encourage them to share with parent councils and parents;
- Sharing information through the Scottish Book Trust’s Bookbug initiative; and
- Including promotional material in the Scottish Government Baby Box contents.

Communicating with seldom-heard groups

We have put in place a number of proactive measures to ensure that our communications are inclusive and accessible to the widest possible audience, including:

- Producing benefit information in nine languages – including British Sign Language and Braille, as well as Easy Read – available at launch of any new benefit;
- Ensuring ease of access by providing materials electronically and, where appropriate, in print to stakeholders supporting a range of clients;
- Creating bespoke products to address specific barriers to access (e.g. our collaboration with MECOPP to produce [video resources](#) made by and for Gypsy/Traveller communities); and
- Collaborating with partner organisations to give seldom-heard groups confidence in their ability to access our services (e.g. incorporating trusted brands such as Happy to Translate across all of our materials as a recognised mark to give people who speak little or no English confidence that they will be able to interact easily with our service).

Invitation to apply

This year, we have introduced an invitation to clients to apply for three of our Best Start benefits. Using Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) data, we identify those who are likely to be eligible for a Best Start Grant, and issue a letter inviting them to apply.

As part of our early roll-out approach, we are aiming to generate a steady stream of applications between November 2020 and February 2021. People who are identified as being likely to be eligible for Best Start Foods will be invited to apply first, with options to also apply for the Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment. Following this, those who are likely to be eligible for the Early Learning Payment and then School Age Payment will receive an invitation to apply, with possible eligibility for the Scottish Child Payment highlighted. Finally, anyone on the database who has not already applied for the Scottish Child Payment will be invited to do so.

Evaluation of the initial round of invitation to apply for Best Start Grant payments is still underway. We are continuing to carry out user research with those who received these first invitations to establish how we can improve this to encourage more people to act on receipt of these letters.

National engagement and local delivery

Social Security Scotland will work closely with a wide range of national and local stakeholders to encourage take-up of Scottish Child Payment. We will:

- Form partnerships with other services such as health, education, social care, housing and the voluntary sector who we know support eligible families so they actively promote Scottish Child Payment in the course of their work;
- Work alongside trusted organisations to help our communications reach those clients in most need and/or least likely to engage with traditional communication routes;

- Work with the local strategic planning partnerships to ensure they are developing local plans, and that the active promotion of Scottish Child Payment and Social Security Scotland's other benefits is part of their approach to tackling child poverty and improving local services; and
- Ensure that our stakeholders have all the information they need to be able to talk confidently about Scottish Child Payment and signpost people to apply.

Social Security Scotland are running a series of virtual stakeholder roadshows between October and December 2020 to talk to a wide range of partner organisations about Scottish Child Payment. We will also meet with a wide range of national and local organisations to agree the specific ways in which they can help us to promote Scottish Child Payment to eligible families.

A range of best practice has been developed for Social Security Scotland's existing benefits, and we will extend these to include Scottish Child Payment. For example, during routine discussions during midwifery and health visitor appointments and the registration of a birth of a child we will ensure that information on social security support is available.

Local Delivery is a fundamental part of Social Security Scotland's approach to promoting the take-up of Scottish benefits. We continue to engage with external stakeholders during current Covid-19 restrictions. Whilst face-to-face meetings have been suspended, virtual stakeholder meetings are taking place, giving Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery teams the opportunity to increase awareness of future benefit launches, including Scottish Child Payment, and to maintain a visible presence in local areas.

Inclusive Communication

Social Security Scotland aims to be a leader in inclusive communication. A range of services are in place to ensure that people who communicate in different ways can access Scottish Child Payment:

- Information materials for clients and stakeholders will be made available in a range of different formats and languages, including British Sign Language (BSL) and Easy Read. They will be available for stakeholders to download or order in print from the [stakeholder resources section of the Social Security Scotland website](#).
- Alternative versions of materials will be proactively provided to the stakeholders that support specific client groups to ensure they get into the hands of the people that need them.
- Interpretation, Translation and Transcription services are available in over 100 languages.
- BSL video relay service is available through Contact Scotland.
- Deafblind interpreters, Text Relay and electronic note taker services are available.
- All letters, information and guidance are available in Braille, Large Print, Easy Read and various Audio formats.

- Online content is compatible with screen reader software on Jaws, Voiceover and Non Visual Desktop Access (NVDA) platforms.

Social Security Scotland will continue to work closely with stakeholders to review and improve our services. This will ensure that everyone is able to understand information and express themselves.

Support and advice

We acknowledge the importance of specialist advice services in maximising take-up. The Benefit Take-Up Strategy introduced 2 new funds totalling £600,000 to assist 26 third sector organisations to support people who will be applying for Scottish benefits and to ensure people are aware of the financial support available to them. A proportion of this funding has allowed organisations to prepare their services to support clients to access the Scottish Child Payment.

Applications - a user-centred approach

Our approach to increasing benefit take-up is founded on implicit design principles of accessibility, simplicity, dignity, and respect. Applications need to be as straightforward and transparent as possible, and processes need to be designed to deliver fair outcomes. Throughout the development of all benefits, we have worked directly with people who have experience of the social security system – from initial exploratory research, through to the testing of prototypes and final designs.

Simplified application process

In designing the Scottish Child Payment, we have closely matched eligibility to our existing low income benefits, and particularly Best Start Grant. This means that the key eligibility criteria of child responsibility and qualifying benefits found in Best Start Grant will be replicated as far as possible for Scottish Child Payment which we expect will increase awareness and understanding of this new benefit, and ensure a simpler application process.

In order to further maximise access to the Scottish Child Payment, we have made multiple application channels available, including the use of telephone, digital, and paper applications.

Administrative innovation

Joint applications – Best Start benefits and Scottish Child Payment

We will offer individuals applying for i) Scottish Child Payment, or ii) Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods the opportunity to be considered for the other benefit, and to combine applications – meaning they only have to provide information once. Individuals will still retain the right to receive determinations on each application they submit – meaning they will not have to wait on a decision for one of the benefits in order to receive the other.

Automation

The principle of automating benefit payments, where appropriate and feasible, is one which we support. Whilst we have been unable to introduce automated payments of Scottish Child Payment for launch of the benefit, we remain committed to automation where possible, and we will review the feasibility again as part of the wider review of the Scottish Child Payment when it is fully rolled out, though it is important to note that an automated service would still be complex and require substantial work, as well as a significant level of support from the DWP.

Next steps

- The Scottish Child Payment for under 6s will open to applications in November with the first payments made to eligible families from the end of February 2021.
- We are committed to publishing the operational guidance for the Scottish Child Payment, and will endeavour to do so as soon as is practical.
- Our ambition is to deliver Phase 2 of Scottish Child Payment for under 16s by the end of 2022, provided that the UK Government agrees to match our pace in providing the data that we need. The Scottish Fiscal Commission estimate that there could be 499,000 eligible children in 2022/23.
- We are committed to reviewing the Scottish Child Payment during the course of the next Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan (2022-2026), and will continue to work closely with stakeholders to ensure that support is targeted on those families that need it most.

Scottish Government
Social Security Directorate

October 2020

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The Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

ISBN: 978-1-80004-250-6 (web only)

Published by The Scottish Government, October 2020

Produced for The Scottish Government by APS Group Scotland, 21 Tennant Street, Edinburgh EH6 5NA
PPDAS777726 (10/20)

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