



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Social Security Scotland
Agnes Husband House
17 South Union Street
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06 May 2025

Dear Ms Stevenson,

Thank you for your letter dated 8 April 2025 requesting information for the Social Justice and Social Security Committee's inquiry into financial considerations when leaving an abusive relationship.

1. How do the rules governing benefits Social Security Scotland delivers take account of the impact of domestic abuse?

We engage with some of the most vulnerable people in Scotland and this may lead to instances where it becomes apparent that a person may be at risk of harm, including physical, mental, emotional harm or concerns of financial abuse.

The Social Security Information Sharing (Scotland) Amendments Regulations 2024 allow us to make referrals of suspected risk of harm to the relevant authorities to safeguard vulnerable individuals and ensure they receive appropriate support. Situations where immediate threat and endangerment to life have been identified are treated differently and reported to Police Scotland.

Some of the devolved benefits have specific support available to people who have been forced to leave their home due to domestic abuse through Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment. Normally second or subsequent children receive £383.75 but where a client tells us they have been forced to leave their home we will award £767.50. This reflects that in these circumstances they will have been forced to leave baby clothes and equipment behind.

2. Where rules have flexibility built into them to account for domestic abuse, what evidence is required from the client?

When applying for Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment, there is an option in the application form for clients to tell us if they were forced to leave their home due to domestic abuse. We have guidance for these cases and will not ask for any information about their experience or ask them to verify it.

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3. Are staff at Social Security Scotland trained to recognise different forms of domestic abuse, including economic abuse? Are they trained in trauma-informed working practices?

All colleagues who work with clients complete annual training which covers principles of safeguarding, abuse and public protection. Colleagues are also encouraged to liaise with our Safeguarding Team, a team of trained professionals to support clients identified as at risk.

Our 'risk of harm and suicide intervention' training addresses various types of harm our clients may encounter, including domestic abuse, economic abuse, and child abuse. Colleagues participating in this training take part in group activities where they discuss real-life case studies and determine the best actions to support each client.

We are committed to integrating a trauma-informed approach throughout our organisation. Trauma awareness is included in our induction programme, and we have staff trained to expert level. All Health and Social Care staff currently undergo training on trauma-informed practices in conjunction with NHS Education for Scotland.

Our Charter commits that all our services will adopt trauma-informed practice as a standard. We are actively working to embed trauma-informed practices across the organisation.

4. Are staff also trained to understand the reasons people might want responsibility for a benefit transferred from an ex-partner, and the process to action this?

Mandatory learning on child responsibility must be completed by all frontline colleagues, and there is internal guidance for colleagues on how to process these applications.

Although the process for benefit transfer may vary by benefit type, all decisions are made with the best interests of the child at the heart of the decision-making process and in accordance with the Social Security Scotland values of dignity, fairness and respect.

5. How do Social Security Scotland ensure its administration of benefits cannot be used to perpetrate economic abuse?

Following stakeholder feedback in 2020, a number of important improvements have been made to the appointee provisions, through the introduction of safeguarding principles, and periodic reviews that have been welcomed by stakeholders.

Some clients might need an appointee if they are unable to make or communicate decisions because of their condition. We require a face-to-face visit with the client and potential appointee before the appointment is made, which includes interviewing them separately, where possible. This provides an important opportunity to detect any potential coercion or abuse.

Clients can also authorise a third-party representative to support them with their application and throughout the lifecycle of their payment. Due to concerns raised about potential exploitation linked to domestic abuse, the period of authorisation does not last indefinitely unless explicitly specified by the client.

Our safeguarding measures are in place to ensure potential abuse is identified and the relevant authorities are alerted at an early stage.

6. What is Social Security Scotland doing to address the time it can take to resolve who is responsible for a child in cases of competing claims for Scottish Child Payment?

In cases where there is a responsibility dispute, we require information from both parties, which they are asked to provide within 28 days.

The evidence is thoroughly reviewed to ensure the correct decision and payment is made as early as possible. Due to the complex nature of some of these cases, advice may be sought from specialist policy and legal teams to ensure the decision is in line with our regulations.

7. In what circumstances can Scottish Child Payment and Best Start Grants be backdated?

There are no provisions in relation to backdating for Best Start Grant payments or Scottish Child Payment. However, there are 'Treat as Made' provisions where the client may make an application before or after they become eligible. Rather than asking a client to apply again, we may treat their application as made, depending on the circumstances, from the date determined by us or a date nominated by the client.

For example:

Best Start Grant:

- If a client applies and would not be eligible on the date of the application, but would become eligible within 10 days of the application, we may choose a date within those 10 days that the application is treated as made,

Scottish Child Payment:

- If a client applies and would not be eligible on the date of the application but would become eligible within 14 days of the application, we may choose a date within those 14 days that the application is treated as made.

8. How does Social Security Scotland help to raise awareness of Scottish Child Payment, and eligibility for this?

We raise awareness of Scottish Child Payment and eligibility criteria through regular communications activity.

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Over the last 12 months, we have delivered targeted marketing campaigns across multiple channels. We also engage and organise events with external stakeholders and trusted parties, who have relationships with our clients? and can help increase understanding of eligibility. Translated factsheets and materials are available on our website and have been shared with schools as part of a digital resource.

9. To what extent are those being cared for involved in the application process for Carer Support Payment, and could this be increased and improved?

In line with its Charter commitments, Social Security Scotland processes includes both carers and cared for people.

A cared for person will be notified of their carer's application, with information on how they can contact us if they any have concerns about this. There is no specific action required at that stage by the cared for person, however they can contact us at any point to dispute an award.

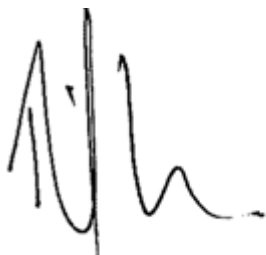
Where the person listed on the application contacts us to dispute that the applicant is caring for them, we have processes in place to investigate the dispute which will take safeguarding procedures into account where necessary.

Anyone with concerns about potential fraud relating to a Carer Support Payment application will also be able to report this to Social Security Scotland in the same way as other benefits. Ongoing payments of Carer Support Payment can also be suspended where there is a risk of financial abuse.

We are committed to continuous improvement and are still seeking and reviewing feedback following the launch of the benefit, including as part of a formal evaluation, as we work to further improve support for carers.

I hope this information is helpful to Members.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Wallace', with a stylized, flowing script.

David Wallace

Chief Executive
Social Security Scotland

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