

News release

Embargoed until 00:01 hours, 2 May 2019

Benefits delivery set to get much harder

The Scottish Government has done a good job of delivering its first set of devolved benefits, but the real challenge is still to come, says Scotland's national spending watchdog.

Carers and new parents successfully received payments in 2018 and the country's new benefits agency, Social Security Scotland, was set up. But bringing in early benefits was harder than expected.

The Auditor General for Scotland says the government does not yet have a clear picture of what will be needed to make the next, much more complex, set of benefit payments.

Constant short-term pressures and a high pace of work has left civil servants little time to pause and refocus their activity. That poses risks to the overall delivery of future benefits.

Caroline Gardner, the Auditor General for Scotland, said: "The government has done well to date but has had to work flat out to reach this point, leaving little time to draw breath and plan for the challenges ahead.

"The social security team is doing the right things to address that issue, but it hasn't yet got a clear understanding of what's needed to deliver the more complex benefits to come, or how much it will cost. Many decisions about future benefits are still to be made and it's critical that detailed plans are now put in place."

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Notes to editors

1. The Scottish Government has spent £90m on delivering devolved benefits to date but is not clear on what it expects the overall programme to cost or the workforce required to deliver it.
2. £35m has been paid in Carers Allowance Supplement to 75,000 people; £2.7m has been paid in Best Start Grant baby and pregnancy grants to 7,000 people.
3. During the period covered by the audit, about 30 per cent of posts within the social security programme were vacant.
4. Social Security Scotland was established in September 2018, employing 300 staff.
5. About 1.4m people are expected to receive social security payments from Social Security Scotland every year, once all devolved benefits have been implemented.
6. Benefits due to be delivered from 2020 onwards include Personal Independence Payments and Disability Living Allowance and will be much more complex to deliver because of more complicated eligibility rules.
7. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

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