

# Social security: implementing the devolved powers

AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland

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## Background

The Scotland Act 2016 devolved 11 social security benefits and gave the Scottish Government the power to create new benefits and to top up existing ones. Implementing these powers is a major and complex programme of work for the Scottish Government and its social security agency, Social Security Scotland.

The Scottish Government has set a clear aim to deliver a service which is based on dignity, fairness and respect and plans to have completed the implementation and transfer of the benefits by 2024/25.

We last reported on the progress the Scottish Government had made on this programme of work in May 2019. Our report, including recommendations for improvement, can be found [here](#).

Our audit interest is how Scotland's new social security powers are being implemented and the impact they have for

people in Scotland will extend into the longer term. This performance report is the latest audit in that series of work. Future work in this area will continue to build upon the themes and lessons learned through this audit.

## Why is this audit important?

In April 2020, the Scottish Government became responsible for all devolved benefits, however it is yet to take on the administration for the highest value and most complex benefits. Devolved social security expenditure is projected to increase from £3.7 billion in 2021-22 to approximately £5.2 billion in 2026-27<sup>1</sup>. This is a significant, demand-led, element of the Scottish budget which will need to be managed alongside other priorities.

The impact of Covid-19 and government's response to it has brought into sharp focus the impact of inequalities in our society and the role of the social security system in addressing these. Successful delivery of the

<sup>1</sup> [Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts](#), Scottish Fiscal Commission, August 2021

new social security powers will be crucial to peoples' experience of the Scottish social security system and the Scottish Government's achievement of its wider policy aims.

### What will the audit look at?

We will assess what progress the Scottish Government has made on managing the delivery of its devolved social security powers and the extent to which it is well placed to deliver the remaining benefits and a social security system which meets its aspirations. We will also consider the changed delivery context as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In particular, the audit will focus on the delivery of Scottish Child Payment for children under the age of 6 and Child Disability Payment, as well as preparedness for extending Scottish Child Payment to children under 16 and delivering Adult Disability Payment. We will also consider supporting functions including the digital systems, workforce and financial planning.

### How will we carry out this audit?

We will review a range of documents and supplement these with interviews and analysis.

We will review information from the Scottish Government, Social Security Scotland, the Scottish and UK Parliaments, the Scottish Fiscal Commission, the Scottish Commission on Social Security and other relevant stakeholders and representative groups.

We will speak with representatives from the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland, as well as drawing on our other audit work, including the annual audit of Social Security Scotland.

### What do we want to happen as a result?

The audit will provide assurance to the Scottish Parliament and the public on how well the Scottish Government is managing and implementing its devolved social security powers. Our recommendations will promote and support improvement and transparency. We will report publicly, to support the independent scrutiny of Scotland's public finances.

### Timetable and contact

We plan to publish a national report for the Auditor General for Scotland in Spring 2022. For further information please get in touch with Pauline Gillen, Senior Audit Manager, on 0131 625 1772 or [pgillen@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:pgillen@audit-scotland.gov.uk).



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