



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Our Charter

What you can expect from the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland.

Dignity, fairness, respect.



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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Social Security Scotland

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About Our Charter

Introduction

The Scottish Government is creating a new social security system for Scotland. Over the next few years it will take control over a range of benefits from DWP – mostly disability and carer’s benefits, together with a smaller number of income related benefits like Best Start Grant and Funeral Expense Assistance.

The people of Scotland were asked how these new social security powers should be used. They said that the UK system is stressful, complicated and often inhumane.

The Scottish Government is determined do things differently. It has set-up Social Security Scotland to deliver benefits in a more positive and supportive way, based on the fact that social security is a human right. This approach is more fully described by the eight principles in Section 1 of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 – the law that created the new system:

1. social security is an investment in the people of Scotland
2. social security is itself a human right and essential to the realisation of other human rights
3. the delivery of social security is a public service
4. respect for the dignity of individuals is to be at the heart of the Scottish social security system
5. the Scottish social security system is to contribute to reducing poverty in Scotland
6. the Scottish social security system is to be designed with the people of Scotland on the basis of evidence

7. opportunities are to be sought to continuously improve the Scottish social security system in ways which –
 - (i) put the needs of those who require assistance first, and
 - (ii) advance equality and non-discrimination,
 8. the Scottish social security system is to be efficient and deliver value for money.
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What is Our Charter?

It takes these principles and explains what they will mean in practice and what you are entitled to expect from the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland.

Who created Our Charter?

- People with lived experience of social security.
 - Organisations that help or represent people who may use the new system.
 - Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland staff.
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Who is the ‘our’ in Our Charter?

Every person in Scotland. Social security is a human right – an investment in ourselves and each other. It is a public service that any of us could need at any time. So Our Charter belongs to all of us.

Who makes sure that Our Charter is being delivered?

The Scottish Government must explain to the Scottish Parliament what it has done to make sure the commitments in Our Charter are being delivered. The Scottish Commission on Social Security (an independent group of experts) will also report to the Scottish Parliament on how it thinks the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland are doing against Our Charter. The Scottish Parliament will use this information to decide if the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland are doing well or if they should do more.

Each of us also has a personal responsibility in making sure Our Charter is delivered in practice:

- We all need to know what our rights are and what is expected of us.
 - We need to speak up if these commitments are not being delivered.
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What is the difference between the Scottish Government, Social Security Scotland, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Commission on Social Security?

The Scottish Parliament is made up of 129 MSPs elected by the people of Scotland. Its job is to pass laws and to hold the Scottish Government to account.

The Scottish Government is led by the First Minister and is normally formed by the party with the largest number of MSPs. Its job is to develop and implement policies (i.e. to decide what should be done) in the areas it is responsible for (e.g. health, education and some social security benefits).

Social Security Scotland is an agency created by the Scottish Government to deliver benefits in a way that is consistent with the approach outlined in Our Charter. It cannot develop social security policy (e.g. decide eligibility rules or payment levels) but is responsible for ensuring that Scottish Government policy is delivered in practice.

The Scottish Commission on Social Security is an independent group of experts responsible for checking new social security policy and legislation and advising the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament if it thinks improvements could be made. It will also report to Parliament on how it thinks the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland are doing against the commitments in Our Charter.

All four organisations have a crucial role to play in Scotland's social security system. The Scottish Government is ultimately responsible for policy and the performance of the system. Social Security Scotland is responsible for delivering that policy in practice. The Scottish Parliament is responsible for holding the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland to account. The Scottish Commission on Social Security will provide independent scrutiny, challenge and advice.

Who can you tell if you do not think Our Charter is being met?

For feedback, suggestions and complaints, please speak to a member of Social Security Scotland staff, visit www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/what-we-do/feedback or call freephone 0800 182 2222.

Staff will try to help you right away and to ensure we do better next time. We will listen, learn and improve.

If you are still unhappy please contact independent Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).

Visit spso.org.uk or call freephone 0800 377 7330.

You can also complain about matters relating to policy decisions (eg. levels of payment or eligibility rules) direct to Scottish Ministers. Please contact sgcomplaints@gov.scot

A people's service

We are here to help you get everything you're entitled to.

Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government will:

1. be patient, kind and consider how you might feel
2. listen to you, trust you and treat you as an individual
3. treat everyone equally, fairly and without discrimination
4. support you through your application, keeping you updated and explaining what will happen and why
5. ensure staff are knowledgeable about social security to help you get what you're entitled to
6. refer you to independent advice and support if you want extra help with your application or appeal. You are also entitled to ask someone that you know to support you
7. make decisions in a way that is consistent and accurate – and aim to get them right first time
8. be honest, provide clear reasons for decisions and explain what to do if you disagree
9. pay you on time in the right amount
10. refer you to other organisations, services or forms of help where they could help improve your wellbeing or financial circumstances
11. tell you if we think you might be entitled to benefits not delivered by Social Security Scotland

12. recruit people who care about delivering a service based on equality, respect, dignity and human rights
 13. involve people with diverse lived experiences of social security and the organisations that represent them in training staff.
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Please help us by:

1. treating staff with dignity, fairness and respect
 2. telling us if you have particular access or cultural needs – we'll do our best to meet them
 3. giving us the information we need to help you and telling us if something changes that might affect your entitlement
 4. telling us about any problems with getting this information that we might be able to help with
 5. telling us how you feel about the service. We always want to get better and your ideas can help us do that.
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Processes that work

We will design services with the people who use them.

Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government will:

1. make communications, processes and systems as simple and clear as possible by testing them with the people who will use them

2. recognise that your time is precious and handle your application and enquiries as quickly as we can
3. adapt processes and ways of communicating as much as we reasonably can to meet your needs and preferences, for example by providing interpreters
4. support your wellbeing and make your contact with us as positive and stress-free as possible
5. ensure that disabled people who need help with the application process can get independent advocacy
6. deliver face-to-face services in local communities in places that are convenient and accessible. This includes home visits if appropriate
7. look at your application again if you disagree with a decision. This is called a re-determination. When we do this someone different will look at it as if it was a completely new application
8. explain how you can appeal if you still don't think the right decision has been made after a re-determination
9. continue to pay you at the same level if you challenge a decision to reduce or stop your benefit
10. only carry out a face-to-face assessment for disability benefits when we are not able to make a decision with information that is already available
11. ensure face-to-face assessments are carried out in a way that puts your wellbeing first
12. make sure that face-to-face assessments are carried out by qualified staff who understand your condition and the impact it is having on you.

A learning system

We will encourage feedback and empower people to deliver the best service possible.

Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government will:

1. listen, learn and improve by owning up to mistakes and valuing feedback, complaints and appeal decisions
2. encourage you to provide feedback, explain how you can complain and do everything we can to make things right
3. involve people using the service in measuring how well it works - including the commitments in Our Charter
4. make sure staff are well trained, supported and well equipped to do their jobs
5. ensure staff understand the needs of different people and the barriers they face - so that no-one experiences discrimination because of who they are
6. encourage staff to speak up when they feel we could provide a better service
7. build a workforce that reflects the diversity of the people of Scotland
8. create a culture of trust by being open and transparent
9. work with other organisations to ensure services and policy are joined up to provide the best possible help and support

10. encourage other organisations working in social security to adopt the approach described in Our Charter
 11. base services in places that are accessible and welcoming for everyone.
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A better future

We will invest in the people of Scotland – making a positive difference to all our lives.

The Scottish Government will:

1. embed the social security principles and Our Charter in the policymaking process
2. involve people with diverse lived experiences of social security in developing policy
3. develop policy that seeks to advance equality, non-discrimination and the human right to social security as defined in laws, treaties and guidance
4. use social security powers to help ensure people can play a full and active part in society
5. promote a positive view of social security, explaining it is a public service to be proud of – a human right there for all of us who need it
6. publicly challenge the myths and stereotypes about social security to help reduce stigma and negativity

7. change the language on social security - introducing more positive words to describe the service and the people who use it
8. look for ways to make eligibility rules fairer and consider creating new benefits to meet people's changing needs
9. review the payment levels of Scottish benefits every year
10. increase the value of disability, employment-injury, carers and funeral expense benefits every year in line with inflation
11. improve take-up, ensuring as many people as possible get what they are entitled to, making a particular effort to reach people who are most likely to be excluded
12. use social security powers to contribute towards tackling poverty
13. work with other public services to support delivery of the National Outcomes. These define the Scottish Government's vision for a fairer, more prosperous Scotland
14. allocate resources fairly and efficiently, delivering value for money in a way that puts people first
15. develop ways of measuring how we are doing against the commitments in Our Charter.

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This document can be provided in audio, Braille, easy read, large print or alternative languages by calling 0800 182 2222.



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Whilst every effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of this text, the original documentation should be relied upon as the true and accurate version.