

Scottish Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Welfare policy in Scotland](#), HC 889

Thursday 11 March 2021

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Members present: Pete Wishart (Chair); Mhairi Black; Deidre Brock; Wendy Chamberlain; Alberto Costa; Jon Cruddas; Sally-Ann Hart; John Lamont.

Questions 135 - 174

Witnesses

I: Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People, Scottish Government; Callum Smith, Reserved and Working Age Benefits Team Leader, Scottish Government; and Catherine Reeves, Social Security Programme Management Office, Scottish Government.



Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Shirley-Anne Somerville, Callum Smith and Catherine Reeves.

Q135 **Chair:** Welcome to the Scottish Affairs Committee, in what will be our penultimate evidence session on our welfare in Scotland inquiry. We are delighted to be joined today by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security in Scotland, Shirley-Anne Somerville. I will let Shirley-Anne introduce herself and her colleagues before starting questions. Over to you, Cabinet Secretary.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Thank you very much, Chair. My name is Shirley-Anne Somerville. I am the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People within the Scottish Government. I am joined today by two Scottish Government officials, Callum Smith, who is from the social security policy division on reserved benefits, and Catherine Reeves, social security programme management and delivery division.

Q136 **Chair:** Thank you very much. How could we possibly forget the older people part of your title? Thank you for that. Can I start with a couple of general questions, Cabinet Secretary? I think it is four years now since the Scottish Government have had responsibilities for certain sections of social security in Scotland. In your view, how are the Scottish Government getting on with coping with their new responsibilities and what you have found are the major issues with that?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I think this is going well, but I would refer you to the recent client survey from Social Security Scotland, which demonstrated that the clients who are using our service at this moment also believe it is going well. They believe they are getting treated with dignity, fairness and respect—just as we hoped they would—given that is at the foundation and heart of our social security system. We have delivered on 10 new benefits. Currently, seven of those are brand-new benefits. All of them have improved eligibility, for example, or payment rates since we took those over from the DWP in the cases where there are legacy benefits.

I do believe this is going well. I would not point to what I think about it, but to what stakeholders are reporting back and also what the clients themselves are reporting back. I think that shows that we are on a journey, but that the people of Scotland have faith that we are on a good journey with them to deliver a service that they believe supports them, just as a social security service should.

Q137 **Chair:** I did read a very similar thing, which we will come to in a minute. One of the things you did mention that I am keen to explore with you a little bit further: when all this was started, the Scottish Government claimed that they would take a different approach to the UK Government on social security and that this would be determined by founding principles of dignity, respect and human rights. Would you say that your approach for social security has been typified and characterised by this



approach? How does this work with the approach the UK Government have adopted? Could you talk us through a little bit? Is there a culture clash at the heart of what is being done in Scotland and how does this all work together with the very different and distinct approach the UK Government takes?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It would be fair to say that there are a range of political differences between the Scottish and UK Governments about social security—which I am sure we will come on to later—although that does not mean that the two Governments cannot work well together. We need to because this is a joint programme, the devolution of benefits, and we have shared clients and a shared responsibility for them. We can have political differences over different parts of the social security system but still make sure that we are working well together to serve the people throughout Scotland that rely on both the Scottish and UK Governments.

We do have principles that underlie what we do. That was developed in our 2018 Act. It includes the fact that social security should be seen as an investment in the people of Scotland, that it is a human right, that it should be designed with the people of Scotland and have that dignity, fairness and respect at its heart. I would say the UK Government does have a very different approach. More importantly, I think the clients who we are designing our service with have reported to us that there is a very different approach from the UK Government.

What we are trying to do with the way that we deliver social security is change how social security is seen, so that it is seen as an investment in people, which I hope helps change the fact that there is a stigma for some people in coming forward to claim the benefits and payments that they are entitled to. We need to change that perception. The way to do that is to deliver it in a different way, so that people do have faith that they can come forward to the system because we will all need social security at some point in our lives. We might not know when and it is important that, when we do need it, we feel that that system will be supportive of us in that process.

That does feel quite different to certainly what my constituents and the research that we have done on how people feel the DWP presents its system. That is a choice of the Government to do things in a different way.

Q138 **Chair:** I am grateful for that. We will explore some of these issues with you. We are particularly interested in some of the relationship issues with the UK Government and the question of data sharing. I know colleagues have questions about that.

We did see your survey and it is roughly in line with what we found in our survey. It is unusual for a Select Committee of the House of Commons to conduct a survey, but it has been very helpful for us. What we found in our survey, Cabinet Secretary, is that 68% of the respondents found the process of applying for welfare to be difficult. Another majority of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

claimants did not think that their benefit was adequate and that people claiming sickness and disability benefits, in particular, were let down by the system. I do not know if that is consistent with what you found in your survey. Is there anything that you have seen that is apparent and obviously needs to be addressed? What are the Scottish Government doing to address some of these issues?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: One of the key ways that we can address these is building our service and designing that service with people who have experience of the current service. If you want to know what a service should look like, it is very important that you ask the people who use it. We have been very clear to do that. You can have a much more simplified application process while still having a very, very robust decision-making process at the back of that.

Certainly, from the results that we have seen from our recent client survey for the agency, people do believe that the benefits and payments are easy to apply for and that decisions are taken quickly. That is a very important aspect around this, because the ability for people to feel that the process is simple will itself encourage benefit take-up. I go back to my point about encouraging people to claim what they are entitled to. It is very important that we don't have a complex system.

Q139 **Chair:** Lastly from me, a good part of our inquiry has been about Universal Credit, how it has been applied in Scotland and the question as to whether it has been sufficient to combat poverty in Scotland. We have heard quite a lot about some of the issues around digital and the five-week wait for payment for claimants in Scotland. Obviously, there is an ongoing debate about whether the £20 uplift, which was introduced in the course of the past year, will be made permanent. What is your view about the operation of Universal Credit generally in Scotland just now?

We know that the Scottish Government have particular responsibilities around Scottish choices, which we will come on to in detail, but I want to hear your general view about how Universal Credit is working out in Scotland and what you have identified as being the major difficulties and issues. What are the Scottish Government doing to try to ensure that those who are on Universal Credit are being made to feel that the system is working for them?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: On your last point, there is very little that we can do to ensure that people feel that the system is working for them, given we have exceptionally limited powers over Universal Credit, for example, around Scottish choices and split payments and so on. That is really what we can do directly in terms of Universal Credit.

I would say at the outset I would like to give credit to the DWP staff, who have worked tremendously hard in unbelievably difficult circumstances to deliver for people right across the UK during the pandemic. I may disagree profoundly with certain aspects of Universal Credit, but I think



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that the staff themselves have done an amazing job, as I say, under very difficult circumstances.

Various Ministers from the Scottish Government have written, raising our concerns about a number of aspects around Universal Credit. I would suggest the fact that the £20 uplift came in at all shows that it was not enough to live on in the first place and, therefore, absolutely should remain a permanent fixture and indeed extended to legacy benefits.

We obviously had a number of concerns around the adequacy of the payment even before coronavirus. We have seen a number of pieces of research that show, for example, that people on Universal Credit often skip meals because they don't have enough for their basic living costs. That would suggest there is an underlying problem.

We then get to other issues, which again coronavirus has shown perhaps more clearly but have always been there. For example, the five-week wait, the benefit cap, the child limits and various aspects of Universal Credit that are built into the system show that things make it tremendously difficult for people. Obviously, that five-week wait example is something that is not just a concern of the Scottish Government, or indeed third sector agencies, but I also understand Committees of the House of Commons too.

Chair: Absolutely. Thank you for that. We will come back with more detailed questions about Universal Credit, which colleagues will raise with you, but first we will go to Sally-Ann Hart.

Q140 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Chairman. Good morning to our panel. I want to ask a couple of questions about poverty in Scotland. I know that Scotland is very rural in parts. Have the Scottish Government identified particular groups in Scotland that are more at risk of poverty and what is being done to support these groups? I will direct that at Ms Somerville first.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We do have, for example, our child poverty action plan, which has demonstrated that there are concerns over particular family types, for example, lone parent families—the majority of course are obviously women—families with a disabled child or adult and also ethnic minority families as well. Those are some of the key family groups in our child poverty action plan that we are concerned about.

Under the powers that we have, not just within social security but within other areas, we are obviously keen to use the powers of the Scottish Parliament to access. Obviously we do have a challenge when we are looking at poverty in Scotland on the basis, for example, that it is only 15% of benefit expenditure that is devolved to Scotland and, therefore, that we can influence or change direction thereof.

I hope that gives you an example of some of the types of families that we have specifically pulled out. As you mentioned, we have rural, remote and island areas, where we need to ensure that we are not just delivering a service that fits the central belt but obviously works if you are in one of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

our island communities as well. An example I would give of that is the local delivery we have put in place for Social Security Scotland. That allows that face-to-face support for claiming for benefits to be delivered right across Scotland, regardless of where people live.

Q141 Sally-Ann Hart: You mentioned child poverty. What work is being done to meet the Scottish Government's child poverty targets and are there any areas the Scottish Government need to address to be sure of meeting these targets?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: As I say, one of the main areas that we are looking at is child poverty in Scotland. One of our main policies that we have recently implemented for this is the Scottish Child Payment. That is a £10 per week payment currently for children under six but will be rolled out to children under 16 in 2022. We do believe that this will make a difference. As I say, not only do we believe that, but it has been classed as a game-changer by poverty campaigners.

This is one of the main areas that we are looking at. Obviously dealing with child poverty isn't and should not just be about social security. It should also be about a job that pays a fair wage and also ensuring that those jobs are available for people that perhaps might be further from the labour market, such as disabled groups and so on as well.

Q142 Sally-Ann Hart: Talking not just about welfare payments to help with child poverty, are the UK Government providing any support to help to specifically achieve child poverty targets, looking at employment and so on?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Yes, there are aspects of this that are in place. I would go back to the point about whether it is adequate. If you will forgive me, I will use a social security example. We are delivering the Scottish Child Payment but, within six months of our delivery of that, we will see the cut to Universal Credit and the £20 uplift gone. Therefore, a family of two in Scotland will receive no benefit from the Scottish Child Payment, because what the Scottish Government are giving the UK Government will take away when the £20 uplift goes. That is a real concern for us.

We do try very hard to work with the UK Government, but we do have political differences that mean we feel the UK Government should go further, not just in the adequacy of social security but also in key areas around employment support and employment law. That would allow, for example, if this was devolved to the Scottish Parliament, a very different way of delivering aspects around employment law that I simply don't think the UK Government are currently interested in, unfortunately.

Q143 Sally-Ann Hart: You have had discussions with the UK Government. Have you had discussions with the UK Government about best practice on tackling child poverty?



Shirley-Anne Somerville: We do try very hard to share examples of what we are doing. I think both Governments can learn from each other in these aspects. There are undoubtedly aspects that we can learn from the UK Government. I would also suggest that there are aspects that the UK Government could learn from the Scottish Government. The main relationship drivers—particularly at ministerial level—are around the devolution of benefits, however, rather than aspects around child poverty when it comes to social security, so we would deal with that in a different way in trying to have a shared understanding of priorities, for example. I would say that that doesn't seem likely, given our very different political perspectives on how we want to tackle poverty and the priority we put on it.

Q144 **Sally-Ann Hart:** I want to ask a couple of questions on jobcentres in Scotland. I have heard that the Christie Commission recommended the full devolution of competence for job search and support to the Scottish Parliament to achieve the integration of service provision in the area of employability, while the Smith Commission disagrees, recommending that all benefits should be delivered by the DWP Jobcentre Plus, so that will remain reserved. What changes, if any, would the Scottish Government make to the way jobcentres function to help people in Scotland?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: For a start, we would not close jobcentres, therefore allowing people to access support as and when they require it. That is the type of work that we are doing with our local delivery for social security, for example. A key difference is that we do appreciate and understand the importance of people being able to access a local service.

Some of the other examples I would give is that we would run a system that did not have punitive sanctions. For example, a very important aspect would be to move away from a digital by default approach as well. If we had responsibility for services in Scotland, you would see that—as we are doing with Social Security Scotland—the client chooses the channel on how to contact the agency rather than the agency determining that it will be digital by default. We do not feel that that is the correct way of going about things if you want to make the system as accessible to people, as we do.

Q145 **Sally-Ann Hart:** Talking about Jobcentre Pluses, do you welcome the increase in work coaches for jobcentres to help people with employment and getting back into work?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: There has been a concern for some time—and I don't think it has gone—that the level of work that job coaches have is still high. Absolutely, an increase in the number of job coaches is to be welcomed. I think the proof will have to be in what difference that makes on the ground, whether work coaches feel that the level of cases that they have to take on allows them to deliver the standard of service that a client requires and should have a right to. That is one of the



challenges that I am not entirely convinced that the increase so far does solve.

Q146 Sally-Ann Hart: Would the Scottish Government like to see oversight of jobcentres devolved to Scotland in order to help in administering social security north of the border?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Undoubtedly, we have a more complex system because we have some benefits being completed by an agent and some benefits being completed by the DWP. Therefore, that places a very high responsibility on both Governments to ensure that that complexity is dealt with by the agencies involved rather than the client. I do believe that that can be done and that the client can still have a seamless process, even in a more inherently complex system.

The challenge is that we have two systems that work in very different ways. I go back to the point I was making to the Chair earlier on about a social security system from the agency, based on dignity, fairness and respect, and a feeling certainly from our clients in Scotland that that is not the service they are receiving from the DWP.

We can make things work behind the scenes—and we certainly should do—to ensure that this is seamless for people and is not complicated for them any more than it needs to be, but they will still, I think, have a very different service experience when they approach the agency and when they approach the DWP.

Q147 Sally-Ann Hart: If benefits are fully devolved, how would the Scottish Government work with the jobcentres? Would you keep the work coaches? How would you work with the jobcentres?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Very importantly, I would go back to basics and we would design a system that works not just for Government but for the people who use it. How can we change a system so that we are getting the best out of it? I would go back to some of the examples I gave you earlier. We will always need people to assist clients with support to get a job, information about what is out there and information about, for example, training opportunities. That doesn't have to be done in a way that involves sanctions. It doesn't have to be done in a way where I think people still have a fear of the jobcentre rather than feeling that they will be supported in that. That is the difference we could make if there was full devolution.

Sally-Ann Hart: Thank you. I have no further questions.

Chair: Thank you, Sally-Ann. Just to say to your colleagues, Cabinet Secretary, if they feel they have anything to add or contribute, just put your hand up and the MP who is asking the questions will see you or I will see you and make sure that you are brought in. Please feel free to contribute to the proceedings; you don't have to wait to be asked.

Q148 Jon Cruddas: Good morning, everyone. Can I ask a couple of questions



about communication between Governments, which the Chair has already touched on? From our evidence so far, there have been two highlights. First, are the two different philosophical models: one based on a rights-based approach to social security, the other on a more policing welfare recipients model.

Secondly, witnesses have often highlighted different working relations and levels of communication with the DWP and Scottish Government, often suggesting a lack of engagement with the DWP in contrast to the Scottish Government. Yet, in the written evidence provided from the Scottish Government and DWP, collaboration appears to be working well. First, can I ask at the political level how effective the communication is between the UK and Scottish Governments on welfare policy? For example, how often do meetings take place and who is in attendance at those meetings?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: At a political level, we do meet twice a year within our Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare. It is attended by the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Work and Pensions and myself. We use this to go over key areas that have been escalated to a ministerial level, if there are still concerns, discrepancies and so on, but we also use it for a general update from both our groups of civil servants from this. I go back to the very important point that this is a joint delivery programme, the devolution of benefits.

We have those two meetings and we also, if required, have bilateral meetings. I will meet with—obviously, virtually now—the Minister to discuss particular issues, and we will update each other if there are key statements that come out. The ways of working at an official level go on absolutely on a day-to-day basis, as you would expect. This is an enormous programme.

Obviously, during the pandemic, officials in both Governments moved away from some of the responsibilities and changed priorities from some of their responsibilities to ensure that we were supporting Government for the wider Covid pandemic, but even throughout we still had good channels of communication.

At a daily level and even at a senior level, an official level, there is good communication. That is not to say that there are not areas of frustration, where we would like information from the DWP at a faster level to allow us to develop our build up here. I am sure some of those same frustrations are felt the same way in aspects from the DWP to the Scottish Government. In general, we have a good working relationship. We absolutely fundamentally agree politically, but there is a good working relationship. There are areas of tension. We have areas of concern where we might want to see things move faster. That is why we have, for example, that joint ministerial working group to try to alleviate some of that at a ministerial level.

Q149 **Jon Cruddas:** Thanks. That is a very full answer. Can I push you a bit,



however, on the extent to which your directorate feels communication channels are a success? Bluntly put, is it a valuable use of your time in reducing poverty in Scotland? How far are the Scottish Government able to influence Scottish welfare policy through these meetings, given, as you agree, your very different philosophical approaches?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is difficult to implement any change or indeed influence any change over our welfare policies because we fundamentally disagree on those. We will also disagree, for example, on priorities and how the DWP might be prioritising work within the devolution programme. I entirely accept the devolution programme is but one of the aspects that the DWP works on, but we would have liked to have seen much faster movement, for example, on the full mitigation of the Bedroom Tax, which we are doing but in a circuitous route because we are still awaiting movement on that from the DWP, and also our work on split payments.

I would like to think, however, despite the fact that we fundamentally disagree politically on both of those issues, that the DWP would work with the Scottish Government to deliver both of those policy objectives, given that we have the power to be able to do those. We wait on the DWP to implement the changes required for that.

In other areas, as I say, we do raise areas of concern. I would give one example around the Scottish Child Payment. We cannot deliver the Scottish Child Payment for six to 16 year-olds without data from the DWP. We do the zero to sixes because we received that for the Best Start Grant, for example. We do not have access to the data for Scottish Child Payment phase 2. We are still awaiting information and I think a level of co-operation that is required for me to feel comfortable that the DWP will work with us speedily enough to allow us to deliver on that.

Q150 **Jon Cruddas:** I am not sure if that meant you feel you can influence Scottish welfare policy through these meetings, but can I ask you a final question more specifically on whether the UK and Scottish Government are currently using the Joint Framework on Communications and Partnership Working from the memorandum of understanding and whether in your eyes it is fit for purpose?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: To go back to your earlier question, I will be very brief on it. No, we cannot influence overall welfare policy. We can certainly say what we would like to do, but on much of it we still require the DWP to implement it. If it doesn't like what we would like to do it does not have to implement our intended solutions for that. We may see that on split payments.

Around the joint framework, I think it does work well. We do have good broad working relationships with the DWP. We would not have been able to deliver the benefits that we have without that. However, we are running now to the more complex benefits that we will be devolving and the challenges will be more developed within those, given in effect when



we look at disability, for example, and for carers, we are sharing clients. The DWP will depend on information from us just as much as we will depend on information from the DWP to ensure that that client receives everything that they are entitled to from both systems.

Jon Cruddas: Thanks for those very full answers.

Q151 **Deidre Brock:** Welcome, Minister and colleagues, to today's session. It is wonderful to have you here. We had a session recently with the Scottish Parliament's Social Security Committee, which was extremely helpful. One area it was very keen for us to highlight in this inquiry were concerns around the agency agreement system, which delivers some benefits to people in Scotland. Could you tell us, from your view, what you think the main difficulties are in that delivery system, Minister?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: The agency agreements are a very important part of how we are delivering social security. In essence, they are the pragmatic way to ensure the continuity of payments for people in Scotland. It would be fair to say that is not without its challenges. The most obvious example I would give of that is: an agency agreement with the DWP means that the benefit needs to be delivered in a business-as-usual state. We cannot, for example, make any changes to eligibility and even the level of management information cannot be changed compared to a business-as-usual. It does absolutely provide limitations.

However, what it does do is ensure that we have a smooth transition of the delivery of benefits. While there are undoubtedly frustrations around them, in essence, it does ensure that people are paid the right amount at the right time, which when we ask clients is consistently the most important thing for them as we move to devolution, as we ensure that we protect their benefit and that people don't have a concern that they will be unduly put out or concerned about any changes as we make a change to their life and to their payments.

Q152 **Deidre Brock:** That is very important. Look, I was so pleased to hear your comments about the client survey. I see also from the disability benefits policy position papers that Social Security Scotland and its more people-centred approach has been getting very strong positive feedback. I am going to share a quote that I noticed in one of those papers, which I was so delighted to read. It was, "I am blown away by the fact this was the most straightforward benefits application I have ever done. If this is the future of devolved benefits in Scotland then I feel a great sense of hope".

I must say, I shared that sense of hope when I read that quote and you have already indicated that you are getting very good feedback on the approach taken by the Scottish Government and the new system. Could I ask: is there any scope for the DWP to use those Scottish principles when it administers benefits through these agency agreements?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: There absolutely would be scope. I would go back to an earlier answer, where I said that how you deliver social



security is a political choice on how you deliver a system and the investment you put in to ensuring that it is delivered well is a political choice. We have a benefit in Scotland that we are setting up from scratch. The ability of setting a system up from scratch is that you don't come with the baggage of an old application form and an old way of doing things. You can genuinely go back to first principles and deliver a system as you would like it to be and as people would like it to be. That does not mean that change isn't possible.

I go back to the simple aspects around an application form. You can make that simple. It does not mean that you would have poor decision-making at the end of it. The way we have done that is by designing it with people. If the DWP wanted to deliver a system under agency agreements that was more heavily built on dignity, fairness and respect, about making applications easier, it could undoubtedly do that. It could do that for the entire system in the UK. It believes—and it is perfectly entitled to—that its system is better.

In recent conversations, the Minister made it very clear to me that he absolutely thinks that the way that disability benefits are done for the rest of the UK and in England is better than what we are suggesting we will deliver in Scotland. He is entitled to his opinion. I just fundamentally disagree with it.

Q153 **Deidre Brock:** Thanks very much. Could I ask a technical question: how does the recharging of the costs associated with the delivery of these benefits work? This might be a question for one of your colleagues, I am not sure, but the DWP, we are told, will recharge the Scottish Ministers' delegated expenditure limit for these costs. How does that work in practice?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I might bring in one of my colleagues on this one. Do you mean for agency agreements and how the agency—

Deidre Brock: Yes, indeed.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will see if Catherine or Callum want to come in, but, in essence, the way that an agency agreement works is that—to put it crudely—the DWP can overcharge us for the service and do it at a profit. What is done for business-as-usual is the cost that that service takes to provide. That is the reassurance we have around the system, but I will see if Catherine or Callum want to add anything to that.

Catherine Reeves: Just to echo what the Cabinet Secretary is saying there, agency agreements are good value for money. They are fair to the taxpayer. HMT has guidance on managing public money, which prohibits DWP from charging another Government Department for services delivered to make a profit, so in effect that means that value for money just for the costs that DWP has to undertake to deliver these benefits on our behalf.

Q154 **Deidre Brock:** You are able to keep an eye on that is basically the gist of



it. That is good. Lastly, I know that the DWP does not share or produce information on Scottish claimants specifically. You have touched on this previously, but does that make the work of the Scottish Government more difficult in terms of trying to understand the needs of welfare claimants in Scotland?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It does. Again, Catherine and Callum might have some useful recent examples of this. Yes, it does make it challenging if we don't have access to data. I will give an example. We looked at what Northern Ireland did recently about a payment for disabled people for a coronavirus payment. We did one for carers, for example, so I was very keen to see if there was anything we could learn. We do not have the same access to data as the current arrangements between Northern Ireland and the DWP, which means for us to do something with disability payments would involve new processes, new systems being set up to allow that to happen.

Clearly that is not something that can be done overnight, but I think Callum can perhaps give an example around Scottish choices, which I know the Committee has also been looking at.

Callum Smith: Absolutely, thank you very much. Universal Credit Scottish choices are something that are administered on behalf of the Scottish Government by the DWP. One of the regular data releases that we get from the DWP is around the uptake figures around that, but I think that one of the things we have found over the last couple of years—and it is something that we are working with DWP officials to improve—is the quality and quantity of data that we get to help inform a thorough understanding of how the policy is working and potential improvements that can be made.

It is worth noting as well that one of the recent recommendations of the Work and Pensions Committee, in its recent report on the wait for a first payment of Universal Credit, included a recommendation that the DWP does improve the availability of data around the Scottish choices in particular. It is something that we would be very keen to see as well.

Q155 **Deidre Brock:** Thank you. Can I just come back on something you said, Minister? You mentioned that there was a difference in the relationship on a particular benefit with Northern Ireland and the DWP in comparison to Scotland. Is that a historical relationship or is that something fairly recent that has been established?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It is historical, inasmuch as there is a different relationship between Northern Ireland and the DWP and how that has been set up over time. We are at a different place as we are currently setting up our system. What I would like the DWP to recognise and to understand is we are sharing clients. Therefore, that means that we do need to share information. Obviously that needs to be done with purpose. This is people's information that we are talking about, people's personal details, so it cannot be done without ensuring that we are



HOUSE OF COMMONS

dealing with that correctly and dealing with that sensitively. We cannot deliver our invite to apply letters—because we proactively write out to people to encourage them to apply for benefits—unless we have information from the DWP to allow us to do that.

Again, perhaps if I could bring in Catherine to give a very critical example around the Scottish Child Payment, about why this issue around data is very key. You will obviously understand the importance we place on delivering the Scottish Child Payment. With your permission, I will bring in Catherine on that.

Catherine Reeves: Cabinet Secretary, you referred to this a little bit earlier. Essentially for the Scottish Child Payment, where we are seeking to expand eligibility to all eligible children under 16 in 2022, we can only do that if the DWP provides us with the data we need on those children who are six to 16. We have existing data feeds for children under six, which are allowing us to make payments of the Scottish Child Payment currently to that group of children, but we are very much dependent on DWP proposing an acceptable data-sharing solution for those older children to get the payment as well next year.

Deidre Brock: That is fascinating. I think my colleagues are going to pick up on this as well, but thank you, Minister, and thank you, Callum and Catherine.

Q156 **Mhairi Black:** Thanks to our witnesses for giving us your time, we appreciate it. Deidre was right, I want to pick up on this point here. It would be very useful for us to hear what the current processes are for determining whether data is shared with the Scottish Government or not. Any information around that would be very useful. Also, more broadly, is it that there is almost a random decision as to whether data is shared or is there a well-established logical system, as such? Any information you can give us would be good, thanks.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I am going to try to be generous to the current system and say it is a work-in-progress and that currently the aspects that we look at are on a benefit by benefit basis, for example. That is reasonably understandable. We do—how can I put it?—have different interpretations of GDPR and how that would be implemented. I will perhaps bring in Catherine to give a little bit more detail on the Scottish Child Payment.

The Committee will forgive me, but the reason I am looking at this in particular is this is critical to how we deal with child poverty in Scotland. It is an area that I have raised with the Minister and we have been assured by the DWP that this will be sorted. I am getting a bit concerned about the timelines and aspects of that. I will bring in Catherine again to give a little bit more detail than she did to Deidre Brock around some of this, because I think it does sum up part of the challenge that we have.



Catherine Reeves: Just to add a bit of detail to that. At the moment, we do get data feeds through for children under six from the DWP. They support the low income benefits that we have already implemented. At the moment, as we move towards the launch of the second phase of the Scottish Child Payment, it seems that there is a bit of a change in attitude from DWP about exactly what data it wants to share. It wants to move to a more strategic solution, according to our discussions with it, but it seems at the moment as though that would give us a bit less data and in fact less data than we need to be able to extend the payment to those children from six to 16. I should say we are still awaiting its final proposal on that and we are hopeful that we can reach a solution that will allow us to extend that eligibility next year.

Q157 **Mhairi Black:** Just on that timeline, how much time have you been waiting for a decision as to whether or not you get data?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We first made the call for data obviously when we brought in the Scottish Child Payment policy. The Scottish Child Payment was something that was developed very quickly, at an unprecedented speed between our decision to do it and delivery of 18 months, which is unprecedented in the UK. As we moved through that process, since the summer of 2019 we have been clear on the data issues because, at that point, we knew the type of payment that we would like to do, we knew the type of information that was going to be required, which is in effect what we now have for the zero to sixes. That has been certainly at least since summer 2019.

I absolutely understand there has been a pandemic for part of that, but not for all of this. We would certainly see this as a priority to fix now that we are moving out of the pandemic and more people are moving back into the devolution programme within the DWP to be able to assist with this.

Q158 **Mhairi Black:** Excellent. Correct me if I am wrong, but as things stand now, the Scottish Government have to ask basically on a case-by-case basis for the data that they need. When the decision is made as to whether that data is shared or not, there is sometimes disagreement over the interpretation of GDPR. What processes are in place to allow that to be resolved or is it just hanging there?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I suppose there are formal and informal channels. If we make a request for data and the DWP decides not to do it, that is the end of the matter. We cannot make the DWP give us that information. The DWP will have reasons for doing that, which I am sure it will explain to you, but it puts the challenge we have into context. We can ask and we can have discussions, but it is a decision finally for the DWP.

We can escalate disputes through this memorandum of understanding, which was discussed earlier, and there are ways that can be done to escalate up through official levels and so on. We do have those escalation measures.



Perhaps it would be useful for both Governments to take a step back from social security information to see what is working as we go through this. I will give an example of another benefit that will come up: cold weather payments. That is information that we will be required to have from 11 legacy benefit systems within the DWP that we will then attempt to collate and pay out. That is challenging. It is particularly challenging if we are having discussions around how information sharing works.

I do not say that these cannot be overcome. With a fair wind and goodwill from both Governments, they can be. But is it a challenge? Absolutely. Is it one of the areas that can make the process go in a more difficult manner and in a longer manner? Yes, it is one of the areas. If we do not know about data, it is difficult to build systems because we will not know what we are building it for.

Q159 Mhairi Black: Thank you. More specifically—forgive me if you have already clarified this—we have heard in evidence previously in this inquiry that it would certainly be helpful to the Scottish Government to see Universal Credit data to allow more informed future planning. Is Universal Credit data ever shared with the Scottish Government?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We do find the information that we receive from Universal Credit data useful. We have access to some data at the moment and that is how we pay the low-income benefits we have. One of the examples I gave earlier was when we wrote to everybody on Universal Credit and HMRC tax databases to tell them about the launch of the Scottish Child Payment and to encourage them to apply.

That is the type of thing we can do is: we have information and data. We can be more proactive, which ties into how we want to run our system. That is very much the challenge we have if we do not have access to data. I would very much hope that we would have continued access to that type of data to allow us to do invitations to apply and to allow us to run our part of the system to its full potential.

Q160 Mhairi Black: Excellent. Lastly, what data does the Scottish Government need from the DWP that they do not have now? If you had to pick one bit of data that you could get, what would it be?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: It would absolutely be data on six to 16-year-olds to allow us to progress with the Scottish Child Payment. We are waiting at our end to move forward with that, but we need to have an agreement with the DWP about the data and how it will be delivered between the Governments.

Q161 Chair: This year the Scottish Government assume most responsibilities for disability payments, the Child Disability Payment from summer 2021 and the Adult Disability Payment from summer 2022. Are they all still on target?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Absolutely. I was delighted that the Scottish Parliament Social Security Committee recently discussed and agreed the



regulations for the Child Disability Payment. There was a change to the timetable because of coronavirus. We would on our original timetable be introducing our replacement to PIP at this point for the Adult Disability Payment, but we did lose time because of coronavirus, not simply because of what was happening in the Scottish Government but within the DWP, within health and social care and within local authorities. It simply was not possible to build that system. We are on track and looking forward to delivering the Child Disability Payment pilot in the summer before moving to a full national rollout.

Q162 **Chair:** That is reassuring to hear. I am certain, looking at all my MP colleagues, that we are experienced when it comes to dealing with constituents with issues around the personal independence payment, which now becomes the Scottish Adult Disability Payment. I have noticed in quite a bit of the evidence that you are going to change a number of features of this. One most notably is that you are hoping to reduce the number of face-to-face assessments and will take a face-to-face assessment when it is the only practical way to make a decision.

Can you talk us through a little bit of the thinking behind that? What is your view about assessments? How have you observed perhaps the DWP undertaking this responsibility? What will you do differently?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: To summarise, we are scrapping the DWP-style assessments. They will not have any place within the Scottish system at all. We are doing that because of our feedback from clients. They use words like “barbaric” for what they have to go through. They talk about the stress and anxiety of that. We do not want that to have any place in our system.

We can do that by changing the model right from the beginning. We have the application form, which is designed to ensure that we have the information required to make a decision. We ensure that we have the supporting information coming in from whoever knows the client best. That does not necessarily mean a medical practitioner. For example, there is a role for carers within that and informal information coming from them. We have our guidance and our information that case managers will look at.

If and only if we cannot make a decision on what is based in there, we will have a consultation. That is not a difference in terms. It is an absolutely different way of doing things entirely. These people will be employed directly by the agency. There will be no private sector involvement. There are no targets to meet in any of these aspects. It will be a conversation between a client and a case manager to discuss only what they need to discuss to make a decision on a benefit.

That will mean none of these functional assessments will take place, for example, where clients are asked to walk to the other side of the room or to do certain aspects, because they are inherently degrading and do not give the information. They are a spot check of what happens to people.



If we change all of that, we will have an entirely different process. We will still get the case outcome based on eligibility but we will have a system through the application form and through the decision-making process, which assumes right from the start that the client is providing the most accurate account of their disability and that we will have the information required through formal supporting information, for example a confirmation of a diagnosis. It will not mean that clients will have to create an exhaustive list of information. We feel it is very much in the minority of cases where a case manager cannot make a decision that we would need to move to an assessment.

Q163 **Chair:** Those of us who have been MPs—and I am looking at Jon Cruddas—for a number of years will be comforted by the fact that there will be no Atos-style assessments, which were the bane of our lives for so many years. I see Jon Cruddas nodding his head in agreement with that. Those will not be a feature of how you are planning to go forward.

If that is the case, are you confident that there will be no fraud as part of the system and that you will make proper assessments without the need to go down that particular route?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Absolutely. We can have a strong and robust system and still treat people with dignity, fairness and respect. The things are not mutually exclusive. We can have a system that is simple and does not try to catch people out, where people do not feel they are not being trusted. We can gather the supporting information within the agency rather than putting that responsibility on the client. We can work through with case managers.

For example, we will have specialists within the agency if case managers require information about specific conditions or how different medical conditions interact with each other. We can have all that. We can have discussions with clients. We can still treat them with dignity, fairness and respect. We do not need to make them walk along a carpark to see how they got from their car to the front of the office—and we have all heard examples in our constituency cases—to make a decision about someone. That is the key difference to all of this. We can have a robust system. We do not need to put people through the current assessments that go on.

We are confident this can be done because we are not simply designing this with the clients that might go through it. We are designing this with the decision-makers who will make the decisions. They are looking at it, knowing that we are designing a system where they can get the information they require. In some cases, this includes people who might have worked at the DWP, Atos or a similar type of organisation. They know how it works and they know the failures in the system where they do not get the right decisions for people and they know how we can change that.

Q164 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Thank you very much to our witnesses and to the Cabinet Secretary for coming today. I want to echo your point at the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

start, Cabinet Secretary, around the work that the DWP and those in Jobcentres are doing. I visited Cupar Jobcentre virtually in the last fortnight. It was great to hear about the amount of work that is going on and how it is coping with the pandemic and different ways of working.

If I may, I want to turn to Universal Credit and how it is deployed in Scotland. We know that the Help to Claim service is administered via Citizens Advice. How is that service being delivered? Is it getting to where it needs to be? We have had some concerns in evidence submitted that there is a variable level of support across Scotland.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I will bring one of my colleagues in on this aspect as well.

Part of the challenge, if I could take a step back, is how people feel about responding to Universal Credit and how they feel about getting support. Even if you have a fantastic system in place, if people feel fearful about the system or they do not know how it will interact with their other ways of living, they are not going to go to even trusted sources, like Citizens Advice, because they do not know what will happen with this.

I will let Callum come in with a little bit more about the Citizens Advice service as well. Thank you.

Callum Smith: Thank you very much. Yes, this is one of the many strands of work that the Scottish Government have been supporting through funding and it is part of a broader package of benefit optic work that the Scottish Government are committed to. A key part of that is not only based around increasing the accessibility level and knowledge on benefits that people are entitled to but also reducing the stigma around them as well to remove that as a barrier, too.

In January this year we launched a £250,000 multimedia platform and an income-maximisation marketing campaign, which was specifically aimed at low-income families to bolster the existing support available in Scotland to help people access all benefit, not just devolved ones but also reserved ones, too.

Q165 **Wendy Chamberlain:** Absolutely. That is great to hear. That is additional support the Scottish Government are providing. I take it that that goes beyond that initial application for Universal Credit, which the DWP services, where it starts and where it ends?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Yes, this is a different service that is funded by the Scottish Government to assist people with income maximisation.

Q166 **Wendy Chamberlain:** In terms of that interaction of the benefits, it is the same people they will see through Citizens Advice Scotland regardless of what it is, so it is more of that seamless approach.

I take it as well then that the additional support will ensure people have more information about Scottish Choices. We have heard in evidence—and I wonder if this is a reflection on how Scottish Choices is rolled out—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

that the real barrier to people accessing the option to have two-weekly payments for Universal Credit is, first, not knowing about it and, secondly, the five-week wait. That does more harm than good in some circumstances. Would that be fair?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We have supplied the Committee with a recent report as we have reviewed Scottish Choices, which has been very interesting for us. We will continue to look at this.

That report shows that different people are using it in different ways, which is fine. That is good. It is not supposed to be the right thing for everybody to use. But there are challenges in the system that we are keen to look at. The aspect that you quite rightly point out about the knowledge people have about it is key. We will need to work with the DWP to see what can be changed, for example, in journal entries to point people to it, not just near the start of their process—because it is not available right at the beginning—and also as they go through Universal Credit because their circumstances might change. Something they dismiss right at the start might be exceptionally relevant to them six months later. We need to look at those aspects.

There are many challenges around the five-week wait. I am sure I do not need to tell you or the Committee about them. There are a number of challenges. We are seeing people getting into debt right at the start of the process. That makes it very difficult for them. Having payments twice a month, or having them as the DWP would originally pay them, is rather irrelevant in many ways if you are already in debt because you have had to wait at least five weeks for a payment and you are starting to get some of the money clawed back.

Scottish Choices is important. It cannot solve the inherent challenges and difficulties within the Universal Credit system.

Q167 **Wendy Chamberlain:** In some respects, reflecting on that rollout—and I appreciate your earlier evidence in relation to the next stage of Scottish Choices and some of the challenges from a data perspective—were they the right choices to be rolled out in the first instance or was the decision-making driven by the data you were able to obtain from DWP?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: When it comes to Scottish Choices, the way it is working at the moment was very much designed on information that we there as we designed the process. At that point, the feedback we were getting from clients was that they did not want to be offered it immediately, partly because they did not know how much Universal Credit they were going to get and so they could not work out how to budget. It was very difficult.

We seem to be getting different feedback at this point and people do want to see that right at the start. We need to have a look at that and do a little bit more research because both points are equally valid. It is really about what works.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I go back to the point about how we may wish to do something but certainly the DWP is not keen for Scottish Choices to be discussed right at the start of a Universal Credit journey. Certainly, at this point the DWP seems quite set on that.

If you would like to know more about Scottish Choices and those particular aspects, Callum would be able to give you much more detail.

Q168 **Wendy Chamberlain:** That would be great. My other thought, based on what you said, Cabinet Secretary, is about getting different information. I suppose we have to acknowledge that many more people in Scotland are now accessing Universal Credit as a result of the pandemic. Is it the same people who are saying that they want something different now or is it the people who have come into the system over the last 12 months? I do not know if you have that level of detail but that was my initial thought on what you said.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: Yes, partly. We have seen a very different demographic. A lot of people coming into Universal Credit are touching the benefit system for the first time and may never have been on a benefit before. Therefore, they are probably more used to working on a monthly wage cycle, for example, and many will have come from a job with a final pay packet that may see them over at least some of that five-week wait.

That is very different to someone who has come in from a different demographic, some of the people who might have been on Universal Credit before or indeed some of the people who will come on Universal Credit but are not doing so from a permanent job where they are used to a monthly pay packet.

I will let Callum come in with some more information on Scottish Choices and how that works for different people.

Callum Smith: Thank you very much. To refer back to an answer I gave earlier, this is one of the key areas where improving the data we are getting from the DWP could really lead to some improvements. At the moment, the data we get around the people who are taking up Scottish Choices does not have very granular demographic breakdowns. We can make good judgments on that based on broader figures on UC uptake in Scotland and we can get quite granular detail from that.

We are working with officials at the moment to improve the quality and nature of the data we are getting around Scottish Choices. I am certainly looking forward to having a bit more insight into that in the not-too-distant future.

Q169 **Wendy Chamberlain:** For dignity, fairness and respect, it needs to be an individual approach. Getting to that level of granular detail is important. Thank you.

The second part I want to move into is a discussion around the digital-by-



HOUSE OF COMMONS

default nature of the DWP and Universal Credit services. I heard you in an earlier answer, Cabinet Secretary, say that that was a deliberate choice and the Scottish Government are making a very different choice in relation to that.

What does that look like now and what will it look like in the future? I suppose we have to acknowledge that although we do not necessarily want a service to be completely digital by default, the reality is that that is the direction of travel on a societal basis. I would appreciate your thoughts on that.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: I would go back to what I said earlier. It needs to be right for the client. If it is right for the client to be digital, we should make that available. When the Child Disability Payment comes online, it will be the first opportunity for people in the UK to apply for a disability benefit on a digital platform. If a digital platform is the right thing for you, it should be available for all benefits.

However, there will always be a part of society that feels more comfortable or does not have access to the facilities to allow them to use digital. They might not be able to or they might not want to. They are perfectly entitled to make that choice and we need to support them.

It very much depends. When we look at our different benefits, it varies. Our Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods are for young children and support for families. Some 93% of those applications are online. It is available on a paper application form and it is available for people to complete by phone, but the vast majority are online. When you look at funeral support payments, that really does drop away quite significantly. Some 39% of people apply for that by telephone.

The challenge for an organisation—not for the clients—is how to make sure that they can apply in a way that is right for them. How do we give them the same level of service regardless of how they apply?

The final aspect of that is local delivery. It is a really important part of the social security service where people can be supported, either through preapplication or through filling in an application form. People can be talked through that process and given support. The agency is there to support people through a process. That then goes off to an entirely different part of the agency and the decision-makers make a decision, but we can still support someone to fill in the application form if they find that challenging.

Q170 **Wendy Chamberlain:** My final point on this is the fact that local delivery is not necessarily only through Jobcentres. We have already touched on Citizens Advice Scotland and there are probably other council services involved.

How do we balance the needs of those clients we have described with potential squeezes on council budgets that might hinder some of those services—I am thinking of libraries and council buildings—to really deliver



that local service?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: My apologies. I should have made very clear that local delivery is done by Social Security Scotland staff throughout Scotland. It is an additional service to what is already supplied, for example, by Citizens Advice or by the other welfare rights agencies out there that support people.

The importance of that is that our agency staff will not just be delivering the service from an office. It is not like we will have everyone—to use a Fife example—going to Glenrothes or Kirkaldy to visit an agency office. We will have agency staff who will go to the different parts of Fife, and of course all over Scotland as well, to deliver that service. Wherever people are is where our local delivery people should be: in a local library, in a local council office or indeed directly in people's homes if that is best for them.

Wendy Chamberlain: Absolutely. I appreciate the Fife example, given that North East Fife is pretty rural. I do get correspondence in relation to things in Glenrothes and Kirkaldy. Thank you, Cabinet Secretary.

Q171 **Chair:** There are more regions available in Scotland than just Fife, lovely though it is and my home county. Sally Ann, your next question was addressed in your earlier question, so we will move on from that. Is that all right, Sally Ann? Shake your head or nod if that is okay. Yes, it is. Thank you.

I have a couple of last things from me, Cabinet Secretary, about the take-up of benefits. This is to follow on from some of the questions from Wendy Chamberlain around Scottish Choices. It would be best to characterise the take-up as mixed. What do you think about the take-up?

If it helps, what we have heard from people who have come in front of this Committee in the evidence is that there is an issue about the hassle factor in taking up Universal Credit payments. They have to apply through the normal way and it is paid in the first five weeks, as for the rest of the UK, and changes to Scottish Choices at that point.

I am interested in your views about the knowledge of the availability of Scottish Choices. Is it something that concerns you? Is there anything you are doing to address that?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That is one of the main reasons we undertook the review into Scottish Choices. It has been in place for a few years now. We wanted to know how it was working for people. We set off with the best of intentions, as we always do with a Government policy, but is it actually delivering? Do people know about it?

We absolutely do need to work on the area of people's knowledge of Scottish Choices. We will endeavour to do what we can within the Scottish Government and within the agency to develop that. We need to



HOUSE OF COMMONS

work with the DWP on what is available, for example, through the Universal Credit journal on this, too.

We have an overall responsibility to ensure the highest possible benefit take-up. I stress within that point that we have a responsibility to ensure people are getting the benefits in the way that is right for them. That is part of our Scottish Choices challenge.

I am not concerned by the figures, but they do show that there is room for improvement, undoubtedly, on how much we can do around Scottish Choices. I am very keen to work with the DWP on that.

Q172 Chair: Tell us a little bit about this Scottish social security charter you are creating in a bid to get wider uptake of benefits. How will this operate? What will be included in all this? How do you see this working its way through the whole social security system in Scotland?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: In essence, the charter exemplifies much of what we have already spoken about today, I suppose. It exemplifies how to build a system with dignity, fairness and respect. It takes the principles in the Act and then shows how that can be delivered.

I am aware there are some very bad examples, probably across Governments, about charters that are meaningless and do not actually change anything in the end. This one was codesigned with some of our experienced panel members, people with experience of the current DWP system. They have chosen what to measure and how it should be measured. That is tied into the client survey we have undertaken through the agency. We would have much more on the measurement of that had it not been for the coronavirus, but we have done that client survey.

The charter really does exemplify everything about the social security system that we want to have in Scotland. The charter is important because it is a living and breathing document. It will be measured. We will be held accountable for it. The Scottish Commission on Social Security has oversight of the charter. It can look at the charter and can see what is being done on the charter. People can raise issues with the Commission if they do not feel the charter is being delivered on. It is a living and breathing document, not something that we will do right at the start of setting up a social security system that sits somewhere on a shelf. People designed this and they will absolutely hold us accountable to it. I am pleased to say that so far we are delivering on what is in that charter.

Q173 Chair: How does this differ from the DWP's customer charter? Before I started this inquiry, I did not even know there was a DWP customer charter. That is how well-known it was to me as an MP of 20 years. In what way does this differ? Would you have an ambition to have the DWP's operations in Scotland included in the Scottish Government charter?



Shirley-Anne Somerville: One of the big examples is that we never talk about customers. Customers would suggest that they had a choice on where to go and they do not if they are going to social security. We have clients within our system, not customers. That is a more respectful and realistic way to describe people.

The way that it differs—I go back to the point I made—is that you can have a charter on any part of government and you can have a set of principles that a government system is based on, but it is how it is implemented, how it is measured and how you are held to account if you fail. The route that we have from our Act, which has our principles in it, to our charter, to the way that the Commission has oversight and to the way that we measure what is in the charter allows us to demonstrate that we are delivering.

If we are not, it will be very clear for people to see. That is a very important difference in this. It cannot just sit in the office drawers of senior staff within the agency. This has to be easy for people to understand, it has to be measurable and we have to be held accountable to it.

Q174 **Chair:** Thank you. I promised to let you away in an hour and a half and we are just about getting there.

Lastly, we have the DWP Minister coming next week to conclude our evidence sessions in this inquiry. What should we put to him that would most be of assistance to the operation of Social Security Scotland? What should we say to him about the transfer and devolution of social security responsibilities to Scotland that would make your job easier?

Shirley-Anne Somerville: That will probably take longer than the hour and a half you have just given, but I will summarise it. It is very important that both Governments have a shared understanding of the fact that this is a joint programme with joint delivery. We are sharing clients and, therefore, sharing responsibility. There is no disagreement on that, I would hasten to add.

If both Governments can publicly restate those priorities and those shared endeavours, and the fact that both Governments want devolution of social security to work for our shared clients, that is a very important signal to send to people right across Scotland. We have two Governments who will disagree pretty much on most aspects of welfare and social security policy but they can come together for the benefit of the people of Scotland. The devolution of social security has been agreed and we need to deliver on that. It takes both Governments to do that.

I do not think there is anything I have said that the DWP would inherently disagree with, given the conversations we have had. It would be reassuring—as I am happy to do today—to restate those principles and my willingness to work with the DWP as we move forward with this. I



HOUSE OF COMMONS

am sure the DWP is willing to work with me, or indeed my successor after the election if it is not me in post.

Chair: We still hope it will be you, Cabinet Secretary. Can I thank you and your colleagues for coming along this morning and giving us your time? It was an excellent session. You have helped us immensely better understand some of the issues around the devolution of social security responsibilities and operation of social security in Scotland. Thank you for that.

If there is anything you feel you can usefully contribute to this inquiry while it is still ongoing, please make sure you give us that information and submit it to us. For now, thank you for your attendance and we will hear from the DWP Minister next week in the last of our sessions.