

WELFARE REFORM COMMITTEE

THE FUTURE DELIVERY OF SOCIAL SECURITY IN SCOTLAND

WRITTEN SUBMISSION RECEIVED FROM SHETLAND ISLANDS COUNCIL

In general it is requested that devolved powers are used to:

- better dovetail welfare services with employability services within Scotland, and within local areas; and
- to simplify the benefits landscape. In recent years, the introduction of the Scottish Welfare Fund has assisted with this, and there may be potential to incorporate other benefits into this Fund and distribution.

More specifically, and as requested:

a.) Personal Independence Payments, Disability Living Allowance Attendance Allowance and Carer's Allowance

- To ensure that the assessment process is fit for purpose in remote rural areas, such as Shetland; i.e. flexible, responsive and timely. Since the introduction of PIP, Shetland residents have experienced many delays in having assessments. This is particularly the case in winter months, when travel can be disrupted and assessments can take a long time to be re-arranged. ATOS have recently promised improvements, however.
- Shetland has also experienced delays in assessments undertaken by Maximus for ESA Healthcare Assessments:
 - It is generally the case that an assessor has to visit from elsewhere necessitating short, intensive bursts of activity whereby an assessor is in the area carrying out assessment for a few days at a time. If people miss out on an assessment they have weeks to wait until an assessor visits again.

b.) Universal Credit (housing element and administrative arrangements) and Discretionary Housing Payments

- The housing element of Universal Credit to be paid direct to the landlord is paramount. Shetland is now over 2 months into the implementation of Universal Credit, and, as yet, there is no evidence to suggest that Alternative Payment Arrangements will be put in place for claimants, by DWP, despite arrears, vulnerability of individuals and court cases pending.
- To ensure the Under-occupancy payment requirements are removed.
- To ensure that the housing element is payable to 18-21 year olds.

c.) The Work Programme and Work Choice

- For benefits and employability support to be integrated at a local level, as part of the Employability Pipeline.
- To be flexible and targeted to provide support for those who are furthest from the labour market, with multiple and complex barriers to employment.

d.) The Regulated Social Fund, new benefits, top-ups and delivery of benefits overall.

- For the Cold Weather Payment to include wind-chill within the calculation for temperature. Despite Shetland having one of the worst climates in the UK, due to the nature of our winters, it is seldom that Shetland residents are able to benefit from Cold

Weather Payment as there are currently insufficient number of degree days when the climate (excluding wind chill) is cold enough.

- For the benefit cap to remain no lower than £26,000 / household.