

Social Security Advisory Committee: Business Plan 2015-16

Social Security Advisory Committee: Chair's Foreword

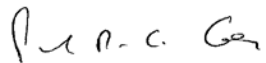


I am delighted to present the Social Security Advisory Committee's Business Plan for 2015-16 which sets out our strategic objectives for the year ahead.

The Department faces a number of interesting challenges in the year ahead with the continued roll-out of Universal Credit, the Government's commitment to reduce welfare expenditure, and the devolution of a number of welfare provisions to the Scottish Government. The Committee intends to closely monitor developments in each of these areas and ensure that we make a timely and effective contribution where appropriate.

Closer to home, Sarah Stoney (Treasury Solicitor's Department) completed her independent Triennial Review of SSAC in March 2015. I am delighted that Sarah's report was positive about much of the Committee's performance, although she did highlight an opportunity to strengthen the way in which we assess the impact of our independent work programme. We will consider carefully the points that Sarah has raised in her report, and develop a robust action plan for responding to them during the course of this year.

I am delighted to be leading the Committee at such an important time, and we look forward to continuing to make a positive and constructive contribution over the next twelve months.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Paul Gray'.

Paul Gray

About Us

The Committee has, by statute, a vital role to play in scrutinising detailed and complex regulations and expressing its views to Ministers and Parliament. We also have an important role in identifying and commenting on wider issues in social welfare through our independent work programme.

Established in 1980, we are an independent statutory body that provides advice on social security and related matters.

Our main responsibilities are to:

- perform a mandatory scrutiny of most of the proposed regulations that underpin the social welfare system on behalf of the Secretary of State for both DWP and Parliament; and to
- provide advice and assistance to the Secretary of State, whether in response to a specific request or on our own initiative.

Advice offered formally by us in relation to proposals for legislation must be published by the Secretary of State, along with the Government's response to our conclusions and recommendations. There is no obligation upon the Secretary of State to respond to other forms of advice from the Committee, or to act upon any of the advice we offer.

We perform a similar role for the Department for Social Development (DSD) in Northern Ireland.

About Us

In addition to the scrutiny of proposals for legislation, we have general advisory functions. For example, where resources permit, we:

- informally scrutinise regulations that are exempt from our statutory scrutiny;
- respond to public consultation exercises conducted by Government and others where we believe that we can add value;
- respond to specific requests for advice from Ministers and officials;
- undertake our own detailed studies as part of our independent work programme;
- provide comment on a range of draft guidance and communications produced by the DWP and HMRC.

We also have a non-statutory role offering advice to Treasury Ministers and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) on tax credits, National Insurance, Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance.

We are supported by a small Secretariat (currently 4.6 people headcount). This is funded from the Committee's budget, with the exception of one post which is funded by HM Revenue and Customs.

Our Overall Aims

Our two main priorities for 2015-16 remain to:

- Undertake impartial, effective and timely scrutiny of draft regulations relating to social security benefits.
- Provide impartial, well-informed and constructive advice to the Secretary of State on issues relating to social security and welfare reform.

The exact volume of work flowing from this statutory role is largely outside our control as it is dictated by the level of Government legislative activity and the nature of the proposals brought forward.

Our statutory role takes priority over any other activity undertaken by the Committee.

Our Objectives

There are a number of specific activities which we intend to focus upon in the year in order to be more effective in delivering our priorities. In particular, we aim to:

- continue to strengthen our constructive engagement with DWP to ensure that draft regulations, and the appropriate supporting explanatory material, are of high quality and presented to the Committee for consideration in an appropriate and timely manner;
- continue our rolling annual programme of appropriate and timely research projects for the Committee's independent work programme, with a minimum of two projects (on localisation¹ and Universal Credit) to be completed within 2015-16;
- review our past recommendations on a regular basis for continued relevance and to ensure that the impact of our reports is understood;
- continue to develop more active stakeholder engagement to ensure that our advice to Ministers is well-informed and takes account of a wide range of perspectives;
- continue to bring together policy makers, think tanks, local authorities, the third sector and academia to discuss a range of welfare issues and seek input to our reviews through two stakeholder events – one of which will be outside London;

¹ The Committee's report on [Localisation and Social Security](#) was published on 21 May

Our Objectives (continued)

- make a continuing effort to be inclusive of stakeholders in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to ensure that their voice is heard in the advice we provide to Ministers and that the impact of greater devolution of welfare provision is understood;
- play an active role in determining the Committee's future role in relation to the further devolution of welfare provision to the Scottish Government;
- continue to review our programme of DWP visits to ensure that we understand the operational issues that are likely to flow from new policy initiatives, and are able to review progress of the implementation of Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment;
- contribute to DWP's evaluation process, as a member of DWP's Methodology and Design Steering Group and External Stakeholder User Group, as the implementation of Universal Credit rolls out more widely;
- continue to strengthen our interaction with relevant stakeholders via greater and more targeted use of a range of communication channels;
- continue to build our links with HMRC and the Treasury under our [Memorandum of Understanding](#) to ensure that due account is taken of their role in relation to benefit matters, particularly in the transition to Universal Credit;

Our Objectives (continued)

- continue to scrutinise regulations from an equality perspective through the Department's equality analyses, and ensure that diversity and equality are reflected in the Committee's other activities (including its recruitment exercises);
- make good progress against the recommendations made following our second Triennial Review in March 2015. We will provide an update on how we have responded to those recommendations in our Annual Report at the end of the year;
- continue to utilise our resources effectively, and in a cost conscious manner.

Measuring our success

We will report on the degree to which we have achieved these objectives in our 2015-16 Annual Report. Our success criteria will include:

- Timely scrutiny of draft regulations within agreed deadlines.
- Provision of pertinent and well informed advice to the Government, informed by our stakeholders experience, expertise and other evidence. This will be determined by seeking feedback from our stakeholders and by assessing the extent to which SSAC's role as a source of expert advice is demonstrated by references to our work by the Department, in Parliament, by the media, by other organisations in their own reports, and on social media.
- Improved engagement and collaboration with the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue and Customs, Department for Social Development Northern Ireland and other appropriate Government and devolved bodies. This will determined through annual feedback commissioned independently by DWP's Stewardship Team.
- Continued transparency about the Committee's operation and expenditure, including publication of our minutes and reports, the fees and expenses for each Committee member, and the costs of our Secretariat.

Our Operating Principles

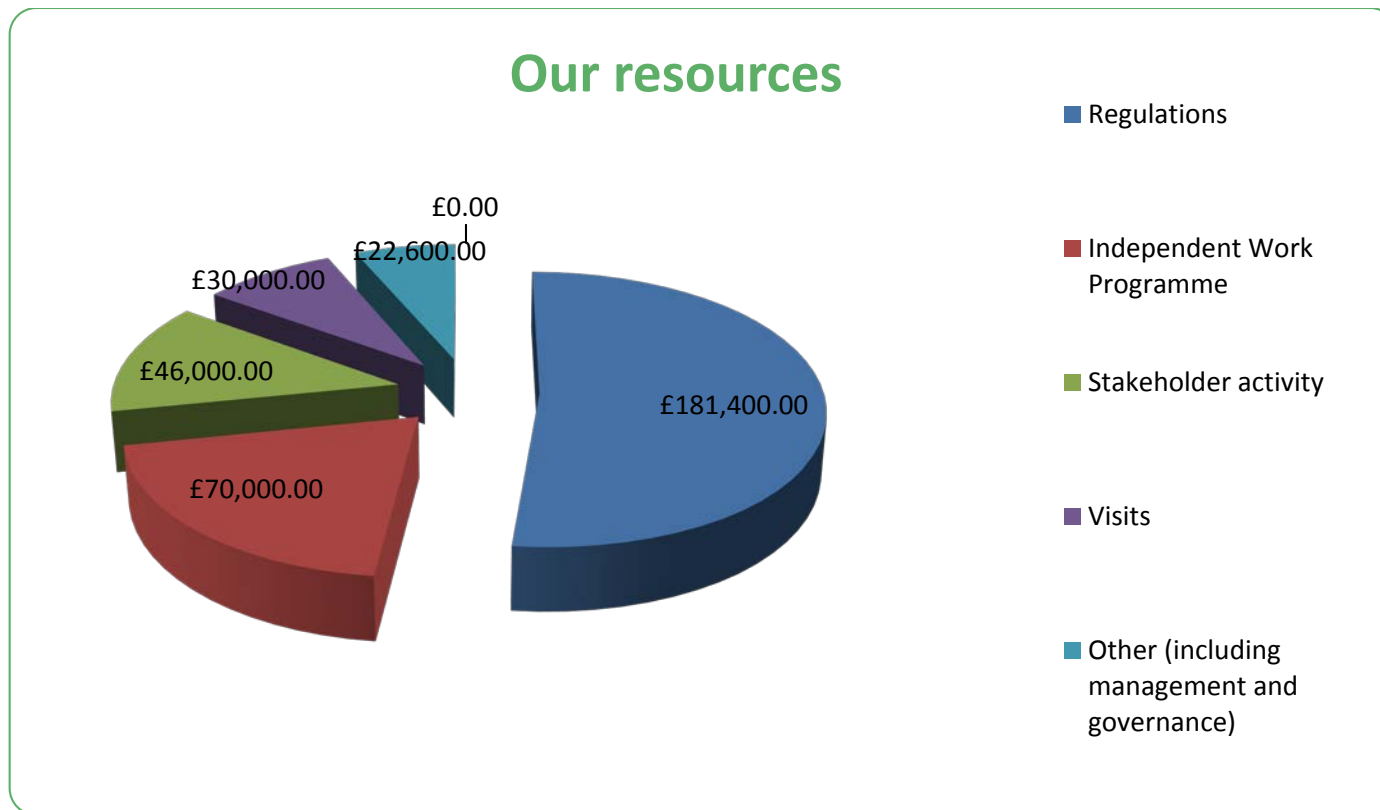
Whilst undertaking our activities we will be conscious of our responsibilities for prudent management, confidentiality where appropriate, transparency and quality governance in accordance with the [DWP/SSAC Framework Agreement](#).

We will publish an annual report on our website in 2016 showing how we performed against those objectives.

We regularly assess our risks and have mitigating strategies in place to deal with them.

Our Resources

Our budget for 2015-16 is £350,000. Unlike many independent arm's length bodies, we are a demand-led organisation and much of our core scrutiny function is determined by Government activity. It is, therefore, difficult to forecast our expenditure accurately at the start of the year as the reality is that we have to keep it under regular review throughout the course of the year so that we are able to respond effectively to emerging priorities. However, based on our activities during 2014-15 and what we already know about our priorities in the coming year, we currently anticipate that our resources are likely to be deployed broadly as follows:



Our Organisation²

Committee Membership

Paul Gray (Committee Chair)

John Andrews³
Rachael Badger
Adele Baumgardt
John Ditch⁶
Colin Godbold⁷
Chris Goulden

Jim McCormick⁴
Gráinne McKeever⁵
Matthew Oakley
Seyi Obakin
Judith Paterson
Nicola Smith

Committee Secretariat

Denise Whitehead (Committee Secretary)

Guy Colton
Paul Mackrell

Matthew Moon
Graham Walmsley

Victoria Todd⁸ (Adviser on HMRC issues)

² As at 1 April 2015

³ Chair of SSAC's HMRC sub-committee

⁴ Chair of SSAC's Stakeholder Engagement sub-committee

⁵ Chair of SSAC's Postal Regulations sub-committee

⁶ Chair of SSAC's Independent Work Programme sub-committee

⁷ Chair of SSAC's Operations sub-Committee

⁸ Unpaid secondment from Chartered Institute of Taxation

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