

SOCIAL SECURITY

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

# **Social Security Advisory Committee: Business Plan 2016-17**

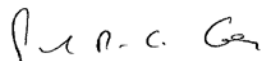
## Social Security Advisory Committee: Chair's Foreword

I am delighted to present the Social Security Advisory Committee's Business Plan for 2016-17 which sets out our strategic objectives for the year ahead.

As ever, the UK Government faces a number of important challenges relating to the social security system over the coming year, for example:

- the roll-out of Universal Credit continues to transition from accepting claims from only the most straightforward cases involving single claimants to taking on more complex scenarios;
- preparing for the migration of tax credits to Universal Credit;
- ensuring an appropriate spectrum of support is provided to disabled people, from work-focussed activities to help individuals move closer to the labour market, through to appropriate financial provision for those who are unable to work;
- the continued devolution of welfare issues both at national and local levels; and
- the Government's on-going commitment to scale back welfare expenditure.

The Committee intends to monitor closely developments in each of these areas and ensure that we make a timely, effective and constructive contribution where appropriate.



**Paul Gray**  
**Chair**

## 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 related issues 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 security system on behalf of the Secretary of State for both DWP and Parliament; and
- 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 secondary 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 Communities 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 (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 2016-17 remain to:

- undertake impartial, effective and timely scrutiny of draft regulations relating to social security benefits; and
- 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 (including on decision-making and mandatory reconsideration) to be completed within 2016-17;
- continue to review our past recommendations on a regular basis for continued relevance and to ensure that the impact of our reports is understood as recommended by the triennial review of SSAC in 2015;
- 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 – in Manchester (19 May) and London (10 November);

## 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 – including city devolution and localisation - of social security provision is understood;
- 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 plans for, and the progress of, the implementation of Universal Credit;
- contribute to DWP's evaluation process, by attending meetings of DWP's Expert Working Group, as the implementation of Universal Credit rolls out more widely;
- 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 of tax credits to Universal Credit;
- 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); and
- continue to utilise our people and financial 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 2016-17 Annual Report. Our success criteria will include:

- rigorous 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 Communities Northern Ireland and other appropriate Government and devolved bodies. This will be 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

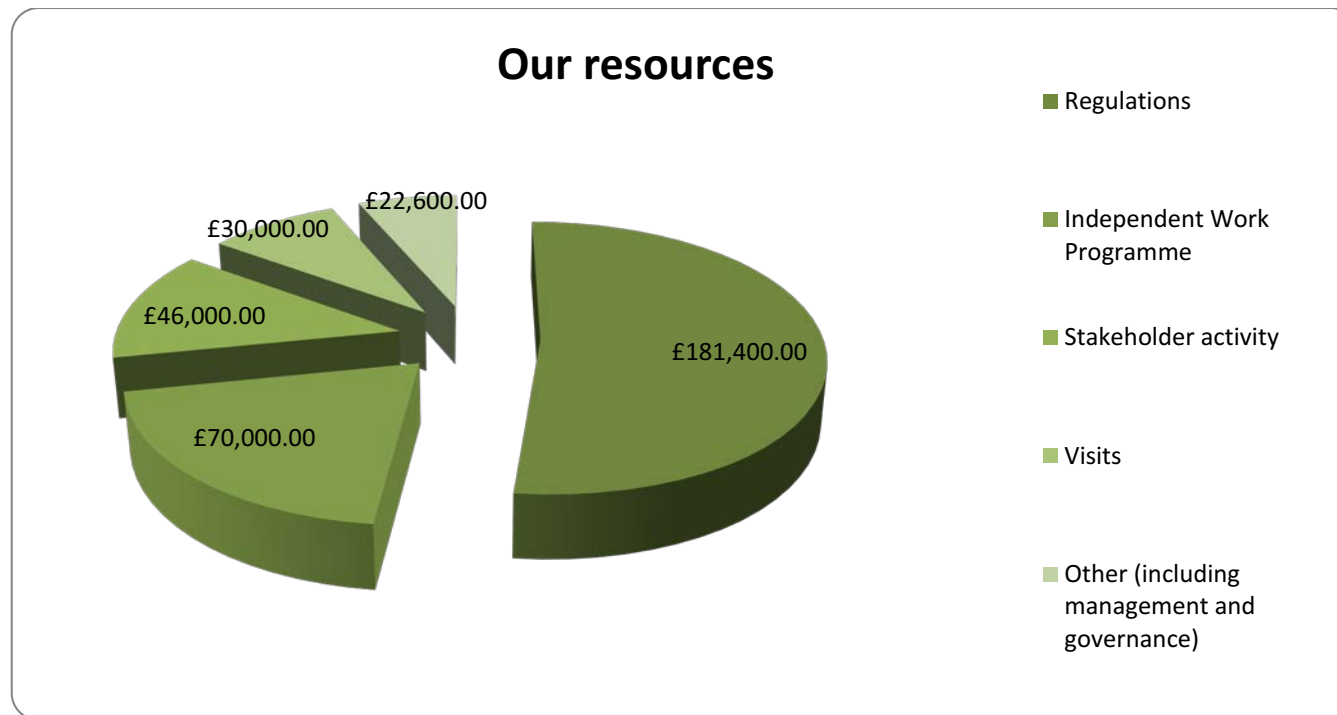
Whilst undertaking our activities we will be conscious of our responsibilities for prudent management, confidentiality where appropriate, transparency and quality governance in accordance with the [DWP/SSAC Framework Agreement](#).

We will publish an annual report on our website in 2017 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 2016-17 is £350,000.<sup>1</sup> 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 2015-16 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:



<sup>1</sup> Approximately £210,000 of this represents staff costs.

# Our Organisation<sup>2</sup>

## Committee Membership

Paul Gray (Committee Chair)

John Andrews<sup>3</sup>

Rachael Badger

Adele Baumgardt

John Ditch<sup>6</sup>

Colin Godbold<sup>7</sup>

Chris Goulden

Jim McCormick<sup>4</sup>

Gráinne McKeever<sup>5</sup>

Matthew Oakley

Seyi Obakin

Judith Paterson

Victoria Todd<sup>8</sup>

## Committee Secretariat

Denise Whitehead (Committee Secretary)

Michael Coombs

Henry Parkes

Paul Mackrell

Eirteqa Sultan<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> As at 1 April 2016

<sup>3</sup> Chair of SSAC's HMRC sub-committee

<sup>4</sup> Chair of SSAC's Stakeholder Engagement sub-committee

<sup>5</sup> Chair of SSAC's Postal Regulations sub-committee

<sup>6</sup> Chair of SSAC's Independent Work Programme sub-committee

<sup>7</sup> Chair of SSAC's Operations sub-Committee

<sup>8</sup> Adviser on HMRC issues: Unpaid secondment from Chartered Institute of Taxation

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**SOCIAL SECURITY**  
**ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**Social Security Advisory Committee**  
**5th Floor Caxton House**  
**Tothill Street**  
**London SW1H 9NA**

**Telephone: 0207 829 3354**

**E-mail: [ssac@ssac.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ssac@ssac.gsi.gov.uk)**

**Follow the Committee on Twitter [@The\\_SSAC](https://twitter.com/The_SSAC)**

