

Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare, 11th Meeting

Dover House, London

Monday 10 September 2018

Chair: Secretary of State for Scotland

Attending: Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills
Officials from the Scottish Government, Department for Work and Pensions and Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland

Items 1&2: Welcome and Introductions, and Minutes and Actions from the previous meeting

1. The Secretary of State for Scotland (SoSS), David Mundell MP, welcomed all attendees, including the new Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People (CSSO) and thanked Angela Constance MSP and Jeane Freeman MSP in absentia for their work in this group in their previous Ministerial posts. SoSS highlighted the importance of the group as a forum for both formal and more informal discussion on devolution in the fields of employability and social security.
2. All present noted the minutes of the previous meeting had been agreed and will shortly be published, and that all actions from that meeting were either complete or included in the agenda of this meeting.

Item 3: Legislative updates

3. CSSO provided an update noting there are a range of Orders planned in the near future and stated that the timescales may be challenging for both Governments, noting the importance of joint working to support this.
4. CSSO reported that officials are working closely on the detail of an additional Section 93 Scotland Act Order for delivery of devolved social security benefits, with an aim for this to be in place by mid to late 2019. CSSO requested reassurances regarding the timetable to ensure delivery timescales are met. SoSS noted that a revised draft timetable had been shared. CSSO asked that both sides work together to ensure timescales are agreed and met. There had been misunderstandings in this respect with regard to what had been agreed about the UC Housing provisions. SoS DWP confirmed that her Department would support Local Authorities with the administration of Discretionary Housing Payments in the interim period. SoSS agreed the need to engage and discuss with COSLA in a timely manner as required.
5. CSSO updated the group on Scottish Government's Programme for Government which announced the aim to make the first payments of Best Start Grant before Christmas. CSSO emphasised the need to progress with the Section 104 Scotland Act Order to close Sure Start Maternity Grants in Scotland and disregard Best Start Grant payments in income-related benefits at Great Britain level. There had been some challenges to ensure the Customer Information System (CIS) was available

to Scottish Government. SoSS clarified that the Scottish Government regulations needed to be commenced before the GB provisions could take effect. CSSO confirmed that the BSG regulations were being laid in the Scottish Parliament the day after the Working Group meeting. DWP officials outlined the issues around CIS, and the interim and long-term solutions available. SG officials confirmed that they were developing contingency plans.

6. CSSO reported that officials had been continuing to work closely on a draft for the Section 63 Scotland Act Order to facilitate the Job Grant, in line with SG's implementation timetable.
7. SoSS noted that the letter regarding the Section 104 Scotland Act Order for Funeral Expenses Assistance had been received, and he would respond shortly.

Item 4: Employability Programmes

8. The Minister for Business, Fair Work and Skills (MfBFWS), Jamie Hepburn MSP, updated the Group on contracted employment provision. MfBFWS stated that levels of referrals to Fair Start Scotland from Jobcentres had been in line with forecasts, and highlighted ongoing successful joint working between DWP and SG, as well as with contractors and partners. In particular the enthusiasm of work coaches for Fair Start Scotland had been, and would continue to be, valued.
9. MfBFWS reported that there had been an ongoing lack of clarity on the devolution of budgets linked to Specialist Employment Support. SoS DWP highlighted that the Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work, Sarah Newton MP, had been working closely with the Scottish Government on this.

Item 5 a): Current delivery activity

10. CSSO reported that Social Security Scotland was officially operational. She paid tribute to the hard work of staff in the Scottish Government, the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland, and the Department for Work and Pensions in delivering this aspect of the joint programme of devolution of social security powers, and noted that joint planning had, in general, worked very well. SoSS echoed CSSO's thanks to officials and recognised this as a significant achievement. SoSS stated that this achievement demonstrated that officials from the two governments can work together well to reach a positive outcome for the people of Scotland.
11. SoS DWP asked for an update on the Scottish Government's plans for split payments of the UC award. Universal Credit was fundamentally about providing wider support for people to meet their aspirations and address their challenges, not just through financial assistance. Domestic abuse was a case in point, where support could not be limited to changes to benefit payments.
12. CSSO explained that the Scottish Government was working with stakeholders and people in receipt of benefits to develop its policy on splitting payments of the UC award between partners in a couple. The Scottish Government's view was that entitlement to financial independence was a basic human right, and the

introduction of split payments in UC would increase equality and fairness. CSSO advised there should be more policy detail by the end of the year. CSSO asked whether the UK Government planned to support the Universal Credit (Application, Advice and Assistance) Bill 2017-19 being taken through by Philippa Whitford MP.

Item 5 b) Future Design and Planning

13. CSSO noted that devolution of the remaining benefit areas (“Wave 2”) would bring a higher number of claimants into the Scottish social security system. This would place a premium on close collaborative working to ensure a seamless transition. Both sides would need to work together to ensure timescales were discussed, agreed and met.
14. SoSS agreed, and noted that Wave 2 changes represented a more significant challenge for both Governments. SoS DWP agreed, and noted the continued importance of sharing policies and plans so that detailed discussions and planning could happen at the right pace. Ministers from both Governments expressed their keenness to draw and apply lessons from experience to date in the devolution of social security and employability provision.

Item 6: AOB

No items

15. SoSS closed the meeting, stating the next meeting would be held on 13 December 2018.

ENDS