

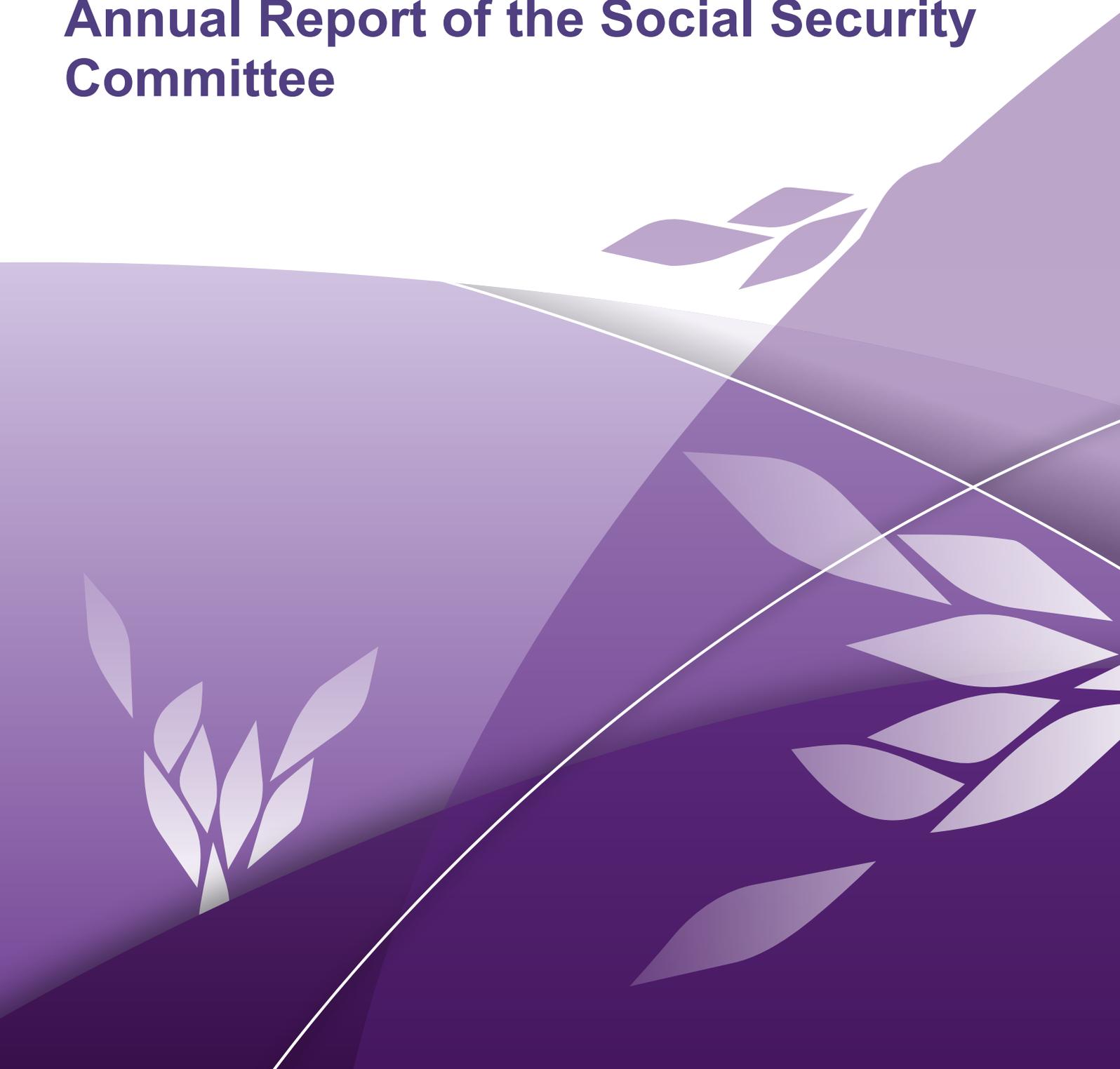


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Social Security Committee **Comataidh Tèarainteachd Sòisealta**

Annual Report of the Social Security Committee



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Social Security Committee

To consider and report on matters relating to social security (including the delivery and payment of benefits that help address poverty) falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People.



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Scottish Conservative
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Alison Johnstone
Scottish Green Party



Shona Robison
Scottish National Party

Summary infographic

Committee Meetings, Equalities & Engagement



Evidence sessions



Inquiries

Legislation



Source: Scottish Parliament

Change of Membership

1. In August 2020, Graham Simpson was replaced by Rachael Hamilton.

Introduction

2. Our remit is to consider and report on matters relating to social security (including the delivery and payment of benefits that help address poverty) within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People.
3. This report covers the work of the Committee from 12 May 2020 to 24 March 2021, after which the Scottish Parliament goes into the campaign recess period from 25 March to 4 May 2021. On 3 March 2021, the Scottish Parliament agreed to vary Standing Orders to provide that committees could not meet during the pre-election campaign period (with the exception of the COVID-19 Committee, which may be convened in an emergency). This decision was taken in response to the Scottish General Election (Coronavirus) Act 2021 which provides that the Scottish Parliament will not be dissolved until 5 May 2021 to permit the Parliament to meet to legislate for a new polling date if required.
4. This annual report can be read alongside the Committee's legacy report covering work over the whole Session and looking ahead to, what this Committee, sees as some of the challenges for our successor committee. Our work this year was, as it was for everyone, overshadowed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Inquiries

Scottish Government social security programme

5. As a result of the pandemic, the Scottish Government [announced](#) delays to the delivery of its social security programme. In June, we took evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People on the revised delivery timetable for Scottish benefits including the new Scottish Child Payment, Child Disability Payment, and Child Winter Heating Assistance. We continued to monitor the impact of Covid-19 on the social security programme and launched an inquiry into the social security response to the pandemic.

Social Security response to Covid-19

6. Our inquiry looked at how Scottish social security, and its part within the broader context of all UK social security, should contribute to the social and economic recovery from Covid-19. Our call for evidence was based around six themes: the economic downturn, the role of social security, suggestions for change, changes requiring little DWP input, constraints and barriers to doing more and entitlements versus discretionary funding. We took formal evidence during November and December and also undertook informal engagement activity. This was our final [inquiry report](#) of the year and our recommendations included making permanent the temporary increases to UC and applying them to legacy benefits, reviewing the purpose, operation and funding of the Scottish Welfare Fund and calling on the Scottish Government to consider carefully whether financial assistance should be provided through social security entitlements rather than discretionary funding.

Citizens Basic Income

7. Following publication of the final report on the feasibility of a Scottish citizen's basic income (CBI) pilot, we took [evidence](#) from members of the feasibility study steering group. We heard about lessons learned from the project and the challenges a CBI presents.
8. The key conclusion from the steering group was that although a pilot would be worth exploring further, it must be taken forward with the co-operation and collaboration of all relevant parties, particularly the UK Government (through DWP and HMRC).

2020/21 Budget Scrutiny

9. In our [pre-budget letter](#), we welcomed the Scottish Government's response to the pandemic, providing an additional £350m through the Communities Fund.
10. We made several recommendations including: asking the Scottish Government to explore whether uprating could be brought forward for the Scottish Child Payment, and to work with COSLA to consider resourcing for the administration of the Scottish Welfare Fund. The Scottish Government [replied](#) on 28 January 2021.

The fiscal framework agreement between the Scottish and UK Governments

11. In October 2020, in anticipation of a review of the fiscal framework agreement, a

joint letter from the Conveners of the Social Security Committee and the Finance and Constitution Committee and the Cabinet Secretary for Finance was sent to the Chief Secretary of the Treasury. The [letter \(and accompanying report\)](#) was the output of an official-led working group that included clerks and Scottish Government officials. The joint report identified issues, from the operation of the Agreement to date, that should be included in the review.

Brexit and Social Security

12. The Committee commissioned Dr Simon Roberts, University of Nottingham, to assess the impact of Brexit on Scottish social security. The Committee received three briefings setting out firstly the principles of EU social security co-ordination, secondly the impact of the UK's Withdrawal Agreement and finally emerging arrangements to co-ordinate social security for future movers.

Primary Legislation

The Social Security Administration and Tribunal Membership (Scotland) Bill

13. The [Bill](#) was introduced by the Scottish Government in April 2020 with a request for an expedited scrutiny timetable. The Bill made administrative changes to the social security system and expanded the range of people allowed to act as judges in Scottish Tribunals.
14. We issued a call for views and took evidence in May. We supported the general principles of the Bill but sought clarification of the proposals for appointees. Our [Stage 1 report](#) was published in June, the Scottish Government [responded](#) that month and stages 2 and 3 took place in September.

Subordinate Legislation

15. We continued to consider draft regulations setting out the detail of and eligibility for the new Scottish forms of social security. We considered 22 Scottish statutory instruments (11 affirmative, 11 negative).
16. This included regulations to establish the new Scottish Child Payment which provides, in the form of a top-up to Universal Credit, £10 per week for each child under six for families in receipt of qualifying benefits. We also considered and recommended approval of draft regulations for the Child Winter Heating Assistance Regulations, an annual payment of £200 for children and young people with serious disabilities and Child Disability Payment Regulations; the Scottish Government's replacement for Child Disability Living Allowance.

Committee Meetings, Equalities and Engagement

17. The Committee held 28 meetings:
 - 18 contained items taken in private,
 - 2 were entirely in public
 - 8 were entirely in private.
18. All meetings, apart from one, were held virtually. During Stage 2 of the Social Security Administration and Tribunal Membership (Scotland) Bill, the committee met in hybrid formⁱ.
19. The meetings and items taken in private were primarily to consider evidence heard, draft reports and the Committee's work programme.
20. We used a variety of methods to gather information including informal virtual participation in community meetings and focus groups in addition to formal evidence sessions. Virtual meetings made it easier for us to hear from people who, in normal times, may be less able or willing to travel to the Parliament in Edinburgh to give evidence in person in a traditionally more formal setting.
21. During formal evidence sessions, the Committee took evidence from 82 witnesses, 47 (57%) of whom were female.
22. The Committee's twitter account continued to grow and now has 4022 followers. We used various approaches to engage our audience including video clips, infographics, linking to Committee papers and highlighting recommendations from our reports.

ⁱ Hybrid format – Some Members attend the Committee virtually, whilst others are physically in the Parliament.

