

Draft Island Communities Impact Assessment (ICIA): The Disability Assistance for Older People (Scotland) Regulations 2024

August 2023

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Introduction

1. The importance of island-proofing was recognised in the "Empowering Scotland's Island Communities prospectus" published in June 2014. The principle of island-proofing is one of building a broad-based islands awareness into the decision-making process of all parts of the public sector.

2. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 places a duty on the Scottish Ministers and other relevant authorities, including a number of public authorities, to have regard to island communities in exercising their functions, and for the Scottish Ministers this also includes the development of legislation.¹ This duty is often referred to as 'island-proofing'.

3. The Scottish Government recognises the importance of island-proofing and committed to island-proofing the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 (the 2018 Act)² in advance of the Islands Act placing a formal requirement to do so. The Scottish Government is also committed to island-proofing the legislation required in support of the delivery of social security powers in Scotland.

4. If Scottish Ministers are of the opinion that any piece of proposed legislation is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities, then the duty to island-proof legislation requires Scottish Ministers to:

- describe the likely significantly different effect of the legislation;
- assess the extent to which Scottish Ministers consider that the legislation can be developed in such a manner as to improve or mitigate, for island communities, the outcomes resulting from the legislation; and
- set out the financial implications of steps taken under this subsection to mitigate, for island communities, the outcomes resulting from the legislation.

Executive Summary

5. This Island Communities Impact Assessment has considered the potential effects of the draft Disability Assistance for Older People (Scotland) Regulations 2024 and how they impact on people living in island communities, as presented below in the **Key Findings** section. The findings here are based on desk research, engagement with and feedback from disabled people with lived experience of the current social security system,³ and the Consultation on Disability Assistance.⁴ This

¹ [Islands \(Scotland\) Act 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

² [Social Security \(Scotland\) Act 2018 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

³ [Social Security Experience Panels: publications - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

⁴ [A Consultation on Improving Disability Assistance in Scotland - Scottish Government \(consult.gov.scot\)](https://consult.gov.scot)

ran between 5 March and 28 May 2019 and received 263 replies, of which 74 were from stakeholder organisations and 189 were from individuals.

6. This in turn led to targeted consultation with stakeholders representing people with protected characteristics which was undertaken during the consultation period in 2019, including disabled people from island and remote communities.

7. The Scottish Government is extending the Island Communities Impact Assessment by considering rurality and remoteness in the same spirit of the Act to gauge evidence as to whether the policy and regulations will impact rural/remote communities differently to other communities.

8. Scottish Ministers have concluded that there will not be any new unique impacts on remote and island communities as a result of the provisions in these regulations, nor will there be a specific financial impact for island communities in isolation resulting from the provisions. The positive impacts of Pension Age Disability Payment that have been identified are expected to have a similar impact on remote and island communities as with the rest of Scotland.

Policy Background

9. The 2018 Act sets out the broad framework for the delivery of the Scottish Government's social security benefits. On 1 April 2020, executive and legal competence for disability benefits, including Disability Living Allowance for Children, Personal Independence Payment and Attendance Allowance was transferred to Scottish Ministers.

10. The Scottish Government has now replaced Disability Living Allowance for Children with Child Disability Payment, and Personal Independence Payment with Adult Disability Payment. Attendance Allowance is currently being delivered by the Department for Work and Pensions on behalf of the Scottish Government under the terms of an Agency Agreement. Under the 2018 Act, it is the Scottish Government's intention to replace Attendance Allowance with Pension Age Disability Payment. This was formerly known as Disability Assistance for Older People.

11. The draft Disability Assistance for Older People (Scotland) Regulations 2024 set out the eligibility criteria and how Social Security Scotland will deliver Pension Age Disability Payment, the replacement for Attendance Allowance in Scotland.

12. Pension Age Disability Payment will be delivered by Social Security Scotland on behalf of Scottish Ministers. People will be able to challenge a determination by requesting a re-determination, and subsequently they will be able to appeal to the Social Security Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland.

13. The regulations also make provision for the transfer of awards for individuals in Scotland who currently receive Attendance Allowance from the Department for Work and Pensions. This process is referred to as "case transfer". These provisions are not currently included within the full draft regulations, however they will be added in due course.

14. Based on information from the Department for Work and Pensions' Stat-Xplore service, there were around 144,000 individuals in August 2022 with an entitlement to Attendance Allowance in Scotland whose awards would transfer to Pension Age Disability Payment.⁵

15. As part of the Scottish Government's commitment to a safe and secure transfer, Scottish Ministers do not propose to make significant changes to the existing Attendance Allowance eligibility criteria for Pension Age Disability Payment.

16. Significant changes to the eligibility criteria from that of Attendance Allowance would risk creating a two-tier system of disability benefits for those over State Pension age. Changes to the eligibility criteria for Pension Age Disability Payment would cause unfairness, confusion and disruption for individuals by having two different sets of eligibility criteria and rules, whilst undertaking a significantly complicated case transfer process.

17. Eligibility to Attendance Allowance currently provides individuals with entitlement to various UK Government benefits and premiums, usually referred to as 'passporting'. Throughout the consultation on Disability Assistance, people consistently raised concerns about maintaining other support that they are entitled to as a result of their disability benefit award.

18. This would specifically impact on people who rely on additional means of support such as the Severe Disability premium of Pension Credit which an award of Attendance Allowance may entitle them to.

19. Whilst the passporting of benefit entitlements is not the sole reason for Scottish Ministers' approach to safe and secure transfer, the Scottish Government recognises that these entitlements are crucial to disabled people in Scotland.

20. By maintaining the current eligibility criteria, individuals in Scotland who are eligible for passported benefits and premiums from the UK Government will have seamless access to this vital support. This will provide security to people in Scotland when Pension Age Disability Payment is rolled out.

21. However, there are some key changes along with a number of practical administrative differences between Pension Age Disability Payment and Attendance Allowance which Scottish Ministers expect to have a positive impact for disabled people in Scotland. These differences have been developed through the commitments under the Social Security Charter.⁶

22. The Scottish Government recognises social security as a human right and has designed Social Security Scotland's services with the people who use them so that everyone is treated with dignity, fairness and respect. The Scottish Government is committed to continually improving Scottish disability benefits by continuing to

⁵ [Stat-Xplore - Home \(dwp.gov.uk\)](https://www.dwp.gov.uk/stat-xplore)

⁶ [Social Security Scotland - Our Charter \(socialsecurity.gov.scot\)](https://www.socialsecurity.gov.scot/our-charter)

engage with disabled people and stakeholders to identify areas for further improvement in future.

23. The Scottish Government has made changes to the application process for all forms of disability assistance, including Pension Age Disability Payment, which will help to reduce stress and anxiety for individuals. People interacting with Social Security Scotland will require options and choices that suit them best. Social Security Scotland offers a multi-channel approach including online, telephone, paper-based and face-to-face applications. As well as offering choices, this ensures that those who cannot or choose not to adopt digital methods will not become isolated.

24. People who require further assistance or would prefer face-to-face support will be able to access that through Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery service. Local Delivery staff will provide one-to-one support and help disabled people to understand what Scottish Government benefits they may be entitled to. They can also provide assistance to complete application forms and take forward any follow-up actions relating to a person's application.

25. It is considered that this support will be of particular benefit to older people applying for Pension Age Disability Payment, as many older people may find completing application forms overwhelming and might not have access to a support network to assist them.

26. The Scottish Government also launched the Social Security Independent Advocacy Service in January 2022, and has committed to investing £20.4 million in the service over the following four years. The service is free and supports people who self-identify as a disabled person to access and apply for Social Security Scotland assistance.

27. As with the Scottish Government's other disability benefits, a new approach to gathering supporting information is being utilised by Social Security Scotland which will help reduce stress and anxiety for individuals. A Case Manager will ordinarily only seek one piece of supporting information from a professional to support the decision-making process when making a determination on an individual's entitlement to Pension Age Disability Payment.

28. Case Managers will use a collaborative approach to help people gather supporting information from a professional, where an individual does not already have this to hand. This includes Case Managers obtaining supporting information from professionals on the individual's behalf.

29. Case Managers can also assist in gathering supporting information from the individual's wider support network, such as a family member or unpaid carer, which can help Social Security Scotland to understand the individual's needs, conditions or disability.

30. Applications will be fast tracked from people with a terminal illness. Individuals who are terminally ill will automatically receive the highest rate of Pension Age Disability Payment and there will be no award reviews.

31. The Scottish Government's new definition of terminal illness will apply to Pension Age Disability Payment. The Scottish Government's definition removes the arbitrary 12 month timescale currently used by the Department for Work and Pensions. Instead, the judgement as to whether a person should be considered terminally ill for the purposes of determining eligibility for Pension Age Disability Payment will be made by clinicians, based on guidance prepared by the Chief Medical Officer.⁷

32. For many people in the current system, the award end date for disability benefits can be extremely stressful, particularly for individuals whose conditions are unlikely to change over time and who are consequently subject to unnecessary reviews of entitlement.

33. Providing ongoing awards that are subject to light-touch reviews will help to reduce the stress and anxiety associated with approaching an award review by removing a financial cliff edge for individuals. This is a change from the 'renewal' process for Attendance Allowance, whereby an individual has to complete a new application form and will see payments stop if they do not reapply in time. By continuing entitlement while a review is taking place, disabled people will continue to receive the assistance they are entitled to until a Case Manager has made a new determination.

34. Light-touch reviews will make the process easier and less stressful for individuals. This means that Case Managers are able to, if needed, gather supporting information for the person whose award is being reviewed and consider existing information and previous determinations to avoid asking unnecessary questions.

35. Case Managers will be empowered to make a determination without supporting information if this information is unavailable during a review, and request case discussions with practitioners to further reduce the need for intrusive questions. Having a light-touch review process is more appropriate, particularly where an individual's needs are unlikely to have changed significantly. 66% of respondents to the Consultation on Disability Assistance agreed with this approach alongside general agreement from Experience Panels.^{8,9}

36. Additionally, when asked if review periods should be between 5-10 years for individuals with conditions unlikely to change, 58% of respondents to the consultation agreed. This will help to cut down on the number of unnecessary award reviews that disabled people will need to go through, and as a result, reduce stress and anxiety, thereby having a positive impact on individuals. Work is also underway to consider in more detail whether and in what circumstances indefinite awards should be made available to people whose needs are highly unlikely to change.

⁷ [Social Security Scotland Disability Benefits - Terminal Illness CMO guidance \(socialsecurity.gov.scot\)](https://socialsecurity.gov.scot)

⁸ [Social Security - A Consultation on Disability Assistance in Scotland - Scottish Government response \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

⁹ [Social Security experience panels: decision making and reviewing an award - main report - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

37. The Scottish Government wants to ensure that no one is disadvantaged by time limits for challenging a determination. In response to feedback from the Disability Assistance consultation, Experience Panels and the Disability and Carers Benefits Expert Advisory Group, Scottish Ministers have set the time limit for requesting a re-determination to 42 calendar days across the Scottish Government's disability benefits. This is an increase on the month time limit that is set for requesting a mandatory reconsideration by the Department for Work and Pensions.¹⁰ This will provide individuals with additional time to seek advice or gather supporting information which might be required before requesting a re-determination.

38. If an individual is not able to request a re-determination within 42 calendar days, they can ask for this time limit to be extended. The 2018 Act provides for an extension of up to a year for late re-determination requests. Guidance will ensure that, where an individual requests a late re-determination, their request is considered in a holistic and person-centred manner, taking account of their circumstances.

39. In the Consultation on Disability Assistance, it was proposed that Social Security Scotland be allowed 40-60 days to carry out a re-determination. 60% of respondents to the Consultation on Disability Assistance agreed with this proposed approach. However, some stakeholders felt that this was an excessive period for someone to be left without clarity over their award level or eligibility.

40. Given the concerns raised in the consultation, and subsequent stakeholder engagement, the Scottish Government has settled on the timescale for Social Security Scotland to undertake a re-determination at a maximum of 56 calendar days. It may be necessary to gather supporting information on behalf of the individual, and this information may take some time to obtain.

41. This will be beneficial as it will ensure that disabled people and their families or carers will have certainty about how long Social Security Scotland has to complete a re-determination. Similarly, by enabling individuals to appeal directly to the First-tier Tribunal, should Social Security Scotland be unable to complete the re-determination process within the prescribed timescale, this will further reduce any uncertainty and make people feel more confident in challenging a determination they do not agree with.

42. The Scottish Government has committed to providing Short-term Assistance where Social Security Scotland has made a determination to reduce or stop an ongoing Scottish Government benefit and that determination is subject to a request for re-determination or an appeal. As with the Scottish Government's other disability benefits, Short-term Assistance will be available for those with an award of Pension Age Disability Payment.

43. The intention of Short-term Assistance is to ensure an individual is not discouraged from challenging a review of their award determination or from accessing administrative justice, by having to manage, for a period, with a reduced income. Short-term Assistance is not available in the UK Government system.

¹⁰ [Social Security - A Consultation on Disability Assistance in Scotland - Scottish Government response \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2018/06/Social_Security_-_A_Consultation_on_Disability_Assistance_in_Scotland_-_Scottish_Government_response.pdf)

Providing support in this way is another example of where Scottish Ministers are removing barriers in the Scottish social security system.

44. The policy position for Pension Age Disability Payment is closely aligned with the Healthier, Wealthier and Fairer Strategic Objectives, and contributes to the following National Outcomes:

- We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination;
- We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth, and power more equally;
- We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe.

45. This impact assessment is one of a package to accompany the regulations. The others are: Equality Impact Assessment; Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment and the Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment.

Scope of the Island Communities Impact Assessment

46. This Island Communities Impact Assessment considers the impact of replacing Attendance Allowance with Pension Age Disability Payment in Scotland on disabled people over the State Pension age and their families and carers, who live in island and remote communities.

Key Findings

47. This section provides an overview of the issues for Scottish island and remote communities that are relevant to these regulations. Island stakeholders have emphasised the importance of understanding the island experience.

48. Each island has its own specific considerations and constraints. Rural Scotland accounts for 98% of the Scottish landmass, with 17% of the population residing there.¹¹

49. At the time of the 2011 Census, Scotland had 93 inhabited islands, with a total population of 103,700. This was 2% of the Scottish population.¹² Of these islands, only five are connected to the Scottish mainland by bridge or causeway.

50. Part 4 of the Islands Act identifies six local authorities representing island communities. These are: Argyll and Bute Council; Comhairle nan Eilean Siar/Western Island Council; Highland Council; North Ayrshire Council; Orkney Islands Council and Shetland Islands Council. Amongst them, Orkney, Shetland and Western Isles are entirely island authorities, while Argyll and Bute, Highland and North Ayrshire cover island regions as well as mainland regions.

¹¹ [Rural Scotland: key facts 2018 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

¹² [Inhabited islands analytical report | Scotland's Census \(scotlandscensus.gov.uk\)](http://scotlandscensus.gov.uk)

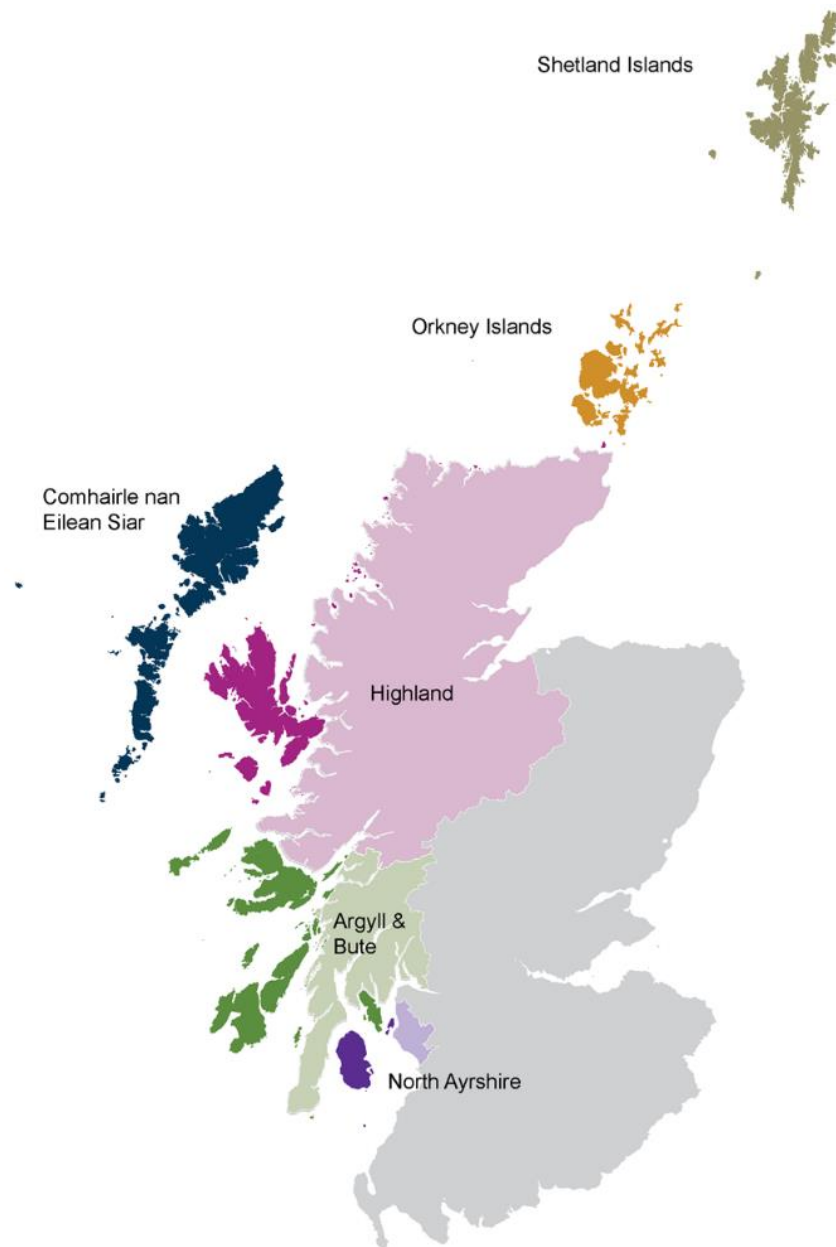


Figure 1: Map highlighting all six local authorities representing Island Communities. Islands are in a darker shade where the islands are part of mainland Local Authority areas.¹³

Demography and Health

51. According to the 2011 Census, 83% of island residents reported their health as being ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’ compared with 82% for Scotland as a whole.¹⁴ The proportion of island residents with a long-term health problem or disability that limited their day-to-day activities was just under 20%, including 9% who reported their daily

¹³ [Islands \(Scotland\) Bill | Scottish Parliament](#)

¹⁴ [Inhabited islands analytical report | Scotland's Census \(scotlandscensus.gov.uk\)](#)

activities were limited a lot.¹⁵ The corresponding proportions for Scotland as a whole were very similar. 21% of island residents were aged 65 and over, whereas the proportion nationally was 17%.¹⁶

52. Across the United Kingdom, disabled people have higher poverty rates than the general population. 24% of people over State Pension age with a disability are in poverty compared with 17% of those without a disability.¹⁷ Data related to disability specific to island communities is not available.

53. In Scotland, 410,000 households in poverty (42%) include a disabled person. 1 in 8 people aged over 65 in Scotland experience poverty in the last year of their life. The impact of social inequalities on health outcomes in older people is well documented.¹⁸

54. As of August 2022, around 16,500 individuals had an entitlement to Attendance Allowance within the entirety of the six island local authority areas, with around 3,500 of those individuals residing on the islands. This accounts for around 2.4% of those with an entitlement to Attendance Allowance within Scotland.¹⁹

55. Although Pension Age Disability Payment is not intended to be an income replacement benefit, it is intended to provide support with helping to meet the extra costs associated with having a disability. The Scottish Government's approach to delivery is expected to improve outcomes for older people across Scotland, including in island communities, by starting from a position of trust and listening to what individuals tell Social Security Scotland about their personal circumstances while endeavouring to make the right determination at the first opportunity.

Cost of Living

56. The cost of many amenities and activities are higher for people living in island communities than those living on the mainland. A lack of choice and accessibility means that shopping, mobile phone services and broadband can be more expensive for people living in island communities compared to those on the mainland. The greater distances and remoteness means that day to day travel, postage, fuel, day-trips and holidays are also more expensive for people in remote communities.

57. Citizens Advice Scotland have identified issues of grid, utilities, digital and travel as key barriers for people in accessible rural, remote rural and remote small towns.²⁰ Furthermore, a typical food basket can cost as much as 50% more on island

¹⁵ [Inhabited islands analytical report | Scotland's Census \(scotlandscensus.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/inhabited-islands-analytical-report)

¹⁶ [Inhabited islands analytical report | Scotland's Census \(scotlandscensus.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/inhabited-islands-analytical-report)

¹⁷ [UK Poverty 2022: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK | JRF \(www.jrf.org.uk\)](https://www.jrf.org.uk/uk-poverty-2022)

¹⁸ [Population Groups: Older People - Public Health Scotland \(www.healthscotland.scot\)](https://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups-older-people)

¹⁹ <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>

²⁰ Sutherland, F (2015) Remotely excluded: barriers facing Scotland's rural consumers, CAS, Edinburgh, 36 pp

communities in Scotland, while transport can be up to £40 a week more expensive due to longer distances for commuting and a higher price for petrol.²¹

58. According to Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE), household budgets in remote rural Scotland in 2013 were typically 10-40% higher than elsewhere in the United Kingdom.²² Although this had reduced slightly in 2016 and has a more modest impact on older people, HIE attributes these extra costs to three principle sources:

- The higher prices that households were required to pay for food, clothes and household goods;
- Considerably higher household fuel bills, influenced by climate and fuel sources;
- The longer distances that people have to routinely travel, particularly to work.

59. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that levels of poverty among disabled people are generally underestimated.²³ Because disabled people's needs are often greater than for those without a disability, the cost of living for disabled people is frequently higher. These costs are higher in island and remote communities due to an environment that is less accessible, with higher costs for reasonable adjustments to technology, housing and transport.

60. A range of work is being undertaken by the Scottish Government to address the challenges that people in island and rural communities face. For example, the Islands Strategic Group was established in August 2016.²⁴ The group considers strategic issues affecting the island communities of Scotland, and to ensure greater involvement of the relevant councils in helping to identify and design solutions to the unique needs and challenges these communities face.

61. The Scottish Government recognises that both being disabled and living in a remote rural area makes it more expensive to meet material needs and participate in society. While Pension Age Disability Payment is not intended to be an income-replacement benefit, it is intended to provide support with helping to meet the extra costs of care associated with having a disability. For some disabled people, entitlement to Pension Age Disability Payment may bring additional entitlement to other benefits and premiums.

Connectivity and Accessibility

62. Alongside the areas identified by Citizens Advice Scotland, research briefings from 2017 for the Islands (Scotland) Bill suggest that residents of islands rely on

²¹ A Minimum Income Standard: For Remote rural Scotland; Loughborough University, UHI & Highlands and Islands Enterprise; 2013

²² [A Minimum Income Standard for Remote Rural Scotland 2016 | Highlands and Islands Enterprise \(www.hie.co.uk\)](http://www.hie.co.uk)

²³ [Disability, Long Term Conditions and Poverty - New Policy Institute \(npi.org.uk\)](http://www.npi.org.uk)

²⁴ [Islands Strategic Group - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

ferry crossings and air travel to reach the mainland and larger islands to access key services such as secondary and higher education, care, and medical services.²⁵

63. In 2011, the proportion of island households with at least one car or van available was 79%, compared with just over two-thirds (69%) nationally.²⁶

64. In rural remote areas and island communities, disabled people face a lack of access to opportunities that are more readily and frequently available to those on the mainland or in urban areas. Furthermore, a lack of accessibility to employment, education and leisure opportunities can be made more difficult for someone with a physical condition, especially when transport options are limited.

65. Bus services in remote and island communities can be unreliable and are often community run. Even where buses are available, they often run rarely and timetables do not always meet the needs of people living in the community. Furthermore, if there is already someone with a wheelchair or pram on the bus it is not always possible for a wheelchair user to board.

66. Not all islands are served by buses and there are not always taxis available. It is known that disabled people on islands rely heavily on neighbours, friends and families driving them as a primary means of transport.

67. The needs of wheelchair users can be different in island and rural communities than the needs of wheelchair users in an urban environment due to more challenging terrain.

68. Research undertaken by the Scottish Government and by stakeholders in 2020 have found that a lack of connectivity in rural or remote communities has been compounded by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁷ An absence of good quality internet connection can significantly impact on an individual's ability to socialise and partake in cultural activities, particularly where people already have difficulty taking part in activities as a result of a disability or health condition.

69. The Scottish Government is working to address some of these issues through Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery staff sharing locations with other services so that they are based where people currently go, to ensure that individuals can access advice and support in existing island locations.

70. Social Security Scotland will offer a multi-channel approach, including telephone, paper-based and face-to-face applications to ensure that people are not isolated through a lack of access to technology.

71. Social Security Scotland will also support individuals to gather supporting information. This includes, if authorised by the individual, gathering supporting information on their behalf if they do not have this to hand. For individuals living in

²⁵ [Islands \(Scotland\) Bill | Scottish Parliament \(digitalpublications.parliament.scot\)](https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot)

²⁶ [Inhabited islands analytical report | Scotland's Census \(scotlandscensus.gov.uk\)](https://scotlandscensus.gov.uk)

²⁷ [Poverty types: Working age without children - Poverty in Perspective: a typology of poverty in Scotland - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot)

rural or island communities, this may be of particular benefit as it may be difficult for residents to gather supporting information from a professional given the remoteness and lack of connectivity.

Culture

72. Stakeholders have identified potential cultural barriers to applying for Pension Age Disability Payment. This is because of the close-knit nature of island communities. Although there is research that evidences the positive impact of the support provided by close-knit communities, certain barriers may also be present.

73. It is possible that the stigma attached to identifying as disabled could act as a barrier to people applying for Pension Age Disability Payment. The need for privacy and dignity is emphasised by disabled people in remote and island communities.

74. Dignity, fairness and respect underpins how Social Security Scotland will deliver Pension Age Disability Payment, including protecting the privacy of individuals. For instance, Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery team will share locations with other services so that they are based where individuals currently go to ensure that they can access advice and support in existing island locations. This should help to reduce the stigma of seeking support when applying for Pension Age Disability Payment.

75. Access to information on Pension Age Disability Payment will also be reflective of culture and lived experience. Social Security Scotland will create a range of Pension Age Disability Payment stakeholder resources and content in accessible formats.

76. Such resources will be proactively supplied to relevant stakeholder organisations through the National Engagement Team for organisations to distribute to people in local communities. Social Security Scotland proactively translates information resources into Gaelic, which may be beneficial to some island communities, particularly those residing in the Western Isles, Highlands and Argyll and Bute.

Choice and Representation

77. The Scottish Government has heard how there are limited options for people living in island and remote communities with regard to leisure activities, support services and support groups, with the importance of choice being a key theme in previous social security and disability assistance consultations. However, such choices are often diminished or non-existent in rural areas.

78. As previously highlighted, Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery team will share locations with other services so that they are based where people currently go to ensure that they can access advice and support in existing island locations.

79. Social Security Scotland will also offer a multi-channel approach, including telephone, paper-based and face-to-face applications to ensure that people are not isolated through a lack of access to technology. Further to this, carers, adult children and those with power of attorney will be able to navigate the process of applying for and maintaining Pension Age Disability Payment through Social Security Scotland's multi-channel approach. People applying for Pension Age Disability Payment will not be required to undergo a face-to-face consultation.

80. The importance of representation has been heard from island communities. The Scottish Government will ensure that individuals can request a third party representative with ease to support them in their engagement with Social Security Scotland. Scottish Ministers believe this strikes the right balance to encourage people in this age group to gain support from friends and relatives when required, while also maintaining their financial independence.

81. Engagement with key stakeholders, including advice organisations, will be ongoing throughout the development and delivery of Pension Age Disability Payment to ensure that they understand the application process and eligibility criteria to provide representation for individuals.

82. The Scottish Government launched the Social Security Independent Advocacy Service in January 2022 and has committed to investing £20.4 million in the service over the following four years. The service is free and supports people who self-identify as a disabled person to access and apply for Social Security Scotland assistance. The service is independent of the Scottish Government and is delivered by VoiceAbility, a charity with 40 years' experience of delivering independent advocacy services. Advocates from VoiceAbility can support people to have their voices heard, understand and secure their rights under the Scottish social security system, express their wishes and be fully involved in order to make informed decisions.

83. It is expected that the Scottish Government's approach to delivering Pension Age Disability Payment will help to ensure that individuals can interact with Social Security Scotland in a way that best meets their needs, while having support from friends or relatives as well as independent advice organisations, no matter where they reside in Scotland.

Implementation

84. A communications strategy and comprehensive guidance will be developed in advance of the launch of Pension Age Disability Payment. This will ensure that individuals who are eligible and their families, the third sector, local authorities and advice providers are aware of Pension Age Disability Payment, and have an understanding of the application process and eligibility criteria.

85. The communications strategy will be linked with wider Scottish Government initiatives on improving outcomes for disabled people and for remote and island communities. This will ensure that Pension Age Disability Payment is part of wider efforts to meet the needs of people living in island communities.

86. The Scottish Government recognises that awareness and understanding of Attendance Allowance is often limited, which is especially relevant in rural communities. Scottish Ministers intend to provide clear information about eligibility and the new application process for Pension Age Disability Payment which will be more personalised and efficient than the current process.

87. Social Security Scotland's Local Delivery staff will provide support to applicants in rural areas. This will be an improvement on the current level of support offered through the Department for Work and Pensions system.

Monitoring and Review

88. Monitoring the impact of Pension Age Disability Payment in island and remote rural communities will be a continuous process and, where any unintended consequences are identified, steps will be taken to improve the service. The Scottish Government will put in place a monitoring and evaluation plan for Pension Age Disability Payment prior to implementation which takes account of the issues identified within this impact assessment.

89. On-going stakeholder engagement with key organisations will also provide the Scottish Government with an opportunity to monitor the impact of the policy.

90. The 2018 Act places a duty on Scottish Ministers to report annually to the Scottish Parliament on the performance of the Scottish social security system during the previous financial year. The report is to describe what Scottish Ministers have done in that year to meet the expectations set out in the Charter.

91. Scottish Ministers have also committed to engaging with, and reporting regular progress to, the Islands Strategic Group to ensure that those representing the interests of island communities and others with experience of the current system, are fairly represented in the development and delivery of the Scottish social security system.

Conclusion

92. Scottish Ministers are aware of the duty to consult island communities before making a material change to any policy, strategy or service which, in Scottish Ministers' opinion, is likely to have an effect on an island community which is significantly different from its effect on other communities.

93. This impact assessment has highlighted that living in island and remote communities present unique challenges for disabled people.

94. The Scottish Government has not identified any evidence that the introduction of Pension Age Disability Payment will directly or indirectly discriminate against remote and island communities.

95. The introduction of Pension Age Disability Payment is expected to have a positive impact on disabled people across Scotland, regardless of location, with a secondary positive impact on their families and carers.

96. Pension Age Disability Payment will help to address a number of issues raised in this Island Communities Impact Assessment, such as the higher cost of living in remote and island communities and challenges faced in accessing social security due to cultural barriers. This Island Communities Impact Assessment has identified the need to ensure that Pension Age Disability Payment is promoted appropriately and sensitively in remote rural areas.

97. The Scottish Government is committed to designing Social Security Scotland's services with people in Scotland. On-going engagement with disabled people, external stakeholders and advisory groups will ensure that the impact of the regulations remain under continuous review.

98. The Scottish Government has concluded that no further changes to the Pension Age Disability Payment regulations are necessary as a result of the Island Communities Impact Assessment.

Authorisation

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