

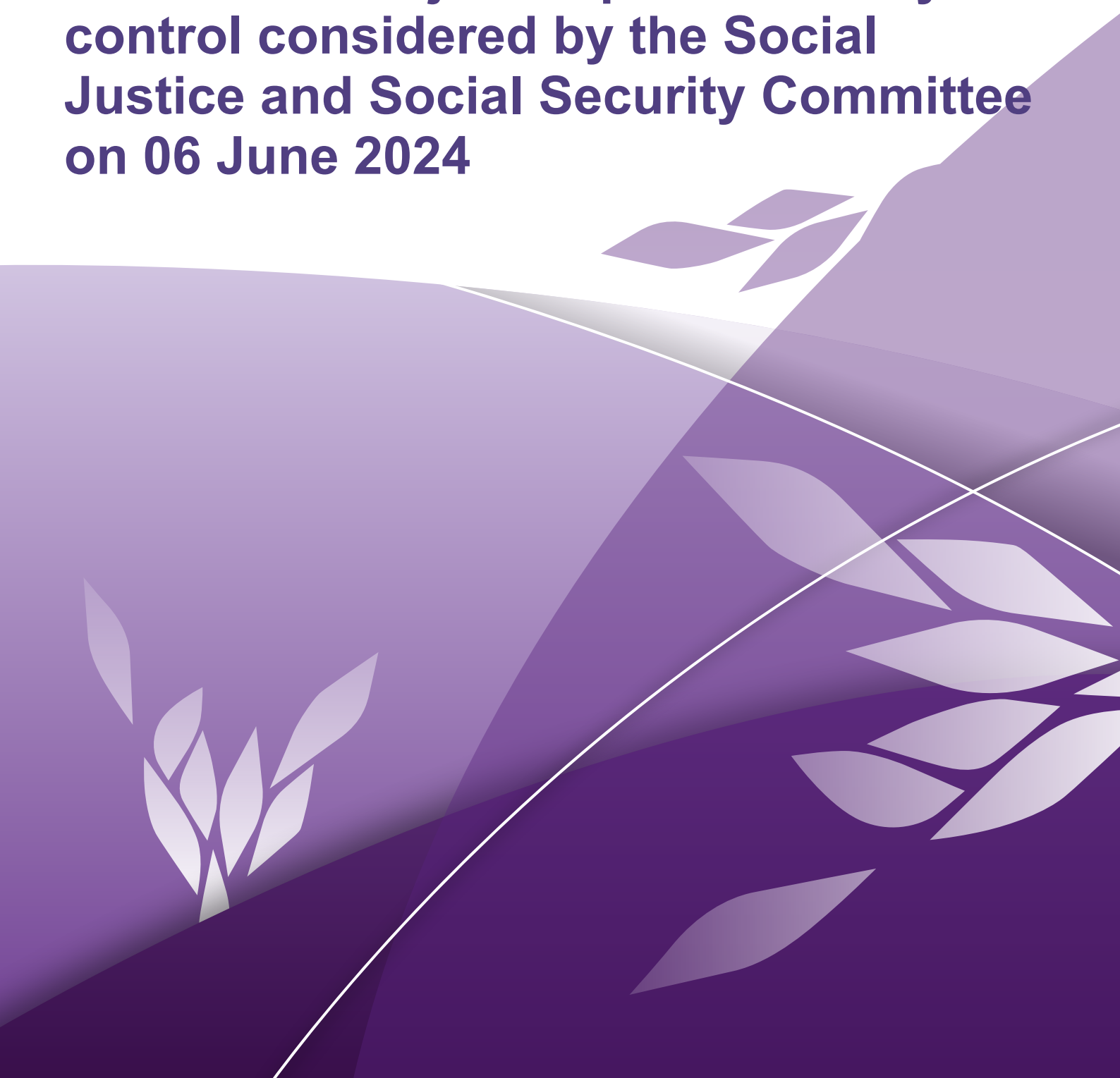


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Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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## **Social Justice and Social Security Committee**

**Document subject to parliamentary  
control considered by the Social  
Justice and Social Security Committee  
on 06 June 2024**



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# Social Justice and Social Security Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice excluding matters relating to housing and tenants' rights.



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# Committee Membership



**Convener**  
**Collette Stevenson**  
Scottish National Party



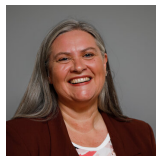
**Deputy Convener**  
**Bob Doris**  
Scottish National Party



**Jeremy Balfour**  
Scottish Conservative  
and Unionist Party



**Katy Clark**  
Scottish Labour



**Roz McCall**  
Scottish Conservative  
and Unionist Party



**Marie McNair**  
Scottish National Party



**Paul O'Kane**  
Scottish Labour



**Kevin Stewart**  
Scottish National Party

# Membership changes

1. The following change to Committee membership occurred during the consideration of the proposed revised Social Security Charter:

- On 18 June 2024, Kevin Stewart MSP replaced John Mason MSP.

# Introduction

2. This report concerns the proposed revised Social Security Charter laid before the Parliament by the Scottish Government on 16 May 2024. The Charter is subject to the affirmative procedure by virtue of Rule 10.10 of the Scottish Parliament's Standing Orders.
3. It is for the Social Justice and Social Security Committee, as lead committee, to decide whether or not to recommend approval.

## About the proposed revised Charter

4. The [Social Security \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#) requires a Charter to be created and then reviewed every five years.
5. The Charter sets out what the social security principles mean in practice and lists around 50 commitments to be delivered by the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. It details what should be expected from:
  - Scottish Ministers when they develop policy
  - Scottish Ministers exercising their functions under Parts 1 to 3 of the 2018 Act)  
- i.e Social Security Scotland
  - Individuals receiving benefits through the Scottish social security system.
6. The first review took place during 2023. A report setting out the research undertaken as part of this review and the Charter Measurement Framework are available on the [Scottish Government website](#).



## Consideration by the DPLR Committee

7. The Delegated Powers and Law Reform (DPLR) Committee is required to consider every document subject to parliamentary control laid before the Parliament and decide whether to draw it to the attention of the Parliament on any of the “reporting grounds” set out in Rule 10.3 of the Parliament's Standing Orders.
8. The DPLR Committee considered this document at its meeting on [28 May 2024](#) and agreed that it did not need to be drawn to the Parliament's attention on any of the reporting grounds.<sup>1</sup>

# Consideration by the Social Justice and Social Security Committee

9. At its meeting on [06 June 2024](#), the Social Justice and Social Security Committee took evidence on the proposed revised Charter from the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice and officials.
10. The Cabinet Secretary explained that the review of the Charter was co-produced with people who have experience of the Scottish social security system and "the changes and restructuring largely reflect a social security system that is now operational, while adopting more inclusive and consistent use of language." <sup>2</sup>
11. Members asked if the Scottish Government saw the Charter as an aspirational document. The Cabinet Secretary said the Charter is a 'living, breathing document' and as the Scottish social security system is quite new, the Government is keen to continuously improve it. <sup>3</sup>
12. Members enquired about changes to wording specifically around referrals with, for example, Commitment 1.16 no longer using 'refer' and now instead phrased 'Direct you towards other organisations and services that may be able to give advice or guidance'.

The Cabinet Secretary stated that "more sensible and appropriate language is now used" <sup>4</sup> so that the Charter clearly explains what the Scottish Government does. A Scottish Government Official added that the word 'referral' implies an element of data sharing and this is not the case when people get signposted to local services.

13. On the low awareness of the Charter amongst clients and staff, the Cabinet Secretary emphasised that the Charter is built into all social security activities and systems of governance? and influences its culture and decisions. A Scottish Government Official added that the review is a great opportunity to promote the Charter. <sup>5</sup>
14. The Cabinet Secretary gave the Committee more information about the co-design process and stated that—  

**”** It is important that we hear from as many people as possible and from a broad range of people, both directly from clients and through stakeholders that represent clients—especially those who are seldom heard in these types of activities. [...] There was, as a priority, engagement with people from seldom-heard groups because we need to look specifically at the barriers that they face when engaging with public services. That has given us a wealth of evidence about how clients' priorities are already reflected in the charter and about how they could be reflected slightly better. <sup>6</sup>
15. On the low number (only seven) of stakeholder organisations taking part in the survey, she explained that—

- ” Partner organisations were invited to take part in the survey and in one-to-one interviews and so on. I think that the number of responses reflects the fact that they did not feel that there was much to say on the charter, rather than that they did not know that the review was going on.”<sup>7</sup>
16. Members enquired about the impact of removing the commitment to handle applications “as quickly as we can” and expressed concerns about what it would mean for clients getting clearer timescales when applying for benefits. The Cabinet Secretary explained that the change was driven by clients' feedback and the term "quickly" might have a different meaning to different people. It was therefore important to ensure that "what is in the charter means something to clients who are going through the process.”<sup>8</sup>
17. She added that she is aware processing times were too long and work is taking place to keep bringing them down but that "the charter is separate and has been through a process that is not impacted by what is happening on processing times in the agency.”<sup>9</sup>
18. Members asked about another change in terminology and whether it was implemented to reflect the actual experience of clients. Specifically they asked why the commitment to deliver 'face-to-face services' changed to a commitment to delivery 'in person if necessary'.
19. The Cabinet Secretary assured this was just about making language sharper and that face to face support remains available should clients prefer this option. She added—
- ” It is not just for someone who is housebound, for example, or on a disability benefit. The change is a recognition of the fact that, particularly over the past couple of years, people are much more relaxed about using a video call and so on. [...] The face-to-face local delivery service is unique to the social security system in Scotland and is a very important and integral part of it, which we will not be losing.”<sup>10</sup>
20. Following oral evidence, the Cabinet Secretary moved motion [S6M-13481](#) — That the Social Justice and Social Security Committee recommends to the Parliament that the Proposed Revised Social Security Charter (SG/2024/96) (Draft) be approved.
21. The motion was agreed to.

# Recommendation

22. Accordingly, the Committee recommends to the Parliament that the draft Proposed Revised Social Security Charter be approved.

- 1 [Subordinate Legislation Considered by the Delegated Powers and Law Reform Committee on 28 May 2024](#)
- 2 [Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Official Report, 06 June 2024, Col 25](#)
- 3 [Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Official Report, 06 June 2024, Col 26](#)
- 4 [Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Official Report, 06 June 2024, Col 26](#)
- 5 [Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Official Report, 06 June 2024, Col 28](#)
- 6 [Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Official Report, 06 June 2024, Col 29](#)
- 7 [Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Official Report, 06 June 2024, Col 30](#)
- 8 [Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Official Report, 06 June 2024, Col 31](#)
- 9 [Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Official Report, 06 June 2024, Col 31](#)
- 10 [Social Justice and Social Security Committee, Official Report, 06 June 2024, Col 33](#)

