



Scottish
Commission
on Social
Security

Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS)

Business Plan

April 2021 – March 2022

1. Chair's foreword

I am pleased to introduce the Scottish Commission in Social Security (SCoSS) business plan for 2021-22. This sets out our strategic approach and priorities for the year and how we intend to measure success. That said, a key learning point from 2020-21 was just how quickly, unexpectedly and fundamentally priorities can change. As for everyone else, what we expected to do that year, and what we ended up doing, were not the same, due to the impact of Covid. Our work priorities will always, unavoidably, to a considerable extent be driven by Scottish Government's timetable for regulations. Where these are subject to change, so too will be our workplan. Last year such was the scale and pace of change that we were unable to produce a meaningful business plan and so instead published a high level [interim report](#) .

This year we expect change to continue to be a major theme as the pandemic plays out, plans that had to be shelved during a state of emergency start to be revisited and new priorities continue to emerge. The Scottish Parliament election in May can be expected to result in changes to Ministers and Parliamentary Committee – two sets of critically important stakeholders for us. On top of that, with the well-deserved promotion of our Secretary into a new role in March 2021, there will clearly be changes to the support available to us at what could well be a very demanding time. Nonetheless, we hope to be able to return to developing our work-plans for the Social Security Charter and for wider stakeholder engagement, in particular concerning the involvement of people with lived experience. We also hope to have capacity to progress the recruitment of a fifth SCoSS Board member and maybe, just maybe, we will at last see the launch of our own SCoSS website! Above all, our focus will be on ensuring we have the capacity and capability to provide independent expert advice that adds demonstrate and significant value in support of our vision for a robust, effective, efficient Scottish social security system that meets its full potential to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland.

Our business plan therefore aims to give a clear sense of direction and priorities while being adaptable to fresh challenges should they arise. We also want to make sure we continuously improve what we do. That means making the most efficient and effective use of the capacity of our Board and secretariat, reviewing how we work with Scottish Government and routinely seeking feedback on our work. On that note, we hope you find this business plan useful and welcome any suggestions you may have for improvement.

Dr Sally Witcher OBE
Chair, Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS)

2. About Us

Our Board



Chair: Dr Sally Witcher OBE:
Independent Consultant



Member: Judith Paterson: Head of
Advice and Rights (Scotland) for Child
Poverty Action Group in Scotland (CPAG)



Member: Dr Mark Simpson: Lecturer in
Law at Ulster University, researching social
security and human rights



Member: Sharon McIntyre: Head of
Career Information, Advice and Guidance
at Skills Development Scotland

Purpose

The Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS) was set up in 2019 to provide independent scrutiny of the Scottish social security system and hold Scottish Ministers to account.

The Commission is separate from the Scottish Government and from the Parliament. It carries out its work independently of both, but works closely with both.

Information on the Commission's functions are set out within [Section 22 of the Social Security Scotland Act 2018](#). SCoSS's role is made up of three parts:

1. Scrutinise draft regulations and publish full reports including recommendations to Scottish Government.
2. Reporting on the [Social Security Charter](#) to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament on whether the expectations in the Social Security Charter are being met. The Scottish Government and [Social Security Scotland](#) published the Social Security Charter in January 2019. It is called '[Our Charter](#)'.
3. Responding to requests from Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to report 'on any matter relevant to social security' when asked by either of them.

Our Vision

A robust, effective, efficient Scottish social security system that meets its full potential to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland. To help achieve the vision for Scottish social security by providing independent expert advice that adds demonstrable and significant value.

Our Values

- **We Are Independent**
- **We Are Committed**
- **We provide Assurance and Accountability**
- **We are Outcome Focussed**

3. Approach to the Business Plan

- **Strategic Overview** section sets the foundation on which our strategic objectives are agreed
- **Strategic Objectives** are our long-term priorities for SCoSS.
- **Our Priorities** provide an overview of what SCoSS will focus on for the current reporting year.
- **Our Stakeholder Approach** will inform how we aim to deliver our objectives through open and positive communications, forming and strengthening key relationships.
- **Operating Principles** provide the basis of how we will deliver our priorities including robust governance and finance measures.

4. Strategic Overview

We contribute to the Scottish Government National Performance Framework (NPF), the foundations on which we as SCoSS align our strategic objectives.

Scottish Government intends that public bodies should align the outcomes of their activity with the Government's National Performance Framework and associated National Outcomes. Our work contributes to the following National Outcomes:

- We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination

Click on the link for more information on the [NPF](#).

We embed social security principles and a rights based approach in everything we do.

The Scottish social security system is founded on values of dignity, fairness and respect. The system is underpinned by core principles and a rights based approach. These principles will be embedded within SCoSS and help to shape our Strategic Objectives.

[Social security principles;](#)

- social security is an investment in the people of Scotland
- social security is itself a human right and essential to the realisation of other human rights
- respect for the dignity of individuals is to be at the heart of the Scottish social security system
- the Scottish Ministers have a role in ensuring that individuals are given what they are eligible to be given under the Scottish social security system
- the Scottish social security system is to be designed with the people of Scotland on the basis of evidence
- opportunities are to be sought to continuously improve the Scottish social security system in ways which put the needs of those who require assistance first
- the Scottish social security system is to be efficient and deliver value for money

Throughout, SCoSS also takes account of how COVID has impacted on national outcomes and our work, and we reflect on this when measuring our progress. Scottish Government published their report on [Scotland's Wellbeing: The Impact of COVID-19](#).

5. Our Strategic Objectives - 2021/2022

Our objectives set out what we aim to achieve as SCoSS an independent body, whilst contributing to the NPF, Programme for Government and COVID- 19 impact.

Our Objectives

1. We provide expert, independent and evidence-based scrutiny that is informed by human rights and the social security principles.
2. We aim to ensure, where possible, our work involves people who have lived experience of the social security system and organisations with an interest in social security. It is critical for us to take account of differing perspectives and involve people who have real experience and understanding of social security assistance in their daily lives.
3. We aim to help the Scottish Ministers, Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament develop effective regulations that meet policy goals and deliver on expectations in the social security charter, to maximise support to people who rely on Scottish social security.
4. We want people to understand how our decisions are made and are transparent about the way we make decisions.
5. We will aim to provide material on our website which is clear and accessible.
6. Spend public money effectively and efficiently, and ensure that we deliver on all our corporate responsibilities where these are fully within our control.
7. Provide input and evidence to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee during their scrutiny period of draft regulations.
8. Embed a continuous improvement approach to the way in which we operate, supported by a fully resourced secretariat.

6. Our Priorities – 2021/2022

Scrutinising Regulations

- Scrutinise and report on draft regulations referred to SCoSS by Scottish Ministers within agreed timescales.
- Consult (written evidence, round tables, events etc.) with stakeholders to inform our scrutiny of draft regulations where this can add value and is timely and affordable.
- Engage with Scottish Government officials on policy, equality impact assessments, consultations and research.

Social Security Charter

- Develop and implement a strategic approach to fulfil our Charter function.
- Strengthen our relationship with Social Security Scotland.

Communications

- Launch a new website that is independent, transparent, inclusive and provides full access to all our reports and minutes.
- Create a communications plan to support engagement with our stakeholders.
- Develop a Lived Experience framework, utilising existing Lived Experience engagement mechanisms.
- Build strong relationships with Scottish Government Ministers and Parliamentary Committee members with responsibility for social security.

Governance and Assurance

- Develop and deliver our Continuous Improvement Action Plan (CIAP).
- Commence the process for the appointment of a 5th board member to join SCoSS, strengthening the expertise and capacity of our board.
- Develop our secretariat capacity and capability.
- Appoint an audit advisor to support the board and secretariat with governance and audit-related work including review of governance documentation, advise and support continuous improvement.
- Review and develop our secretariat capacity and capability

Our Objectives

1. Provide expert, independent and evidence-based scrutiny that is informed by human rights and the social security principles.
2. Aim to ensure, where possible, our work involves people who have lived experience of the social security system and organisations with an interest in social security.
3. Aim to help the Scottish Ministers, Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament develop effective regulations that meet policy goals and deliver on expectations in the Social Security Charter, to maximise support to people who rely on Scottish social security.
4. We want people to understand how our decisions are made and are transparent about the way we make decisions.
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7. Provide input and evidence to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee during their scrutiny period of draft regulations.
8. Embed a continuous improvement approach to the way in which we operate, supported by a fully resourced secretariat.

Our Priorities

1. Scrutinise and report on draft regulations referred to SCoSS by Scottish Ministers within agreed timescales.
 - 1.1. Consult (written evidence, round tables, events etc) with stakeholders to inform our scrutiny of draft regulations where this can add value and is timely and affordable.
 - 1.1.1. Engage with Scottish Government officials on policy, Equality Impact Assessments, consultations and research.
2. Develop a Lived Experience framework, utilising existing Lived Experience engagement mechanisms.
3. Develop a strategic approach to fulfil our Charter function which also enhances our scrutiny function.
 - 3.1. Strengthen our relationship with Social Security Scotland.
 - 3.1.1. Build strong relationships with Scottish Government Ministers and Parliamentary Committee members with responsibility for social security.
4. Launch a new website that is transparent, inclusive and provides full access to all our reports and minutes.

5. Create a communications plan to support engagement with our stakeholders.
6. Appoint an audit advisor to support the board with governance and audit related work.
7. Develop our capacity and capability through the commencement of recruitment for a 5th board member to join SCoSS, strengthening the expertise of our board.
8. Develop and deliver our Continuous Improvement Action Plan (CIAP).
 - 8.1. Develop our secretariat capacity and capability.

Monitoring our Success

- Our performance, delivery and processes are informed by information, research, lived experience, feedback and continuous improvement.
- Monitor and analyse how the Scottish Government and the Social Justice and Social Security Committee take account of our reports, to ensure we are being effective and influential.
- Conduct regular discussions with the Social Justice and Social Security Committee and the Scottish Government to make sure we are adding value, while maintaining our independence.
- Adopt a lessons learned culture, where we systematically review the effectiveness of our work to identify where improvements could be made.
- Developing our potential ensuring all board members are supported, motivated, skilled and our working practices are flexible and progressive.

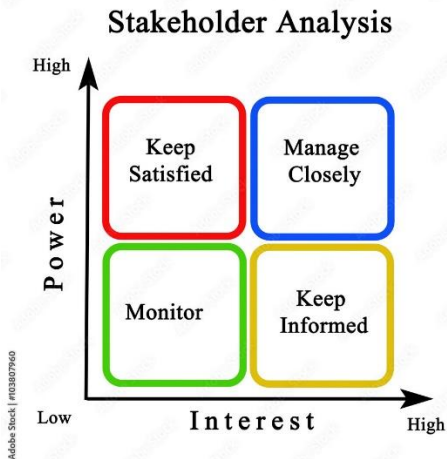
7. Our Stakeholder Approach

We will continue to engage with stakeholders nationally and locally across sectors and across UK to work closely with a wide range of participants to help us deliver our priorities as efficiently and effectively.

Our collaboration with others to support our work, increases the understanding and importance of what we do and raise awareness of our functions and the positive impact our work has on the Scottish social security system.

We are aware the value of seeking views from a wide and diverse audience, capturing different perspectives, expertise and experience to ensure the best results. We aim to achieve this by;

- Explore different avenues of accessing stakeholder input in ways which are timely, accessible efficient and add value to the work being delivered by SCoSS.
- Seeking opportunities to engage with key stakeholders and those with lived experience to promote wider understanding, opportunities for input and generate feedback that will contribute to our continuous improvement.
- Develop and maintain a regular programme of positive engagement with existing stakeholders which support delivery of our ongoing work.



8. Operating Principles

Finance

Our current budget provides funding to cover all expenditure associated with operating SCoSS.

- Preparing Annual Report and Accounts
- Providing quarterly finance updates to Members
- Prepare Annual report and Accounts, agreed by SCoSS Accountable Officer and Audit Scotland

We are supported by a small secretariat. This along with our operation costs is funded from a Commission budget of £340K

Governance

Our governance, assurance and risk management approaches are robust, proportionate and accord with relevant principles and legislation.

- Deliver on our corporate responsibilities as a Non Departmental Public Body (NDPB), ensure that we create a sound governance framework and demonstrate value for money through our audited accounts.
- Commit to appointing an experienced audit adviser who will provide independent scrutiny and advice on governance, risk management, the control environment and the integrity of financial statements and our annual report.
- Review our corporate documents in accordance with agreed review period.

Operations

Our board members and secretariat have sufficient capacity and capability to effectively carry out their role.

- Professional development plans in place for board members as part of annual appraisals.
- Identify new areas of learning and development as well as any work practice efficiencies collectively as a board.
- Ensure SCoSS core values are embedded in our working practice.
- Deliver our workplan efficiently and effectively in a timely manner.

Our Structure

SCoSS is administered through funding from Scottish Government, is supported by a secretariat and works with Scottish Government Sponsor team to meet governance and assurance requirements.

SG Deputy Director for Social Security Policy is the nominated Accountable Officer for SCoSS. The accountable officer is responsible for the formal Annual Report and Accounts and maintaining the agreement between SG and SCoSS on the Framework Document and Protocol under which SCoSS operates.

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