

1. A high level summary of the essential maintenance being carried out.

*Agriculture and Rural Economy Directorate operate a complex digital estate. As with any digital capability, it requires regular patching and maintenance to ensure it remains operationally resilient and to introduce change and/or new functionality. The upgrade activity includes the patching and redeployment of associated platform components and operators, alongside essential maintenance tasks.*

2. Reasons why two weeks (which includes six standard business days) are necessary to perform this essential maintenance.

Maintaining alignment with supported product lifecycles is essential to ensure the ongoing supportability, stability and security of ARE's infrastructure. As noted below, this is a period of low use, with no scheme deadline due during this period.

3. Reasons why the specific two week period from Monday 22-Dec-25 to Monday 5-Jan-26 was selected for the essential maintenance.

*The work has been scheduled during a period which over previous years has seen reduced service usage from external customers.*

4. For each day of the downtime the number of staff (permanent or contract) working or planned to work, e.g. Mon 22nd - 10, Tue 23rd - 8, etc..

Note, only staff performing duties in relation to the essential maintenance should be included in these figures.

Each maintenance release is unique and relies on a range of skillsets to successfully deliver and deploy. There were no individuals working on this solely across this time period, and all change activities were carried out in accordance with our established change and risk management processes.

5. Impact assessments or consultations undertaken in relation to the effect the two week downtime would have on users of the affected IT systems, e.g. farmers and their agents.

*All upgrades and maintenance activities are carried out in accordance with established change and risk management processes.*

*No formal impact assessments or consultations were formally undertaken in relation to the effect the two week removal of external user access would have on users of the affected IT systems.*

*Internal considerations did take place to consider impact and with the main application impacted, the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (SSBSS) which was due to close for application submission on 31 December, being extended to 14 January to ensure all applicants had sufficient time to submit applications. This change has been supported by communications to the farming industry. Due to the extension to the SSBSS submission period and supporting communications, there was minimal impact to the farming industry related to the removal of external access.*

6. Notice of the downtime starting Monday 22-Dec-25 was published on Monday 15-Dec-25. Webpage metadata shows the page (link provided above) was last updated or created at 17:08:56 and the ScotGovRural account on the X platform posted notice of the downtime at 18:02.

Please provide information on the timing of the notice given and why this period of notice was deemed as acceptable or necessary.

The timing of the notice reflected the point at which all necessary dependencies had been confirmed, including confirmation of the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme deadline extension being passed by Scottish Ministers.

Once confirmation had been received, notice was issued promptly using multiple communication channels to ensure users were informed as widely as possible. This approach ensured that information provided was accurate and avoided issuing provisional or potentially misleading information.