



Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS)

Business Plan

April 2023 – March 2024

INTRODUCTION

The Business Plan sets out our strategic objectives and our priorities for 2023-24 which will enable us to meet these objectives.

Devolved benefits are being introduced and delivered in a challenging socio-economic environment. These challenges include the impact of the pandemic on the labour market, the cost of living crisis and the challenges facing public finances both in the current financial year and future years.

The devolved benefits system will undergo further significant expansion during 2023-24. For SCoSS, this will include scrutiny of regulations that will lead to the delivery of the Carer Support Payment and Pension Age Disability Payment which will be the fourteenth and fifteenth benefits to be devolved. In addition, the 'safe and secure' transfer of around 700,000 disability and carer benefit cases from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to Social Security Scotland will continue in 2023-24 and is a critical area of activity to the effective delivery of devolved benefits.

Delivering devolved social security benefits aligned to the Social Security Charter underpins the Scottish Government approach to developing the devolved social security system in Scotland. The Scottish Government has begun work reviewing the Charter and SCoSS intends to assist and scrutinise the outcome of the review.

In 2022-23, the Scottish Government commissioned a review of the remit, role and constitution of SCoSS conducted by independent consultants. SCoSS anticipates that the findings of the review will be published in 2023-24 and will begin implementation of the recommendations in the current financial year. The outcome of the review will provide a key means of ensuring that the governance of SCoSS is effective to enable the delivery of our priorities and statutory responsibilities.

The key priorities section of the business plan sets out in more detail the focus our work in 2023-24, under the broader headings of our Strategic Objectives which are detailed below.

ABOUT US

The Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS) was established in 2019 by the Scottish Parliament. We are an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB). We undertake independent scrutiny of the Scottish social security system. Our relationship with the Scottish Government and the framework within which SCoSS operates is set out in a [Framework Document](#).

We have three Commissioners, a Secretariat of six staff provided by the Scottish Government and we are supported by an audit adviser.

Commissioners

- Judith Paterson, Acting Co-Chair of SCoSS, Head of Advice and Rights (Scotland) for Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (CPAG)
- Dr Mark Simpson, Acting Co-Chair of SCoSS, Senior Lecturer in Law at Ulster University, researching social security and human rights
- Marilyn Howard, Commissioner, postgraduate research student and honorary research associate at the University of Bristol

OUR PURPOSE, VISION AND VALUES

Our Purpose

The Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS) provides independent scrutiny of the Scottish social security system. SCoSS is separate from the Scottish Government and from the Parliament. We carry out our work independently but we work closely with both the Government and Parliament.

Our functions are set out in Section 22 of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 and are principally as follows—

1. Scrutinising draft regulations and publishing reports with recommendations to the Scottish Government.
2. Reporting to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament on whether the expectations in the Social Security Charter are being met. The Scottish Government published the Social Security Charter in January 2019. It is called ‘Our Charter’.
3. Responding to requests from the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government to report on any matter relevant to social security when asked by either of them.

Our Vision

We want a robust, effective, efficient Scottish social security system that meets its full potential to improve outcomes for the people of Scotland. We want to help achieve this by providing independent expert advice.

Our Values

We are independent from Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament. We scrutinise impartially on the basis of evidence, while actively seeking out and carefully considering different views and perspectives.

We make sure human rights, the social security principles and the lived experience of people who use or need to use social security are at the heart of our work.

We provide expert, thorough scrutiny which helps people and the Scottish Parliament hold the Scottish Government to account.

We make a real difference to the lives of individuals by giving practical advice for improving social security regulations and making sure the commitments made in the Charter are fully realised.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Our strategic objectives set out what we do to achieve our purpose of scrutinising social security regulations and reporting on the social security charter. Our Strategic Objectives for 2023-24 are—

1. We will provide expert, independent and evidence-based scrutiny of draft social security regulations that is driven by the social security principles and human rights.
2. We will provide independent challenge and advice on whether people are getting the service from the social security system that the Social Security Charter says they should expect.
3. We will work alongside Scottish Ministers, the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament as well as other key stakeholders, such as people with lived experience, to ensure our work constructively supports the development of a devolved social security system based on dignity, fairness and respect.
4. We will make engagement with people with lived experience of the devolved social security system and other stakeholders central to our scrutiny.
5. We will be transparent about how we make our decisions.
6. We will improve the accessibility and inclusivity of our information.
7. We will ensure our remit, governance model, operating structure, processes and resource management are fit for purpose and are systematically reviewed to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of SCoSS's contribution to the maintenance and development of the devolved social security system.
8. We will seek to embed continuous improvement across all our work.

PRIORITIES FOR 2023-24

In line with the Strategic Objectives set out above, we agreed the following key priorities in 2023-24.

Scrutiny of draft social security regulations

We will undertake expert, independent, evidence-based scrutiny of draft regulations referred to us by the Scottish Government, including—

- Draft Carer’s Assistance (Carer Support Payment) (Scotland) Regulations 2023
- Draft Disability Assistance (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2023
- Draft Pension Age Disability Payment regulations
- Draft Up-rating regulations

Social Security Charter

- We will establish ways to learn directly from stakeholders and people with lived experience on whether people are getting the service that the Social Security Charter says they should expect.
- We will produce a report based on evidence gathered on improvements that the Scottish Government could make to better deliver commitments in the Charter.
- We will inform the Scottish Government’s review of the Social Security Charter.

Work alongside Scottish Ministers, the Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and key stakeholders

- We will work with Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament to agree a framework for dealing with requests for reports on social security that they may request from us.
- We will provide evidence to the Scottish Parliament’s Social Justice and Social Security Committee when requested.
- We will hold workshops with Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland staff to improve the shared understanding as to the role and remit of SCoSS.

Stakeholder engagement

- We will review and update the stakeholder engagement strategy, including embedding lived experience within the strategy.

Monitoring impact of scrutiny work

- We will develop a monitoring framework that will provide a systematic approach to monitoring the impact of SCoSS scrutiny of draft regulations.
- We will obtain feedback from Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and all stakeholders who contribute to SCoSS scrutiny.
- We will engage with the wider policy community to obtain feedback on the impact of SCoSS scrutiny work.

Transparency and accessibility

- We will publish all Minutes of Board meetings, Audit Sub-Committees and scrutiny reports on the SCoSS website.
- We will improve the accessibility of the SCoSS website and through publishing documents in an alternative format.
- We will regularly utilise social media to promote engagement and awareness of our work.

Governance

- We will deliver on our corporate responsibilities, ensure that we create a sound governance framework and demonstrate value for money through our audited accounts.
- We will work with our audit adviser to ensure effective governance, risk management, and the integrity of financial statements and annual report and accounts.
- We will review governance, finance, performance and assurance framework and risk register on a quarterly basis at meetings of the Audit Sub-Committee.
- We will review our corporate documents.
- We will provide induction to new Board members and identify training opportunities for Members to support their role as a Board Member of an advisory NDPB.
- We will implement, as appropriate, the recommendations of the independent review of SCoSS.

FINANCE

Our current budget provides funding to cover all expenditure associated with operating SCoSS within the guidance of an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body. We are supported by a secretariat of Scottish Government civil servants, which has been expanded in 2022-23 to provide more effective support to the SCoSS Board. This, along with our operational costs and members' fees, is funded from a Commission budget which is provided by the Scottish Government.

In 2023-24, the SCoSS Budget is expected to be £450,000. SCoSS will fully comply with the requirements of external audit, undertaken by Audit Scotland, and publishes an Annual Report and Accounts which is also laid in the Scottish Parliament.