



# **Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS)**

## **Business Plan**

**April 2024 – March 2025**

## INTRODUCTION

We are happy to introduce the Scottish Commission on Social Security's (SCoSS's) business plan which sets out our strategic objectives and what we plan to do in 2024-25 to meet these objectives.

In the five years since SCoSS was set up, our work has focused on providing independent scrutiny of draft regulations which set up the 13 benefits that Social Security Scotland is now delivering. In the year ahead, SCoSS expects to scrutinise draft regulations for the next benefits to transfer from the UK to Scotland – Winter Fuel Payment which will become Pension Age Winter Heating Payment, and Disability Living Allowance for adults. The Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill progressing through Parliament, includes proposals to expand the range of draft regulations that will fall within SCoSS's remit. These proposals follow recommendations from the independent review of SCoSS and are a welcome enhancement to scrutiny. We will be reviewing how we work to make sure our processes are fully effective to deliver an expanded remit.

Alongside Social Security Scotland's enormous task of delivering new benefits and taking over awards transferred from the DWP, there is also a continual focus on looking for ways to improve the system, making sure it delivers with dignity and respect. SCoSS has a role in advising on whether people are getting the service they are entitled to expect under 'Our Charter'. In the coming years, SCoSS will develop this role. We plan to expand how we learn from people with experience of the Scottish social security system so that lived experience is at the heart of our independent advice.

The independent review of SCoSS recommended streamlined governance procedures. We look forward to implementing these including, subject to the Bill before Parliament, adapting to the removal of the requirement for externally audited annual accounts.

SCoSS is able to provide effective advice thanks to the expertise of our members and the unflagging support of our secretariat. We look forward to building the team with recruitment getting underway for a new Chair and permanent member. Finally, we are grateful to the many stakeholders whose contributions are so valuable to informing our scrutiny.



Judith Paterson and Dr Mark Simpson, Interim Co-Chairs, Scottish Commission on Social Security

## 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.

The Commission has four Commissioners and is supported by a Secretariat of five staff provided by the Scottish Government.

### Commissioners

- Judith Paterson, Interim Co-Chair of SCoSS, Head of Advice and Rights (Scotland) for Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (CPAG)
- Dr Mark Simpson, Interim Co-Chair of SCoSS, Senior Lecturer in Law at Ulster University, researching social security and human rights
- Dr Marilyn Howard, Commissioner, honorary research associate at the University of Bristol
- Dr Jackie Gulland, Commissioner (until 31 July 2024), Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the University of Edinburgh.

### 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—

- Scrutinising draft regulations and publishing reports with recommendations to the Scottish Government. Regulations set out in law the eligibility conditions for Scottish social security benefits and how they are administered.
- Reporting to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament on whether the expectations in the social security charter are being met. ‘Our Charter’ explains what people are entitled to expect from the Scottish social security system and how the Scottish Government will uphold the principles in the Act.
- 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 based on 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 2024-25 are—

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 Scottish social security system based on dignity, fairness and respect.
- We will make engagement with people with lived experience of the Scottish social security system and engagement with other stakeholders central to our scrutiny.
- We will be transparent about how we make our decisions and make our information accessible and inclusive.

- We will make the improvements to how we work that were recommended by the independent review of SCoSS, making sure we can deliver statutory functions within our budget.

## **PRIORITIES FOR 2024-25**

In line with the strategic objectives set out above, these are our priorities in 2024-25.

### **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 Scottish Adult Disability Living Allowance Regulations
- Draft Funeral Expense Assistance Regulations
- Draft Pension Age Winter Heating Payment Regulations
- Draft Up-rating Regulations
- Draft regulations following from the parliamentary passage of the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

We will review our scrutiny processes to improve efficiency and make sure that reports and recommendations are clearly founded on human rights and the Scottish social security principles.

### **Social security charter**

- We will expand the ways we 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 report on improvements that the Scottish Government could make to better deliver commitments in the Charter.

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

- We will develop a longer-term work programme, which we will share with Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament, with a framework for dealing with requests for reports on social security that may be requested from us.
- We will engage proactively with, and when requested provide evidence to, the Scottish Parliament's Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

- We will hold workshops with Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland staff to improve the shared understanding of the role of SCoSS as our remit expands under proposals in the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

### **Stakeholder engagement**

- We will implement our updated stakeholder engagement strategy which includes embedding lived experience within our scrutiny work.
- We will gather feedback from Scottish Government, Scottish Parliament and all stakeholders who contribute to SCoSS scrutiny.
- We will engage with the wider policy community to gather feedback on the impact of SCoSS scrutiny work.

### **Transparency and accessibility**

- We will publish all Minutes of SCoSS Board meetings, Sub-Committee meetings and scrutiny reports on the SCoSS website.
- We will improve the accessibility of the SCoSS website.
- We will make sure that we engage with stakeholders in an inclusive way.

### **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 review governance, finance, performance and assurance framework and risk register on a quarterly basis at meetings of the Audit Sub-Committee.
- 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 streamline our governance procedures as legal requirements on SCoSS for external audit are removed under proposals in the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

### **Finance**

Our current budget provides funding to cover all expenditure associated with operating SCoSS within the guidance of an advisory Non-Departmental Public Body. The SCoSS Board is supported by a secretariat of Scottish Government civil servants. The secretariat, along with our operational costs and members' fees, is funded from a Commission budget which is provided by the Scottish Government.

In 2024-25, the SCoSS Budget is £450,000. SCoSS will undertake a full mid-year review of its budgetary position in 2024-25, in what is anticipated to be a challenging financial environment.

SCoSS will fully comply with the requirements of external audit, undertaken by Audit Scotland, and will publish an Annual Report and Accounts which will also be laid in the Scottish Parliament.