



Scottish Commission on Social Security (SCoSS)

Business Plan

April 2025 – March 2026

Introduction

I am delighted to introduce the Scottish Commission on Social Security's business plan setting out our strategic objectives and priorities and what we plan to do in 2025-26 to meet them.

Since taking up the position of Chair, in August 2024, it has been clear that the focus of the Commission is beginning to shift from scrutiny of the initial devolution of social security benefits to consideration of draft regulations that seek to amend existing devolved benefits. This has a subsequent impact of the depth and extent of our scrutiny workload with reports often within restricted timescales. We anticipate that this change in focus will continue in 2025-26 as the initial devolution of benefits approaches its conclusion.

I would like to draw particular attention to two significant highlights in my first months as Chair of the Commission. Firstly, we published our first report under our duty to, from time to time, consider whether the expectations in the social security charter are being met. We considered the experiences of people with communication needs interacting with the devolved social security system, and our report represents not only the culmination of an extensive period of scrutiny work but also a positive milestone in the development of our scrutiny work.

Secondly, I have been struck by the extent to which we rely upon the expertise of, and assistance from, our stakeholders in supporting our scrutiny work. Accordingly, we published our first stakeholder engagement strategy in 2024 in recognition of the importance of this area of our work. I fully expect that stakeholder engagement and Charter scrutiny will continue to develop as important areas of our work in 2025-26.

The implementation of the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2025 will expand our remit and also streamline our governance arrangements. We expect that regulations to give effect to these provisions in the Act will take effect during 2025-26.

We look forward to working with you throughout 2025-26 as the Commission aims to continue delivering independent, expert scrutiny that seeks to assess whether the Scottish social security system meets its full potential to improve outcomes for people accessing the system.



Ed Pybus, Chair, 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 a Chair and four Commissioners. The Commission is supported by a Secretariat of five staff provided by the Scottish Government.

Commissioners

Ed Pybus, Chair, Independent Policy Consultant on social security as well as poverty, housing, childcare, environmental justice, and community ownership.

Adam Bennett, Commissioner, Founder and CEO of ProjectChange, an organisation dedicated to empowering people with lived experience to lead changes in Scotland's care system.

Dr Marilyn Howard, Commissioner, writes on social security and is a member of the Policy Advisory Group of the UK Women's Budget Group.

Judith Paterson, Commissioner, Head of Advice and Rights (Scotland) for Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland (CPAG).

Dr Mark Simpson, Commissioner, Senior Lecturer in Law at Ulster University, researching social security and human rights.

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 2025-26 are—

- We will provide expert, independent, proportionate 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, Social Security Scotland 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 streamline our governance and finance processes.

Priorities for 2025-26

In line with the strategic objectives set out above, these are our priorities in 2025-26.

Scrutiny of draft social security regulations

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

- Draft regulations arising from the enactment of the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2025
- Draft Up-rating Regulations

We will review the volume, frequency and timing of referral of draft regulations to ensure that we have the time, capacity and resources to deliver proportionate scrutiny.

We will review the impact of our previous recommendations on the development of the Scottish social security system.

We will continue to develop our policies and processes to ensure that human rights and the social security principles are central to our scrutiny.

Social Security Charter

We will report on improvements that the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland could make to better deliver expectations in the Charter.

Work alongside Scottish Ministers, the Scottish Government, Social Security Scotland, Scottish Parliament

We will gather feedback from Scottish Government, Social Security Scotland, and the Scottish Parliament on the impact of our scrutiny and Charter work.

We will work with the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland staff to improve the shared understanding of our role as our remit expands under the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2025.

We will engage proactively with, and when requested provide evidence to, the Scottish Parliament's Social Justice and Social Security Committee.

Stakeholder engagement

We will continue to implement our stakeholder engagement strategy.

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 engage with the wider policy community to gather feedback on the impact of our scrutiny work.

We will explore mechanisms to directly bring external expertise into our work.

We will have a presence at relevant events to provide more information to stakeholders and others on our role.

We will make sure that we engage with stakeholders in an inclusive way.

Transparency and accessibility

We will publish all Minutes of Board meetings, Audit and Charter Sub-Committees and scrutiny reports on our website.

We will improve the accessibility of our website,

We will continue to improve the readability of our reports by using plain English and reducing the use of acronyms.

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 our governance, finance, performance and assurance framework and risk register on a quarterly basis at meetings of the Audit Sub-Committee.

We will streamline our governance procedures as legal requirements for external audit are removed under proposals in the Social Security (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2025.

We will review the governance of our Sub-Committees.

Finance

SCoSS will fully comply with the requirements of external audit, undertaken by Audit Scotland, and will publish an Annual Report and Accounts (2024-25) which will also be laid in the Scottish Parliament.