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News release

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Managing ICT programmes continues to be a challenge

The Scottish Government and central government bodies continue to encounter difficulties in managing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) programmes, though progress is being made to overcome these issues.

ICT can help to deliver better public services, as well as reducing costs and meeting future demand. A report published today by Audit Scotland assesses the Scottish Government's oversight of ICT programmes, and features examples of how some central government bodies have managed such projects.

It charts progress since Audit Scotland's August 2012 report, which made recommendations for improving the management of ICT contracts. Today's report also includes updates on ICT management at Registers of Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, and Disclosure Scotland.

A lack of digital skills in the public sector remains a significant problem, according to the report. The Scottish Government did not carry out a sector-wide skills assessment until August 2014, but now plans to develop a shared Digital Transformation Service to strengthen access to digital skills for central government bodies. This is an ambitious project, and how the service will operate has yet to be finalised.

The report also notes that the Scottish Government introduced an assurance framework in February 2013 to support bodies undertaking ICT programmes. However, the framework was not clear enough and the Scottish Government did not oversee its implementation effectively. Revised framework and governance arrangements are now in place, and these need careful management and strong leadership if they are to be effective.

Caroline Gardner, Auditor General for Scotland, said: "When managed effectively, ICT programmes have the power to transform public services, and make a real and positive difference to people's lives.

"However, the difficulties in managing ICT programmes in both the public and private sector are well documented, and remain a complex challenge for the Scottish Government and central government bodies. While steps have been taken to improve, and overcome obstacles such as the shortage of ICT skills in the public sector, today's report shows that significant progress is still needed.

"Our recommendations reflect the continuing work by the Scottish Government and central government bodies and are intended to help them achieve the full benefits of effective ICT; particularly in this time of reducing budgets and increasing demand for public services."

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Notes to editors

1. In August 2012, the Auditor General for Scotland published a report focussing on three central government ICT projects that had encountered difficulties. The three bodies were Registers of

Scotland, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, and Disclosure Scotland. Today's report includes an update (Appendix 2) on the position of the three bodies in relation to ICT management.

2. The Scottish Government published its digital strategy in September 2012. This set out its vision to use digital technologies to deliver integrated public services innovatively by working across organisations to meet users' needs. Through this strategy, the public sector is expected to deliver all services online where feasible.

3. In 2013/14, the Scottish public sector spent £739 million on suppliers of ICT-related goods and services of which at least £153 million was central government spend (Exhibit 1 of the report). This figure does not include the cost of in-house service provision and is based on 21 central government bodies that account for 60 per cent of the total central government budget.

3. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

- The Auditor General appoints auditors to Scotland's central government and NHS bodies; examines how public bodies spend public money; helps them to manage their finances to the highest standards; and checks whether they achieve value for money. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament
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