

News release

For immediate release

Scottish Social Services Council's ICT project 'lacked clarity'

The Auditor General has raised concerns about the management of an ICT project at the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC).

Caroline Gardner says the SSSC's ending of a shared services agreement with the Care Inspectorate to pursue a separate ICT strategy lacked good governance and transparent decision-making.

Her report to Parliament notes that in implementing its ICT strategy, the SSSC did not:

- clearly articulate the intended benefits of the project at the outset, including details of the budget and anticipated cost savings;
- provide clarity around roles and responsibilities for overseeing the project;
- undertake sufficient reporting and monitoring of the project as its scope and costs increased;
- effectively identify or manage all the risks related to the project, including those posed by ending the ICT shared services.

The Scottish Government has provided around £3.1m of funding to the project within its budget allocation to the SSSC.

But Ms Gardner says that, given the lack of a proper business case and fully-costed budget, the SSSC cannot demonstrate that the project - which is expected to cost at least £4.1m - has delivered value for money.

Her report also highlights a lack of continuity in managing the project - three different ICT contractors have been employed as digital lead in the last 12 months.

Ms Gardner said: "The SSSC has fallen short of the standards I would expect around governance and transparency - first around its decision to end the shared services agreement, and then through the implementation of a new digital strategy and the management of that project.

"The SSSC's planning, reporting and monitoring were inadequate. Effective scrutiny is central to making the best use of public money, but not enough information was provided at the right levels of governance at each stage of the project."

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Notes to editors:

1. The Auditor General has prepared the report on the Scottish Social Services Council's audited accounts for 2017/18 under Section 22 of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. This allows the Auditor General to bring to the Parliament and the public's attention matters of public interest related to the financial statements of public bodies.

2. The SSSC shares several services with the Care Inspectorate, including financial, human resources and information and communications technology (ICT). There are also joint posts across the two organisations, including the director of corporate services and the head of finance and shared services. A service agreement is in place covering the shared services, but there is a lack of formal governance arrangements.

3. The auditor has identified a risk that Council members' discussions at policy forum meetings - an informal discussion forum for Council members where no formal minutes are taken - may replace formal business at Council meetings.

4. Section 22 reports are submitted to Scottish Ministers for laying in the Parliament along with the accounts of the relevant body. While there are statutory deadlines for these reports, the actual timing of publication is determined by when the report is laid in the Scottish Parliament by Scottish Ministers.

5. 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

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