



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Mr Colin Cook
Director, Digital
Scottish Government

**Public Audit and Post-legislative
Scrutiny Committee**

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The Scottish Parliament
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Dear Mr Cook,

I would like to thank you and your colleagues for providing evidence on the Audit Scotland report, 'Principles for a digital future: Lessons learned from public sector ICT projects'.

The context

As I said at the start of the meeting, this is the third Audit Scotland overview report in recent years, which clearly demonstrates that there is a significant problem for the Scottish Government and other public bodies to address. It is essential that the Scottish Government's new suite of initiatives make a positive difference this time, as the cumulative loss to the public purse and loss of public confidence from previous IT failures has been substantial.

Accountability in social security

The issue of accountability is crucial to our work, both in terms of IT delivery and more generally. It was therefore disconcerting to hear the confusing evidence about who is ultimately responsible for the successful delivery of the IT systems for the new social security powers. You initially stated—

“If it is a specific issue around the delivery of social security, the buck stops with Lisa [Lisa Baron-Broadhurst, programme director for social security]. If it is about how the programme is developed, we share accountability through the programme board structure for the delivery of that programme.”¹

¹ Col 10: <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11156&mode=pdf>

In response to a question about whether one person is responsible for the design and delivery of the project in its entirety, Ms Baron-Broadhurst then said, “I am responsible”². Later, we were told that a Mr Stephen Kerr was both the accountable officer and senior responsible officer for social security³.

This specific example will no doubt be considered in more depth by our colleagues on the Social Security Committee but we make the point now that clear lines of accountability will be absolutely essential.

Lines of accountability

Our Committee’s broader interest is in **understanding the accountability arrangements in place, within the Scottish Government and beyond, for the future delivery of all major IT projects**. However, it is not clear which devolved public bodies are and are not covered by such initiatives as the Scottish Government’s new Assurance Framework and the Central Government Digital Transformation Service. The Scottish Government’s written submission used a number of terms, such as ‘Central Government’, ‘the wider Scottish Government community’, and ‘core Scottish Government’.

Further, in oral evidence you stated, “I am here to improve the way in which the Scottish Government and the public sector beyond that—we work in partnership with local government, health and others—deliver IT programmes.” We are also aware that a chief digital officer and chief technology officer have been appointed to drive change across local authorities.

Further information required

Given the above, we request—

- a clear explanation of exactly how different parts of the public sector are working together to deliver IT programmes;
- how clear lines of accountability are being maintained in a time of increased partnership working;
- a concise guide or diagram that clearly sets out lines of accountability across Scottish Government and the wider public sector.

We stress the need for clarity as one of the recurring themes from our evidence session was that the information provided by the Scottish Government was not always as clear as it should have been.

IT updates

Given our committee’s long-standing concerns, **we also request six-monthly updates** from the Scottish Government on the progress of major IT projects. We envisage that this would cover any projects where a ‘stop-go assessment’ has

² Col 10: <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11156&mode=pdf>

³ Col 15: <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11156&mode=pdf>

decided that there should be a stop⁴. Our ultimate goal, however, is **to be reassured that decisive action is being taken whenever there are clear signs that a major IT project is going off track**. The updates should therefore bear this aim in mind.

Follow up information

In addition to our main points highlighted above, **we request further information on the following points that arose at the committee meeting—**

- IT vacancy levels across the Scottish Government, on a trend basis if possible;
- further information on the IT costs described in the Financial Memorandum for the Social Security Bill (see column 34 of the Official Report);
- an assurance that the Scottish Government has carried out appropriate checks on any academics from whom it is seeking advice, in order to ensure there are no potential conflicts of interest⁵;
- a detailed explanation of how the following figures in your written submission were calculated and when they are expected to materialise. As I suggested at the meeting, realising £1bn in public sector efficiencies could be transformational for Scotland's public finances—

“21. Data innovation could potentially benefit Scotland by £20bn*: using data better to improving productivity and efficiency of organisations, and attracting new businesses to Scotland. Scotland has a world leading set of public sector data that offers the potential to extend and improve the quality of people's lives, as well as deliver £1bn in public sector efficiencies. To achieve this, we need to transform the way data is used for public benefit.”

I would be grateful for a reply, by no later than 18 December, to the specific requests for information set out above. We anticipate receiving the first IT update by May next year but the clerks would be happy to discuss dates with your office if needs be.

Yours sincerely,



Jackie Baillie MSP
Acting Convener of the Committee

⁴ <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11156>

⁵ Annexe C of the Scottish Government's written submission provided the names of academics under two separate headings: (a) Establish all new government organisations as digital businesses based on a clear digital business model and (b) Establish a new group of senior academics to challenge our thinking, identify best international practice and ensure that Scotland remains at the cutting edge of digitally enabled public service reform