SG ANNUAL REPORT ON THE USE OF SETTLEMENT AGREEMENTS APRIL 2022 – MARCH 2023

Introduction

- 1. The Scottish Public Finance Manual (SPFM) states that in considering terms for settlement agreements, severance, early retirement or redundancy packages public bodies should ensure that issues of regularity, propriety and value for money are fully taken into account. The Scottish Government (SG) will be entitled to use the fact that a settlement agreement has been entered into, to collate and provide information to the Scottish Parliament on the number of settlement agreements and the costs of special payments across the Scottish Administration.¹ This report should be seen therefore as the means by which pan Scottish Administration information has been gathered.
- 2. The SG role in the process (as set out in the SPFM) is one of consultation, advice and reporting. The SPFM supporting guidance on Settlement Agreements clearly states that the final decision as to whether to enter into a Settlement Agreement will rest with the Accountable Officer for the public body. The SPFM also sets out the requirements for annual accounts disclosure in relation to settlement agreements.
- 3. On 11 June 2014 the SG notified the Public Audit Committee of the implementation of the above mentioned SPFM guidance on Settlement Agreements and undertook to report back to the Committee on the first year of operation of the guidance, spanning the period April 2014 March 2015.² The first report was submitted in June 2015 and was considered by the Public Audit Committee in February 2016. The Public Audit Committee noted the report in their legacy paper and asked that the SG continue to submit a report annually to the Parliament to be placed in the Scottish Parliament's information centre, SPICe.³ Reports have been submitted annually and this is the ninth such report.
- 4. This report continues to fulfil the 2014 commitment and covers pan Scottish Administration information on:
 - The status and use of Settlement Agreements;
 - SG Settlement Agreement guidance and review process;
 - The use of confidentiality clauses;
 - The number and cost of settlements entered into during 2022-23; and
 - Process improvements.

Status and use of Settlement Agreements

5. A Settlement Agreement is a legally binding contract entered into by an employer and employee to resolve an employment dispute. Settlement Agreements are recognised in law and are an accepted part of employment practice. As such, they are the subject of guidance by the Advisory, Conciliation

¹ <u>http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Government/Finance/spfm/severanceetcterms</u>

² Written submission from the SG to the Public Audit Committee, 11 June 2014

³3rd Report, 2016 (Session 4): Session 4 Legacy Paper

http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/97733.aspx#e

and Arbitration Service (ACAS).⁴ Settlement agreements are specific to an individual case and are separate from more general voluntary severance arrangements which enable organisations to make changes to their workforce by allowing staff the opportunity to leave the organisation with compensation as set out in their compensation schemes.

6. Settlement Agreements are used in circumstances where:

a) the employment relationship has broken down or been significantly impaired;b) the situation cannot be remedied through mediation or other personnel processes; andc) alternative routes to resolution would involve disproportionate cost at a tribunal or otherwise at law; and impair the efficient functioning of the service.

7. Consideration of the use of a Settlement Agreement will take into account:

a) the direct and indirect costs of alternative proceedings and of any awards that might be made;
b) disruption to the effective and efficient operation of the service caused by an on-going dispute and the resultant stress on individuals; and

c) the likely timescales involved, against the need to bring matters to a timely conclusion.

8. Scrutiny of Accountable Officer decision making in relation to Settlement Agreements is undertaken because:

a) they may involve payments to individuals above and beyond their normal contractual entitlement;b) Parliament and the public will want to be assured that, in all the circumstances of the case, their use was appropriate and reasonable; and

c) there is a need to ensure their use does not cut across the important protections offered to whistleblowers.

SG Settlement Agreement guidance and review process

- 9. Settlement Agreement guidance introduced by the SG in 2014 provides for the central review and reporting of Settlement Agreements and is designed to increase transparency, promote consistency and ensure value for money.
- 10. The first line of assurance lies with the designated Accountable Officer for each body as set out in the SPFM⁵. The SPFM notes that "the essence of the Accountable Officer's role is a personal responsibility for the propriety and regularity of the finances under their stewardship and for the economic, efficient and effective use of all related resources. Accountable Officers are personally answerable to the Parliament for the exercise of their functions"⁶. The SPFM and supporting guidance makes it clear that final decisions on Settlement Agreements rest with the Accountable Officer.
- 11. The SPFM and supporting guidance sets out the process for interaction between a designated Accountable Officer and the SG and requires the relevant body to consult the SG before entering into a Settlement Agreement. To this end, the employer will prepare a Business Case with the approval of the relevant Accountable Officer and will seek advice/clearance as required from the Sponsor Team. The Sponsor Team will then send the business case to the Sponsor Director, People Directorate, Finance Business Partner and Severance Policy Team for scrutiny. The Sponsor Team will

⁴ ACAS statutory code of practice on Settlement Agreements. <u>https://www.acas.org.uk/media/3725/Code-of-Practice-on-settlement-agreements/pdf/11287_CoP4_Settlement_Agreements_v1_0_Accessible.pdf</u>

⁵ <u>http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Government/Finance/spfm/Intro</u>

⁶ http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Government/Finance/spfm/Accountability

liaise with both the employer on any cases which breach severance policy (e.g., the £95,000 cap not applied, contentious case or excessive discretionary element) and the Portfolio Cabinet Secretary for comments/views. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance will be included in all Ministerial submissions for information. The Sponsor Team will collate responses and provide feedback to the employer. If the SG is not satisfied with either the need for the proposed agreement, or its terms / value for money, this will be highlighted in the response. The Accountable Officer then makes the final decision on whether to proceed with the proposed Settlement Agreement.

12. The bodies covered by the reporting procedure in the SPFM and supporting guidance are set out at Annex A. For NHSScotland bodies, the reporting procedure follows a similar process and is overseen by Director General Health and Social Care / Chief Executive of NHSScotland. As noted in the 2014-15 year report, scrutiny and oversight for the college sector is delegated to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

Confidentiality clauses

- 13. At the request of the employee or their legal representative, Settlement Agreements may include a voluntary provision whereby the parties agree to keep the agreement itself confidential and not disclose its details to third parties. Inclusion of such a clause protects the rights of the employee who may have legitimate concerns that disclosure of the terms and circumstances of the agreement and their identity would impact negatively on their privacy and employability. The ACAS guidance provides a model Settlement Agreement which includes a standard confidentiality clause⁷.
- 14. Nothing, however, in a Settlement Agreement can prevent the individual from making a protected disclosure under whistleblowing legislation. Any agreement which sought to prevent staff from raising concerns about health and safety or malpractice would be void under the Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998).

Information sharing

- 15. In presenting material, we are mindful of the need to respect the confidentiality of Settlement Agreements and the general entitlement of individuals to privacy. We have thus provided information on the number of Settlement Agreements entered into and the costs involved.
- 16. Disclosing the name of the body entering into the agreement alongside the cost may disclose the name of an individual. As with the previous reports, an anonymised breakdown of each of the agreements and the associated costs is thus provided at Annex B.

Numbers and costs of settlements

17. Headline costs and number of Settlement Agreements for 2022 - 2023 are set out below. A full anonymised breakdown is provided at Annex B.

⁷ <u>https://www.acas.org.uk/media/3736/Settlement-Agreements-A-guide/pdf/Settlement_agreements_Dec_18.pdf</u>

18. Table of Agreements and associated costs (to nearest £)

Oversight Body	Number of Agreements	Number of bodies	Total gross cost (£)	Non- contractual (£)	Number of confidentiality clauses used
SG and Public bodies	24	15	873,342	574,842	17
NHSScotland	27	13	501,885	472,485	0
Scottish Funding Council	7	4	238,857	152,574	4
TOTALS	58	32	1,614084	1,199,901	21

- 19. The costs above include the total gross cost of the Settlement Agreement to the employer, including the contractual and non-contractual payments made to the employee and ancillary costs, such as the cost of negotiating and concluding the settlement and any legal costs.
- 20. Contractual payments are those to which the employee is legally entitled. These will include payments on termination, such as notice payments and pay in lieu of time owed. They will also include any lump sum and pension payments to which the employee is entitled on termination of employment through the Civil Service Compensation Scheme or an equivalent scheme.
- 21. Non-contractual payments are those offered in order to resolve the employment dispute.
- 22. The level of proposed non-contractual payment is included in the draft business case submitted for consideration. This is weighed against the risks and costs of not entering into a Settlement Agreement, as set out in paragraph 7 above.
- 23. Employment disputes are fact and case specific, and the number of settlements (and overall cost) reported in a given year will fluctuate relative to the number of employment disputes in that year across the range of bodies. The business case process aims to ensure that these are the best value conclusions to disputes. While the number of cases this year has decreased (from 79 to 58) we would not draw inference from this fact or assume that it will, or should, continue in future years. The table below details the total number of settlement agreements per year since this report was initiated in 2014. The objective here is to ensure that business cases for settlement are scrutinised effectively and that robust controls are in place rather than to reduce the number of cases.

Reporting	2021 -	2020 -	2019 –	2018 –	2017 –	2016 –	2015 –	2014 -
Year	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2015	2016	2015
Total	79	72	67	70	109	70	88	67
Number of settlements								

24. When considered against the overall size of the public sector workforce and the number of leavers per annum however, it is clear that, Settlement Agreements are used only in very limited circumstances.

Governance and process improvements

25. Scottish Ministers considered wider severance issues and consulted on 'A Severance Policy for Scotland' in 2017. As a result of this consultation, and wider public and parliamentary scrutiny through the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny (PAPLS) Committee, the severance policy was amended through an update to the SPFM on 27 September 2019 to include an administrative exit payment cap of £95,000, an expectation that payback periods for voluntary exit schemes do not exceed 24 months and introduces improved governance of cases. The policy applies to Settlement Agreements made after 27 September 2019 and retains provision for the central review and reporting of Settlement Agreements as set out in paragraph 9 above.

SG periodically reviews the guidance given to NHSScotland (as outlined in paragraph 12). The guidance within SG itself (for SG overseen bodies) has been similarly refreshed and clarified. SG itself continues to engage with Internal Audit to provide assurance on the processes surrounding the scrutiny of data. For the period April 2022 – March 2023 Internal Audit have provided a substantial assurance opinion, the top assurance level available, noting that controls are robust and well managed, and risk, governance and control procedures are effective in the delivery of the scrutiny and challenge function and collective oversight.

Colleges

26. Colleges make a vital contribution to the SG's commitment to improving the lives and employability of all Scotland's people. Effective governance is fundamental in supporting colleges to improve the life chances of their students and the performance of businesses.

The college sector has embraced the need to focus on achieving the highest standards of governance.

A 'Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges' has been developed and the sector's Good Governance Steering Group continues to meet to oversee its implementation and review.

The SFC is continuing to work with colleges to ensure that College board activities are sufficiently transparent, in line with the requirements of the Code, and the SFC continues to keep its guidance around settlement and severance arrangements to the college sector under review.

Cases Exceeding £95,000

27. The SPFM outlines where an organisation considers that there are compelling reasons that the exit payment cap of £95,000 cannot be applied, a full business case must be submitted outlining the reasons for this. Ministerial views must be obtained if this situation arises. For the 2022-2023 reporting year, one case exceeded this cap with a total sum of £110,000. Ministerial views were sought in this case.

Conclusion

28. SPICe are asked to note this report.

LIST OF PUBLIC BODIES COVERED BY REVISED REPORTING PROPOSAL FROM 1 APRIL 2022 – 31 MARCH 2023 [N.B. this list will be updated from time to time as required]

Scrutiny and oversight for the college sector is delegated to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

Scottish Government

The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service

Executive Agencies

Accountant in Bankruptcy Disclosure Scotland Education Scotland Forestry and Land Scotland Scottish Forestry Scottish Prison Service Scottish Public Pensions Agency Student Awards Agency for Scotland Social Security Scotland Transport Scotland

Non Ministerial Offices (NMOs)

Consumer Scotland Environmental Standards Scotland Food Standards Scotland National Records of Scotland Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator Registers of Scotland Revenue Scotland Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service Scottish Housing Regulator Scottish Fiscal Commission

Public Corporations

Caledonian Maritime Assets Ltd Glasgow Prestwick Airport Scottish Water Crown Estate Scotland

Executive NDPBs

Accounts Commission for Scotland Architecture and Design Scotland Bòrd na Gàidhlig Cairngorms National Park Authority Care Inspectorate Children's Hearings Scotland **Community Justice Scotland** Creative Scotland **Crofting Commission** David MacBrayne Ltd Ferguson Marine (Port Glasgow) Ltd Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd Highlands and Islands Enterprise Historic Environment Scotland Independent Living Fund Scotland Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority National Galleries of Scotland National Library of Scotland National Museums of Scotland Police Investigations and Review Commissioner Quality Meat Scotland **Redress Scotland Risk Management Authority** Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh Scottish Agricultural Wages Board Scottish Canals Scottish Children's Reporter Administration Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission Scottish Enterprise Scottish Environment Protection Agency Scottish Funding Council Scottish Futures Trust Scottish Land Commission Scottish Legal Aid Board Scottish Legal Complaints Commission Scottish National Investment Bank Scottish Rail Holdings Ltd NatureScot Scottish Qualifications Authority Scottish Social Services Council

Skills Development Scotland Sportscotland South of Scotland Enterprise Agency VisitScotland Water Industry Commission for Scotland Zero Waste Scotland **Advisory NDPBs** Judicial Appointments Board for Scotland **Boundaries Scotland** Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland Poverty and Inequality Commission for Scotland Scottish Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards Scottish Commission on Social Security Scottish Fuel Poverty Advisory Panel Scottish Law Commission Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee

Tribunals

First-tier Tribunal for Scotland Parole Board for Scotland Upper Tribunal for Scotland

Health Bodies

Healthcare Improvement Scotland Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland NHS 24 NHS Boards NHS Education for Scotland NHS National Services Scotland National Waiting Times Centre Board Public Health Scotland (replaced NHS Health Scotland Board) Scottish Ambulance Service Board State Hospital Board for Scotland

Colleges

Ayrshire College Borders College City of Glasgow College Dumfries and Galloway College Dundee and Angus College Edinburgh College Fife College Forth Valley College **Glasgow Clyde College Glasgow Kelvin College Inverness College** Lews Castle College Moray College New College Lanarkshire North East Scotland College North Highland College **Orkney College** Perth College Sabhal Mor Ostaig Shetland College South Lanarkshire College West College Scotland West Highland College West Lothian College

Parliamentary Commissioners and Ombudsmen

Children & Young Peoples Commissioner Scotland Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland Scottish Biometrics Commissioner Scottish Human Rights Commission Scottish Information Commissioner Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Standards Commission for Scotland

Other Significant National Bodies

Audit Scotland Convener of School Closure Review Panels Court of Lord Lyon Drinking Water Quality Regulator HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary in Scotland HM Chief Inspector of Prisons in Scotland HM Chief Inspector of Prosecution in Scotland HM Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland Justices of the Peace Advisory Committee (6 bodies) Office of the Kings Printer for Scotland Scottish Roadworks Commissioner The Scottish Police Authority The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

LIST OF AGREEMENTS AND COSTS

TABLE A: All Agreements in cost order (including SG and public bodies, NHSScotland and Further Education colleges)

Number	Overall cost (£)	Contractual cost (£)	Non contractual cost (£)	Ancillary costs (£)	Confidentiality Clause used
1a	0	0	0	0	N
2a	0	0	0	0	N
3a	1,000	0	0	1,000	N
4a	1,000	0	0	1,000	N
5a	2,000	0	2,000	0	N
6a	2,516	0	1,766	750	N
7a	2,750	0	2,000	750	N
8a	3,435	3,235	0	200	N
9a	4,300	0	3,300	1,000	N
10a	5,000	0	4,000	1,000	N
11a	5,711	0	4,711	1,000	N
12a	6,500	0	6,000	500	N
13a	7,000	0	7,000	0	Y
14a	8,000	0	7,000	1,000	N
15a	8,500	0	7,500	1,000	N
16a	9,350	0	8,600	750	N
17a	10,000	0	10,000	0	Y
18a	10,000	0	10,000	0	N
19a	10,000	0	10,000	0	Y
20a	10,250	0	9,500	750	N
21a	11,190	11,190	0	0	Y
22a	14,343	500	13,343	500	N
23a	15,172	4,672	10,000	500	Y
24a	16,358	5,938	10,000	420	N
25a	16,500	0	16,500	0	N
26a	17,310	0	16,810	500	N
27a	17,586	13,752	3,834	0	Y
28a	17,672	8,672	8,500	500	Y
29a	18,000	0	17,000	1,000	N
30a	18,361	3,786	14,075	500	Y
31a	23,561	9,997	13,144	420	Y
32a	25,189	9,339	15,350	500	Y
33a	26,135	0	26,135	0	N
34a	30,419	15,469	14,950	0	Ν
35a	30,500	0	30,000	500	N
36a	30,500	0	30,000	500	N
37a	31,000	0	30,000	1,000	N
38a	32,135	12,817	18,898	420	N
39a	32,614	14,093	17,771	750	Y
40a	35,017	12,838	21,179	1,000	Y
41a	35,600	0	35,000	600	N
42a	37,232	22,409	14,073	750	Y
43a	40,331	9,000	31,331	0	Y

Number	Overall cost	Contractual	Non contractual cost	Ancillary costs	Confidentiality
Number	(£)	cost (£)	(£)	(£)	Clause used
44a	40,581	10,712	29,369	500	Y
45a	42,062	0	41,642	420	N
46a	42,091	23,507	18,084	500	Y
47a	44,156	0	42,500	1,656	N
48a	46,329	7,501	37,928	900	N
49a	50,275	13,692	36,163	420	N
50a	52,500	0	52,500	0	Y
51a	52,981	14,431	38,250	300	Y
52a	56,476	8,476	30,000	18,000	N
53a	67,409	28,809	35,600	3,000	Y
54a	69,650	30,618	38,282	750	Y
55a	75,834	61,484	14,000	350	N
56a	91,000	0	90,000	1,000	N
57a	92,702	7,389	84,313	1,000	N
58a	110,000	0	110,000	0	Y

TABLE B: NHSScotland Agreements in cost order

Number	Overall cost (£)	Contractual cost (£)	Non contractual cost (£)	Ancillary costs (£)	Confidentiality Clause used
1b	0	0	0	0	N
2b	0	0	0	0	Ν
3b	1,000	0	0	1,000	N
4b	1,000	0	0	1,000	N
5b	2,000	0	2,000	0	N
6b	2,516	0	1,766	750	N
7b	2,750	0	2,000	750	N
8b	3,435	3,235	0	200	N
9b	4,300	0	3,300	1,000	N
10b	5,000	0	4,000	1,000	N
11b	5,711	0	4,711	1,000	N
12b	8,000	0	7,000	1,000	N
13b	8,500	0	7,500	1,000	N
14b	9,350	0	8,600	750	N
15b	10,000	0	10,000	0	N
16b	10,250	0	9,500	750	N
17b	14,343	500	13,343	500	N
18b	16,500	0	16,500	0	N
19b	17,310	0	16,810	500	N
20b	18,000	0	17,000	1,000	N
21b	30,500	0	30,000	500	N
22b	30,500	0	30,000	500	N
23b	31,000	0	30,000	1,000	N
24b	42,062	0	41,642	420	N
25b	44,156	0	42,500	1,656	N
26b	91,000	0	90,000	1,000	N
27b	92,702	7,389	84,313	1,000	N

TABLE C: Further Education College Agreements in cost order

Number	Overall cost (£)	Contractual cost (£)	Non contractual cost (£)	Ancillary costs (£)	Confidentiality Clause used
1c	10,000	0	10,000	0	Y
2c	16,358	5,938	10,000	420	N
3c	32,135	12,817	18,898	420	N
4c	35,017	12,838	21,179	1,000	Y
5c	42,091	23,507	18,084	500	Y
6c	50,275	13,692	36,163	420	N
7c	52,981	14,431	38,250	300	Y

Number	Overall cost (£)	Contractual cost (£)	Non contractual cost (£)	Ancillary costs (£)	Confidentiality Clause used
1d	6,500	0	6,000	500	N
2d	7,000	0	7,000	0	Y
3d	10,000	0	10,000	0	Y
4d	11,190	11,190	0	0	Y
5d	15,172	4,672	10,000	500	Y
6d	17,586	13,752	3,834	0	Y
7d	17,672	8,672	8,500	500	Y
8d	18,361	3,786	14,075	500	Y
9d	23,561	9,997	13,144	420	Y
10d	25,189	9,339	15,350	500	Y
11d	26,135	0	26,135	0	N
12d	30,419	15,469	14,950	0	N
13d	32,614	14,093	17,771	750	Y
14d	35,600	0	35,000	600	N
15d	37,232	22,409	14,073	750	Y
16d	40,331	9,000	31,331	0	Y
17d	40,581	10,712	29,369	500	Y
18d	46,329	7,501	37,928	900	N
19d	52,500	0	52,500	0	Y
20d	56,476	8,476	30,000	18,000	Ν
21d	67,409	28,809	35,600	3,000	Y
22d	69,650	30,618	38,282	750	Y
23d	75,834	61,484	14,000	350	Ν
24d	110,000	0	110,000	0	Y

TABLE D: SG and other public bodies Agreements in cost order