



Social Security Scotland  
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

# Social Security Scotland Corporate Plan Consultation: Analytical Report



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# 1. Introduction

## Background

Social Security Scotland is an executive agency of the Scottish Government set up in 2018 to deliver the social security benefits that are gradually being devolved from the UK Government.

Social Security Scotland has delivered eight benefits at the time of writing and is preparing to deliver a further eight over the coming years (For a list of the benefits see the Corporate Plan on the Social Security Scotland website).

In 2018 Social Security Scotland published an [Interim Corporate Plan](#) to cover the first year of operation with a promise to consult and engage widely on what should be in the subsequent Corporate Plan which would cover the roll out of the rest of the benefits.

Extensive engagement was undertaken across 2018 and 2019 with people with lived experience which resulted in [Our Charter](#) and the [Charter Measurement Framework](#). The findings from this work have been embedded into the working of Social Security Scotland and have been fully incorporated in the preparation of the new Corporate Plan.

In late 2019 we further consulted with Social Security Scotland staff and stakeholders (meaning organisations that represent or work on behalf of people that are served by the social security system). The consultation took the form of workshops across the country; four with a total of 42 Social Security Scotland staff and seven with a total of 70 stakeholders. This report outlines the findings from this activity.

Publication of this report was delayed by COVID 19.

## Workshops

The purpose of the workshops was to inform the development of the Social Security Scotland Corporate Plan by collecting views, opinions, thoughts and ideas on the following:

- **WHY** Social Security Scotland exists, what is its reason for being put in place, why does the Scottish Government fund this agency. This could be described as its **Strategic Purpose**.
- **WHAT** should Social Security Scotland deliver, what sort of an organisation should it be, what does it aim and aspire to, what will it look like when all the work is done. This section could also be described as Social Security Scotland's **Outcomes**.

- **HOW** should it deliver the WHATs, what does it need to do to become the organisation it aspires to be. A different way of describing this would be overarching **Activities**.

We used facilitated discussion groups to collect these views, thoughts and opinions and took extensive notes during the workshops.

## **Analysis**

We collated and analysed all the information we collected; pulling together all the notes from all the events and identifying subjects or topics or themes that occurred. We then systematically organised the material by these themes.

We analysed the themes by summarising the content and identifying what the results mean in the context of Social Security Scotland statutory duties, the role and scope of the organisations work and the Charter commitments.

As such the findings below are suggestions based on a systematic analysis by researchers of the thoughts, views and ideas of the research participants.

We undertook separate analysis of the staff and stakeholder information but please note: in the majority of cases staff and stakeholder participants expressed very similar views, thoughts, ideas and suggestions. Where this is the case we've reported the findings as relating to 'participants' in general. Where staff and stakeholders had differing views we have separated out the findings.

## **Context**

Over the period covered by the 2020-2023 Corporate Plan, Social Security Scotland will be rolling out eight benefits (see Corporate Plan for details). This consultation was designed to explore the strategic context in which the participants in the workshops think those benefits should be delivered, and how they would like to see that reflected in the Corporate Plan.

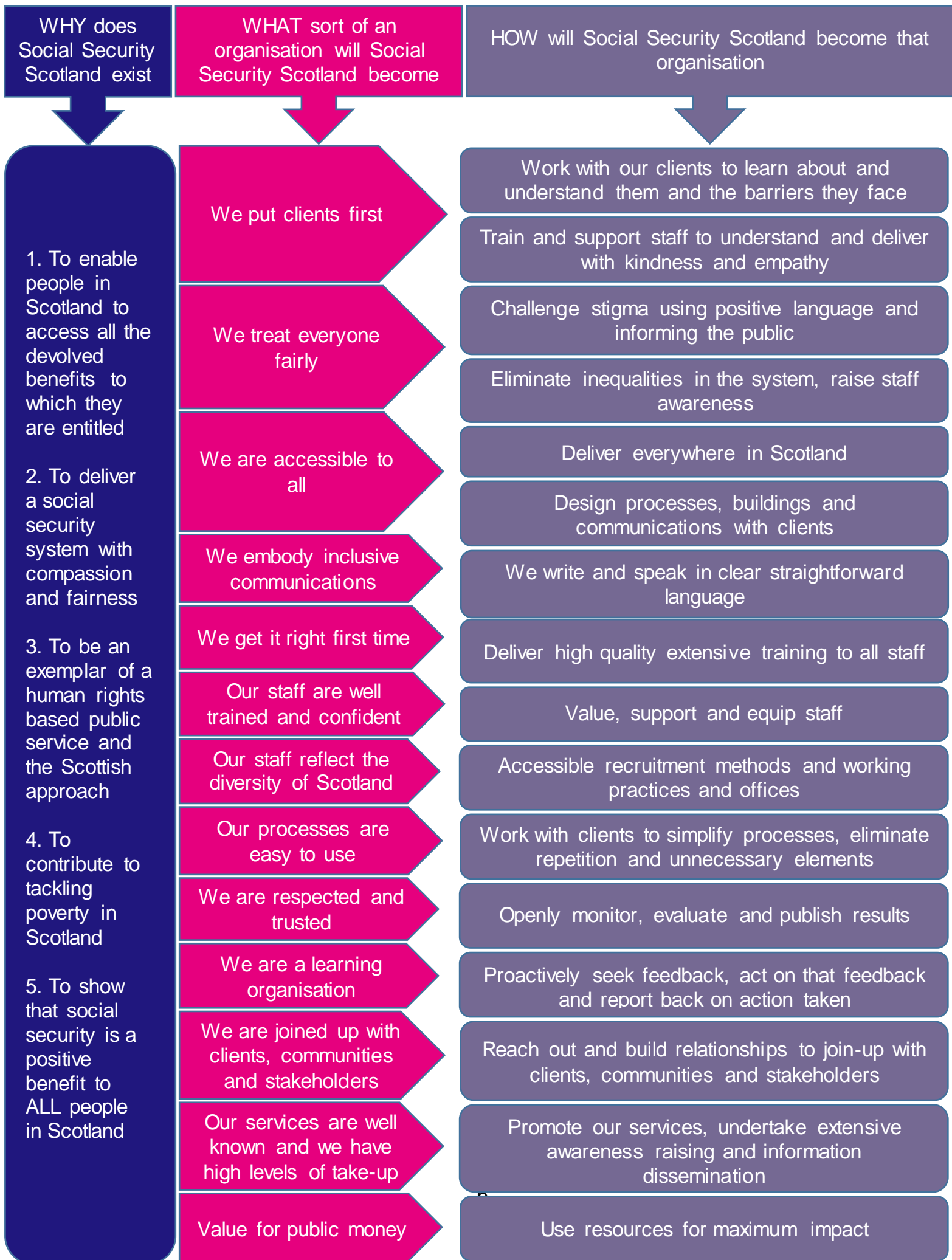
This document is a report on the views of the participants in the workshops on how the Corporate Plan should reflect the WHY, WHAT and HOW of Social Security Scotland.

## **Summary findings**

Figure 1 below is a pictorial representation of the key findings under the three headings WHY, WHAT and HOW. Brief details of what participants said on each theme is set out in the subsequent chapters of this report and finally a conclusion sets out next steps.

Please note: in Figure 1 the WHATs and HOWs are reflected as being connected to each other. This is a reasonably crude connection as many of the HOWs will contribute towards more than one WHAT. Nevertheless it shows the full list of overarching Activities that participants thought were needed to achieve the full list of Outcomes.

# Figure 1



## 2. Consultation findings – WHY

### Introduction

This chapter sets out the views and opinions of staff and stakeholders on WHY Social Security Scotland exists, what its reason is for being put in place and why the Scottish Government funds this agency. This could also be described as its Strategic Purpose.

The research found five overarching reasons for the existence of Social Security Scotland (see WHY column in Figure 1 above). Rather than seeing the WHYs as simply functional reasons for Social Security Scotland to exist, participants thought the organisation also had higher purposes. For example, being an exemplar organisation and to contribute to wider issues including tackling poverty. These are discussed below under the following headings:

- To deliver devolved benefits
- To deliver benefits in a 'new' way
- To be an exemplar of a human rights based service
- To contribute to tackling poverty in Scotland
- To tackle benefit stigma

### To deliver devolved benefits

Although it was common for participants in the research to identify the main function based purpose of Social Security Scotland as:

“to make social security payments to the people of Scotland”

Participants used language that implied that the function was a wider one with notions of support and care being mentioned as an integral part of the function. For example:

‘to help to support and care for those that most need it in society’

The notions of support and care were expanded by participants. They considered a fundamental purpose was not simply to pay out benefits but to support people to get the financial support and in that way to facilitate access to the benefits. Some examples include:

- ‘to make access to support as easy as possible’
- ‘to make sure benefits are easy to claim’

Stakeholders and staff regularly used the language of entitlements and there was consensus that enabling access to such was a key purpose of Social Security Scotland.

### **To deliver devolved benefits**

WHY 1. To enable people in Scotland to access all the devolved benefits to which they are entitled

### **To deliver benefits in a ‘new’ way**

Participants told us that one WHY or reason for its existence was for Social Security Scotland to deliver a different system to the current system.

In many cases the type of system staff and stakeholders wanted to see was articulated in opposition to perceptions of the UK system. So for example staff and stakeholders both suggested Social Security Scotland exists to:

- “Create a better system, a fairer system”
- “Improve the experience of those claiming”
- “Address inequalities in the system”

Moving on to what such a system would look like, participants again referred to supportive delivery and further to diverse needs for example, to:

- “Protect the vulnerable”
- “Support those in need”
- “Care for people needing help”

Participants frequently used the term “compassionate” as an overarching term for how Social Security Scotland delivers.

### **To deliver benefits in a ‘new’ way**

WHY 2. To deliver a social security system with compassion and fairness

### **To be an exemplar of a Human Rights based service**

Taking the notion of Social Security Scotland as setting the scene for the type of system staff and stakeholders want to see in Scotland also prompted participants to refer to the system as being based on Human Rights as set out in the [Social Security \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#).



The detail on the Human Right to social security is set out in the [Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comment 19](#) but in terms of WHY Social Security Scotland exists, for this research, participants wanted the organisation not just to deliver a human rights based system but also to be an exemplar organisation for other public services as one stakeholder said:

“to show other public services how to do it’

A further concept that participants thought Social Security Scotland should be an exemplar for was the [Scottish Approach](#), most especially, in this context, focusing on people in Scotland as assets and using their expertise to ensure our services are fit for purpose and deliver to need.

### **To be an exemplar of a Human Rights based service**

WHY 3. To be an exemplar of a human rights based public service and the Scottish approach

### **To contribute to tackling poverty in Scotland**

Participants believed that Social Security Scotland should acknowledge that it exists not simply to pay benefits but that in doing so it can address wider issues. The most frequently mentioned issues were tackling poverty and addressing the stigma that surrounds social security.

Various participants talked of Social Security Scotland existing to “reduce inequality” and “reduce poverty” and “address disadvantage” by ensuring social security payments contribute to “addressing the imbalance between rich and poor”.

### **To contribute to tackling poverty in Scotland**

WHY 4. To contribute to tackling poverty in Scotland

### **To tackle benefit stigma**

Further, participants believed that the stigma that surrounds benefits and benefit claimants can and should be tackled by the new organisation. There were two aspects identified by the participants.

Firstly, that all people in Scotland can and will need social security at some point, as one stakeholder said:

“people need support through life circumstances death/birth/back to work”

And a staff participant said:

“to be a mechanism to increase income at critical points in people’s lives”

Secondly, that paying benefits, participants suggested, saves other public funds, in terms of health and justice budgets as examples.

So a WHY or key purpose of Social Security Scotland is to help people in Scotland to understand the positive impact of social security to the country as a whole and to all people who live here.

**To tackle benefit stigma**

To show that social security is a positive benefit to ALL people in Scotland

In summary: Social Security Scotland staff and stakeholder participants in the research suggested five wide strategic purposes. Social Security Scotland exists to:

1. Enable people in Scotland to access all the devolved benefits to which they are entitled
2. Deliver a social security system with compassion and fairness
3. Be an exemplar of a human rights based public service and the Scottish approach
4. Contribute to tackling poverty in Scotland
5. Show that social security is a positive benefit to ALL people in Scotland

## 3. Consultation findings – WHAT and HOW

### Introduction

This chapter sets out the views and opinions of staff and stakeholders on WHAT sort of an organisation Social Security Scotland should become or the Outcomes the organisation should aspire to and HOW it should achieve this vision or what the organisation's overarching Activities should be.

The research found thirteen WHATs or Outcomes and sixteen related HOWs or Activities (see WHAT and HOW columns in Figure 1 above and numbered below).

The WHATs and the HOWs cluster in four groups. Firstly, there was a focus on the treatment of clients and staff or people in general and secondly on processes. The final two groups focus on the organisation as a whole and the reputation and public understanding of the social security system in Scotland.

### Clients and Staff - People

As was typical of the consultation as a whole, the treatment of clients and staff was uppermost in the thoughts of participants when discussing the long-term goals of Social Security Scotland (WHAT) and HOW they should be achieved. It's worth reporting that both staff and stakeholders agreed on this and that this finding links well to the compassion and fairness theme in the WHY section of this report.

It may also be useful to note that the treatment of clients and staff is one of the four key themes in [Our Charter: A People's Service](#).

### Clients- Dignity and respect

Many participants expressed this view in Social Security Scotland's own terms - Dignity and Respect which was summed up as suggesting "clients needs should come before the needs of the system".

Re-occurring stakeholder views of dignity and respect suggested that Social Security Scotland should deliver a service that ultimately treated people with "empathy", and that people should experience a service that was "friendly", "provides choice for clients", "responds to need", and simply "treats people as human-beings".

Staff views echoed stakeholder opinions as above and their key WHAT was that clients should be "at the heart of the service". That could be achieved by delivering a system that was "designed for clients not for the government" and should deliver "for people not to people".

All participants agreed that this could be achieved by staff "listening to" clients in order to "understand their needs" and being "respectful", "supportive", "sympathetic" and "non-judgemental".

## **Dignity and respect**

WHAT 1. We put clients first

HOW 1. Work with our clients to learn about and understand them and the barriers they face

HOW 2. Train and support staff to understand and deliver with kindness and empathy

## **Clients - Fairness**

A further finding under the WHAT category - fairness - also reflects Social Security Scotland's own stated aims. Once again participants expanded on what fairness meant to them centering round an equality based system, ensuring no-one was discriminated against and inequalities were removed from the system.

Staff's views on fairness recognised that a system based on fairness for all does not necessarily mean that all should receive the same treatment. In order to be fair, staff felt that sometimes people need extra support, help or indeed payments.

Staff and stakeholders agreed that HOW to deliver this fairness included a need for staff to "treat everyone as an individual" by being aware of clients' backgrounds and taking "account of their cultures", being "adaptable and flexible" and to deliver a service that is "NOT one size fits all".

Stakeholders pointed out that frontline staff taking the above into account was one step in the right directions but that the system needed to be set up to make "just decisions" by "applying the service fairly".

Another way forward towards achieving fairness was the need to use "positive language" and eliminate "inappropriate language and behaviour", and "challenging views and beliefs that are contrary to fairness".

Additionally, stakeholders thought that working in partnership with equalities partners would help achieve fairness.

## **Fairness**

WHAT 2. We treat everyone fairly

HOW 3. Challenge stigma using positive language and informing the public

HOW 4. Eliminate inequalities in the system, raise staff awareness

## **Client - Accessibility**

The research found that accessibility of services was a key issue participants wanted to see reflected in the Corporate Plan. Both in terms of general access and also in terms of accessible communications.

Stakeholders thought that HOW to achieve accessibility included to “provide choice for clients” in how they communicate with Social Security Scotland and how Social Security Scotland communicates with them.

Further elements of fairness were also relevant for accessibility as participants suggested accessibility needed Social Security Scotland to “be responsive to clients needs” as opposed to delivering “one size fits all” services.

Additionally, participants stressed the need to “factor in circumstances” to “reach all those who need it”. This covered geographic issues including public transport links in remote and rural areas. Localised services were seen to be a “vital cog in the wheel of improving accessibility”, preferably “to people in all areas of Scotland, including remote, rural and island communities”.

As well as providing choice and local service provision, stakeholders stressed that they would like to see overtly stated in the Corporate Plan that Social Security Scotland is committed to communicating in a “clear, accessible and inclusive way” with “no jargon” and “straightforward language”. They talked of a need to simplify language and use “everyday words” rather than the “sometimes obscure language of officialdom”.

Removing physical barriers was thought vital, in two ways. Firstly, in terms of accessible parking, accessible buildings and accessible facilities for disabled people with limited mobility, and secondly, a less tangible but equally important plea to “make staff approachable” by “thinking about dress code and the physical environment in buildings”.

Staff participants echoed exactly the stakeholders but using slightly different language. For example, they talked of “understanding peoples’ circumstances” and “proactively engaging with seldom heard communities” and further communication was mentioned with a plea “to communicate with audiences in the way they want” in order to “reduce barriers” and “to be enablers not blockers”.

Staff talked of the corporate term “inclusive communications” but also “an inclusive policy and culture” that “reflects the accessibility needs of Scotland (including language and social disabilities meaning that people with different levels of education and little contact with bureaucracy can perceive public services as impenetrable)”.

Also important to staff was listening to people with lived experience to “meet diverse needs”. They recognised a need to “up-skill staff” and ensure that communications are a “two way conversation”.

## **Accessibility**

WHAT 3. We are accessible to all

WHAT 4. We embody inclusive communications

HOW 5. We deliver everywhere in Scotland

HOW 6. We design processes, buildings and communications with clients

HOW 7. We write and speak in clear straightforward language

## **Staff - Right first time**

Participants wanted Social Security Scotland to commit to getting things right from the first time. This was in order to reduce client stress but also to ensure that resources were efficiently used.

Stakeholders, for example, suggested that getting it right the first time would be an indicator of Social Security Scotland “living and breathing the values base” as set out in detail in the Charter.

Staff alluded to the timeliness suggested in the phrase ‘right first time’ for example stating that Social Security Scotland should commit to “administering a system to give the right people, the right award, at the right times”.

Stakeholders and staff related high quality staff and high quality training to the ability to deliver ‘right first time’. As one participant said “Staff need to be well trained and knowledgeable of all public services and all benefits”.

Participants also alluded to a need for staff to have training that goes over and above training packages suggesting that “All staff should be trained by the experience experts (people with lived experience)”.

Suggestions for management were also discussed in terms of their “providing a learning culture” and ultimately “seeing staff training as an investment”.

## **Right first time**

WHAT 5. We get it right first time

HOW 8. Deliver high quality extensive training to all staff

## Confident staff

Commitment to enable staff to be confident was a recurring theme in the research. Stakeholders and staff recognised that training is only the first step to ensuring “exemplary customer service” as staff confidence also needed to be boosted. Participants suggested ways of doing this “by treating its people in the way it wants their customers to be treated” and “providing support for staff to deliver”.

There was discussion on the need to “listening to staff needs” and to “take action on staff feedback” as they know best “what is needed at the frontline”.

Further still, participants stressed a need for “empowerment of staff” by “including them in decision making” to help them be “engaged and enthusiastic”. Staff themselves wanted to be “proud to be part of Social Security Scotland”.

### Confident staff

WHAT 6. Our staff are well trained and confident

HOW 9. Valuing, supporting and equipping staff

## Staff - Diverse workforce

One way to ensure fairness and equality participants suggested was to have a diverse workforce. This was recognised as ensuring the workforce had representatives from protected characteristic groups but also people with a variety of life experience.

Participants thought that this could be achieved by using accessible recruitment methods and creating “a career path with multiple opportunities to train in many areas”.

### Diverse workforce

WHAT 7. Our staff reflect the diversity of Scotland

HOW 10. Accessible recruitment methods and working practices and offices

## Processes

Just as people, referring to staff and clients, were important considerations for participants, a system with straightforward, easy to use processes was a key aspect that participants would like to see in the Corporate Plan. This also echoes the Charter, where section two is Processes That Work.

Participants’ thoughts on communications processes are covered above under fairness and accessibility but are mentioned here as they were considered a key set of processes to take account of.

Further, and also covered above is the issue of a choice. Staff highlighted choice of how to engage and the “offer of all delivery channels” including web-based applications, paper applications, phone and face to face support for applications as key for clients.

Connected to that choice were discussions, among staff in particular, about Social Security Scotland offering a “personal service” when people need it and how this would help with the goal of “making it easy for people to claim”. A part of this issue is, of course, “clients knowing what they are entitled to” which brings us back to effective communication, which staff thought should be “accessible to all and proactive”.

Accessibility is often seen as breaking down tangible barriers for disabled people but participants stressed that Social Security Scotland should do more than that and make systems “user friendly” for everyone by having “simple processes that work”, “quick assessment processes and “streamlined claims processes” with “straightforward simple forms”.

Echoing HOW number 6 above, staff and stakeholders discussed how important the use of lived experience or “involving all users (staff and clients) in designing services and systems” is in the process. Not just for the design stage but “by seeking feedback” and “continuously improving our processes”.

Participants, stakeholders in particular, emphasised the importance of “supporting people throughout the entire application process” and connected to this, the provision of “a proper advice service, which values the importance of rights and gives helpful advice with attention given to the client journey” as key elements of good processes.

Such support, participants said, needs to come “at the right time – the earlier, the better”.

Finally stakeholders talked about processes needing to be “adaptable and flexible” and “responsive to client needs” reflecting the findings under fairness and accessibility above.

## **Processes**

WHAT 8. Our processes are easy to use

HOW 11. Work with clients to simplify processes, eliminate repetition and unnecessary elements

## **Trust and learning**

Staff and stakeholders wanted Social Security Scotland to be respected and trusted and made suggestions as to how it could gain respect and build trust by openly showing it is a learning organisation and its practices are secure.



With respect to security participants suggested that Social Security Scotland should “administer a system that is fair and secure”. Aspects of this security included “IT safety in-line with the various laws (GDPR, data protection, impact assessments and secure transfer)” and to ensure the system “is auditable by design”.

For learning and improving as one staff participant put it, Social Security Scotland can build trust by:

“Showing how we are learning and improving. In my area, this happens every single day, but the Corporate Plan should show in detail about how to embed this in the agency.”

Another talked about how openness was key in the area of learning and trust:

“We need to show that we are resilient and prepared for things to go wrong by learning from these and getting better.”

And another about how monitoring and evaluation can aid this:

“By evaluating and embracing continuous improvement about our processes for the people of Scotland.”

Stakeholders commented that trust can be built by “demonstrating action on feedback and ideas”, by “being transparent with decision making and when things don’t go to plan” and being “open to scrutiny for public buy-in”.

### **Trust and learning**

WHAT 9. We are respected and trusted

WHAT 10. We are a learning organisation

HOW 12. Openly monitor, evaluate and publish results

HOW 13. Proactively seek feedback, act on that feedback and report back on action taken

### **Joined-up working**

Participants discussed the importance of Social Security Scotland being an organisation that is joined up with partners including clients, stakeholders and the local communities. In fact, all of the WHYs, WHATs and HOWs, they thought, could not be delivered without such partnership. Both staff and stakeholders had a vision for an organisation that was seamlessly connected to relevant third sector organisations and to other public sector organisations including Whitehall. This was variously described as “working with the third sector and other public sector stakeholders” by “linking with other organisations”, “working alongside each other”, and “connecting and collaborating”.

They were clear that to achieve this vision Social Security Scotland should commit in their Corporate Plan to work on this proactively. Some quotes included:

“Social Security Scotland needs to forge meaningful relationships.”

“Proactive join up with other government departments.”

Further that the relationship should go further than that and Social Security Scotland could “recognises stakeholders as partners” and “support delivery in partnership with stakeholders”.

A particular case was made for advice and advocacy services and other organisations that support and represent clients, as these are key to achieving the outcomes for clients.

Finally, participants believed that Social Security Scotland has a role in being an exemplar organisation for others and should “proactively share learning with other public sector organisations”.

### **Joined-up Working**

WHAT 11. We are joined up with clients, communities and stakeholders

HOW 14. Reach out and build relationships to join-up with clients, communities and stakeholders

### **Take-up**

The Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland’s commitment to increase the take-up of benefits was echoed as a key issue for participants in this research. [A take-up strategy](#) has been launched and the research reflected aspects of the strategy. In summary, Social Security Scotland should “inform people”, “understand how people want to engage” and “reach out to people” who are entitled to their services. Furthermore, the organisation should “encourage”, “enable” people, and “support communities to understand entitlements” and “to claim” and ultimately “empower people”.

### **Take-up**

WHAT 12. Our services are well known and we have high levels of take-up

HOW 15. Promote our services, undertake extensive awareness raising and information dissemination

## Value for money

Finally, participants were acutely aware of the demands such a service as they outlined will make on the public purse. As such there is a need for Social Security Scotland to be a value for money organisation.

Participants accepted that resources spent on the new social security system would not be “wasted” as they thought a service such as they had described would, in the long run, save money elsewhere. As an example they suggested that the new and better service could both reduce poverty and improve people’s health thereby saving money on health services.

Efficiency was a key issue here and participants would like to see explicit evidence that resources were “not wasted in needless bureaucracy” and “used for maximum impact”.

One further issue brought to light here was duplication. Some stakeholders warned that it is necessary for Social Security Scotland to ensure that they “don’t duplicate what others do”.

### Value for money

WHAT 13. Value for public money

HOW 16. Use resources for maximum impact

In summary: participants gave us wide ranging ideas and views on WHAT sort of organisation Social Security Scotland should aspire to be and HOW it should go about achieving that positive future. The overarching themes and views are expressed as thirteen WHATs and sixteen related HOWs as set out in Figure 1.

## 4. Conclusions and next steps

### Introduction

Researchers have analysed the thoughts views and ideas of staff and stakeholders collected during consultation workshops to help inform the Social Security Scotland Corporate Plan.

In order to ensure the consultation kept to inclusive communications imperatives we used the straightforward language of:

WHY does Social Security Scotland exist?

WHAT sort of an organisation should it aspire to become?

HOW should it go about becoming that organisation?

The results are set out in summary in Figure 1 at the start of this report and discussed and repeated throughout.

### Conclusions

There are a number of findings that don't relate directly to WHY, WHAT and HOW that could nevertheless be of interest.

Firstly, the findings from this extensive consultation chimed well with the findings of the extensive engagement with people with lived experience that took place to develop the Charter. As such we can say that stakeholders and staff have expectations along the same lines as the people who will be clients of Social Security Scotland.

Secondly, there were no surprise findings in the research, rather the thoughts, views, ideas and expectations expressed reflected the set up and culture of Social Security Scotland and the Scottish Government's vision for the new social security system in general.

Thirdly, the process of consultation with staff was without exception very positive. Staff were overwhelmingly enthusiastic, well informed and highly engaged.

Fourthly and finally, some stakeholders were well informed and already engaged with Social Security Scotland and the new system. Others were not, most particularly those in areas outside the Central Belt. It should be said that at the time of the research, local delivery staff were not in place across the country and where they were, in general, stakeholders were better informed.

### Next steps

These findings reflect the sentiments, practicalities and imperatives of Our Charter, thereby strengthening the evidence base for the commitments in Our Charter.

The findings outlined in this report have been embedded in Social Security Scotland's Corporate Plan. The detail in the body of the report has been used as a checklist to ensure the Corporate Plan reflects all the views, opinions and ideas coming from Social Security Scotland staff and stakeholders.

### How to access background or source data

The data collected for this <statistical bulletin / social research publication>:

- are available in more detail through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics
- are available via an alternative route <specify or delete this text>
- may be made available on request, subject to consideration of legal and ethical factors. Please contact [clientresearch@socialsecurity.gov.scot](mailto:clientresearch@socialsecurity.gov.scot) for further information.
- cannot be made available by Scottish Government for further analysis as Scottish Government is not the data controller.



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