



Executive Advisory Body

Date of Meeting	Tuesday 14 April 2020
Time	10.00 – 12:00
Location	Conference Call

Attendees

Present

David Wallace (DW)	Chief Executive, Social Security Scotland (Chair)
Laura Brennan-Whitefield (LBW)	Non-Executive Member
Jessica Burns (JB)	Non-Executive Member
Chris Creegan (CC)	Non-Executive Member
Ewan Gurr (EG)	Non-Executive Member
Douglas Hutchens (DH)	Non-Executive Member
Elaine Noad (EN)	Non-Executive Member
Russell Frith (RF)	Chair, Audit & Assurance Committee (for Agenda items 1 and 2 only)
Miriam Craven (MC)	Deputy Director of Strategy and Client Experience
Andy McClintock (AM)	Chief Digital Officer
James Wallace (JW)	Deputy Director of Finance and Corporate Services
Paul Knight (PK)	Paul Knight Head of Clinical Operations

In Attendance

NMB	Corporate Assurance/Governance, Business Support Lead
KC	Head of Operations

Apologies

Janet Richardson (JR)	Deputy Director of Operations and Local Delivery
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Secretariat

IB	Governance and Business Co-ordinator
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1. Welcome & Conflicts of Interest

- 1.1. The Chair, David Wallace (DW), welcomed and thanked everyone for their attendance.
- 1.2. Members did not highlight any potential conflicts of interest.

2. Chair's Update

- 2.1. The Chair advised that the majority of this meeting would focus on the impact of COVID-19, with an initial look at the immediate impact.
- 2.2. The Chair introduced (KC), who provided an update on live operations. She advised that the majority of staff were now working from home. A call back service is in place, allowing clients to leave messages that are then passed back to client advisors to return. There is a small cohort of staff providing cover, on a rota basis, for the mailroom in Dundee House and we have introduced social distancing measures. Overall the Chair confirmed we are maintaining a full service during this period.
- 2.3. Jessica Burns (JB) asked about current staff absence rates, and was advised that absence rates, due to illness, were not high and overall absence rates were low.
- 2.4. Elaine Noad (EN) asked about staff engagement and support for wellbeing. The Chair advised that we have adopted a flexible approach to working, allowing staff to work around caring responsibilities and management are in regular contact with staff. Across all divisions, managers are holding daily virtual stand-up meetings, encouraging the use of internal communication platforms, sharing best practice and supporting colleagues where required. The Executive Team have also hosted an all-staff call to maintain visibility and plan to issue a survey to check staff engagement levels. Miriam Craven (MC) added that increased corporate communication is in place to support staff, and we have signposted staff to resources on wellbeing, mental health and resilience.
- 2.5. On recruitment, the Chair advised members that while we have halted the current recruitment programme, we have taken on those Client Advisor's appointed through the recent recruitment exercise, and are currently piloting ways to introduce them to the organisation virtually. We are also carrying out wider work on workforce planning across the organisation.
- 2.6. The Chair noted the impact COVID-19 has had on the Department for Work and Pensions and advised that we have supported them where possible, including through the redeployment of some staff.
- 2.7. Laura Brennan-Whitefield (LBW) asked if an extension of home working could be an option post COVID-19. The Chair advised we will consider the lessons learnt as part of our response to COVID-19, and with regards to wider home working this would be informed by appropriate risk assessments. MC added that this has given us the opportunity as an organisation to look at how we work, the flexibility that exists and the experience of home-working for staff.



However, we would need to fully consider the impact on the health and safety of staff.

- 2.8. Andy McClintock (AM) provided a brief Information Technology update. Overall systems have responded well. As anticipated there have some technological challenges, however we have been able to put in place effective actions to mitigate.
- 2.9. LBW asked for an update on the publication of workforce diversity statistics requested at the Executive Advisory Body meeting on the 3 March 2020. These are published on a routine basis, and we will confirm to members the next date for publication.

Action IB

To contact the Analysis & Insights team to confirm a date for the diversity statistics requested.

3. COVID-19

- 3.1. MC introduced the COVID-19 update. She advised that people from across the organisation have been working on the response and focus is very much on supporting work to maintain services, look after our people and co-ordinate work towards recovery.
- 3.2. MC highlighted to members, the statement made by the Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People. She also outlined the implications of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act on Social Security Scotland, in that it:
 - Modifies timescales for making applications where these have not been able to be met directly as a result of coronavirus.
 - Relaxes timescales which apply to clients seeking a re-determination as well as clients bringing an appeal before the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland.
 - Relaxes, for a limited time, timescales for Social Security Scotland to complete a redetermination. The original timescale of 16 working days has been extended by an additional 9 weeks.
- 3.3. JB asked whether current staff have been redeployed to other teams within the organisation, specifically the Local Delivery Team. MC confirmed that some are supporting live operations but overall they are being supported with any changes to their work.
- 3.4. JB also asked for an update on Child Disability Payment, and MC will update members in due course.
- 3.5. MC advised that in terms of a recovery, the focus will be on the delivery of our current benefits, and supporting staff making the transition from working remotely to working back in the office environment.



- 3.6. Douglas Hutchens (DH) noted that post COVID-19, the future may be different for many. This will change our client profile and the organisation should be mindful of this moving forward. MC assured the members that we will be working closely with colleagues across policy and programme teams to consider this.
- 3.7. The Executive Advisory Body noted this update on the ways in which Social Security Scotland is responding to COVID-19.

Action	IB	To provide the Executive Advisory Body members with an update on the Child Disability Payment pilot once confirmed.
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4. Remote Working Risk Assessment

- 4.1. The Chair introduced details of the assessment undertaken for enabling staff to work from home.
- 4.2. James Wallace (JW) noted the importance of a robust assessment of the potential risks resulting from working from home, so that we can consider and plan the mitigations that need to be implemented. The main priority is to continue to deliver benefits and this risk assessment supports the development of Internal Control measures to help this.
- 4.3. The Executive Advisory Body noted the findings of the risk assessment and mitigating measures in place.

5. Finance Report

- 5.1. JW introduced the Finance Report which covers Social Security Scotland's financial results to the end of February 2020.
- 5.2. JW highlighted an underspend in operating expenditure, and that this was largely driven by slippage of staffing costs / recruitment and accommodation plans through March, some of which are due to COVID-19. JW assured members neither were considered a concern.
- 5.3. JW highlighted the 2021 budget position, pointing out the spending review will set the future budget and we will progress on the basis of the Social Security Programme plan for this year. The majority of the budget was previously allocated to staffing costs, and as this may now happen at a different pace there will be a need to undertake some re-planning.
- 5.4. JW advised members that the benefit expenditure for 2021 may change as a result of the increase to Universal Credit claims. Work to understand the impact is underway.
- 5.5. The Executive Advisory Body noted the report.

6. Future Executive Advisory Body Meetings



- 6.1. MC acknowledged that COVID-19 has meant we are all working differently, consequently the structure of the Executive Advisory Body meetings would have to be flexible to respond to this.
- 6.2. The meeting on the 26 May is again likely to be virtual and we will keep all future meetings under review. In terms of topic-focused sessions, these will resume once meetings are back in the office environment, and we will liaise with Social Security Programme colleagues to plan how best to move forward with these.
- 6.3. A new Governance Team Leader will be starting in April and will be working closely with the Executive Advisory Body.

Action MC/IB/NMB To consider the impact of COVID-19 on the current calendar of business.

7. Any other Business

- 7.1. Members approved the minutes of the Executive Advisory Body meeting on the 14 April 2020. In line with our commitment to proactively publish the agenda, meeting papers, minutes and action tracker, we will publish these on the Social Security Scotland website within twelve weeks of this meeting.
- 7.2. No other business was noted.

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 26 May 2020