Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Executive Advisory Body	
Date of Meeting	Tuesday 18 August 2020
Subject	Inclusive Communication
Agenda No.	4
Paper No.	17.2
Prepared By	[Redacted]
Purpose	Discuss

1. Background

1.1. Social Security Scotland has a range of legal and organisational commitments that require us to communicate in an inclusive way.

1.2. In April 2019, the Agency's Senior Leadership Team agreed to establish an inclusive communication project that would coordinate the work required to establish an inclusive communication approach across everything we do and ensure that this approach became part of our business as usual processes. This paper provides an update on the work that has been taking place.

2. Key points

2.1. Establishing an inclusive communication approach will require concerted effort from every team within Social Security Scotland and close work with Policy and Programme colleagues. Our aim is to ensure inclusive communication becomes a central part of our organisational culture. It's a long term project requiring strong leadership to coordinate a wide range of activity and drive the necessary cultural change.

2.2. The inclusive communication provisions in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 were ground breaking meaning Social Security Scotland is at the forefront of developing an inclusive communication approach for public services. We have found some best practice in other organisations that we can learn from and adapt, but we will also need a lot of innovation. This means there will be some trial and error and we'll need to learn and improve as we go.

2.3. It is important that we communicate a strong commitment to our work in this area. Inclusive communication is referenced in our Corporate Plan and will be a key part of our Equalities Strategy but our stakeholders feel it would also be beneficial to make a specific public statement. The wording of this statement has been agreed by the Agency Leadership Team and Executive Team. It will now be published on our corporate website, included in Social Security Scotland's publications and communicated internally.

2.4. A key challenge for us is how we measure and report on this work. We have not found much best practice in this area so we will need to innovate. We need to develop a measurement framework that:

- Enables us to assess the progress and quality of our actions, using existing data sources wherever possible.

- Gives confidence to Social Security Scotland's leadership, Ministers and our stakeholders that we are meeting our legal commitments and creating positive change for both our staff and clients.

- Connects with other measurement tools such as the Charter Measurement Framework and the Equalities Strategy outcomes and indicators that are being developed.

3. Conclusions

3.1. The Executive Advisory Body is asked to consider the contents of the paper and come to the meeting ready to discuss the following two questions:

- Have you come across any best practice for monitoring and assessing inclusive communication in any other organisations you have worked with?

- You regularly act as advocates for Social Security Scotland. What evidence would you like to see to give you the confidence to talk positively about our ability to communicate in an inclusive way for our staff and clients?

4. GOVERNANCE CHECKLIST

Strategic Objective	Contribution
Dignity, fairness and respect Delivering a service with dignity, fairness and respect at its core.	Will ensure that clients with additional communication support needs are: • able to access help and advice to claim the benefits they are entitled to • supported throughout the application assessment process • able to enjoy a positive experience of the Scottish social security system.
Equality and tackling poverty Promoting equality and tackling poverty.	Our work on inclusive communications will be a key part of our Equalities Strategy. Getting inclusive communication right should also support our work to increase take-up amongst the most vulnerable groups helping to get money to where it is needed most.
Efficiency and alignment Ensuring efficiency and aligning our activities with wider public sector for the benefit of the people we serve.	An embedded, mainstream approach to inclusive communication should help to simplify the system we deliver for our staff and clients and improve the quality of our communications activity and client interactions. It may help to reduce the amount of error caused by a lack of understanding of the system.
Economy, society and environment Contributing to our economy, society and protection of our environment.	Will ensure that the Agency best meets the needs of people with a communication disadvantage and support our work to recruit a diverse workforce.

Strategic consideration	Impact
Environment	N/A
Governance	Will impact on format of governance papers and way meetings are run. Consultation held with Governance Team
Data	Developing a measurement framework will require data collection and need alignment with other measurement frameworks. Analytical team are being consulted.
Finance	No new financial burdens.
Staff	Staff will require new ways of working. This change will be supported and teams across the organisation consulted throughout the project.
Equalities	A key part of our Equalities Strategy. Consultation and joint working is ongoing.
Estates	Will inform how we set out our buildings along with the Look Book and signage etc. Relevant teams are engaged in the project

Strategic consideration	Impact
	4
Communications and Presentation	Will affect both internal and external communication. The Communications Team is working closely with the project team.

Impact Assessment
We have not conducted an impact assessment for our work on inclusive communication but the project has been recognised as an important mitigation for many of the impacts identified through equality impact assessments on other Social Security Scotland policies.

Contents

A: What is inclusive communication?

Inclusive communication is part of a strategic commitment to inclusion and accessibility. It goes beyond accessible information.

It is an approach to <u>all</u> communication whether verbal, in writing, or face-to-face and considers both context and methods i.e. where, how and when.   It is not a separate issue to general communication. It means all communication is inclusive.

It means:

✓ accepting that people understand information and express themselves in many different ways.

✓ thinking about where, how and when people want to interact with us from the beginning when designing services and communicating internally.

✓ following universal good practice in all communication and offering individual support to those who need it.

Communication support

There are diverse reasons for people requiring communication support.

It may be **temporary** due to issues like anxiety, fatigue, or illness.

It may be **longer term** due to issues like literacy difficulties, mental health issues, a neurological condition, learning difficulty, autism or sensory impairment.

A literature review of Communication Support Needs in Scotland (2007) estimated that 20% of the population may experience communication difficulties at some point (www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/179456/0051018.pdf).   Speech Language and Communication Capacity: A National Asset states, for example, that 60% of young offenders, and 80% of young people not in employment, education or training, experience communication disadvantage.
https://www.rcslt.org/governments/docs/speech_and_language_communication_capacity_factsheet_2016.

Inclusive communication practice

✓ allows the **largest number of people** to take part in any interaction.

✓ supports individuals to use whatever ways of understanding <u>and</u> expressing themselves which **they find easiest and prefer.**

B: What would Social Security Scotland look like if all our communication was inclusive?

These are some practical example of what Social Security Scotland will look like when an inclusive communication approach is embedded in the service:

✓ **Everyone** writes in simple, clear language for external and internal use and no-one uses jargon or abbreviations.

✓ Clients are able **always** to access Social Security Scotland through a range of ways so they can choose which they prefer and a time when it is easier for them.

✓ Visitors and staff to buildings housing Social Security Scotland activities are able to easily find their way around through **clear signage** common to all buildings.

✓ Social Security Scotland staff are **confident to manage telephone calls and face to face consultations** with people who communicate in a range of ways.

✓ User researchers include people with diverse communication support needs wider than sensory impairment in all **research design**.

- ✓ **Programme Product Owners** understand the potentially significant impact of small operational decisions for people who understand information and express themselves in different ways.

- ✓ A diverse range of people feel confident and **welcomed to apply for a job** after attending a pre-application session run by Resourcing.

- ✓ A new member of staff with a visual impairment is **able to do their job independently and access staff training from day 1** through availability of appropriate screen reader software.

- ✓ Stakeholders are confident to come to meetings because they know staff will have chosen an **accessible venue** and the meeting will be run in an inclusive way.

C: Why is inclusive communication essential to Social Security Scotland?

- A legal requirement Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018.
- Required by the Charter and supports the Scottish Social Security Principles.
- Commitment in the Corporate Plan.
- Essential to provide the high quality service we want.
- Supports the employment of a diverse workforce.
- Supports achievement of the Public Sector Equality Duty

D: Our approach to inclusive communication

To be successful, we need to integrate an inclusive communication approach across everything we do as part of our corporate culture. It is the responsibility of the whole organisation working closely with the Scottish Government's Programme and Policy teams. It must be a sustained commitment based on continuous improvement.

Workplan

There are five Assets required in the medium term:

- ✓ Leadership and ownership across the organisation.
- ✓ Effective engagement with people who understand and express themselves in different ways
- ✓ Inclusive and accessible systems, processes and locations.
- ✓ Knowledgeable and skilled workforce.
- ✓ Shared inclusive communication resources readily available.

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Inclusive Communication Principles

We are using five key principles to guide our actions:

1. Recognise all communities and groups include people who communicate in different ways.
2. Find out how people prefer to communicate.
3. Take action:
   a. Adapt the physical environment.
   b. Match the way you communicate to the ways people understand.
   c. Respond positively to the different ways people express themselves.
4. Evaluate and change.

E: What we have done so far

✓ Increased awareness of the requirement for inclusive communication and what it might look like.
✓ Established an inclusive communication internal coordination group and external stakeholder group.
✓ Worked alongside teams and the Programme to explain inclusive communication and identify some of the areas where action is required.
✓ Agreed a public statement of commitment (see Annex 1).

F: What next

We will continue to work towards the 5 assets guided by the 4 Principles. For example:

1. Recognise all communities and groups include people who communicate in different ways.
   ⇨ Include Social Security Scotland's commitment to inclusive communication in the Corporate Induction and develop an Inclusive Communication training module.
   ⇨ Link key strategy documents e.g. Equality Strategy to our inclusive communication principles in both content and format.
   ⇨ Offer a range of methods for contacting Social Security Scotland in all service design.
   ⇨ Ensure guidance includes recognition that people understand information and express themselves in different ways and resources and support available.
   ⇨ Establish a readily available platform for staff to access guidance, standards and support around inclusive communication.

2. Find out how people prefer to communicate.

⇨ Establish a system of data collection, storage and use on communication preferences and accessibility requirements.

3. Take action:

a. Adapt the physical environment.
   ⇨ Establish and use clear signage for sites (main buildings and local delivery locations).
   ⇨ Develop and implement an Accessibility Toolkit for co-located sites.
   ⇨ Produce and share guidance for accessible events across the organisation and adopt standards.

b. Match the way you communicate to the ways people understand.
   ⇨ Develop and share Easy Read standards and guidance on how to implement.
   ⇨ Develop tools to support client advisers with communication.

c. Respond positively to the different ways people express themselves.
   ⇨ Skills training for operational staff (telephone/face to face) which includes involvement of people with lived experience.

4. Evaluate and change
   ⇨ Inclusive Communication Stakeholder Reference Group
   ⇨ User research to include people who communicate in different ways.
   ⇨ Design measurements linked to standards.

G: Challenges

! **Scope of work and coordination.**
Inclusive communication is relevant to all business areas and therefore the responsibility of many to implement. This is an opportunity for innovation but also makes it more of a challenge to influence, track change, and coordinate. Driving a cultural change to ensure everyone understands what we mean by inclusive communication and considers it as part of everything they do is critical to the success of this work.

! **Understanding the range of communication difference.**
There is a greater understanding of some types of communication support need for example sensory impairment than other difficulties which may be more hidden. Also it can be easier to implement changes related to making written information easier to understand than two way person to person communication.

! **Link between Programme and Agency.**

We rely on the Programme's Product Owners to produce systems and processes that are accessible and support inclusive communication. Many colleagues are knowledgeable about accessible design but may have less understanding of inclusive communication and the impact that certain design decisions they make can therefore have. Unlike digital accessibility there is not a recognised standard for people to work towards.

There is a commitment across Agency and Programme to inclusion and accessibility. The challenge is to define exactly what this means and to identify who is responsible for implementing actions to prevent duplication of effort.

We have linked in with Service Managers and other senior colleagues across both Programme and Agency. We aim to present to the Product Owner Forum and Business Analysts. We are working on user stories to help influence change.

! **COVID-19 and impact on clients and stakeholders.**

The impact of COVID-19 on the decisions that organisations are taking on how they interact with staff and clients, and the ways that individuals can interact with each other, can be particularly challenging for people who communicate differently. We will ensure that this is considered throughout Social Security Scotland's recovery planning.

H: Measurement

One of our key challenges is developing a framework for measuring activity and reporting on improvement. There is a lot activity going on but not yet an overall framework against which we can measure and report against our progress.

We have not found an existing framework which we can adapt to meet the needs of Social Security Scotland so we will be developing one from scratch. We intend to use our four principles as the basis for quality standards and measurable indicators to allow us to track our progress.

Our measurement framework needs to consider the experience for both clients and Agency staff. It needs to connect with other measurement frameworks such as the Charter Measurement Framework and the outcomes and indicators being developed for Social Security Scotland's Equality Strategy.

Annex 1: Public Statement of Commitment

The Inclusive Communication Stakeholder Reference Group have worked with us to produce a public statement. The following were directly involved in making it clear to read:

- Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy
- Scottish Autism
- Scottish Consortium on Learning Disabilities
- Trust Housing Association Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Manager
- Citizens Advice Scotland

The statement

"Making Social Security Scotland's service inclusive

We are designing our services so that as many people as possible understand what we do and can communicate with us and access our service in the way they want to.

Our clients, staff and other people we work with understand information and express themselves in many different ways. We will remember this every time we communicate verbally, in writing or face-to-face.*

We will ask people where, when and how they want to receive information and to communicate with us. We will offer the support they need to do this.

Social Security Scotland aims to be a leader in inclusive communication. We will ask people about their experience of dealing with us and we will make changes when needed.

David Wallace, Chief Executive, Social Security Scotland

* Further information

- **verbal** is phone, in English or using an interpreter or a virtual communication app.
- **writing** is email, paper, SMS, text relay, text based apps.
- **face to face** is in English or through an interpreter (BSL or foreign language), and with support from other types of communication specialists when needed."