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# Directorate for Internal Audit and Assurance

## Internal Audit Report

### Social Security Scotland 2021-22

### Productivity and Efficiency

Directorate for Internal Audit and Assurance

Issue Date: 23-08-2022

## Audit Personnel

|                                |            |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Head of Internal Audit:</b> | [Redacted] |
| <b>Internal Audit Manager:</b> | [Redacted] |
| <b>Internal Auditor</b>        | [Redacted] |

## Report Distribution

|  |  |
|--|--|
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| <b>Internal Audit Business Support Hub*</b>          | [Redacted]   |

\* Final Report only

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## Contents

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|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction .....   | 4  |
| 1.1. Introduction .....   | 4  |
| 1.2. Audit Scope .....  | 4  |
| 1.3. Assurance and Recommendations .....                            | 4  |
| 2. Management Action Plan .....                                     | 6  |
| 2.1. Management Action Plan .....                                   | 6  |
| 3. Findings, Good Practice and Improvement Opportunities.....       | 13 |
| 3.1. Positive Observations: .....                                   | 13 |
| 3.2. Findings .....   | 13 |
| Annex A Definition of Assurance and Recommendation Categories ..... | 17 |
| Assurance Levels .....  | 17 |
| Recommendation Priority .....                                       | 17 |
| Annex B – Terms of Reference .....                                  | 18 |

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Introduction

This internal audit review of **Social Security Scotland, Productivity and Efficiency** formed part of the Audit Plan agreed by the Accountable Officer and noted by the Audit and Risk Committee on **09 February 2021**. The Accountable Officer for **Social Security Scotland** is responsible for maintaining a sound system of governance, risk management and system of internal control that support the achievement of the organisations policies, aims and objectives.

### 1.2. Audit Scope

The scope of this review was to evaluate and report on the controls in place to manage the risk surrounding Social Security Scotland's arrangements for measuring and monitoring productivity and efficiency.

The agreed Terms of Reference for this review is attached at [Annex B](#).

### 1.3. Assurance and Recommendations

| Assurance Category       | Limited |        |     |
|--------------------------|---------|--------|-----|
| Recommendations Priority | High    | Medium | Low |
|                          | 0       | 2      | 0   |

We are providing a limited assurance rating, however we did consider providing an insufficient rating as we believe there are significant weaknesses in the current risk, governance and/or control procedures, to the extent that the delivery of objectives is at risk. Exposure to the weaknesses identified is sizeable and requires significant mitigating action. This is because the overall status of productivity and efficiency in the organisation is insufficient, as there has been limited development in this space, and productivity and efficiency will become higher risk as Social Security Scotland matures.

We have determined a limited assurance rating, however, as productivity and efficiency does not currently represent the highest risk to Social Security Scotland, as the organisation is currently focused on implementing new benefits successfully. Successful implementation can be seen in the results of the latest client survey in 2021 with 92% of surveyed clients saying their overall experience was ‘good’ or ‘very good’ and 85% saying their application was handled within a reasonable timeframe. This shows that Social Security Scotland has been able to deliver effective results to clients in terms of both quantity and quality.

As Social Security Scotland’s focus so far has been on implementing new benefits, productivity and efficiency of on-going processing has not been a priority. The organisation, however, has implemented process improvements to benefits, such as the ones in the low income space.

With a view to prioritising and implementing a productivity and efficiency approach, we have raised a limited number of strategic recommendations, and underpinned these with more detailed areas for improvement we feel should be addressed when implementing these recommendations.

As Social Security Scotland is now moving towards a steady state in its maturity journey, and is encountering budgetary constraints this year and as it delivers continuous benefit, monitoring productivity and efficiency will become even more important. This represents an opportunity for Social Security Scotland to implement a cohesive, focused and impactful approach. We understand that the full implementation will likely take time and be iterative, but it will create strong foundations for monitoring of productivity and managing of productivity and efficiency.

Findings are summarised against recommendations made in the [Management Action Plan](#).

Full details of our findings, good practice and improvement opportunities can be found [in section 3 below](#).

Please see [Annex A](#) for the standard explanation of our assurance levels and recommendation priorities.

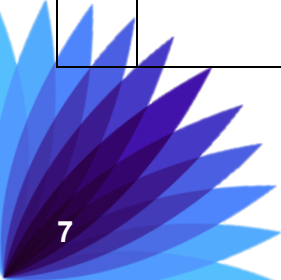
## 2. Management Action Plan

### 2.1. Management Action Plan

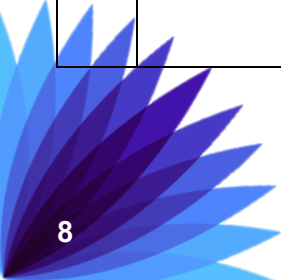
Our findings are set out in the Management Action Plan below

| No. | Issue & Risk   | Recommendation  | Priority        | Management Response & Action Owner   | Action Date |
|-----|--|---|-----------------|--|-------------|
| 1   | <p><u>Strategy, goals and ethos</u></p> <p><b>Issue:</b></p> <p>Social Security Scotland does not have a clear account of what productivity and efficiency mean to them, how this links to their ethos as employer and service provider and to their charter.</p> <p>There is no clear ownership or governance around productivity and efficiency within the operations space.</p> <p>There are various channels by which Social Security Scotland</p> | <p>Social Security Scotland should establish a productivity and efficiency framework and aim to embed it across the organisation.</p> <p>The framework should set out improvement activity identified in 3.2.3 below.</p> | <p><b>M</b></p> | <p><b>Response:</b></p> <p>Management accept that Social Security Scotland still has further work to complete in order to provide a clear strategic approach to understanding productivity and efficiency. There is however significant data capture across the agency which informs decisions on resourcing, continuous improvement and interactions with clients.</p> <p>Management are mindful that this audit captures the specific need to have a clear definition that then informs a structured approach to productivity and efficiency, pulling together significant activities that are being delivered in local practice.</p> <p>The organisations objectives are clearly defined and outcomes articulated within the charter, which continue to</p> |             |

| No. | Issue & Risk   | Recommendation | Priority | Management Response & Action Owner  | Action Date |
|-----|--|----------------|----------|---|-------------|
|     | <p>receives client feedback on its processes. However, there is no account of how the organisation is to use this feedback to inform its productivity and efficiency approach going forwards.</p> <p><b>Risk:</b><br/>There is a risk that Social Security Scotland does not meet their goals if work around productivity and efficiency is not aligned to their overall strategy, will struggle to implement an overarching and consistent approach and does not improve the client's experience.</p> |                |          | <p>inform the agency's approach as we continue to grow the delivery of benefits.</p> <p>It is clear that the next important stage for the agency is to fully understand the extent and use of data, and the level of reporting already in place. This information can then be aligned with a strategic view on our cultural approach to both performance and quality to produce a framework for productivity and efficiency, which will inform agency activities and responses to issues.</p> <p>The agency has already commenced initial work to assess our current reporting abilities with a view of putting in place an interim approach to regular reporting with the aim of capturing productivity and efficiency data, within our current constraints.</p> <p>In addition further scoping work will commence over the next 12 months that will articulate longer term development work</p> |             |

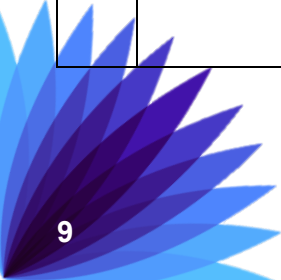


| No. | Issue & Risk | Recommendation | Priority | Management Response & Action Owner  | Action Date           |
|-----|--------------|----------------|----------|---|-----------------------|
|     |              |                |          | <p>on an agency wide approach to productivity and efficiency, linking with work on a Quality Assurance Framework.</p> <p>Therefore the actions set out below should be viewed in this wider context and are considered as steps to achieve our interim objectives whilst we continue to grow at pace. These should provide a platform to develop our longer term strategy and framework.</p> <p><b>Action:</b></p> <p>A – An initial working group will be formed comprising of Senior Management. The aim of this group will be to support and guide activities currently being undertaken. In addition this group will provide focus to future actions in response to audit recommendations.</p> <p>The Agency Leadership Team provides the overarching forum and governance for activities in relation to productivity and efficiency.</p> | <p>September 2022</p> |

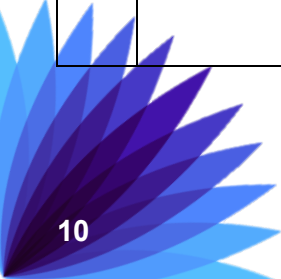




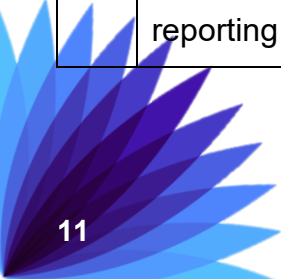
| No. | Issue & Risk | Recommendation | Priority | Management Response & Action Owner  | Action Date   |
|-----|--------------|----------------|----------|---|---|
|     |              |                |          | <p>Agency Leadership Team will conduct the following actions;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engage with the agency Executive Team and agree the proposed approach.</li> <li>2. The Agency Leadership Team recently commissioned Insights &amp; Engagement group, sub group of the Agency Leadership Team, to conduct some discovery work to provide clarity on what data is available and being used in each area of Social Security Scotland. Furthermore to provide an assessment of how data is currently interpreted to understand productivity and efficiency.</li> </ol> <p>This will be considered when available.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. As with action point 2 discovery work has been conducted to review current client insight data and its usage to establish the key factors clients consider important in relation to the efficiency of the service the agency provides.</li> </ol> | <p>September 2022</p> <p>September 2022</p> <p>September 2022</p> |



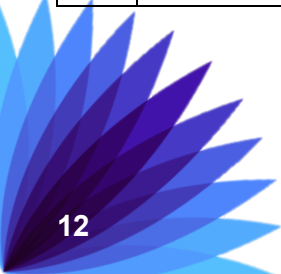
| No. | Issue & Risk | Recommendation | Priority | Management Response & Action Owner   | Action Date  |
|-----|--------------|----------------|----------|--|--|
|     |              |                |          | <p>This information will be considered in conjunction with action point 2 to produce an action plan for the Agency Leadership Team to progress.</p> <p>B – Continue with the current review on the provision of Agency Management Information and establish what the interim requirement would be to include information in relation to productivity and efficiency.</p> <p>C. Engagement and Insights group will identify key internal agency stakeholders to establish what factors are considered important in assessing and understanding productivity, linked to the values of the agency.</p> <p>This will allow support the establishment of some interim measurables.</p> <p>E – Produce the scope to develop an interim framework to support the management of productivity and efficiency.</p> | <p>February 2023</p> <p>February 2023</p> <p>June 2023</p> |



| No. | Issue & Risk  | Recommendation   | Priority | Management Response & Action Owner  | Action Date   |
|-----|---|--|----------|---|---------------|
|     |   |  |          | <p><b>Action Owner:</b><br/>                     Agency Leadership Team<br/>                     [Redacted] – Head of Client Services Operations<br/>                     [Redacted] – Head of People</p>   |               |
| 2   | <p><u>Monitoring and Reporting</u></p> <p><b>Issue:</b><br/>                     Social Security Scotland does not have a clear account of desired monitoring around productivity and efficiency. It therefore cannot give a complete account of the kinds of reporting required to enable such monitoring, and therefore the base data it should be capturing and the analysis it should be performing. Without a thorough understanding and ownership of data and reporting around productivity</p> | <p>Social Security Scotland should produce a data and reporting plan for productivity and efficiency. This should build off the monitoring it requires and include areas identified in 3.2.6 below</p> | M        | <p><b>Response:</b><br/>                     As set out in recommendation 1, Management agree that Social Security Scotland does not have a clear account of the desired monitoring around productivity and efficiency.</p> <p>The agency does capture a significant amount of data and produce different degrees of Management Information. As set out above a review of Management information provisions is currently underway.</p> <p><b>Action:</b><br/>                     A – Agency Leadership Team will consider the findings of the provision of Management Information review and ensure that there are considerations for productivity and efficiency.</p> | November 2023 |



| No. | Issue & Risk  | Recommendation | Priority | Management Response & Action Owner   | Action Date       |
|-----|---|----------------|----------|--|-------------------|
|     | <p>and efficiency, Social Security Scotland will struggle to generate consistent, meaningful and impactful information and change.</p> <p><b>Risk:</b><br/>Social Security Scotland doesn't generate useful or impactful reporting due to unclear level of monitoring, cannot generate the desired reporting because the required data isn't available and is unable to make improvements as it doesn't have the information necessary to understand where improvements are required.</p> |                |          | <p>This should include data to enable monitoring of interim measures which will be established, as the agency conducts wider work to articulate its approach to productivity and efficiency.</p> <p>B. The Agency Leadership Team will consult and share options with the Executive Team in relation to interim measuring and monitoring of productivity &amp; efficiency.</p> <p><b>Action Owner:</b><br/>Agency Leadership team<br/>[Redacted] – Head of Client Services Operations<br/>[Redacted] – Head of People<br/>[Redacted] – Head of Statistics<br/>[Redacted] – Analysis and Insights Unit Head</p> | <p>April 2023</p> |



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## 3. Findings, Good Practice and Improvement Opportunities

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### 3.1. Positive Observations:

#### 3.1.1. Improvements to established benefits

Though there is not an overarching productivity and efficiency approach, Social Security Scotland has and continues to review its processes and software to implement process improvements, and so increase the efficiency of its application processes.

Social Security Scotland has carried out a great amount of work to implement improvements to processes for more established benefits and improve services delivered to clients. This is evidenced by the positive client feedback mentioned above showing that overall clients are very happy with the services delivered by Social Security Scotland.

#### 3.1.2. Impetus for Productivity and Efficiency

Social Security Scotland are aware of the growing need for an established productivity and efficiency process. There is desire and willingness across the organisation to improve this area and start building a robust approach to productivity and efficiency. Social Security Scotland capture data, however there is no robust approach on how this is then used in relation to productivity and efficiency.

### 3.2. Findings

#### 3.2.1. Strategy, goals and ethos

During walkthroughs with key stakeholders within Social Security Scotland, there was not a full and clear account of what productivity and efficiency means for the organisation. In considering what productivity and efficiency means for Social Security Scotland, it should include the role of the organisation's overall goals and strategy, ethos as an employer, requirements under the charter, value for money and client feedback.

For example, it is not clear whether Social Security Scotland should focus on speed of processing, worked hours on processing, accuracy of determinations, client experience or number of redeterminations required, or indeed a combination of all these elements.

As a relatively new organisation, Social Security Scotland is in a position to determine what productivity and efficiency means to it as an organisation and to build a productivity and efficiency monitoring process well orientated to support this view.

### **3.2.2. Ownership and governance**

Through our audit work we have spoken to multiple people across various teams in Social Security Scotland. Though there is interest in productivity and efficiency across these teams, and some work being done, there is no single owner or team for productivity and efficiency. This results in an overall lack of clarity in approach and expected products, and in work being siloed, e.g. reporting being used by one group but not another.

By having a single owner / team for productivity and efficiency, Social Security Scotland can bring together the various aspects that are required for a robust process and better disseminate its outputs for a more impactful and cohesive approach.

### **3.2.3. Role of client feedback**

Social Security Scotland collects feedback from clients through multiple channels and across various teams. The data obtained from the surveys etc. provides useful information on clients' experience of the service, including useful productivity and efficiency metrics such as time taken and accuracy of determination.

Such information can be used to show what the clients consider productive and efficient processing to be, e.g. accuracy of determination being more productive than a quick process, and whether Social Security Scotland is being efficient, e.g. if it is viewed to have long wait times.

Social Security Scotland should determine the role they wish client information to play in their approach to productivity and efficiency, and how they wish such information to feed into any monitoring that is determined necessary.

Social Security Scotland should establish a productivity and efficiency framework and aim to embed it across the organisation (**Recommendation 1- covering points raised in 3.2.1-3.2.3**).

**The framework should set out:**

- What productivity and efficiency means for Social Security Scotland, linking back to overall strategy, ethos as employer and service provider, the charter and value for money. For example a balanced score card could be considered.
- What role client feedback will play in determining what is productive and efficient for the organisation
- The type of monitoring Social Security Scotland desires, e.g. monitoring individuals or teams
- How Social Security Scotland intends to use monitoring to effect increased productivity and efficiency
- Ownership of productivity and efficiency
- Governance and reporting routes for productivity and efficiency metrics

#### **3.2.4. Role of monitoring**

Social Security Scotland does not have a clear account on what monitoring they wish to conduct and how they will use the monitoring to increase productivity and efficiency. For instance, it is not clear if monitoring would be done at a personal, team or even benefit level, and what actions would be required over productive metrics, such as training, improvements to process or targets.

Given the ethos and approach that Social Security Scotland has taken forward as an employer, it will be important to fully consider what they wish to monitor, at what level and to what ends, to ensure they are able to increase productivity whilst maintaining the working environment they aim for.

This observation links back to observation one and three, as a clear account of what it is to be productive and efficient, and how this interacts with Social Security Scotland's ethos as employer and service provider, will greatly inform how monitoring will be performed.

#### **3.2.5. Required Reporting**

As Social Security Scotland does not have a clear account of what monitoring they wish to conduct and what impact it is to have, they cannot give a complete and clear picture of what reporting is required in terms of: what should be reported on, the analysis performed or the sources of data to inform the report.

As there are multiple parties with differing reporting desires, and multiple systems with different data sets, analytical capabilities and focuses (e.g. real time versus historic data), Social Security Scotland should produce a reporting and data plan. A complete approach or plan to reporting which considers all available data and tools would best enable Social Security Scotland to put itself in a strong informative position from which to implement a robust productivity and efficiency process.

### **3.2.6. Current reporting**

Currently there are multiple sources of reporting for Social Security Scotland including SPM, BIRT and COIT. However, the organisation only produces limited productivity and efficiency information, which mainly consists of weekly reporting on the average processing time for each benefit.

Social Security Scotland currently does not obtain more detailed data such as: times for completing individual sub-tasks or the amount of work-hours input into an application, task or sub-task.

Due to the limitations of the data, Social Security Scotland cannot produce more detailed analysis such as if there are any bottlenecks in the processing of benefits applications.

Furthermore, different teams are not aware of the reporting available from systems they do not routinely use, resulting in information being siloed. Without a thorough understanding and ownership of data and reporting around productivity and efficiency, Social Security Scotland will struggle to generate consistent, meaningful and impactful information and change.

Social Security Scotland should produce a data and reporting plan for productivity and efficiency (**Recommendation 2- covering points raised in 3.2.4-3.2.6**).

**This should build off the monitoring it requires and include:**

- the information reporting it requires, considering the information's role throughout the organisation (e.g. operations and workforce planning)
- the base data to be captured to enable this reporting
- what data is currently being captured
- the reporting tools currently in use and the reports these can generate
- a plan for generating the reporting required



## Annex A Definition of Assurance and Recommendation Categories

### Assurance Levels

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Substantial Assurance</b><br><b>Controls are robust and well managed</b>                     | Risk, governance and control procedures are effective in supporting the delivery of any related objectives. Any exposure to potential weakness is low and the materiality of any consequent risk is negligible.                                |
| <b>Reasonable Assurance</b><br><b>Controls are adequate but require improvement</b>             | Some improvements are required to enhance the adequacy and effectiveness of procedures. There are weaknesses in the risk, governance and/or control procedures in place but not of a significant nature.                                       |
| <b>Limited Assurance</b><br><b>Controls are developing but weak</b>                             | There are weaknesses in the current risk, governance and/or control procedures that either do, or could, affect the delivery of any related objectives. Exposure to the weaknesses identified is moderate and being mitigated.                 |
| <b>Insufficient Assurance</b><br><b>Controls are not acceptable and have notable weaknesses</b> | There are significant weaknesses in the current risk, governance and/or control procedures, to the extent that the delivery of objectives is at risk. Exposure to the weaknesses identified is sizeable and requires urgent mitigating action. |

### Recommendation Priority

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>High</b>   | Serious risk exposure or weakness requiring urgent consideration.         |
| <b>Medium</b> | Moderate risk exposure or weakness with need to improve related controls. |
| <b>Low</b>    | Relatively minor or housekeeping issue.                                   |

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**Annex B – Terms of Reference**

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# **Directorate for Internal Audit and Assurance**

## **Internal Audit Terms of Reference**

### **Social Security Scotland 2021-22**

#### **Productivity and Efficiency**

## Key Audit Contacts

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Audit Year:</b>                 | 2021-22  |
| <b>Client Accountable Officer:</b> | David Wallace, Chief Executive   |
| <b>Client Audit Contact(s):</b>    | [Redacted], Head of Business Change<br>[Redacted], Head of Service Management & Service Development<br>[Redacted], Head of People Solutions and Organisation Design<br>[Redacted] Finance and Corporate Services Business Support Team Lead Management<br>[Redacted], Statistician |
| <b>Head of Internal Audit:</b>     | [Redacted],  |
| <b>Internal Audit Manager:</b>     | [Redacted],  |
| <b>Internal Auditor</b>            | [Redacted],  |

## Estimated Reporting Timescale

|                                 |                  |
|---------------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Fieldwork Starts:</b>        | 28 February 2022 |
| <b>Fieldwork Ends:</b>          | 18 March 2022    |
| <b>Draft Report Issued:</b>     | 31 March 2022    |
| <b>Final Report Issued:</b>     | 14 April 2022    |
| <b>Estimated Resource Days:</b> | 20               |

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## 1. Introduction

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- 1.1. This internal audit review forms parts of our planned audit coverage agreed by the Accountable Officer and noted by the Audit and Assurance Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2021.
- 1.2. Social Security Scotland is still a relatively new organisation, productivity and efficiency is and will continue to be impacted by the industry standard agile approach to launching benefits, and their supporting systems and services, with a Minimum Viable Product (MVP). However it is essential that management remain aware of and understand current productivity and efficiency levels and are actively using this information to develop and aid continuous improvement. Such information should also be factored into Social Security Scotland's Corporate Plan and Business Plans.
- 1.3. The Social Security Scotland Strategic Risk Register includes the following mirrored risk from the Social Security Directorate (Programme) risk register:
- IF the Programme fails to limit as far as possible and adequately manage the impact of delivering further short term solutions and manual workarounds to the Social Security Scotland THEN the cumulative effect of these will significantly reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of Social Security Scotland operations RESULTING IN Social Security Scotland being unable to accept further Programme releases, failure to deliver the current expected service to citizens, increased costs and reputational damage to SG and Ministers.*
- 1.4. We held a planning meeting on 13th December 2021 with the Head of Corporate Services, Head of Client Services Operations and the Finance and Corporate Services Business Support Team Lead to discuss the proposed scope of this review.

- 1.5. At the planning meeting it was noted that both Social Security Scotland and Social Security Directorate have some current work focussed on productivity and efficiency. The first piece is in relation to Adult Disability Payment Capacity and Productivity. The second piece is in relation to benchmarking. As such it was suggested that our work aligns and supports these other pieces of work in order to assist with progressing them as well as looking at the wider needs of Social Security Scotland.
- 1.6. Our key risks below have been developed through these discussions and our knowledge of Social Security Scotland and its objectives.

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## 2. Scope

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2.1. To evaluate and report on the controls in place to manage the risk surrounding Social Security Scotland's arrangements for measuring and monitoring productivity and efficiency.

### 2.2. Remit Item 1 – Productivity and Efficiency Projects

Social Security Scotland and Social Security Directorate are currently developing approaches in relation to Productivity and Efficiency. Our review will consider the overall aims of these projects, the current status and timescales for completion, and assess whether there are any gaps in the current work which will result in the projects not delivering output which meets the needs of Social Security Scotland going forward.

#### Key Risks:

- Lack of clear understanding of what productivity and efficiency is, in relation to Social Security Scotland, and how this can be measured.
- Lack of clarity on the overall goal in relation to measuring productivity and efficiency and lack of understanding of the outputs which may result once developed.
- Insufficient tools and management information and reporting available to enable effective and efficient measurement and management of productivity and efficiency impacting Social Security Scotland's ability to achieve continuous improvement and demonstrate achievement of value for money.

- No understanding of current productivity and efficiency levels as a baseline impacting Social Security Scotland's ability to consider as part of workforce planning and decision making.
- Current projects do not have clear aims and objectives which are aligned with the needs of Social Security Scotland and are not progressing and therefore not assisting Social Security Scotland in being able to understand, measure and improve productivity and efficiency performance.
- There are gaps in the current projects leading to output which does not fully meet the needs of Social Security Scotland.
- Insufficient arrangements in place to enable learning from current projects and their outputs, resulting in an inability to benefit from these projects and utilise this to learn and develop for wider organisational needs.

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### 3. Approach

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- 3.1. We will undertake the audit in compliance with the Internal Audit Charter and Memorandum of Understanding agreed between Internal Audit and Social Security Scotland.
- 3.2. Whilst the current Scottish Government remote working requirements continue, this review will be undertaken remotely and we will utilise Objective Connect for sharing documents and screen sharing technology as necessary. Methods of undertaking fieldwork will be amended as appropriate.
- 3.3. At the conclusion of the audit a customer satisfaction questionnaire will be issued to the main client audit contacts. Internal Audit appreciate feedback and to facilitate continuous improvement, we would be grateful if you could complete and return the questionnaire.
- 3.4. Colleagues are reminded of our need for timely access to people and responsiveness to information requests, to enable the reporting timetable to be met.