

Scottish Social Services Council

Future Proofing Programme

Internal Audit report No: 2023/04

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Level of Assurance

In addition to the grading of individual recommendations in the action plan, audit findings are assessed and graded on an overall basis to denote the level of assurance that can be taken from the report. Risk and materiality levels are considered in the assessment and grading process as well as the general quality of the procedures in place.

Gradings are defined as follows:

Good	System meets control objectives.
Satisfactory	System meets control objectives with some weaknesses present.
Requires improvement	System has weaknesses that could prevent it achieving control objectives.
Unacceptable	System cannot meet control objectives.

Action Grades

Priority 1	Issue subjecting the organisation to material risk and which requires to be brought to the attention of management and the Audit and Assurance Committee.
Priority 2	Issue subjecting the organisation to significant risk and which should be addressed by management.
Priority 3	Matters subjecting the organisation to minor risk or which, if addressed, will enhance efficiency and effectiveness.



Management Summary

Overall Level of Assurance

Good	System meets control objectives.
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Risk Assessment

There is no specific risk in relation to the Future Proofing Programme on the Scottish Social Services Council ('SSSC') Strategic Risk Register. However, the Risk 1 description includes narrative which is relevant to the Future Proofing Programme as follows:

Risk 1 - "We fail to ensure that our system of regulation meets the needs of people who use services and workers." (Residual risk level: Moderate).

Background

As an addition to the Internal Audit programme at the SSSC for 2022/23, we were asked to introduce an additional review of the organisation's Future Proofing Programme.

The Project Initiation Document states that the aim of the programme is to "*improve the processes for applying and maintaining registration*". The key benefit of undertaking the work described in the PID is that "*the register is more up to date as registrants find it quicker and easier to apply for and maintain registration*".

The Business case for the programme states that "*Future Proofing Programme (the programme) started in November 2021 and spans registration, qualifications, and the Codes of Practice. The programme aims to make sure that our regulatory system is clear, transparent and raises the standards of practice in the sector. When the programme is completed in April 2024, the programme will introduce changes to make registration easier, create flexible qualifications at the right level and refresh our Codes of Practice. This project focuses on the changes needed to our key operational systems D365, MatterSphere, MySSSC and our Data Factory to assist in the delivery of the aims and benefits of the programme, specifically around the strand 'Review of the Register'*".

As a condition of funding, the Scottish Government conducted an Independent Assurance Review Gate 0 (Strategic Assessment) over the period from 25 July 2022 to 27 July 2022. The purpose of this independent assurance review was to add value and support the SSSC decision making process on the Future Proofing Programme. The outcome of the review was set out in a report to the Senior Responsible Owner (SRO). The Major Investment section of the Scottish Public Finance Manual sets out the responsibilities of the SRO.

The SRO is responsible for implementing the actions in response to the recommendations and for further circulation of the report as necessary. If the review had identified serious deficiencies or difficulties (including probable failure to meet the planned budget) within the project, then the Accountable Officer was required to inform the relevant Minister/s. No serious deficiencies or difficulties were flagged in the SSSC report.

Scottish Government have advised that the next suggested review is Gate 4 (Readiness for Service) in December 2022.



Scope, Objectives and Overall Findings

The table below notes the objective for this review and records the results:

Objective	Findings			
The objective of our audit was to confirm that:		1	2	3
		No. of Agreed Actions		
1. There is sufficient evidence to confirm that the action plan arising from the Scottish Government gateway review has been addressed	Good	-	-	-
2. There has been adequate reporting and discussion at the Programme Board around the action plan arising from the gateway review	Good	-	-	-
3. The findings of the gateway review have been adequately reflected in the project risk register	Good	-	-	-
4. There is sufficient evidence to support a report to Council recommending that the project proceed to the next phase.	Good	-	-	-
Overall Level of Assurance	Good	-	-	-
		System meets control objectives.		

Audit Approach

The Senior Responsible Officer and the Programme Manager were interviewed, and the body of evidence compiled to demonstrate that the action plan arising from the gateway review had been adequately addressed was then reviewed.



Summary of Main Findings

Strengths

- We reviewed each of the nine recommendations arising from the Scottish Government's Independent Assurance Review Gate 0 (Strategic Assessment) and discussed these recommendations with the Senior Responsible Officer and the Programme Manager. A body of evidence was agreed, and this was subsequently provided and was subject to review to confirm that the actions had been progressed;
- The minutes of the Future Proofing Programme Sponsorship Group meeting on 7 September 2022 confirm discussion around the independent review and the action plan, under the Programme Highlights heading;
- A full review of the risk register was completed on 4 August 2022 with the project leads, SRO and programme manager. This resulted in a number of new identified risks, rewording to some existing risks and some risks being closed; and
- From the interviews with the SRO and Programme Manager, and our subsequent review of the documentation described under Objective 1 above, we are satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to support a report to Council recommending that the project proceed to the next phase, bearing in mind the continuing uncertainty around the carry forward position and the funding position beyond the current financial year 2022/23, which will require careful monitoring going forward in order to protect the interests of the SSSC.

Weaknesses

- There were no weaknesses identified from the work performed on this review.

Acknowledgments

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff at the SSSC who helped us during our review.

Main Findings and Action Plan

Objective 1: There is sufficient evidence to confirm that the action plan arising from the Scottish Government gateway review has been addressed

We reviewed each of the nine recommendations arising from the Scottish Government's Independent Assurance Review Gate 0 (Strategic Assessment) and discussed these recommendations with the Senior Responsible Officer and the Programme Manager.

A body of evidence was agreed, and this was subsequently provided and was subject to review.

The evidence examined for each recommendation was as follows:

Recommendation 1 – “The fees consultation should have a specific stakeholder engagement and communication strategy and plan that clearly separates the consultation for the Future Proofing Programme. This work should be presented as a ‘business as usual’ activity”.

We reviewed the Communications Plan produced for the programme. This contained a stakeholder analysis for phase 1 of the programme and set out key stakeholders; the nature of their stake in the project; the type and purpose of the engagement; what was required from these stakeholders: the method of engagement; the timing and frequency of engagement; responsibilities; and key messages which required to be communicated to each stakeholder.

We also reviewed the email of 17 August 2022 from the Office of the Chief Social Work Adviser confirming that “*the Minister has agreed to delay any consultation on registration fees increases*” and advising that this position would be reviewed again “*in late 2023*”.

Recommendation 2 - The Programme Team should produce an Outline Business Case (OBC) to formally set out the agreement from Council to justify the need for funding and the benefits that it will deliver.

We reviewed the document ‘Business Case Future Proofing Register – System Changes’ and confirmed that this is a comprehensive document, which has been prepared in line with good programme management discipline. We also reviewed the minutes of the Future Proofing Programme Sponsorship Group meeting on 7 September 2022, which confirms that the business case – systems development had been presented to the Programme Board and advised that three options had been considered within the business case, with option three being the recommended option.

Recommendation 3 - The SRO should secure SSSC funding commitments for the Programme for 2023/24 and 2024/25

At the date of our fieldwork in September 2022, we were advised that there was no agreement in place regarding the carry forward position on funding. However, we did review the minutes of the Future Proofing Programme Sponsorship Group meeting on 7 September 2022, which contains an agenda item on the budget position. We also reviewed email correspondence in relation to the OCSWA/SSSC Monthly Liaison meetings which confirms ongoing dialogue around the budget position.



Objective 1: There is sufficient evidence to confirm that the action plan arising from the Scottish Government gateway review has been addressed (Continued)

Recommendation 4 - The Programme Team should continue to improve the articulation of intended benefits and to develop robust baseline measures to demonstrate success being achieved. In addition, the Programme Team should also ensure that dis-benefits of unintended consequences are captured, monitored and reported.

We reviewed the document prepared to describe the customer benefits of a review of the register, which details:

- Aims
- Benefits
- Measures
- Source
- Baseline Position
- Expected Benefit
- Expected Date
- Measurement frequency

Recommendation 5 - The SRO should confirm the mechanism to achieve timely escalation and decision making by the Council when there is not a 'quorum' at the Programme Board meeting.

We reviewed version 1.2 of the Future Proofing Programme Sponsor Group terms of reference, last updated on 17 August 2022 to reflect the governance arrangements in line with Independent Assurance Review recommendation. We confirmed that the terms of reference now reflect the mechanism to achieve timely escalation and decision making by the Council when there is not a 'quorum' at the Programme Board meeting. We noted that tolerances had yet to be defined. These terms of reference were presented to the Future Proofing Programme Sponsor Group meeting on 7 September 2022.

Recommendation 6 - The SRO (with support from the Council) should continue to work closely with its Scottish Government Sponsor to press for timely laying of the supporting amendments.

We reviewed documentation which demonstrates ongoing dialogue between OCSWA and SSSC via the Monthly Liaison meetings, although we noted that the topic of timely laying of the supporting amendments was not a separate agenda item for discussion.

We also reviewed the assurance report for the period to 31 July 2022 to confirm reporting on this issue to Council.

Objective 1: There is sufficient evidence to confirm that the action plan arising from the Scottish Government gateway review has been addressed (Continued)

Recommendation 7 - The Programme should critically review and prioritise work into the areas it has direct control and those that need legislative changes. A phased delivery approach should be adopted. This would initially focus on what can be achieved this financial year and what needs to wait until next year.

We reviewed the output from the workshop session held on 6 September 2022 which was convened to specifically address this point.

Recommendation 8 – The Programme Team should further develop the current programme plans to detail resources required for each task and identify the critical paths of the Programme to successful completion.

We reviewed an extract from the programme plans which demonstrated the individual projects within the projects; described the individual tasks within each project; and the action owners. We also reviewed an extract from the Gantt Chart used to track completion of these tasks.

Recommendation 9 - A full review of the risks and their scoring would be beneficial at this stage.

We reviewed the Future Proofing Risk Register Monitoring and Review paper which was presented to the 7 September 2022 meeting of the Future Proofing Programme Sponsor Group, together with the updated Future Proofing Programme risk register as at August 2022.

Objective 2: There has been adequate reporting and discussion at the Programme Board around the action plan arising from the gateway review

The minutes of the Future Proofing Programme Sponsorship Group meeting on 7 September 2022 confirm discussion around the independent review and the action plan, under the Programme Highlights heading. The Programme Manager was tasked with sending the assurance review documents and the action plan to Council members by 14 September 2022.

Objective 3: The findings of the gateway review have been adequately reflected in the project risk register

A full review of the risk register was completed on 4 August 2022 with the project leads, SRO and programme manager. This resulted in a number of new identified risks, rewording to some existing risks and some risks being closed. As a result of the Scottish Government decision to revoke authority to consult on fees in this financial year, two risks relating to the consultation were also closed following the risk register review. The risk register paper submitted to the Future Proofing Programme Sponsorship Group meeting on 7 September 2022 states that the risk register will be reviewed by the Future Proofing Programme Board at each future meeting with comments and updates on any scoring of 16 or more.

Therefore we are comfortable that there are mechanisms in place to allow the risks arising from the gateway review to be captured within the risk register and monitored via the Future Proofing Programme Sponsorship Group meetings.

Objective 4: There is sufficient evidence to support a report to Council recommending that the project proceed to the next phase.

From the interviews with the SRO and Programme Manager, and our subsequent review of the documentation described under Objective 1 above, we are satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to support a report to Council recommending that the project proceed to the next phase, bearing in mind the continuing uncertainty around the carry forward position and the funding position beyond the current financial year 2022/23, which will require careful monitoring going forward in order to protect the interests of the SSSC.

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