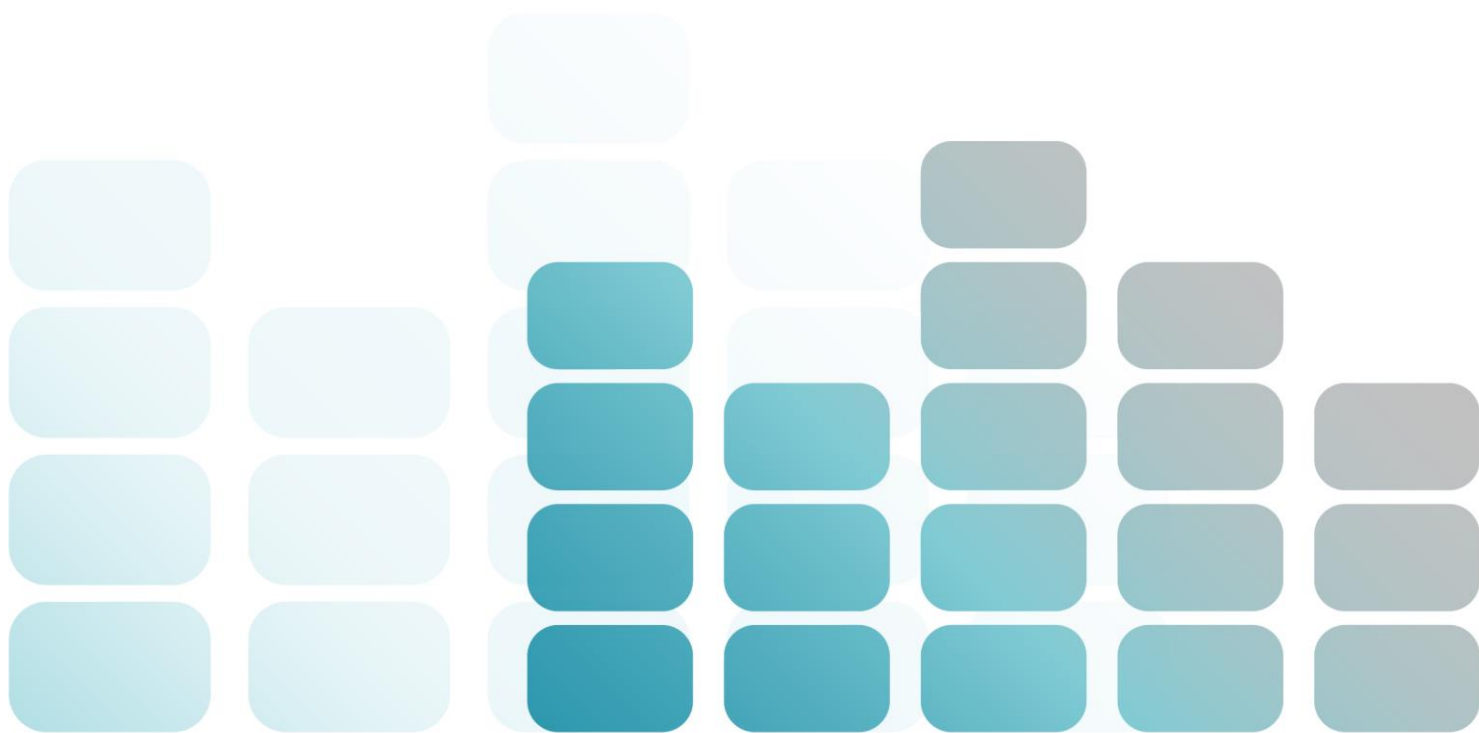


# Social Security Scotland

Annual Audit Plan 2024/25



 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Prepared for Social Security Scotland  
February 2025

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# Introduction

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## Purpose of the Annual Audit Plan

1. The purpose of this Annual Audit Plan is to provide an overview of the planned scope and timing of the 2024/25 audit of Social Security Scotland annual report and accounts. It outlines the audit work planned to meet the audit requirements set out in [auditing standards](#) and the [Code of Audit Practice](#), including supplementary guidance.

## Appointed auditor and independence

2. Pauline Gillen, of Audit Scotland, has been appointed by the Auditor General for Scotland as the external auditor of Social Security Scotland for the period from 2022/23 until 2026/27. The 2024/25 financial year is therefore the third of the five-year audit appointment.

3. Pauline Gillen and the audit team are independent of Social Security Scotland in accordance with relevant ethical requirements, including the Financial Reporting Council's Ethical Standard. This standard imposes stringent rules to ensure the independence and objectivity of auditors. Audit Scotland has robust arrangements in place to ensure compliance with ethical standards. The arrangements are overseen by the Executive Director of Innovation and Quality, who serves as Audit Scotland's Ethics Partner.

4. The Ethical Standard requires auditors to communicate any relationships that may affect the independence and objectivity of the audit team. There are no such relationships pertaining to the audit of Social Security Scotland to communicate.

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# Audit scope and responsibilities

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## Scope of the audit

**5.** The audit is performed in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice, including supplementary guidance, International Standards on Auditing (UK), and relevant legislation. These set out the requirements for the scope of the audit which includes:

- An audit of the financial statements and an opinion on whether they give a true and fair view and are free from material misstatement, including the regularity of income and expenditure.
- An opinion on statutory other information published with the financial statements in the annual report and accounts, the Performance Report, and the Governance Statement, and an opinion on the audited part of the Remuneration and Staff Report.
- Conclusions on Social Security Scotland's arrangements in relation to the wider scope areas: Financial Management, Financial Sustainability, Vision, Leadership, and Governance, and Use of Resources to Improve Outcomes.
- Reporting on Social Security Scotland's arrangements for securing Best Value.
- Provision of an Annual Audit Report setting out significant matters identified from the audit of the annual report and accounts and the wider scope areas specified in the Code of Audit Practice.

## Responsibilities

**6.** The Code of Audit Practice sets out the respective responsibilities of Social Security Scotland and the auditor. A summary of the key responsibilities is outlined below.

### Auditor's responsibilities

**7.** The responsibilities of auditors in the public sector are established in the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. These include providing an independent opinion on the financial statements and other information reported within the annual report and accounts, and concluding on Social Security Scotland's arrangements in place for the wider scope areas.

## Social Security Scotland's responsibilities

8. Social Security Scotland has primary responsibility for ensuring proper financial stewardship of public funds, compliance with relevant legislation and establishing effective arrangements for governance, propriety and regularity that enables it to successfully deliver its objectives. The features of proper financial stewardship include:

- Establishing arrangements to ensure the proper conduct of its affairs.
- Preparation of an annual report and accounts, comprising financial statements and other information that gives a true and fair view.
- Establishing arrangements for the prevention and detection of fraud, error and irregularities, and bribery and corruption.
- Implementing arrangements to ensure its financial position is soundly based.
- Making arrangements to secure Best Value.
- Establishing an internal audit function.

# Audit of the annual report and accounts

## Introduction

**9.** The audit of the annual report and accounts is driven by materiality and the risks of material misstatement in the financial statements, with greater attention being given to the significant risks of material misstatement. This chapter outlines materiality, the significant risks of material misstatement that have been identified, and the impact these have on the planned audit procedures.

## Materiality

**10.** The concept of materiality is applied by auditors in planning and performing an audit, and in evaluating the effect of any uncorrected misstatements on the financial statements or other information reported in the annual report and accounts.

**11.** Broadly, the concept of materiality is to determine whether matters identified during the audit could reasonably be expected to influence the decisions of users of the financial statements. Auditors set a monetary threshold when determining materiality, although some issues may be considered material by their nature. Therefore, materiality is ultimately a matter of the auditor's professional judgement.

**12.** The materiality levels determined for the audit of Social Security Scotland are outlined in [Exhibit 1](#).

## Exhibit 1

### 2024/25 Materiality levels for Social Security Scotland

Materiality	Amount
<b>Materiality</b> – based on an assessment of the needs of users of the financial statements and the nature of Social Security Scotland's operations, the benchmark used to determine materiality is gross expenditure based on the forecasts for 2024/25. Materiality has been set at 1% of the benchmark.	£63 million
<b>Performance materiality</b> – this acts as a trigger point. If the aggregate of misstatements identified during the audit exceeds performance materiality, this could indicate that further audit procedures are required. Using professional judgement, performance materiality has been set at 60% of planning materiality.	£38 million

Materiality	Amount
<b>Reporting threshold</b> – all misstatements greater than the reporting threshold will be reported.	£500,000

Source: Audit Scotland

## Significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements

**13.** The risk assessment process draws on the audit team's cumulative knowledge of Social Security Scotland, including the nature of its operations and its significant transaction streams, the system of internal control, governance arrangements and processes, and developments that could impact on its financial reporting.

**14.** Based on the risk assessment process, significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements have been identified and these are summarised in [Exhibit 2, page 8](#). These are the risks which have the greatest impact on the planned audit approach, and the planned audit procedures in response to the risks are outlined in Exhibit 2.

**15.** The risk assessment process is an iterative and dynamic process. The assessment of risks set out in this Annual Audit Plan and Exhibit 2 may change as more information and evidence is obtained over the course of the audit. Where such changes occur, these will be reported to Social Security Scotland and those charged with governance, where relevant.

## Exhibit 2

### Significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements

Risk of material misstatement	Planned audit response
<p><b>Fraud caused by management override of controls</b></p> <p>Management is in a unique position to perpetrate fraud because of management's ability to override controls that otherwise appear to be operating effectively.</p>	<p>The audit team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate the design and implementation of controls over journal entry processing.</li> <li>• Make inquiries of individuals involved in the financial reporting process about inappropriate or unusual activity relating to the processing of journal entries.</li> <li>• Test journals entries, focusing on those that are assessed as higher risk, such as those affecting revenue and expenditure recognition around the year-end.</li> <li>• Evaluate any significant transactions outside the normal course of business.</li> <li>• Assess the adequacy of controls in place for identifying and disclosing related party relationships and transactions in the financial statements.</li> <li>• Assess changes to the methods and underlying assumptions used to prepare accounting estimates and assess these for evidence of management bias.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Risk of material misstatement caused by fraud and error in benefit expenditure delivered by DWP</b></p> <p>Practice Note 10 extends the requirements of ISA 240 to include consideration of fraud in expenditure for public bodies. For Social Security Scotland this is a significant and extensive risk given the underlying legislation for the different benefit streams which gives rise to regularity issues for the £2.4 billion expenditure administered by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).</p> <p>The complexity of social security systems, inter-relationships between devolved and delegated assistance and the volume of payments means that there is an inherent risk of error and fraud.</p>	<p>The audit team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess the audited financial summary prepared by the DWP.</li> <li>• Review 'agreed upon procedures' completed by the National Audit Office (NAO) on our behalf.</li> <li>• Review the DWP published estimates for fraud and error levels and consider appropriateness for Social Security Scotland.</li> <li>• Review benefit expenditure against independent forecasts and investigate any significant variances.</li> </ul>



Risk of material misstatement	Planned audit response
<p><b>Risk of material misstatement caused by fraud and error in benefit expenditure delivered by Social Security Scotland</b></p> <p>The value of benefits administered by Social Security Scotland has increased significantly in 2024/25. Social Security Scotland's understanding of the fraud and error that exists within the range of benefits it delivers is still in development. There is a risk that fraud and error arrangements are not developed at the same pace as the roll-out of new benefits. If Social Security Scotland is unable to accurately disclose the level of fraud and error that exists there may be an impact on the audit opinion.</p>	<p>The audit team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the design and implementation of internal controls over benefits administered by Social Security Scotland, including case transfer, with a focus on prevention and detection of fraud and error.</li> <li>• Review developments in fraud and error prevention and detection arrangements.</li> <li>• Engage with management to assess progress with the development of arrangements to estimate levels of fraud and error.</li> <li>• Complete detailed testing of benefit payments.</li> </ul>

Source: Audit Scotland

**16.** Social Security Scotland use the Scottish Government's general ledger and supporting systems. On 1 October 2024, the Scottish Government replaced the existing financial and eHR systems with the new Oracle cloud-based system. Our risk assessment work to date has not identified a significant risk of material misstatement around the implementation of the new system. However, we will continue to monitor the use of the new system throughout the audit. We will also consider the findings of the work undertaken by the Scottish Government audit team around the controls in place for the data transfer to Oracle.

## Key audit matters

**17.** The Code of Audit Practice requires public sector auditors to communicate key audit matters. Key audit matters are those matters, that in the auditor's professional judgement, are of most significance to the audit of the financial statements and require most attention when performing the audit.

**18.** In determining key audit matters, auditors consider:

- Areas of higher or significant risk of material misstatement.
- Areas where significant judgement is required, including accounting estimates that are subject to a high degree of estimation uncertainty.

- Significant events or transactions that occurred during the year.

**19.** The matters determined to be key audit matters will be communicated in the Annual Audit Report. [Exhibit 2](#) outlines the significant risks of material misstatement to the financial statements that have been identified, including those that have greatest impact on the planned audit procedures and require most attention when performing the audit.

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# Wider scope and Best Value

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## Introduction

**20.** Reflecting the fact that public money is involved, the Code of Audit Practice requires that public audit is planned and undertaken from a wider perspective than in the private sector. The wider scope audit set out by the Code of Audit Practice broadens the audit of the annual report and accounts to include consideration of additional aspects or risks in four wider scope areas, which are summarised below:

- **Financial Management** – this means having sound budgetary processes. Factors that can impact on Social Security Scotland being able to secure sound financial management include the strength of the financial management culture, accountability, and arrangements to prevent and detect fraud, error and other irregularities, bribery and corruption.
- **Financial Sustainability** – this means looking forward over the medium and longer term in planning the services to be delivered and how they will be delivered effectively. This is assessed by considering Social Security Scotland’s medium- to longer-term planning for service delivery.
- **Vision, Leadership and Governance** – this means having a clear vision and strategy, with set priorities within the vision and strategy. This is assessed by considering the clarity of plans in place to deliver the vision and strategy and the effectiveness of the governance arrangements to support delivery.
- **Use of Resources to Improve Outcomes** – this means using resources to meet stated outcomes and improvement objectives through effective planning and working with partners and communities. This is assessed by considering Social Security Scotland’s arrangements for ensuring resources are deployed to improve strategic outcomes, meet the needs of service users, and deliver continuous improvement.

**21.** A conclusion on the effectiveness and appropriateness of arrangements Social Security Scotland has in place for each of the wider scope areas will be reported in the Annual Audit Report.

## Duty of Best Value

**22.** The [Scottish Public Finance Manual](#) (SPFM) explains that Accountable Officers have a specific responsibility to ensure that arrangements have

been made to secure Best Value. [Best Value in public services: guidance for Accountable Officers](#) is issued by Scottish Ministers and sets out their duty to ensure that arrangements are in place to secure Best Value in public services.

**23.** Consideration of the arrangements Social Security Scotland has in place to secure Best Value will be carried out alongside the wider scope audit, and a conclusion on the arrangements Social Security Scotland has in place will be reported in the Annual Audit Report.

**24.** Auditors may also carry out specific audit work covering the seven Best Value characteristics set out in the SPFM. The risk assessment process did not identify a need to carry out specific audit work on any of the characteristics. However, auditors are required to carry out a review of the 'fairness and equality' characteristic at least once during the audit appointment, and this will be carried out during the 2024/25 audit.

### Significant wider scope and Best Value risks

**25.** Our planned work on wider scope responsibilities is risk based and proportionate. In summary, our wider scope audit will focus on the following risks:

- **Financial Sustainability:** Social Security Scotland is facing increasing financial pressures to reduce operating expenditure as the implementation of devolved benefits continues and services transition from the Scottish Government Social Security Programme (the programme). There is a shared understanding with the programme that longer-term financial planning for an Agile project of this scale is challenging and brings increased uncertainty the further into the future costs are projected.
- **Programme Closure:** The programme delivery life cycle is due to end in 2026 and responsibility for investment in the future development and management of the processes and systems that enable the ongoing delivery of social security payments will transition to Social Security Scotland. Social Security Scotland will have to ensure there is sufficient capability, capacity and funding to run, maintain and change those services once the programme is closed.
- **Systems Development:** The main system used by Social Security Scotland to administer benefits is the Social Programme Management (SPM) case management system. As the benefits administered by Social Security Scotland increase in volume and complexity, the need for robust system controls which prevent and detect fraud and error increases.

The fast pace of Agile system development is achieved by focusing on the core 'must-have' system functionality to allow a benefit to be launched in an acceptable way and in line with the planned

timescales. The technical work required to implement the planned system releases and updates needs to be well managed to ensure the system supports the effective delivery of benefits.

- **Performance Management Arrangements:** Social Security Scotland needs an evidence based assessment of performance to be able to demonstrate value for money and support the measurement of the social security system's impact on outcomes. Performance management arrangements continue to evolve and the 2024/25 Business Plan includes a commitment to develop and publish a Quality and Performance Framework.

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# Reporting arrangements, timetable and audit fee

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## Audit outputs

**26.** The outputs from the 2024/25 audit include:

- This Annual Audit Plan.
- An Independent Auditor's Report to Social Security Scotland, the Auditor General for Scotland, and the Scottish Parliament setting out opinions on the annual report and accounts.
- An Annual Audit Report to Social Security Scotland and the Auditor General for Scotland setting out significant matters identified from the audit of the annual report and accounts, conclusions from the wider scope and Best Value audit, and recommendations, where required.

**27.** The matters to be reported in the outputs will be discussed with Social Security Scotland for factual accuracy before they are issued. All outputs from the audit will be published on Audit Scotland's website, apart from the Independent Auditor's Report, which is included in the audited annual report and accounts.

**28.** Target dates for the audit outputs are set by the Auditor General for Scotland. In setting the target dates for the audit outputs, consideration is given to the target date for approving the annual report and accounts, which is 31 August 2025 for central government agencies and non-ministerial departments.

**29.** The audit team will be unable to achieve the target date of 31 August 2025 for issuing the Independent Auditor's Report and Annual Audit Report. This is because the audit of Social Security Scotland depends on assurances from the National Audit Office over the transactions and balances for benefits administered by the DWP on behalf of Social Security Scotland. These assurances are not available until after the target date. The audit team are working towards completion of the audit by the later date of 30 September 2025.

## Audit timetable

**30.** Achieving the timetable for production of the annual report and accounts, supported by complete and accurate working papers, is critical

to delivery of the audit to agreed target dates. [Exhibit 3](#) includes a timetable for the audit, which has been agreed with management. Agreed target dates will be kept under review as the audit progresses, and any changes required, and their potential impact, will be discussed with Social Security Scotland and reported to those charged with governance, where required.

### Exhibit 3

#### 2024/25 audit timetable

Audit activity	Target date
Issue of Annual Audit Plan	31 January 2025
<b>Annual report and accounts:</b>	
Submission of unaudited annual report and accounts and all working papers to audit team	23 June 2025
Issue of draft annual audit report for clearance discussion	3 September 2025
Latest date for audit clearance meeting	9 September 2025
Agreement of audited and unsigned annual report and accounts	17 September 2025
Issue of draft Letter of Representation, proposed Independent Auditor's Report, and proposed Annual Audit Report	19 September 2025
Approval by those charged with governance and signing of audited annual report and accounts	30 September 2025
Signing of Independent Auditor's Report and issue of Annual Audit Report	30 September 2025
Latest date for signing of SG Consolidation return	To be confirmed

Source: Audit Scotland

### Audit fee

**31.** Social Security Scotland's audit fee is determined in line with Audit Scotland's fee setting arrangements. The proposed audit fee for the 2024/25 audit is £446,920 (2023/24: £438,680).

**32.** In setting the audit fee, it is assumed that Social Security Scotland has effective governance arrangements in place and the complete annual report and accounts will be provided for audit in line with the agreed timetable. The audit fee assumes there will be no significant changes to the planned scope of the audit. Where the audit cannot proceed as

planned, for example, due to incomplete or inadequate working papers, the audit fee may need to be increased.



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# Other matters

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## Internal audit

**33.** Social Security Scotland is responsible for establishing an internal audit function as part of an effective system of internal control. As part of the audit, the audit team will obtain an understanding of internal audit, including its nature, responsibilities, and activities.

**34.** While internal audit and external audit have differing roles and responsibilities, external auditors may seek to rely on the work of internal audit where it is considered appropriate. A review of internal audit's 2024/25 audit plan was carried out to identify if there were any areas where the audit team could rely on its work. The audit team concluded it will not rely on internal audit's work. However, the audit team will review internal audit's reports and assess if there is any impact on the audit.

## Audit quality

**35.** Audit Scotland is committed to the consistent delivery of high-quality audit. Audit quality requires ongoing attention and improvement to keep pace with external and internal changes. Details of the arrangements in place for the delivery of high-quality audits is available from the [Audit Scotland website](#).

**36.** The International Standards on Quality Management (ISQM) applicable to Audit Scotland for 2024/25 audits are:

- ISQM (UK) 1, which deals with an audit organisation's responsibilities to design, implement, and operate a system of quality management (SoQM) for audits. Audit Scotland's SoQM consists of a variety of components, such as: governance arrangements and culture to support audit quality, compliance with ethical requirements, ensuring Audit Scotland is dedicated to high-quality audit through engagement performance and resourcing arrangements, and ensuring there are robust quality monitoring arrangements in place. Audit Scotland carries out an annual evaluation of its SoQM and has concluded it complies with this standard.
- ISQM (UK) 2, which sets out arrangements for conducting engagement quality reviews, which are performed by senior management not involved in an audit, to review significant judgements and conclusions reached by the audit team, and the appropriateness of proposed audit opinions on high-risk audits.

**37.** To monitor quality at an individual audit level, Audit Scotland carries out internal quality reviews on a sample of audits. Additionally, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England and Wales (ICAEW) carries out independent quality reviews on a sample of audits.

**38.** Actions to address deficiencies identified by internal and external quality reviews are included in a rolling Quality Improvement Action Plan, which is used to support continuous improvement. Progress with implementing planned actions is monitored on a regular basis by Audit Scotland's Quality and Ethics Committee.

**39.** Audit Scotland may periodically seek the views of Social Security Scotland on the quality of audit services provided. The audit team would also welcome feedback at any time.

# Social Security Scotland

Annual Audit Plan 2024/25



Audit Scotland, 4th Floor, 102 West Port, Edinburgh EH3 9DN  
Phone: 0131 625 1500 Email: [info@audit.scot](mailto:info@audit.scot)  
[www.audit.scot](http://www.audit.scot)