The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Leslie Evans
Permanent Secretary
Scottish Government

By e-mail only

Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee
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The Scottish Parliament
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5th March 2019

Dear Ms Evans,

The 2017/18 audit of the Scottish Social Services Council - Governance of public sector ICT projects

As you are aware, at its meeting on 7 February, the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee took evidence from the Auditor General for Scotland on her report "The 2017/18 audit of Scottish Social Services Council – Governance and transparency". Following the evidence session, the Committee agreed to take evidence from the chief executive of the Scottish Social Services Council and from the Scottish Government sponsor department.

The Committee also agreed that it wished to hear from you and the Director Digital on the broader issues to which the audit gave rise. In particular, you will be aware that this Committee (and its predecessor committees) has often expressed frustration that failings in public sector ICT projects has been a regular theme in its scrutiny of audit reports.

The Committee understands that you are unable to attend the evidence session on 14 March. However, it is keen to obtain your view on the broader governance issues in respect of public sector ICT projects. As such, in advance of the session, the Committee is seeking clarification on the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to address these issues, which were aired during the evidence session on 7 February. These included—

- the need to ensure that the preparatory work undertaken on IT projects is thorough and detailed, including having a clear scope, budget and timescale for the programme and assessing and managing the anticipated risks; (see Col 3)

- awareness of and use by public sector bodies of existing guidance, good practice materials, tools and checklists that have been developed in relation to managing ICT projects; (see Col 8)
- the difficulties experienced by the public sector in recruiting and retaining staff with the required technical IT skills; (see Col 8);
- the need to ensure that smaller projects and smaller public bodies are also subject to a similar governance framework to that developed by the chief information officer; (Col 9)
- whether and the extent to which smaller bodies are able to access Scottish Government core expertise; (see Cols 12)
- the need to ensure that public bodies have the skills to identify when they need to recruit external IT expertise and where to recruit it from; (see Col 12)
- the reasons why public sector bodies are apparently still failing to recognise that IT projects are high risk in terms of governance and skills; (see Col 13)
- the variety in support that public bodies are receiving from their respective Scottish Government sponsorship department in respect of IT projects. (see Col 14)

The Committee would welcome your response to these issues **in advance of the evidence session on 14 March**. The clerks will be in contact in respect of the timing for receipt of the submission.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Marra MSP
Convener