The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Leslie Evans
Permanent Secretary
Scottish Government

By e-mail only

**Public Audit and Post-legislative
Scrutiny Committee**
Room T3.60
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Direct Tel: (0131) 348 5390
(RNID Typetalk calls welcome)
Email: papls.committee@parliament.scot

28 March 2019

Dear Ms Evans,

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

Thank you for your letter of 8 March, which provides a response to a number of the broader issues relating to ICT public sector projects that had been raised during the scrutiny by the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee of the Auditor General for Scotland's report "The 2017/18 audit of Scottish Social Services Council – Governance and transparency".

As you are aware, at its meeting on 14 March the Committee took evidence from the Accountable Officer of the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and then from Paul Johnston, Director-General, Education, Communities and Justice, Colin Cook, Director Digital and Michael Chalmers, Director for Children and Families from the Scottish Government.

Following the evidence session, the Committee agreed to write to you again to highlight a number of specific issues of concern.

Joined-up Government

In your response to the Committee of 8 March, you set out the role of the Government sponsorship department in respect of IT projects.

The Committee sought to explore during the evidence session the extent to which officials from the sponsorship department had worked with officials within the Digital Transformation team and the office of the chief information officer to support SSSC during the development of its ICT project. In response to a question as to whether all three teams had had a joint meeting, Paul Johnston replied that: "Yes, I think that they did."

Michael Chalmers further clarified that—

"However…, when we reflected on it, we accepted that there should have been better communication between our sponsor team and the teams that you mentioned. They should have spoken more and had fuller discussions."

In his evidence to the Committee, Paul Johnston advised that it was the responsibility of the sponsorship department to co-ordinate the different parts of the Scottish Government in this kind of case.

The Committee is concerned about the lack of a joined-up Scottish Government approach in this instance. Paul Johnston advised the Committee that he is convening a session for sponsor leads across his areas of responsibility with input from Audit Scotland, to ensure that there is clarity on the role that sponsor teams adopt in their support and scrutiny of sponsored bodies. The Committee supports this development and seeks clarification as to whether this kind of session is planned across all directorates in the Scottish Government with a sponsorship function.

Governance issues

As you know, the focus of the Auditor General's section 22 report on the SSSC was on the governance of the ICT project. In her evidence to the Committee, Lorraine Gray, chief executive of the SSSC acknowledged that there should have a been a better business case and that reporting to the board and recording decisions could have been improved. She told the Committee—

"We accept that mistakes were made on governance issues and programme management, that there should have been a better business case at the beginning and that there should have been more detailed reporting to the council."

The Committee notes above the work that Paul Johnston is undertaking in this directorate to remind sponsorship departments about their roles and responsibilities. The Committee is seeking clarification on the current guidance in place for sponsorship departments to ensure that they are providing effective challenge and scrutiny of the bodies for which they are responsible and whether any further steps will be taken to ensure that all sponsorship departments across the Scottish Government are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

IT capacity and skills

In your letter to the Committee of 8 March, you set out the steps that the Scottish Government is taking to seek to improve its ability to attract and retain specialist IT staff.

During the evidence session, the Committee expressed concern about the level of IT skills within SSSC and the continuity of such skills. Lorraine Gray told the Committee that—

"The first contractor left because there were so many challenges around shared services. The second contractor, who came from the west, left when they were

offered a position in an organisation. The contractor that we have now will stay with us, until we bring in a permanent solution next year, for which we now have a budget."

It would be helpful if you could outline specifically how the initiatives that you describe in your letter; that is, the Digital, Data and Technology Profession, the Scottish Digital Academy and the Digital Fellowship Programme, will address the kind of difficulties experienced by the SSSC in this case, and by other bodies within the public sector, which are struggling to recruit and retain specialised IT staff who are capable of leading on complex public sector IT projects.

I would be grateful if I could receive a response to this letter **by Tuesday 16 April**.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Marra MSP
Convener