

Chapter 29

Social Services—Protecting Children-in-Care Information in the Linkin System

1.0 MAIN POINTS

By November 2020, the Ministry of Social Services fully addressed the remaining recommendation first made in our 2016 audit—to update its Linkin system to better protect the Ministry from known security vulnerabilities. The Linkin system is up-to-date and supported at November 2020.

The Ministry uses Linkin, an electronic case management system, to support the delivery of its programs and services for children-in-care. Linkin contains confidential information about children-in-care (and their families).

Keeping business critical systems, like Linkin, up-to-date makes them less susceptible to compromise and failure.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes our second follow-up audit of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2016.

Our *2016 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 17 reports the Ministry of Social Services had effective processes to protect information in the Linkin system about children-in-care, other than the areas identified in our four recommendations. Our *2018 Report – Volume 2*, Chapter 47, indicates that by August 2018, the Ministry implemented three of the four recommendations.

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. Ministry management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

For this follow-up audit, we reviewed and assessed related reports, plans, and IT system settings.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION

This section sets out the recommendation, including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at November 30, 2020, and the Ministry of Social Services' actions up to that date.



1.1 Linkin System Kept Up-to-date

We recommended the Ministry of Social Services establish a written plan for updating its Linkin system to protect it from known security vulnerabilities. (2016 Report – Volume 1, p. 224, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement March 14, 2017)

Status—Implemented

The Ministry of Social Services established a plan for keeping the Linkin system up-to-date to protect it from known security vulnerabilities, and is carrying out that plan.

Under its plan, the Ministry expects to upgrade the Linkin application every two years. In addition, the Ministry works in conjunction with its IT service provider, the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement, to routinely update the Linkin system and ensure it receives timely security patches.

We noted the Ministry of Social Services last upgraded the Linkin application in May 2019. We found the Linkin application, along with other components of the system—such as the database and server operating system—were supported as of November 2020.

We also found the Linkin system is patched on a regular basis (e.g., annually).

Being aware of end-of-support dates and updating systems on a timely basis makes IT systems less susceptible to compromise and failure. Routinely upgrading and patching is key to address the risk of exposure for sensitive and business critical systems, like Linkin.