

Agenda

Thursday 15 June 2023, 9.30am
Audit Scotland offices, 102 West Port,
Edinburgh, and online via Microsoft Teams
500th meeting of the Accounts Commission

1. **Apologies for absence**
2. **Declaration of connections**
3. **Order of business**
The Chair seeks approval of business, including proposing taking items 9 to 16 in private for the reasons set out on the agenda.

Business requiring decisions in public

4. **Minutes of meeting of 11 May 2023** Interim Secretary
5. **Strategy and work programme: Work programme update - June 2023** Executive Director of PABV
6. **Commission meeting arrangements 2024** Interim Secretary

Business for information in public

7. **Secretary's update report** Interim Secretary

Any other public business

8. **Any other public business** Interim Chair
The Chair will advise if there is any other public business to be considered by the Commission.

Business for information in private

9. **Acting Chair's update report** Interim Chair
10. **Controller of Audit's update report** Controller of Audit

Business requiring decisions in private

11. Adult Mental Health draft performance audit report

Executive Director of
PABV

[Item to be taken in private as it requires the Commission to consider a draft publication which the Commission is to consider in private before publishing.]

12. Accounts Commission - Draft Annual Report 2022/23

Interim Secretary

[Item to be taken in private as it requires the Commission to consider confidential policy matters.]

13. Intelligence report

Interim Secretary

[Item to be taken in private as it requires the Commission to consider confidential policy matters.]

14. How Councils Work (HCW) report – re-promotion plan

Executive Director of
PABV

[Item to be taken in private as it requires the Commission to consider confidential policy matters.]

15. Options to engage Councils in Best Value process

Controller of Audit

[Item to be taken in private as it requires the Commission to consider confidential policy matters.]

Any other private business

16. Any other private business

[Item may be required if there are any confidential matters that require to be discussed out with the public domain. The Chair will inform the meeting in public at the start of the meeting if this item is required and what it covers.]

Business requiring decisions in public

17. LGBF: National Benchmarking Overview Report 2021/22

Interim Secretary

Minutes of previous meeting

Interim Secretary, Accounts Commission

Purpose

1. This paper presents for the Commission's approval the draft minutes of the previous meeting of the Commission along with a summary of matters arising from those minutes.

Recommendations

2. The Commission is asked to:
 - Approve the attached draft minute of its previous meeting.
 - Note the summary of the matters arising, as well as any other updates provided at today's meeting.

Minutes

3. The minute of the previous meeting is in Appendix 1. A summary of matters arising from the May Commission meeting is attached in Appendix 2.
4. Members should note that the action tracker – available on the member SharePoint site and also provided to members on a monthly basis – provides updates on progress from previous meetings.

Minutes

Thursday 11 May 2023, 9.30am

Audit Scotland offices, 102 West Port, Edinburgh, and
online via Microsoft Teams

499th meeting of the Accounts Commission

Present:

Tim McKay (Acting Chair)

Malcolm Bell

Nichola Brown

Andrew Burns

Sophie Flemig*

Sheila Gunn

Jennifer Henderson

Christine Lester

Geraldine Wooley

Andrew Cowie*

* Online attendance

Apologies:

Blyth Deans, Interim Secretary to the Commission

In attendance:

Helena Gray, Controller of Audit

Martin McLauchlan, Policy Manager, Accounts Commission

Antony Clark, Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value

Carol Calder, Secretary to the Strategic Scrutiny Group (item 11)

Elaine Boyd, Director of Audit Quality and Appointments (item 12)

Owen Smith, Senior Manager, Audit Quality and Appointments (item 12)

John Cornett, Executive Director of Audit Services Group (item 13)

Parminder Singh, Audit Manager, Audit Quality and Appointments (item 13)

Gemma Diamond, Director of Innovation and Transformation (item 14)

Simon Ebbett, Communications Manager (item 14)

Michelle Borland, Head of Organisational Improvement (item 14)

Vicki Bibby, Chief Operating Officer (item 14)

The acting Chair thanked the former Chair for the time and effort he dedicated to Commission.

1. Apologies for absence

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Ruth MacLeod.

2. Declaration of connections

The following declaration of connection was noted:

Geraldine Wooley, in respect of item 6, due to occasional employment as equalities consultant.

3. Order of business

It was agreed that the following items be considered in private session:

- Items 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 as they required the Commission to consider confidential policy matters.

4. Minutes of meeting of 13 April 2023

The Commission considered a report by the Interim Secretary presenting the minutes of the meeting of 9 March 2023, including a summary of business arising from those minutes.

During the discussion:

- Christine Lester suggested that that it would be useful for timescales to be attributed to the Action Tracker and imminent and important actions only to be highlighted to members.

Action: Interim Secretary

- Noted that Geraldine Wooley is meeting with Gemma Diamond to discuss the methodology of performance measurement in the quarterly performance reports.
- Noted that the Interim Secretary, in response to the requests made by members, has now issued the work programme consultation to an additional 40 stakeholders including relevant MSPs and Committee Clerks; Police Scotland; a wider range of Third sector and voluntary organisations (including the Carnegie Trust).

Following discussion, the Commission:

- Approved the draft minute of its previous meeting as a correct record.
- Noted the summary of matters arising.

5. Minutes of meetings of Commission committees of 27 April 2023

The Commission considered a report by the Interim Secretary presenting the minutes of the meetings of the Commission's committees of 27 April 2023.

During discussion, the Commission:

- Noted that the Controller of Audit had provided an update by correspondence in relation to Item 4 in the Financial Audit and Assurance Committee (FAAC) minutes.
- Noted that there were no specific recommendations made in respect of the Performance Audit Committee.

Following discussion, the Commission:

- Approved the draft minutes of the Committees, subject to a minor amendment of an action holder in the FAAC minutes.

6. Work programme: stakeholder consultation feedback 2023

The Commission considered a report by the Interim Secretary providing an update on the Work programme: stakeholder consultation feedback 2023.

The Commission noted:

- The response rates and summary of responses from those stakeholders that were initially consulted.

During discussion:

- Malcom Bell and Sheila Gunn asked if there was anything to consider for future consultations to help improve the response rate and further promote the work of the Commission. The subsequent discussion included consideration of whether the low response rate from Integration Joint Boards could be attributed to some being included within council responses, and the ongoing development of the National Care Service.
- Christine Lester suggested the need to be more forthright and succinct in our messaging. Despite Councils being asked to provide a collective response it was suggested that, in future, directly sending consultations to Section 95 officers and Chairs and Chief Finance Officers of Integration Joint Boards should be considered.

Action: Interim Secretary

- Geraldine Woolley highlighted the need for direct ongoing engagement with stakeholders to encourage more responses to formal consultations, and to look at the process in its entirety.
- In respect of Item 6, Geraldine Wooley requested that employability services be considered as part of the forward work programme review, specifically as part of future inequalities and community focused audit work.

Action: Director of Performance Audit and Best Value

- Andrew Burns welcomed the positive and supportive feedback received to the consultation, with Tim McKay suggesting that earlier engagement with stakeholders would be useful in future consultation exercises.

Following discussion, the Commission:

- Noted the intended reporting timeline of the full detailed consultation results to the Commission in June.

7. Secretary's update report

The Commission considered a report by the Interim Secretary providing an update on significant recent activity relating to local government.

The Commission noted advice from the Policy Manager that, in line with the approach agreed with Commission members, members had been given the opportunity to provide

queries on the Secretary's report in advance of the meeting. No queries were received but anything arising from the meeting will be circulated in due course to members.

During discussion:

- Geraldine Wooley queried the figure of £25 million and the number of affordable homes planned in relation to the delivery plan announced by the Scottish Government referenced in item 12. It was agreed that further information would be provided to members as an appendix to the Secretary's update report in June.

Action: Interim Secretary

- The Acting Chair asked if a copy of the guidance for approving consultations referred to in the report could be circulated to members. The Policy Manager advised that an update on this would follow in June and, depending on its status, a draft or the finalised guidance would be provided to members for information alongside the June papers.

Action: Interim Secretary

- Christine Lester asked for equalities around remuneration and gender balance to be taken into account when considering future consultation responses in related areas, in reference to the Acting Chair noting a further consultation has been opened on Councillor's remuneration. The Policy Manager advised that advice would be issued on the appropriateness of the Commission responding to this consultation for members to consider, following further consideration by the Commission Support Team.

Action: Interim Secretary

Following discussion, the Commission:

- Noted the report.
- Agreed to the proposed actions with regard to the Commission responding to the consultations highlighted within the report.

8. Any other public business

The Acting Chair, having advised that there was no business for this item, closed the public part of the meeting.

9. Chair's update report

The Commission considered and noted a report by the Chair providing an update on recent and upcoming activity.

During discussion, the Acting Chair:

- Advised members that the strategy seminar planned for 7/8 June 2023 would now be a 1-day event on 7 June only.
- Confirmed that the September meeting of the Accounts Commission would now take place on Wednesday 13 September 2023.

Following discussion, the Commission:

- Noted the report.

10. Controller of Audit's update report

The Commission considered and noted a report by the Controller of Audit providing an update on recent and upcoming activity.

Following discussion, the Commission:

- Noted the report.

11. Strategic Scrutiny Group update

The Commission considered an update by the Secretary to the Strategic Scrutiny Group.

During discussion, the Commission:

- Noted the progress made in repositioning the scrutiny improvement groups. The Commission will still be a member of the new Strategic Public Sector Scrutiny Network but will have no responsibility for chairing. The new group will have a wider remit and terms of reference were agreed at the final meeting of the Strategic Scrutiny Group in April 2023.
- The new Scrutiny Coordination Group (SCG) will report to the Commission on an annual basis. External members of the group may be invited to update the Commission at future meetings.
- Christine Lester asked if there will be a process in place to ensure our statutory responsibilities are fulfilled and if we will be notified of any issues as they arise. Carol Calder explained that issues arising will be reported to the Commission by the chair of the scrutiny coordination group in addition to the 12 monthly formal reporting of the SCG to the Commission.

Following discussion, the Commission:

- Noted the report.

12. Draft Quality of public audit in Scotland

The Commission considered a draft report by the Director of Audit Quality and Appointments on the Quality of public audit in Scotland.

During discussion:

- Tim McKay asked if there were any updates to the Action Plan. A further update will be reported back to the Commission in November 2023, but the Director will consider what information can be provided in the interim. Tim McKay also requested that the final version of the report be circulated to Commission members in advance of it being signed off by the Audit Scotland Board.

Action: Director of Audit Quality and Appointments

- Christine Lester asked which improvement areas Audit Quality and Appointments have identified in respect of the work of the Accounts Commission. Further information was provided.
- Geraldine Wooley asked how our work is being perceived by wider stakeholders and if there is methodology on analysing the information we are receiving and the basis for assessing the effectiveness of internal training. Further details were provided.
- Sheila Gun noted that audit providers should formulate plans to address issues around resourcing, timelines, technical changes in profession.
- Andrew Cowie asked for clarification on the escalation of action planning to an urgent level reference in paragraph 93 and was advised that the presentation would be considered as part of the planned update report for the Commission.

Action: Director of Audit Quality and Appointments

- Jennifer Henderson raised the issue around transparency and the applicability of Freedom of Information exemptions due to commercial confidentiality, noting the response given about their applicability.
- Tim McKay raised operational independence and if the wording used in the report could be made clearer for members of the public.

Action: Director of Audit Quality and Appointments

Following discussion, the Commission:

- Noted the excellent independent review results achieved by the audit firms and Audit Scotland's Performance Audit and Best Value Group over the last four years.
- Note the improvement in Audit Scotland's Audit Services Group financial audit quality results in 2021/22.
- Endorsed the Quality of public audit in Scotland report 2023, subject to the final version being circulated by email before the next meeting of the Audit Scotland board.

13. Update on annual audit delivery

The Commission considered an update by the Controller of Audit on annual audit delivery.

During discussion, the Commission:

- Christine Lester raised a point around new Best Value requirements, noting the response from the Executive Director of ASG about the progress being made in embedding these as part of the new audit appointments.

Following discussion, the Commission:

- Noted the update provided.
- Noted the actions being undertaken by Audit Scotland's Audit Quality and Appointments Team (AQA) to monitor audit delivery.

14. Public Audit in Scotland and Audit Scotland Corporate Plan

The Commission considered a report by the Director of Innovation and Transformation providing an update on Public Audit in Scotland and Audit Scotland Corporate Plan

During discussion, the Commission:

- Noted the point raised by Geraldine Wooley around the shift from a process focus to an outcomes focus and how this differs from the draft Quality of public audit in Scotland report considered at Item 12 above. Further to this, Geraldine Wooley raised an issue around wording within the report for the team to consider as it is being finalised.
- Christine Lester asked if Tim McKay would be present at the Audit Scotland Board meeting on 23 May where this report would be signed off to provide any further updates on behalf of the Commission. The Acting Chair advised he would attend said meeting to represent the Commission.
- Sophie Flemig raised the point about the performance management framework, and how this translates into engagement plans. Vicki Bibby provided further information in response.
- Nichola Brown asked what measures are in place around innovation and learning and how this relates the Audit Quality report quality report considered at Item 12, noting the response provided.
- Andrew Burns commended the teams on the close vision and alignment between the two pieces of work and thanked everyone for their work.
- Tim McKay asked how the Commission Change Programme will fit in with the thinking of Audit Scotland's corporate plan, noting the response that the Commission Support Team is considered to be a business group for Audit Scotland's internal planning purposes, and the change programme would be considered as part of that business group's wider business plan.

Following discussion, the Commission:

- Noted the progress of the overall project to refresh PAIS and develop Audit Scotland's new corporate plan.

15. Controller of Audit update on Stakeholder Engagement

The Commission considered a verbal update from the Controller of Audit on an ongoing programme of Stakeholder Engagement.

Following discussion, the Commission:

- requested that the Controller of Audit prepare a formal report for their consideration upon completion of the planned programme of engagement.

Action: Controller of Audit

16. Any other private business

The Acting Chair, having advised that there was no business for this item, closed the meeting.

Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 12.40 pm.

Strategy and work programme: Work programme update - June 2023

Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value

Item 5
Meeting date: 15 June 2023

Purpose

1. This paper introduces the joint Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) and Accounts Commission work programme update.

Recommendations

2. The Commission is invited to:
 - note the progress delivering the work programme from March 2023 to May 2023 (slide 6 of Appendix one)
 - note the planned products up to December 2023 (slide 7 of Appendix one)
 - agree the additions and changes proposed to the programme (slides 8-10 of Appendix one)
 - feedback on the audit work in the pipeline to March 2025 (slides 11-21 of Appendix one), noting that this is flexible and can be revisited as part of future work programme updates

Background

3. In April 2021 the AGS and the Commission agreed the joint dynamic work programme. We published this on the Audit Scotland website on 24 May 2021. This is the eighth quarterly update of the programme and the next update will be in September 2023.

Considerations

4. Appendix one presents the work programme update. It aims to provide one report that meets the needs of the AGS and Commission, with clarity on who is producing which products and when. It includes:
 - **What we've delivered:** From March 2023 to May 2023.
 - **What's coming up:** Planned audit products from June 2023 to December 2023, and audit work in the pipeline from January 2023 to March 2025.
 - **Decisions required:** Proposed changes to the programme.
5. In this update we have proposed adding one new Commission product to the programme (Local heat and energy efficiency strategies) as well as two delays to planned Commission

products (sustainable alternatives to custody and the LGO symposium). We would draw the Commission's attention to four areas where it would be helpful to get feedback on the work programme. These cover joint areas of interest between the Commission and the AGS and are related to both current proposals and audit work in the longer-term pipeline:

- **Sustainable alternatives to custody (ref slides 9 and 15)** – We are proposing delaying this planned joint performance audit and continuing to monitor this area. The planned joint performance audit on drug and alcohol services will cover aspects of community justice and it is not clear what further impact a separate performance audit would make at this time. We have noted ongoing issues of capacity within criminal justice social work and the likely impact of the Bail and Release from Custody Bill, but it will take time before any measures are implemented. We would welcome feedback from the Commission on whether it is content to delay audit work in this area or if there are specific areas of interest it would like us to investigate further.
- **Primary care (ref slides 9 and 21)** – The AGS has noted his interest in demand and capacity in primary care and progress with wider primary care reform. We are proposing to add a performance audit covering these topics to the work programme, aiming to publish in Q3 2024/25. The audit will require thorough scoping to ensure we keep it manageable and focus on the areas where we can add most value. Given the role of IJBs in planning and commissioning primary care services, we would welcome feedback from the Commission on its interests in this area.
- **Social care (ref slide 14)** - We are monitoring progress with the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill and broader developments in the social care sector which relate to the issues and challenges highlighted in the [January 2022 joint briefing](#). We anticipate producing a series of products over the next few years which will consider the ongoing challenges in social care in the period running up to the establishment of the NCS (e.g. workforce, procurement, service commissioning, prevention).

In that context we will also develop future IJB financial bulletins to provide a wider picture of IJBs, including leadership, performance and outcomes. This will also be a vehicle for the Accounts Commission to make wider comment about current issues in social care. This work will continue to be supported by independent oversight and public reporting at both national and local level on the current performance of IJBs through ongoing annual audit work in IJBs and related audit reporting (local AARs and national AARR) until such time as a NCS becomes operational and local Care Boards are established.

We also remain committed to a longer-term programme of performance audit work on implementation of the NCS, subject to this major programme of change receiving Parliamentary approval. Audit work in this area would draw on the findings of previous audits of major structural reform (e.g. police and fire) and would focus on both the process of implementing the reform and whether they delivered their intended improved outcomes in the longer-term.

We will bring a set of proposals for short, medium and longer-term audit work on social care to the Commission's PAC in August 2023 for further discussion.

- **Children and young people with additional support needs (ref slide 16)** - We would like to explore options for delivering a product on children and young people with ASN during 2023/24. Stakeholders have been supportive of a focus on the learner journey from pre-school to post-school for children and young people who need additional support,

including looking at transition points. Education Scotland is planning thematic work on ASN and we will explore the potential for joint work. There are concerns about the lack of data in this area and it may be worth considering publishing a shorter, quicker output highlighting the key issues and then doing a full performance audit at a later stage. We would welcome the Commission's feedback on its interests in this area.

6. We are working closely with the new Controller of Audit on how best to bring together a strategic overview of the Commission's work programme, developing stronger links between the audit products, and the Commission's assessment of audit risks and its strategic priorities. This will be a key area of focus for the Commission's strategic work planning discussion which is planned to take place following the August Accounts Commission meeting.

Resourcing the work programme

7. We continue to improve and refine our budget and cost data for performance audit and Best Value work. We have been discussing with the Commission's Deputy Chair a developing prototype that outlines budget data on a product-by-product basis, looking at both planned audit days and the equivalent financial costs on a quarterly basis. We plan to bring resourcing information to the Commission's strategic work planning discussion to enable it to take an informed decision on priorities. We are keen to explore with the Commission when would be the best time to discuss the prototype further to ensure it meets the needs and expectations of members.

Dynamic work programme – Update

June 2023

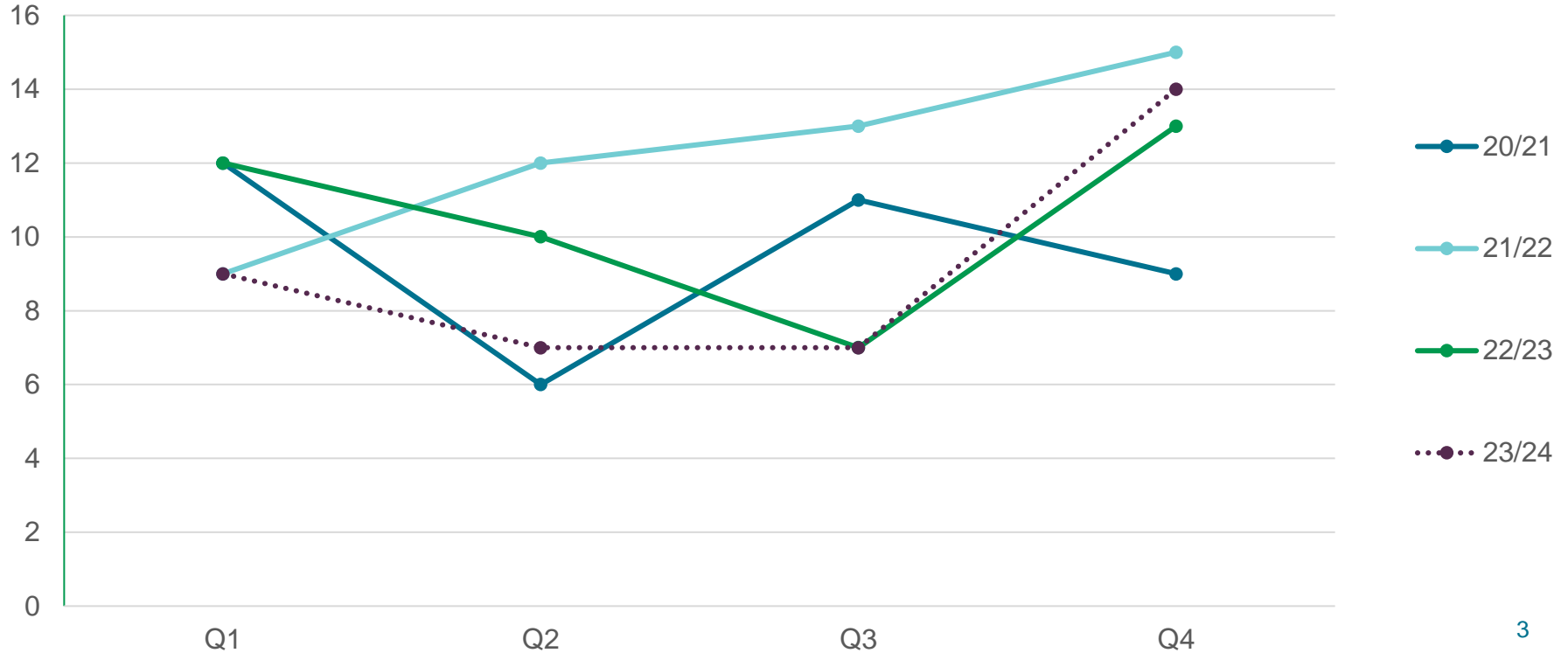
AUDITOR GENERAL 

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

-
- We delivered 10 audit products between March and May and there are a further 15 products planned between June and December (slides 6-7).
 - This work programme update proposes adding five new products to the programme as well as two delays to planned products (slides 8-10).
 - Slides 11-21 outline how we are continuing to develop the longer-term work programme proposals across the portfolios.
 - A strategic work planning discussion is planned to take place following the August Accounts Commission meeting. We are working closely with the Controller of Audit on how best to support this.
 - We plan to bring resourcing information to this discussion to enable the Commission to take an informed decision on work programme priorities.

Audit products per quarter since April 2020

Audit products per quarter since April 2020



What guides our planning and delivery...

Providing assurance and driving improvement

We will use our unique local and national perspective to provide assurance about how Scotland's public services are recovering from Covid-19. We aim to provide insight and learning, and drive improvement, innovation and transformational change as Scotland moves towards renewal.

Taking a person-centred approach

Where possible and appropriate, we will capture the needs and concerns of the people who use public services through our audit work.

Integrating cross cutting issues

We will integrate consideration of issues that cut across policy areas and have an impact on citizens and service users throughout our audit work and public reporting. We will prioritise developing our audit approach on the following issues: climate change, digital transformation, inequality and human rights, community empowerment.

Taking a risk-based and proportionate approach

We recognise the potential impact of audit work on people working in public services who are still responding to Covid-19. We will ensure our audit response is proportionate and risk-based, and that audited bodies have clear advance notice of any planned work.

Being flexible and agile

We will adapt our work programme as new issues emerge or risks change. We will use a range of approaches to report our audit work.



ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND GROWTH

How public money is being used to support economic recovery and the renewal of public services

- Public finances
- Supporting economic development and growth
- Skills and training
- Infrastructure and investment

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY



How public bodies are ensuring proper and effective use of public money across the public sector and within individual bodies

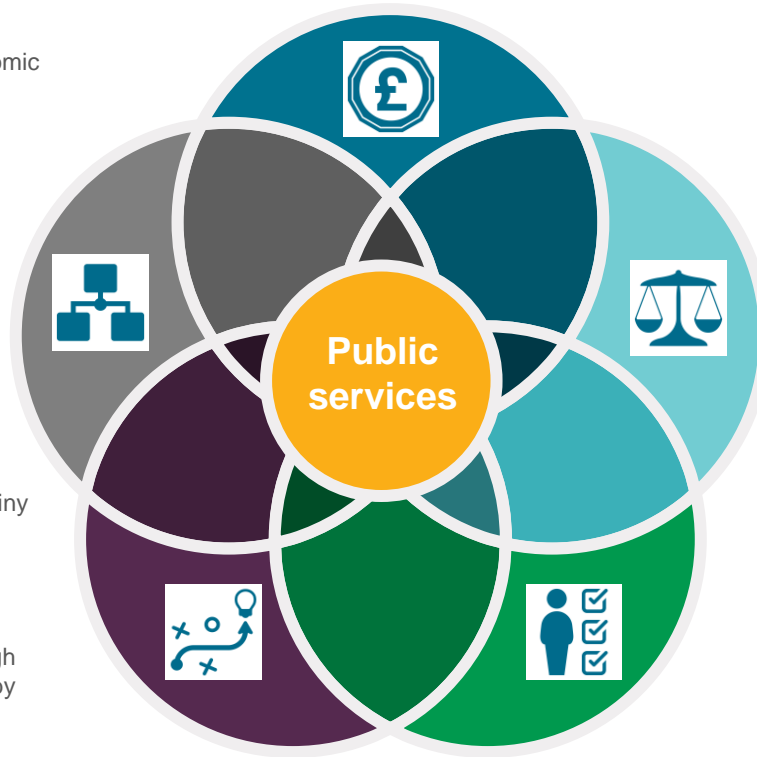
- Collaborative leadership
- Annual audits
- Fraud risks
- Effective scrutiny



INNOVATION AND TRANSFORMATION

How public bodies are learning through continuous improvement, innovation and by transforming public services

- Local government
- NHS
- Policing
- Best Value
- Service redesign
- Digital transformation
- Workforce planning



INEQUALITIES AND HUMAN RIGHTS



How Covid-19 is impacting on different groups in society, focusing on the risk of deepening existing inequalities. Helping ensure public bodies address inequalities and protect human rights, recognising the multiple ways people experience disadvantage and poorer outcomes.

- Child poverty
- Children and young people with additional support needs
- Care experienced children and young people
- Mental health
- Housing benefit
- Digital exclusion
- Social security
- Gender pay gap reporting



POLICY PRIORITIES AND COMMITMENTS

Progress on key policy commitments. Public services' ability to deliver on long-term strategic priorities and outcomes

- Climate change
- Early learning and childcare
- Court backlogs
- Health and social care integration
- Social care
- National Care Service
- Drug and alcohol services
- Community justice
- Community empowerment
- School education
- Housing and homelessness

What we've delivered: March to May

Overview reports	Performance audits	Other audit products
Local government in Scotland overview 2023	Climate change: Scottish Government delivery arrangements	Annual Assurance and Risks Report (Internal report)
	Criminal court backlogs	Scotland's financial response to Covid-19: Spending update (Web product)
	Statutory reports	Learning the lessons of Covid-19 has never been more important (Blog)
	Ferguson Marine Port Glasgow	Encouraging progress on education data but still a long way to go (Blog)
		Homelessness affects us all - action is needed (Blog)

Key:

Auditor General for Scotland

Accounts Commission

Joint – Auditor General and Accounts Commission

Audit Scotland

What's coming up: June to December*

Performance audits	Best Value	Statutory reports
Early learning and childcare (follow up) (June)	Best Value Legacy report (September)	South Lanarkshire College (June)
Adult mental health (September)	Controller of Audit report: South Ayrshire Council (October)	Scottish Canals (June)
Briefings	Controller of Audit report: Dundee City Council (November)	Glasgow City Council (August)
Colleges product (TBC) (September)	Controller of Audit report: West Dunbartonshire Council (December)	Other audit products
Scottish Government's capital programme (September)		City Region and Growth Deals (Impact briefing) (June)
Scotland's public sector workforce (TBC) (October)		Annual fraud and irregularity report 2022/23 (July)
		Four nations climate change (September)

Key:

Auditor General for Scotland

Joint – AGS and Commission

Accounts Commission

Audit Scotland

*Months in brackets in tables are indicative publication months

Summary of proposed changes to programme

Change	Detail
Adding	<p>Colleges output (AGS): We are proposing adding a short briefing to the programme, drawing on a review of 2021/22 annual audit reports. We will aim to publish this during summer or autumn 2023.</p>
	<p>Climate change - Heat in homes (AGS): In February we proposed publishing a briefing in September 2023 focusing on the Scottish Government’s Heat in Buildings strategy. This would look at what progress the Scottish Government is making, what has been delivered against plans and targets and what funding is available and required. It would provide scrutiny on progress against a key pathway to net zero. We’re now proposing to make this a small performance audit instead of a briefing which will push the timescales back to early 2024 (ref: slide 13).</p>
	<p>Scotland’s public sector workforce (AGS): We propose adding a short briefing to the programme in October 2023. This will be a scene setting piece, as opposed to a detailed audit, aiming to inform future audit work in this area, including planned work on wider public sector reform. The briefing will set out the Scottish Government’s approach to managing this key plank of its public service reform agenda. It will provide more information on the scale of the challenge and key risks associated with delivering this major programme of change. The target audience is the Public Audit Committee and the Finance and Public Administration Committee. However, it is likely to be of interest to other committees and may generate wider media and public interest, given the continuing pay disputes in the public sector and reported pressures on services and front-line staff.</p>

Summary of proposed changes to programme

Change	Detail
Adding	<p>Primary care (TBC): Primary care is the cornerstone of our health and social care system. Over 90 percent of health interactions take place in primary care. The last time Audit Scotland undertook work in primary care was 2009 and 2007. The new General Medical Services contract (2018) was part of the Scottish Government's plans to transform primary care services through a programme of reform. Yet in 2022 GP's said that demand is substantially exceeding capacity. The 2021/22 Programme for Government committed to increase primary care funding by 25%, over this Parliament. Yet the emergency budget review in November 2022 included a £65m cut from primary care services. We propose a performance audit looking at demand and capacity in primary care and progress with wider primary care reform. The audit will require thorough scoping to ensure we keep it manageable and focus on the areas where we can add most value, aiming to publish in Q3 2024/25.</p> <p>Local heat and energy efficiency strategies (LHEES) (AC): We propose undertaking a performance audit on local heat and energy efficiency strategies, to publish in 2025/26. This would focus on the early implementation of the LHEES, which each local authority must have in place by December 2023. It would look at initial progress towards an area-based approach to heat and energy efficiency planning and delivery, and may encompass wider themes such as workforce planning, estate management and equalities.</p>

Summary of proposed changes to programme

Change	Detail
Delaying	<p>Sustainable alternatives to custody (Joint): We propose delaying this planned joint performance audit and continuing to monitor this area. The AGS briefing on sustainable alternatives to custody, published in July 2021, had significant impact and it is not clear what further impact a performance audit would make at this time. The planned joint performance audit on drug and alcohol services will cover aspects of community justice. Our monitoring work suggests that there are ongoing issues of capacity within criminal justice social work linked to increasingly complex caseloads and funding. The ongoing Bail and Release from Custody Bill, now at Stage 3, is likely to impact on the work of criminal justice social work but it will take time before any measures are implemented. We would welcome feedback from the Commission on whether it is content to delay audit work in this area or if there are specific areas of interest it would like us to investigate further.</p>
	<p>LGO symposium (AC): We are proposing to pause work on the LGO Symposium planned for June 2023 to allow for the appointment of a new Commission Chair and their input into the direction of this work.</p>

Audit work in the pipeline – January 2024 to March 2025

Summary of agreed products: January 2024 to March 2025

Product	Type	Author	Quarter
Local government financial bulletin 2023/24	Briefing	Accounts Commission	Q4 23/24
Administration of Scottish Income Tax 2022/23	Report	AGS	Q4 23/24
BV Controller of Audit report: Orkney Islands Council	BV CoA report	Accounts Commission	Q4 23/24
Climate change: Heat in homes	Performance audit	AGS	Q4 23/24
Administration of Scottish Income Tax 2022/23	Annual report	AGS	Q4 23/24
National Strategy for Economic Transformation	Briefing	AGS	Q4 23/24
BV Controller of Audit report: Dumfries and Galloway Council	BV CoA report	Accounts Commission	Q4 23/24
BV follow up: Shetland Islands Council	BVAR	Accounts Commission	Q4 23/24
NHS in Scotland 2023: Focus TBC	Overview	AGS	Q4 23/24
AGS budget briefing	Internal report	AGS	Q4 23/24
Local government budget briefing	Internal report	Accounts Commission	Q4 23/24
Annual Assurance and Risks Report	Internal report	Accounts Commission	Q4 23/24

Summary of agreed products: January 2024 to March 2025

Product	Type	Author	Quarter
Digital exclusion	Performance audit	Joint – AGS and Commission	Q4 23/24
LGO Symposium	Event	Accounts Commission	TBC
Integration Joint Boards: Financial and performance analysis 2022/23	Briefing	Accounts Commission	Q1 24/25
BV Controller of Audit report: Clackmannanshire Council	BV CoA report	Accounts Commission	Q1 24/25
BV Controller of Audit report: Moray Council	BV CoA report	Accounts Commission	Q1 24/25
Best Value thematic report – Leadership	TBC	Accounts Commission	Q1 24/25
Drug and alcohol services	Performance audit	Joint – AGS and Commission	Q1 24/25
BV Controller of Audit report: Falkirk Council	BV CoA report	Accounts Commission	Q2 24/25
Annual fraud and irregularity report 2022/2	Annual report	Audit Scotland	Q2 24/25
National Fraud Initiative in Scotland	Other	Audit Scotland	Q2 24/25
Local government financial bulletin 2023/24	Briefing	Accounts Commission	Q3 24/25
Primary care (TBC)	Performance audit	TBC	Q3 24/25
NHS in Scotland 2024	Overview	AGS	Q4 24/25

In the pipeline:

January 2024 to March 2025

Economic recovery and growth

Area of focus	Latest plans
Infrastructure and investment	<p>Reducing emissions from transport will make an important contribution towards the Scottish Government's net zero target. We plan to carry out research and development work on sustainable transport in late 2023, with a view to bringing forward proposals to the Accounts Commission and AGS for future audit work in due course. Our initial thinking is to focus this work on the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods, which would encompass wider themes around infrastructure investment and local planning. We will explore options for a joint audit in 2024/25 but need to consider this in the context of other priorities relating to transport and infrastructure, including ferries and estates management. We will need to ensure that we have resources available to deliver on the priorities of the AGS and Accounts Commission and may need to re-prioritise work on sustainable transport in response to this.</p>
Supporting economic development and growth	<p>We are considering a performance audit on the Scottish National Investment Bank in 2024/25 which would cover investment to date and an early assessment of what impact this has made, as well as how it is evaluating and monitoring the impact of its investments.</p> <p>We are monitoring place-based economic growth initiatives (local and regional) and are likely to propose we undertake work in 2025/26 to assess how funding is being targeted, and the impact of regional economic activities on outcomes.</p>

In the pipeline: September 2023 to March 2025

Economic recovery and growth

Area of focus	Latest plans
Public finances	<p>We have reported on the urgency and severity of the financial challenge ahead for the Scottish Government in Scotland's public finances: challenges and risks published in November 2022. This gained significant media, social media and political engagement.</p> <p>The Scottish Government is undertaking a two-track approach to reform, targeting “short-term efficiencies and wider, deeper, and longer-term reform.” Planned audit work in 2024 will assess how well the Scottish Government’s budget processes manage a tighter financial position while implementing this reform, achieving the Scottish Government’s goals, and maintaining public services.</p> <p>This will follow on from the planned briefing paper on the public sector workforce (and its links to reform) and our annual reporting on Scottish Income tax, where differing economic growth between Scotland and the rest of the UK and diverging tax policy are an increasing feature.</p>
Skills and training	<p>We continue to monitor the impact of our performance audit report on Planning for skills and await the findings and recommendations of the independent review of the skills delivery landscape, due in spring 2023. We will use this, and the Scottish Government’s response to the review, to inform proposals for future audit work, which is likely to begin during 2024/25.</p>

In the pipeline: January 2024 to March 2025

Area of focus	Latest plans
Climate change	<p>We recognise the priority placed on climate change by the AGS and Accounts Commission.</p> <p>Reflecting feedback from previous work programme discussions, we have developed proposals for a programme of climate change audit work up to 2025/26. In addition to the small performance audit on heat in homes planned for Q4 2023/24, we plan to scope audit work on how the public sector is adapting to the impacts of climate change during summer 2023, with a view to undertaking a performance audit on adaptation (likely joint AGS and AC) to publish in 2024/25.</p> <p>We are also proposing undertaking a performance audit for the Accounts Commission on local heat and energy efficiency strategies, to publish in 2025/26.</p> <p>We plan to carry out research and development work on sustainable transport in late 2023, working with the infrastructure and investment team, with a view to bringing forward proposals to the Accounts Commission and AGS for future audit work (ref: Slide 11).</p>
Early learning and childcare	<p>The next joint audit work in this series will look at the impact of the expansion. This is likely to focus on assessing whether the significant investment being made in expanding publicly funded ELC has delivered improved outcomes, is helping to reduce the poverty-related attainment gap and has made a difference in supporting parents and carers to work, train or study. This audit is likely to start in 2025.</p>

In the pipeline:

September 2023 to March 2025

Area of focus	Latest plans
Health and social care	<p>We are monitoring developments in the social care sector on the issues highlighted in the January 2022 joint briefing and the progress with the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill. We anticipate producing a series of products over the next few years that consider the challenges in social care by focusing on particular aspects. Products might focus on: workforce issues; commissioning of services; leadership and governance in IJBs; joint working; service demand and capacity; outcomes and performance; or service user and carer experience. We plan to bring proposals to the Accounts Commission's PAC and to the AGS in August 2023 for discussion. To maintain flexibility and responsiveness we will consider the priorities and focus for this work on a rolling basis alongside the other commitments for the portfolio and cluster and bring forward detailed proposals through future work programme updates.</p> <p>We will develop future IJB financial bulletins to provide a wider picture of IJBs, including leadership, performance and outcomes. This will also be a vehicle for the Accounts Commission to make wider comment about current issues in social care. This work will continue to be supported by independent oversight and public reporting at both national and local level on the current performance of IJBs through ongoing annual audit work in IJBs and related audit reporting (local AARs and national AARR) until such time as a NCS becomes operational and local Care Boards are established.</p> <p>We also remain committed to a longer-term programme of performance audit work on implementation of the NCS, subject to this major programme of change receiving Parliamentary approval. Audit work in this area would draw on the findings of previous audits of major structural reform (e.g. police and fire) and would focus on both the process of implementing the reform and whether they delivered their intended improved outcomes.</p>

In the pipeline: September 2023 to March 2025

Policy priorities and commitments

Area of focus	Latest plans
Homelessness	We are likely to propose a report on homelessness during 2024, potentially examining the pathways through the system for homeless people and families. Our work on the picture of homelessness across Scotland would support priorities around inequalities, human rights, access and affordability. In taking a pathways approach, it would be firmly person-centred. Work being undertaken across the UK by the Centre for Homelessness Impact on the impact and cost of temporary accommodation for homeless families would complement our work by providing a wider narrative of one element of the cost of homelessness.
Drug and alcohol services	We plan to start a joint performance audit in July 2023 and publish around June 2024. This will include detailed analysis of spending and will explore what is being delivered in local areas by Alcohol and Drug Partnerships and other partners such as integration authorities and community planning partnerships. It is likely to pick up links with community justice and have a strong third sector focus. We are also considering building in lived experience work and focus on prevention, outcomes, equalities and human rights.
Community justice	We have proposed delaying planned joint work on sustainable alternatives to custody for 2024 and will continue to monitor this area while seeking feedback from the AGS and Commission on their specific interests in future community justice audit work.
School education	We are continuing to monitor progress against the recommendations in the Improving outcomes for young people through school education report through ongoing cluster monitoring and stakeholder engagement. We anticipate carrying out further audit work, but not until 2024 at the earliest.

In the pipeline: September 2023 to March 2025

Area of focus	Latest plans
Digital exclusion	We are carrying out a joint performance audit on how the public sector is addressing digital exclusion with a view to publishing in March 2024. We are taking a human rights based approach for this audit, which includes considering how we can engage with service users. We will also continue to look at digital exclusion through other audit work, such as overviews and social care.
Poverty	<p>We are developing options for a full performance audit on child poverty, which is likely to start in 2024/25, allowing us to include data on performance against the 2023/24 interim targets for reducing child poverty. Future audit work relating to services for children and young people will also consider links with child poverty.</p> <p>We will continue to monitor the transfer of social security powers to Scotland with a view to considering how this informs and impacts on other audit areas, such as child poverty and inequalities, and whether we should produce any further outputs in this area.</p>
Children and young people with additional support needs	We would like to explore options for delivering a product on children and young people with ASN during 2023/24. Stakeholders have been supportive of a focus on the learner journey from pre-school to post-school for children and young people who need additional support, including looking at transition points. Education Scotland is planning thematic work on ASN and we will explore the potential for joint work. There are concerns about the lack of data in this area and it may be worth considering publishing a shorter, quicker output highlighting the key issues and then doing a full performance audit at a later stage. We would welcome AGS and Commission feedback on their interests in this area.

In the pipeline: September 2023 to March 2025

Innovation and transformation

Area of focus	Latest plans
Best Value assurance reporting	<p>Best Value work in councils is now fully integrated with the annual audit and will be reported in Annual Audit Reports, including risk-based, follow up and thematic BV work. Work on the first national BV thematic report drawing on local BV thematic annual audit work starts in October 2023. This report is due for publication in 2024. The theme agreed by the Commission for this first report is leadership.</p>
Local government overview reporting and auditing local services	<p>We have delayed wider discussions about the development of local government overview reporting from 2024 following changes within the Commission and the cancellation of its June strategy seminar. We are currently engaging with the new Controller of Audit about the future of overview reporting, reflecting the Commission's interest in performance and, amongst other things, are considering options for a more specific service focus for this work in future.</p> <p>Our goal is to ensure that the total package of Accounts Commission local government reporting (including the AARR, BV thematic and BV CoA reports) provide sufficient coverage and depth, making best use of the overview approach where that will add greatest value. We have not yet agreed whether we will produce a local government overview (LGO) in 2024 or a more focused performance audit. We will discuss this with the Commission at its strategic work planning discussion following the August Commission meeting.</p>

In the pipeline: September 2023 to March 2025

Innovation and transformation

Area of focus	Latest plans
National Health Service	<p>We are developing proposals for a future programme of health and care audits, recognising the ongoing policy focus on health and care, with significant reforms on the horizon and the dominance of spending in this area. This will impact on our reporting on the NHS as we are considering the future format and frequency of the NHS in Scotland report to allow for a shift of some resources to other more focused and thematic health and care audit work.</p> <p>We recognise the whole systems approach required for public health due to the broader factors affecting health and wellbeing, such as housing, income and the education and justice system, and the impact of the broader economy and inequalities. As such we will consult on our proposals in due course with the AGS and, where necessary and relevant, with the Accounts Commission.</p>
Policing	<p>The AGS is interested in Best Value work on policing during the next audit appointment round. We intend to allocate resources to research and development work on policing over summer 2023 to inform the potential scope and approach to this work.</p>

Commission meeting arrangements 2024

Interim Secretary to the Commission

Item 6
Meeting date: 15 June 2023

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to propose meeting arrangements for the Commission for 2024.

Recommendations

2. The Commission is invited to consider:
 - The proposed schedule and arrangements for meetings of the Commission and its committees in 2024.
 - Specifically, any areas of interest for member forum meetings.

Background

3. The Commission has in its Strategy a commitment to continuously improve how it conducts and manages its business. It is customary in June of each year for the Commission to agree its meeting arrangements for the subsequent calendar year.

Commission meeting arrangements

4. The main features of the proposal are:
 - Commission members are asked to commit to one Commission meeting per month, along with a meeting of committees quarterly.
 - These slots will be used for a combination of:
 - Formal meetings of the Commission.
 - Commission member forum (see under 'member forum' below)
 - For meetings of the Commission and its committees, the following assumptions are made:
 - On business days, all Commission business will start at 9.30am and finish at 4pm at the latest, with suitable breaks included to ensure around six hours being devoted to Commission business.
 - Quarterly committees both meet on the same day with meetings lasting for 90 to 105 minutes, with the Financial Audit and Assurance Committee normally meeting at 9.15am and the Performance Audit Committee starting at 11.15am. There is also the option of joint meetings of the committees if worthy for certain business.

- Commission pre-meetings will take place – lasting 15 minutes – before the formal meeting commences.
 - We will continue to use July as a ‘recess’ month. This recognises the benefits of the Commission having some ‘downtime’ in the summer months and also of most Audit Scotland colleagues taking annual holidays during July (and thus reflecting, for example, school holidays).
 - Two strategy seminar slots are included – the first is an overnight event in the Spring and the second ‘mid-year’ event in an afternoon in Autumn (see below).
5. **Appendix 1** proposes a schedule of meetings for 2024. The schedule is explained under ‘strategic planning’ below.

Strategic planning

6. In 2019, the Commission refined its approach to planning its business throughout the year. Most notably, it agreed to retain two strategy events in the year, in Spring and Autumn.
7. The Spring event is longstanding and is normally an overnight event to review progress in the past year and agree broad themes for an annual refresh of the Commission strategy. The Autumn event has been used variously for progress reporting and for more ‘internal’ facing matters such as Commission development.
8. The introduction in 2021 of the dynamic work programme, which the Commission agreed for the first time in May 2022, allows scope for revisiting the purposes of the strategy seminars. It is therefore proposed that the main purpose of the Spring 2024 event – to review progress as a Commission and to find some ‘space’ to think about its strategic messages – be retained. Outputs from the event will feed directly into the work programme update in subsequent months. With work programme updates taking place quarterly, it allows the Commission to make more flexible use of the Autumn seminar, for example to focus more on ‘internal’ facing matters, as was originally intended.
9. How this looks in an overall meeting schedule and planning cycle for the Commission is set out in **Appendix 2**. To make best fit with the approach to dynamic work programme, and accommodating a role for the Commission’s committees in the work programme as well as for the Commission itself, it is proposed that the schedule for meetings of the committees is as follows:
- February
 - May
 - August
 - November

Commission member forum

10. During 2022/23, Commission members have made use of the private member forums for different purposes. It is proposed that this approach be retained to protect space for members to discuss emerging issues or developments as a group.

APPENDIX 1**MEETING SCHEDULE 2024**

11 January	Accounts Commission
8 February	Accounts Commission
22 February	Committees
7 March	Accounts Commission
12/13 March (Tue/Wed)	Spring Strategy Seminar
18 April	Accounts Commission
9 May	Accounts Commission
23 May	Committees
13 June	Accounts Commission
8 August	Accounts Commission
22 August	Committees
11 September (Wed)	Autumn Strategy Seminar
12 September	Accounts Commission
10 October	Accounts Commission
7 November	Accounts Commission
21 November	Committees
12 December	Accounts Commission

All Thursdays except where notified**Notable dates:**

- Easter Sunday: 31 March
- Easter school holidays: Edinburgh/Glasgow/Highland 28 March - 16 April
- Summer school holidays: Edinburgh 28 June – 13 August; Glasgow 27 June – 14 August; Highland 27 June – 20 August
- October school holidays: Highland 14 – 28 October; Edinburgh & Glasgow 14 – 21 October

APPENDIX 2**PROPOSED COMMISSION ANNUAL PLANNING AND REPORTING CYCLE**

	Commission meeting	Other meetings
Jan		
Feb	Annual Assurance and Risks Report	Committee meetings: contribute to quarterly work programme update
Mar	Work programme consultation results (early Jan to late Feb) Quarterly work programme update	Spring Strategy Seminar: Reviews themes from overviews and AARR Agrees content for Annual Report Agrees themes for draft Strategy
Apr	Draft overview report Draft Commission Strategy (high level messages from Strategy Seminar)	
May	Draft Commission Strategy	Committee meetings: contribute to quarterly work programme update
Jun	Draft annual report Quarterly work programme update (reflecting any revised Strategy)	
Jul	Recess	
Aug		Committee meetings: contribute to quarterly work programme update
Sep	Quarterly work programme update	Autumn Strategy Seminar: Team development etc.
Oct		
Nov	Annual planning guidance	Committee meetings: contribute to quarterly work programme update
Dec	Quarterly work programme update Draft consultation themes	

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Commission on significant recent activity relating to local government.
2. The Commission receives regular information to complement this report, which is available through the [members' SharePoint site](#). This includes:
 - The Controller of Audit report to the Commission, updating the Commission on her activity. This is intended to complement this Secretary's update report.
 - An update on issues relating to local government which is considered by the Commission's Financial Audit and Assurance Committee.
 - A weekly news coverage briefing provided to the Commission by Audit Scotland's Communication Team, now supplemented with a summary of parliamentary activity from the Commission Support Team.

Recommendations

3. The Commission is invited to:
 - Note this report and consider any implications for its work programme.
 - Agree to the proposed actions with regard to the Commission responding to the consultations highlighted at the end of this report.

Commission business and recent publications

4. Monthly updates on the activities of both the Chair and Controller of Audit are standing items on the Commission's agenda.
5. Information relating to recent [publications](#) and [blogs](#) is available online, with future planned publications and activities outlined on the members' communications schedule available on the [members' SharePoint site](#). This includes a list of planned publications and activities for the year, along with indicative roles for members in promotion and engagement activities. This document is live and is updated monthly.
6. On 17 May the Accounts Commission [published](#) a report "Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023". The report confirms that Scotland's councils face considerable funding challenges and immense pressures on their workforce which are deepening after the pandemic rather than easing. Radical change, through greater collaboration with third sector partners and communities, is urgently needed if council services are to be maintained. Up to 31 May the webpage had been viewed 1,619 times and the report had been downloaded 1,229 times. Regarding the reports social media outreach, there had been 17,700 impressions which had led to 576 engagements (link clicks, likes, comments, shares, and post clicks) and Tim's audiogram had been listened to 2,700 times.

7. As part of the revised approach to preparing this update report introduced in 2023, it was agreed that quarterly and annual publication statistics for relevant Accounts Commission publications would be provided to supplement the regular monthly publication statistics. [Appendix 1](#) includes the 2022/23 Quarter 4 (January to March 2023) and Annual (April 2022 to March 2023) publication statistics. Quarter 1 2023/24 statistics (April to June) will be reported to the Commission at its August meeting, due to no meeting taking place in July.

Issues affecting Scottish local government

Scottish Government

8. On 03 May after meeting poverty campaigners, First Minister Humza Yousaf [confirmed](#) that tax, targeted support and tough budget choices will all need to be considered as part of bold measures to tackle poverty. COSLA announced that the initiative is one that local government can get behind and work with the Scottish Government on.
9. On 11 May the Scottish Government [called](#) for expressions of interest from communities across Scotland to consider whether their local area could be designated as the country's newest national park. Individuals, groups or organisations considering making a proposal can now register early interest. Nominations will officially open later this year, once the appraisal framework has been finalised. The government has committed to designating at least one new national park in Scotland by Spring 2026.
10. On 26 May the Scottish Government [announced](#) that a summit focused on tackling violence in schools will be convened by Education Secretary Jenny Gilruth in the coming weeks. It will bring together young people, parents and carers, schools, local authorities and unions to discuss how to tackle the problem. This will build on guidance provided to local authorities and on the £2 million of funding to support violence prevention activities within schools and communities. Education Scotland will also work with every local authority to identify good practice in behaviour and relationships, sharing the findings with schools across the country.
11. At the May Commission meeting, members requested further information on the £25 million five year initiative [announced](#) by the Scottish Government on 23 April to help councils identify affordable homes for key workers in rural communities. This is provided in [Appendix 2](#).

Health, Social Care and Covid Response

12. On 10 May the Scottish Government [announced](#) a further £3.6 million has been allocated to Hospital at Home to support more than 150 extra virtual beds. Hospital at Home can provide a safe, patient centred alternative to an acute hospital admission. It provides a better outcome for the patient, who receives treatment in the safety and comfort of their own home, as well as reducing pressure on hospital sites.
13. On 12 May the Scottish Government [announced](#) that people in health and social care settings will no longer be advised to wear facemasks from 16 May. The return to pre-pandemic guidance means that mask use will be based on clinical need based on infection prevention and control advice. This means that staff, patients, service users and visitors will not be routinely asked to wear facemasks in health and social care settings.
14. On 23 May the Scottish Government [announced](#) a programme of meetings that will take place over the summer giving people across Scotland the chance to have a say on how a

new National Care Service should work. Most of the meetings will be held in person across Scotland but there will also be two online meetings for anyone who would prefer to join discussions remotely.

Social Security and Communities

- 15.** On 03 May the Scottish Government [announced](#) that councils can now apply for their share of £4.5 million to support the provision of after school and holiday clubs for Scotland's most disadvantaged communities. The funding will help improve both indoor and outdoor spaces in the school estate, with schools also encouraged to consider wider community needs.

Economy and business

- 16.** On 16 May the Scottish Government [announced](#) that projects designed to stimulate economic activity, boost tourism and improve community assets on Scotland's islands will share £4.1 million in the latest round of funding from the Islands Programme. A total of 13 initiatives will benefit from the funding which includes a community recycling hub on Shetland, the construction of new accommodation for workers in Mull and the development of a new bike park on the Isle of Arran.
- 17.** On 25 May the Scottish Government [announced](#) the introduction of a bill to enable councils to invest more in local tourism facilities and services through a levy on overnight stays based on a percentage of the accommodation cost. All money raised would have to be reinvested locally on facilities and services substantially for or used by visitors, enhancing the tourist experience and benefitting local communities and their economies.

Scottish Parliament

- 18.** During May, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) [published blogs](#) on: Highly Protected Marine Areas FAQs, Economic and supply chain impacts of wind energy in Scotland, Timeline of Coronavirus in Scotland, Renewable energy map of Scotland, and Medium term financial strategy – decisions pushed back.

Parliamentary committee news

Public Audit Committee

- 19.** During May the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): NHS in Scotland 2022, Administration of Scottish income tax 2021/22, How the Scottish Government is set to deliver climate change goals: Governance and risk management arrangements for net zero targets and adaptation outcomes, and it's work programme.
- 20.** On 18 May the Auditor General Stephen Boyle [wrote](#) to the Public Audit Committee to inform them that he will continue to monitor the cost of the new vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides over the lifetime of the project and confirms that it is his intention to prepare a further report examining the full cost of the project once the vessels have been completed.

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

- 21.** During May the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): Damp and Mould in Social and Private Rented Housing, Community Councils, and subordinate legislation.

Finance and Public Administration Committee

- 22.** During May the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): Public administration - Effective Scottish Government Decision Making, Choice of Deputy Convener, Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill Financial Memorandum, Public administration in

government, Scottish Government's public service reform programme, and it's work programme.

Other Committee news

23. During May the Economy and Fair Work Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): Just Transition for the Grangemouth area, Scottish Government policy priorities, subordinate legislation, and it's work programme.
24. During May the Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): Asylum Seekers in Scotland, and subordinate legislation.
25. During May the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): Scrutiny of NHS Boards (NHS Dumfries and Galloway, NHS Tayside and NHS Lanarkshire), Scrutiny of NHS Boards (NHS Shetland, NHS Eileanan Siar and NHS Orkney), Female Participation in Sport and Physical Activity.
26. During May the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): The role of Local Government in Delivering Net Zero, and subordinate legislation
27. During May the Social Justice and Social Security Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): Cost of Living: Lone Parents, Child Poverty and Parental Employment Inquiry, Appointments and Reappointments to the Poverty and Inequality Commission, Scrutinising Social Justice, Impact of the cost of the living crisis, subordinate legislation and it's work programme.

Local government news

COSLA

28. On 15 May COSLA [responded](#) to the Finance and Public Administration Committee's call for views on public service reform highlighting the significant efficiencies and reforms that councils across Scotland have already been making in response to cuts to core funding over the past decade.
29. On 17 May COSLA [responded](#) to the publication of the Accounts Commissions Local Government Overview report by confirming that councils are at the forefront of service provision, transformation and collaboration in Scotland calling on other public bodies to be as radical and transformative as Scottish Local Government.
30. On 22 May COSLA [published](#) "No Recourse to Public Funds", a report of local authority data highlighting the crucial role of local government in preventing destitution. The full publication can be accessed [here](#).
31. On 24 May COSLA [responded](#) to the rejection of the local government offer to the care home sector by Scottish Care confirming it was the best offer they could make and was at the limits of affordability.
32. On 26 May COSLA [responded](#) to the publication of the Hearings for Children: The Redesign report from the Hearings System Working Group. The report, which highlights the structural and systemic changes required to the broader childcare, protection and support system surrounding children and their families, has been informed and designed alongside young

people. COSLA, confirmed they and their local government colleagues will take the time to fully consider the report and its recommendations. The report can be found [here](#).

Improvement Service

- 33. On 10 May the Improvement Service [responded](#) to the Scottish Government's draft Energy and Just Transition Strategy consultation. The Improvement Service highlighted the crucial role that local government has to play in a Just Transition to Net Zero, and how any action to drive the necessary transformation will be more effective and impactful if councils are able to bring local communities on board.
- 34. On 15 May the Improvement Service [released](#) a new online resource for the public sector, including local government, in Scotland. The new resource has been developed as an introduction to children's human rights to allow users to learn about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including what is happening in Scotland to protect children's rights and what responsibilities public bodies will have as a result of current changes.
- 35. On 22 May the Improvement Service [announced](#) that they are carrying out research on the extent to which the needs of racially minoritised victims/survivors of violence against women and girls are currently met by systems and services across Scotland, and where there may be opportunities to strengthen policy and practice to ensure it is more inclusive of women's needs.

The Scottish Housing Regulator

- 36. On 26 May the Scottish Housing Regulator [published](#) a report on Lessons Learned on effective recording of decisions and discussions by governing bodies of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and is part of the Regulator's suite of advisory guidance. The Regulator commissioned the report to help RSLs following the outcomes of its annual risk assessment and its engagement with a small number of RSLs about how decisions and discussions were being recorded. As with all advisory guidance, RSLs may decide to adopt the advice set out in full, in part or not at all. It is intended to complement the advice produced by other regulators about effective recording of decisions and discussions by governing bodies and provide sector specific advice.

Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman and Standards Commission

- 37. We continue to develop our approach to reporting relevant information from both the SPSO and Standards Commission to the Commission. This will form part of the revised bi-annual Intelligence Report that is reported to the Commission's Financial Audit and Assurance Committee, which will include specific information previously requested by the Committee which is not publicly available.
- 38. The Intelligence Report was scheduled to be reported to the April Committee but, due to delays in receipt of the information required, was not tabled. The report is Item 13 on the agenda of the Commission's June meeting (as a private item). We will then revert to the normal reporting schedule, with the next report due to be considered at the November FAAC meeting.
- 39. Recent and upcoming hearings where decisions were reached, and the results of these, are available [here](#), with hearings resulting in no action or further work outlined [here](#).

Solace

40. On 16 May Solace [published](#) an article calling for councils to be given statutory powers over economic development so they can more effectively help create high-quality jobs, attract investment into local areas, and turbocharge the UK. They believe this will help address social, regional and financial inequalities within and between places and that thriving economies are built on robust physical and social infrastructure with councils being ideally placed to deliver on both fronts.

Other scrutiny bodies

Care Inspectorate

41. On 02 May the Care Inspectorate [notified](#) all chief social work officers that they are undertaking a national review of the experiences of disabled children and young people. The review will provide an overview of social work's contribution to how well disabled children and young people's needs are assessed, planned for, and met. The review commences in May 2023 and concludes in May 2024.
42. On 23 May the Care Inspectorate published a joint inspection [report](#) of services in the Scottish Borders partnership where they key strengths that are having a significant and positive impact on the lives of children and young people. Inspectors also noted some areas which could further improve. The report notes that children, young people and families benefited from supportive and trusting relationships with staff across services who took timely and appropriate action to keep children safe.

Education Scotland

43. On 03 May Education Scotland [published](#) its latest version of Scotland's Equity Toolkit, an interactive learning resource to improve leadership, learning and teaching to support children and young people, their families and communities impacted by poverty. Shaped by stakeholders involved in the Scottish Attainment Challenge, the toolkit can be used to support activities including professional learning, dialogue, and planning and self-evaluation.

Other UK audit bodies

44. On 23 May the Northern Ireland Audit Office [published](#) a report on Mental Health Services in Northern Ireland. The report provides a high-level overview, considering issues around mental health strategy, funding, activity and data. It highlights the prevalence of mental health problems in Northern Ireland, which are approximately 25 per cent higher than in England. One in five adults show signs of mental health problems, with an estimated one in eight young people experiencing anxiety and depression. The report confirms that the higher prevalence of mental health issues has been linked with both greater levels of deprivation in Northern Ireland, and with the impact of the 'Troubles'. In 2022-23, £345 million was allocated for mental health services, representing 5.7 per cent of the overall health and social care budget. Despite higher prevalence levels, funding for mental health in Northern Ireland is lower than elsewhere in the UK and Ireland. The report estimates that bringing funding levels into line with elsewhere in the UK would require an additional £190 million annually.

UK Government

45. On 02 May Public Finance [published](#) an article confirming that the UK government will fail to eradicate regional inequalities across the UK without providing additional support to more

deprived areas and ending competitive bidding pots. Pledges to achieve a “geographical spread” of funding have led to money being given, in many cases, to some of the least deprived areas in England, the Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities said.

46. On 03 May Public Finance [published](#) an article confirming that Welsh councils have told the Welsh government that managing the complicated system of separate grants has stretched already-tight time and resources. Finance and local government minister Rebecca Evans said that she will reduce the number of pots from next year as she wants to give more responsibility for delivery and achieving value for money to local authorities. She has also promised to work with local leaders to develop a new framework for how the government funds the sector.
47. On 04 May Public Finance [published](#) an article confirming Unite announced that 75% of its members in England, Wales and Northern Ireland voted to reject proposals to increase salaries by £1,925 or 3.88%, whichever would be higher. Unite said it will start balloting members for industrial action later in the month.
48. On 11 May Public Finance [published](#) an article confirming that the lack of a clear and comprehensive strategy detailing local authorities' role in the transition to net zero is hindering progress. Key Cities, which represents local governments in 27 English and Welsh cities, said the UK government should use devolution deals to set out clear net zero powers and funding to improve local infrastructure.

Scottish public policy news

49. On 16 May the Scottish Government [confirmed](#) they have taken action to ensure the completion of two ferries by Ferguson Marine following a due diligence assessment carried out on forecast costs. Wellbeing Economy Secretary Neil Gray re-affirmed the Scottish Government's commitment to supporting the completion of the vessels.
50. On 18 May the Scottish Government [announced](#) the establishment of a dedicated Food Security Unit, one of the key recommendations of the Short-life Food Security and Supply Taskforce, which was set up following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.
51. On 22 May the Scottish Government [announced](#) that junior doctors across Scotland have been offered a 14.5% pay uplift over the two-year period 2022-24, following negotiations with BMA Scotland. If accepted, the new and final offer will be a pay raise of 6.5% in 2023/24, as well as an additional 3% towards an already agreed 4.5% uplift in 2022/23.
52. On 23 May the UK Government [published](#) its seventh annual report on the implementation of the Scotland Act 2016. The report notes “substantial progress” on the transfer of welfare powers to the Scottish Parliament in the last year and ongoing work to support the Scottish Government's planned replacement for the Carer's Allowance. It also notes upcoming work on the Fiscal Framework Review.
53. On 25 May the Scottish Government [published](#) their [Medium-Term Financial Strategy](#) which outlines the approach to ensuring Scotland's finances are on a sustainable footing and delivering high-quality public services in the face of high inflation. Economic growth, progressive taxation and spending plans that target those in greatest need are at the heart of this financial strategy. The strategy notes that current resource spending requirements could exceed funding by £1 billion in the next financial year, and by £1.9 billion in 2027-28.

- 54.** On 26 May the Scottish Government [announced](#) a programme to reduce the carbon footprint of NHS Scotland and enable more environmentally sustainable care has been launched. The National Green Theatres Programme, developed by clinicians, will cut the high emissions and waste typically generated in surgery while maintaining the highest levels of patient safety and quality of care. The first set of actions will help NHS Scotland meet its net zero target by 2040 and reduce carbon emissions by 7,100 tonnes of carbon dioxide, the equivalent 4,400 single passenger return flights from Glasgow to New York.
- 55.** On 30 May the Scottish Government [announced](#) that the Scottish Child Payment is being received by the families of more than 300,000 children and young people, according to official statistics. The total amount of the benefit paid out since its February 2021 launch now stands at £248.6 million.

UK public policy news

- 56.** On 09 May Public Finance [published](#) an article confirming that the public increasingly having its “ear to the ground” on local issues has led to financially failing council administrations being punished at the ballot box following the latest round of local elections in England. One expert said the elections partially highlighted the growing trend of people focusing on local priorities in council elections, rather than national issues.
- 57.** On 11 May the Bank of England [raised](#) interest rates again for the twelfth time in a row. The interest rate was increased by 0.25 percentage points to bring the base rate to 4.5%, the highest it has been since October 2008.
- 58.** On 17 May director of local audit at the Financial Reporting Council, Neil Harris, [told](#) Parliament’s levelling up committee that the number of outstanding local authority audits could reach more than 1,000 by the end of 2023 without “urgent and decisive action”.
- 59.** On 23 May the International Monetary Fund have [predicted](#) that the UK should avoid recession with GDP growing by 0.4% in 2023 rather than shrinking by 0.3% as it previously predicted in April.
- 60.** On 25 May the UK Government [announced](#) they had appointed commissioners at Woking Borough Council after an independent review found the authority has failed its best value duty. The review said that the authority is the UK’s most indebted council relative to its size, due to an investment strategy that relied on borrowing to lend to regeneration companies in a way not backed by assets in any way matching that debt.
- 61.** On 26 May the UK Government [announced](#) a £650m life sciences growth package to support economic growth with new commitments and funding for manufacturing, skills and infrastructure. The package will attempt to cut NHS waiting times and improve commercial clinical trials to bring new medicines to patients faster.

Consultations

- 62.** On 11 May, the Scottish Government opened a [consultation](#) seeking views and comments on the designation of at least one new National Park in Scotland by 2026 as one of the priority actions of the draft Biodiversity Strategy. The Biodiversity Strategy sets out Scotland’s ambition to halt biodiversity loss by 2030 and to restore and regenerate biodiversity across Scotland’s land, freshwater and seas by 2045. This is being done because Scotland has seen a decline in its biodiversity. The State of Nature Report for

Scotland showed an average decline in the abundance and the distribution of Scotland's species over recent decades.

63. On 17 May, the Scottish Government opened a [consultation](#) seeking views and comments on making changes to Section 31 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 which concerns disqualification for nomination, election and holding office as member of a local authority. The changes that are being proposed are focused on whether individuals subject to the sex offender notification requirements under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 should be barred from holding the position of councillor in a local authority. At present, some individuals may be subject to Sex Offender Notification Requirements under Part 2 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 ("SONR"), more commonly known as being on the Sexual Offenders Register, but not receive a custodial sentence of imprisonment which would fall within the scope of the existing legislation disqualifying persons from holding office.
64. On 24 May, the Scottish Government opened a [consultation](#) seeking views and comments on effective community engagement in the local development planning process. The guidance forms part of the Government's work on reform of the planning system and implementation of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019. It supports the new approach to local development planning on which further new regulations and guidance are available and is primarily targeted at planning authorities and communities.
65. At the May meeting of the Commission, a consultation on councillor remuneration was raised by the Acting Chair. This was in reference to the [announced](#) joint ambition of the Scottish Government and COSLA to increase the diversity of local councillors, the [decision](#) to reconstitute the Scottish Local Authorities Remuneration Committee (SLARC) to undertake a one-off review of councillor remuneration, and the [recent appointment](#) of Angela Leitch as the Convenor of SLARC. It is our understanding that the consultation is not yet live. Further advice on the appropriateness of the Commission formally responding will be communicated for members to consider in due course, once there is greater clarity on the nature and focus of the consultation questions.
66. We advised members in May that the Commission Support Team have been liaising with members of Audit Scotland staff to update guidance that formalises the role of both the Commission Support Team (in particular the Secretary) in preparing responses, and the Commission in approving consultation responses issued on its behalf. This work is still ongoing.
67. The guidance referred to was prepared in 2022, with input from the Secretary to the Commission, but was only in draft form and never fully implemented. It is mainly operational in nature, setting out the roles and responsibilities for both Audit Scotland staff and the Secretary in ensuring that decisions around responding to consultations are better co-ordinated and communicated. Due to the operational nature of the guidance, we think it premature to share due to it still being finalised but intend to, once it is finalised, provide it as an appendix to a formal paper. This paper will outline for the Commission the roles of the Chair, members and the Secretary in approving responses and ask for formal agreement to the proposed roles, and any appropriate delegations related to these.
68. The Commission Support Team recommend that the Commission:
 - Notes the consultations on National Parks designation, Section 31 of the 1973 Act and community engagement in the planning process but does not formally respond.

- Notes the ongoing consideration of the councillor remuneration consultation by the Commission Support Team as it formulates a proposed recommendation on responding for the Commission's consideration, and the closing date of the consultation (September 2023).
- Notes the intention for the guidance on consultation responses to be tabled formally at a future meeting of the Commission, as part of a formal proposal about the roles and responsibilities for approving consultation responses.

Appendix 1:

Quarter 4 (January to March 2023) and 2022/23 annual (April 2022 to March 2023) publication statistics

Reports (* denotes page views rather than downloads)	Publication	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Quarter 4	TOTAL
2023						
Blog: Encouraging progress on education data but still a long way to go	30/03/23			57	57	57 *
Blog: Learning the lessons of Covid-19 has never been more important	29/03/23			127	127	127 *
Web: Scotland's financial response to Covid-19: Spending update	29/03/23			299	299	299 *
Blog: Reporting on the vital role of Scotland's housing benefit services	15/02/23		90	62	152	152 *
Resourcing the benefit service: A thematic study	15/02/23		234	98	332	332
Web: Public sector gender pay gap reporting	07/02/23		512	457	969	969 *
Local government in Scotland: Financial bulletin 2021/22	12/01/23	807	279	181	1,267	1,267
Reports (* denotes page views rather than downloads)	Publication	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Quarter 4	TOTAL
2022						
Blog: Why Best Value matters, now more than ever	10/11/22	67	92	59	218	760 *
Best Value Assurance Report: Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	29/09/22	48	45	39	132	604
Briefing: Tackling child poverty	22/09/22	168	227	241	636	3,045
Scotland's councils' approach to addressing climate change	08/09/22	152	205	208	565	1,689
Best Value Assurance Report: Shetland Islands Council	25/08/22	48	32	54	134	568
Best Value Assurance Report: Angus Council	05/07/22	38	42	45	125	814
Integration Joint Boards: Financial analysis 2020/21	30/06/22	81	80	99	260	1,175
Accounts Commission annual report 2021/22	29/06/22	14	18	35	67	381
Blog: Inequalities in Scotland	23/06/22	75	51	35	161	988 *
Scotland's financial response to Covid-19	16/06/22	92	109	133	334	2,430
Blog: Local government in Scotland 2022	01/06/22	77	44	44	165	968 *
Local government in Scotland Overview 2022	25/05/22	237	278	234	749	3,606
Children and young people who need additional support for learning	17/05/22	138	196	215	549	1,931 *
Working together to increase collaboration and accelerate improvement	16/05/22	25	26	24	75	367 *
The 2020/21 audit of Orkney and Shetland Valuation Joint Board	22/03/22	31	14	24	69	259
Blog: Councils face complex and urgent challenges	21/03/22	54	69	41	164	989 *
Scotland's economy: Supporting businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic	17/03/22	90	100	106	296	1,214
Local government in Scotland: Financial overview 2020/21	10/03/22	103	80	75	258	1,461
Drug and alcohol services: An update	08/03/22	311	252	369	932	3,188
Best Value Assurance Report: Moray Council - progress report	03/03/22	30	29	44	103	507
The value of independence and scrutiny across local government	24/02/22	24	10	10	44	234 *
Social Care Briefing	27/01/22	233	222	221	676	3,378
Best Value Assurance Report: Falkirk Council	13/01/22	68	61	55	184	780

Reports (* denotes page views rather than downloads)	Publication	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Quarter 4	TOTAL
2021						
Blog: Statutory Performance Indicators	21/12/21	16	4	7	27	138 *
Blog: Assurance and scrutiny	25/11/21	10	6	2	18	89 *
Community empowerment: Covid-19 update	28/10/21	97	80	82	259	753 *
Best Value Assurance Report: South Ayrshire Council	27/10/21	38	37	27	102	485
Auditing climate change: An update	21/10/21	65	38	36	139	962
The role of sponsors in our reporting work	14/10/21	3	11	6	20	95 *
The impact of Covid-19 on Scottish councils' benefit services	07/10/21	26	39	15	80	275
Blog: Christie - it really is now or never	04/10/21	23	21	19	63	275 *
Best Value Assurance Report: East Dunbartonshire Council	29/09/21	37	19	37	93	396
Accounts Commission Strategy 2021-26	23/09/21	60	32	44	136	1,042
Blog: Digital exclusion	16/09/21	80	76	83	239	915 *
Blog: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	31/08/21	36	66	63	165	552 *
Blog: Public Services and Scotland's Voluntary Sector during Covid-19	25/06/21	13	8	14	35	167 *
Best Value Assurance Report: Aberdeen City Council	24/06/21	38	27	40	105	418
Social care	03/06/21	43	33	40	116	524 *
Accounts Commission annual report 2020/21	03/06/21	9	7	11	27	146
Local government in Scotland Overview 2021	27/05/21	69	51	58	178	1,298
Equality outcomes 2021-25	27/04/21	46	23	24	93	498
Mainstreaming equality and equality outcomes: progress report 2019-21	27/04/21	25	18	20	63	235
Improving outcomes for young people through school education	23/03/21	315	254	327	896	4,223
Local government in Scotland: Financial overview 2019/20	26/01/21	45	51	30	126	1,009
Digital progress in local government	14/01/21	97	114	91	302	1,384
- SUPPLEMENT 1 - Checklist	14/01/21	13	21	20	54	535
- SUPPLEMENT 2 - Methodology	14/01/21	9	6	10	25	96
Reports (* denotes page views rather than downloads)	Publication	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Quarter 4	TOTAL
2020						
Housing Benefit Performance audit: annual update 2020	08/12/20	18	17	11	46	147
Best Value Assurance Report: The City of Edinburgh Council	26/11/20	30	23	23	76	310
Covid-19 Strategic Scrutiny Group	05/11/20	6	9	6	21	118

Appendix 2:

Affordable housing initiative for key workers

1. On 23 April the Scottish Government [announced](#) that up to £25 million is being made available to help councils identify affordable homes for key workers in rural communities. The five year initiative, set out in the Scottish Government's priorities for the next three years, will enable local authorities and registered social landlords to acquire or lease properties which can be used to provide homes to meet the needs of their communities.

2. Members may wish to note the following:

- In April 2023, the Scottish Government published Equality, opportunity, community: New Leadership – a fresh start. This set out three key missions for the Scottish Government and included two relevant commitments from Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice to be delivered by 2026:
 - Delivered affordable homes across the country, the majority of which will be for social rent, driving towards our 2032 target.
 - Published a Remote, Rural and Island Housing Action Plan; setting out our approach to rural housing delivery, including support for community housing trusts, and actions to allow suitable properties, including empty homes, to be purchased, or long leased, and turned into affordable housing for those who need them in rural areas, including key workers.
- The definition of key workers is determined by individual local authorities based on local priorities. [Local Housing Strategy Guidance](#) sets out how local authorities are expected to take the needs of Key workers into account including through specific policies, including allocations. Section 10 of the guidance includes specific provisions related to the supply of homes for key workers, including an expectation that the Scottish Government would expect to see due consideration of key workers within each local strategy.

The announcement reflects a commitment made by the now First Minister during his recent leadership campaign and the £25m will be taken from the Scottish Government's existing £3.5 billion [affordable housing programme](#) and made available over the next five years.

The strategy received coverage in both mainstream media and specialist outlets. Gail Matheson, chief executive at Highland Housing Alliance, welcomed the allocation of funding. She said: "Important to future-proofing and strengthening the Highland economy is the availability of high-quality and well-priced homes for local workforces. Without the provision of more housing, we risk jeopardising attracting and retaining skilled workers across the region." ([Inside Housing](#))

Local Government Benchmarking Framework: National Benchmarking Overview Report 2021/22

Interim Secretary

Item 17
Meeting date: 15 June 2023

Purpose

1. This paper introduces for the Commission's information the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) National Benchmarking Overview Report 2021/22 and introduces representatives of the LGBF Board who will present the draft report at today's meeting.

Recommendations

2. The Commission is invited to:
 - Consider the [LGBF National Benchmarking Overview Report 2021/22](#) with a view to identifying any implications for upcoming publications, and in the context of the Commission's Statutory Performance Information Direction, the new approach to Best Value, the recently published Local Government Overview 2023 and developments relating to the proposed New Deal for local government.
 - Consider and comment upon the accompanying presentation by Kenneth Lawrie and Emily Lynch summarising the report and presenting the LGBF Board's thinking on the future development of the project.
 - Note that further dialogue with the LGBF Board to this end will take place in coming months, with the Commission to be updated accordingly.

Background

3. The Commission has maintained a close interest in the development of the LGBF. This interest reflects the Commission's ongoing commitment to encourage local government-led benchmarking and improvement, as well as its statutory responsibilities in directing local authorities to publish performance information and securing the audit of Best Value.
4. The Commission published in December 2021 its three-year [Statutory Performance Information Direction](#). The Direction sets out the performance information that the Commission requires councils to publish and applies for the information covering the three years from 1 April 2022. A core theme of the Direction is the Commission's continued encouragement of the LGBF project. In their 2021/22 annual audit reports, auditors reported on progress made by councils against the Direction, and this was reported to the Commission by the Controller of Audit in the Annual Assurance and Risks Report, considered and approved by the Commission in March 2023.

National Benchmarking Overview Report 2021/22

5. The Improvement Service published this report on 21 March 2023. This is in effect the annual report of the LGBF project and is the eleventh such annual report. It is attached in the **Appendix**. As part of a new approach to reporting, a supplementary interactive [LGBF dashboard](#), which provides access to data and analysis at an indicator level, service level, family group level and council level, along with narrative to support meaningful interpretation, has also been developed and implemented.
6. Kenneth Lawrie, Chair of the LGBF Board (and Chief Executive of Falkirk Council) and Emily Lynch, Programme Manager, Improvement Service, are present at today's meeting to present the report. They will summarise the conclusions of the report.

Conclusion

7. The Commission is asked to consider the 2021/22 Benchmarking Overview report in the context of its SPI direction, the development of a new approach to reporting on Best Value and the wider developments relating to the proposed New Deal for local government.