

Audit scope

Building flood resilience in communities

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland

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Background

Scotland's weather patterns are changing because of climate change. Increasing heavy rain fall together with sea level rise, is causing more extreme floods. Around 284,000 homes and premises in Scotland are at risk of flooding. That number is projected to grow, including in areas that have not previously been affected.

The negative impacts and risks of flooding on communities are increasing. This includes direct impacts such as damage to homes and property, and a threat to life in some areas. Wider impacts include loss of livelihood, disruption of supply chains, damage to infrastructure, homelessness and long-term mental health issues. The economic cost of flood damage to properties in Scotland averages around £200 to £250 million per year, causing financial hardship and impacting on wellbeing.

The impacts of flooding are not felt equally across communities. For example, some may find it more difficult to afford insurance or measures to protect their homes from flooding. This leaves them more vulnerable to flooding and in a position where it is harder to recover from the impacts if affected.

Flood policy in Scotland is evolving, broadening out from a focus on flood prevention measures to a greater emphasis on flood resilience. This includes wider measures to avoid flooding; preparing for and responding more effectively to flooding to minimise the impact when it happens; and improving recovery after a flood.

Why is this audit important?

The Scottish Government, councils, some central government bodies, and communities all have a critical role in building flood resilience. Effective collaboration between them is essential as flood policy evolves and focuses more on resilience.

The Scottish Government invests significantly in this area, channelling £42 million annually through councils for local flooding protection measures. It has allocated an additional £150 million for flood risk management and £12 million for coastal change adaptation over the current parliamentary term. Additional funding may be provided in the aftermath of major flooding events.

What will the audit look at?

The overall aim of the audit is to examine how well the Scottish Government, councils,

central government bodies and their partners are working together and with local communities to build flood resilience.

We will aim to answer the following audit questions:

- What is the impact of flooding on communities and what strategies and plans are in place at a national and local level for building flood resilience in communities?
- How well are public bodies collaborating with each other and with communities to avoid flooding wherever feasible and to support communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from flooding events?
- Looking ahead, how well placed and resourced are public bodies to work together and with communities to achieve long-term ambitions to build flood resilience in communities?

Building flood resilience in communities is a complex issue. The audit will focus on activity and progress across four key policy areas:

- land use and planning
- local flood risk management strategies and action plans, and coastal change adaptation plans
- community level actions
- property level flood resilience measures.

The audit will not examine civil contingency planning or emergency response, the impact of flooding on national infrastructure, such as the transport network and industrial sites, or water quality issues related to sewage entering water courses because of flooding. We recognise that these are important issues, which may be the subject of future audit work.

How will we carry out this audit?

We will review key documents and analyse financial and other relevant data from national and local government and their partners.

We will interview officials in the Scottish Government, SEPA, Scottish Water, a sample of councils and other relevant organisations and forums.

We will undertake more detailed work in specific case study areas to draw on the knowledge, understanding and experience of local communities and public bodies.

What do we want to happen as a result?

The audit will support scrutiny of how well the approach to building flood resilience in communities is working and the barriers that need to be overcome. It will aim to share learning and will include recommendations to help support improvement.

The Scottish Government is due to publish a new national flood resilience strategy and a new Scottish National Adaptation Plan in 2024. The audit will help to inform the further development of plans and actions related to these overarching strategies.

Timetable

We plan to publish the report on behalf of the Auditor General and the Accounts Commission in spring / summer 2025.

Contact

If you have any questions, please get in touch with Rebecca Seidel, Senior Manager, at rseidel@audit-scotland.gov.uk

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Audit Scotland, 4th Floor,
102 West Port, Edinburgh EH3 9DN
T: 0131 625 1500
E: info@audit-scotland.gov.uk
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk