MEETING: 10 DECEMBER 2020

REPORT BY: INTERIM CHAIR OF ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

INTERIM CHAIR'S REPORT

Purpose

1. This report provides an update on the engagements and work of the Interim Chair of the Accounts Commission.

Engagement and Audit Scotland Business

2. The engagements and work in the period from 1 to 30 November have been as follows:

    Audit Scotland Board and Committee meetings

    *   4 November – Audit Committee and Remuneration and Human Resources Committee (RemCo) meetings. The main items discussed were:

        o   RemCo – Taking forward the recommendations from the Commission Support Review; the Diversity and Equality work programme; and the People Strategy and Workforce Plan.

        o   Audit Committee – The draft Quality Interim report; Q2 Financial performance report; a number of Internal Audit reports; the External auditor's independence, objectivity and value for money; taking forward a review of the Audit Committee's effectiveness; and a Covid-19 update. (note: I missed most of this because I attended the Local Government Sector Forum which was scheduled at the same time).

    *   25 November – Audit Scotland Board Meeting. The main items of substance discussed were our Governance arrangements; Budget proposals; a Covid-19 update; the Q2 Financial Performance update; an update on the EU Withdrawal; the New Audit Appointments project; and proposals to take forward a Strategic Improvement Programme.

    Audit Scotland engagement

    *   5 & 11 November – Catch ups with Diane McGiffen, Chief Operating Officer
    *   5 November – Audit Scotland's Performance Audit and Best Value Q4 team meeting to discuss Accounts Commission priorities and allow colleagues the opportunity to ask questions
    *   17 November – New Audit Appointments Steering Group
    *   18 & 24 November – Catch ups with Fraser McKinlay, Controller of Audit
    *   25 November – Catch up with Audit Scotland on New Audit Appointments Steering Group
    *   30 November – Catch up with Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland
    *   30 November – Introductory meeting with Carolyn McLeod, new Audit Director.

- 4 November – Local Government Sector Meeting with private audit firms and Audit Scotland Audit Directors

- 11 November – catch up with Sarah Gadsden, Chief Executive, Improvement Service

- 18 November – Audit Scotland Annual Audit Planning conference

- 23 November – catch up with Jim Savege, Chief Executive of Aberdeenshire Council

- 23 November – catch up with Angela Scott, Chief Executive of Aberdeen City Council

- 24 November – Strategic Scrutiny Group Meeting – update will be shared with members at the December Commission meeting

- 27 November – Meeting with SOLACE Scotland (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers in Scotland) with Fraser McKinlay. Key areas covered included Best Value Audits and Annual Audits in the context of the pandemic, Council responses to the pandemic and thinking about recovery.

- 30 November – catch up with Vicky Irons, Chair of IJB Chief Officers Group and Chief Officer of Dundee IJB.

Commission business, development and support

3. Commission business has been as follows:

- Weekly catch ups with Paul Reilly, Secretary to the Commission, and Jillian Elgin, Executive Assistant

- 2 November – Community Empowerment catch up – Jillian Matthews, Audit Manager and Geraldine Wooley, Commission member

- 2 November – Strategic Scrutiny Group Covid-19 publication – communications approach with Joanna Mansell, Communications Team, and Gemma Diamond, Audit Director

- 3 November – Action Tracker review meeting with Paul Reilly, Jillian Elgin, Peter Worsdale and Erin Lee, who both provide support to the Commission

- 3 November – Preparatory meeting for November Commission meeting with Fraser McKinlay, Paul Reilly, Tim McKay, Interim Deputy Chair, and Jillian Elgin

- 3/18/26 November – Sponsor catch ups with Tim McKay and Local Government Overview team to discuss the approach, timing and emerging messages for the Financial Local Government Overview and the Local Government Overview

- 11 November – Forward planning meeting with Tim McKay and Paul Reilly

- 12/27 November – Best Value Working Group meetings. Updates are shared with Commission Members at each monthly Commission meeting as a standing item on our agenda.

- 11 November – Accounts Commission pre meeting with members

- 12 November – Accounts Commission first meeting in November

- 12 & 20 November – IT catch ups with Pauline Weetman and Sophie Flemig, Commission members

- 16 November – Member catch up with Tim McKay

- 17 November – Paul Reilly, Peter Worsdale, Policy Support to the Accounts Commission, and Craig Flannigan, Joanna Mansell and Elizabeth Sargeant, Communications Team, to discuss Accounts Commission communications, engagement and public profile

- 17/23 November – Edinburgh media catch up with Joanna Mansell

- 18 November – Work Preference Survey responses discussion with Tim McKay, Paul Reilly, Jillian Elgin and Erin Lee

- 23 November – Member catch up with Pauline Weetman

- 25 November – Financial Audit and Assurance and Performance Audit Committee pre meetings

- 25 November – Media interviews for City of Edinburgh Council BVAR publication

- 25 November – Member catch up with Geraldine Wooley

- 26 November – Insight session with members and Jim McCormick, The Robertson Trust

- 26 November – Financial Audit and Assurance Committee and Performance Audit Committee meetings

- 27 November – Member catch up with Andy Cowie, Commission member

- 27 November – Digital Strategy catch up with David Robertson, Head of Digital Services

- 30 November – Preparatory meeting for December Commission meeting with Fraser McKinlay, Paul Reilly and Tim McKay

- 30 November – pre meeting for Edinburgh Council Best Value report discussion with Andy Cowie and Christine Lester, Commission members.

4. Other areas of work have included:

- A blog to support the publication of the Strategic Scrutiny Group Covid-19 publication.

- Short videos outlining the key items considered at the November Commission meeting and the City of Edinburgh BVAR.

- An interim review of Commission Working Groups with proposals for some streamlining which will be reviewed again following the Committee Review being led by Tim McKay, Interim Deputy Chair.

Forthcoming activities

5. My forthcoming engagement activities include:

- 1 December – Weekly catch up with Paul Reilly

- 1 December – Action Tracker review meeting with Paul Reilly, Peter Worsdale, Jillian Elgin and Erin Lee

- 1 December – Weekly catch-up with Jillian Elgin

- 2 December – Meeting with City of Edinburgh Council to discuss Best Value report with Andy Cowie and Christine Lester

- 7 December – Community Empowerment catch up – Jillian Matthews, Audit Manager, Geraldine Wooley and Sophie Flemig

- 8 December – Forward planning meeting with Tim McKay and Paul Reilly

- 8 December – Member catch up with Stephen Moore, Commission member

- 9 December – Accounts Commission pre meeting

- 9 December – Monthly sponsor catch ups with Tim McKay and Local Government Overview team to discuss the approach, timing and emerging messages for the Financial Local Government Overview and the Local Government Overview

- 9 December – Paul Reilly, Peter Worsdale, Policy Support to the Accounts Commission, and Craig Flannigan, Joanna Mansell and Elizabeth Sargeant, Communications Team, to discuss Accounts Commission communications, engagement and public profile

- 9 December – Monthly catch up with Diane McGiffen

- 10 December – Accounts Commission first meeting in December

- 10 December – Member catch up with Sharon O'Connor, Commission member

- 10 December – Member catch up with Andrew Burns, Commission member

- 10 December – Member catch up with Christine Lester, Commission member

- 10 December – Best Value Working Group

- 11 December – Engagement meeting with IJB Chief Officers.

Conclusion

6. The Commission is invited to:

   a) note this report and enquire about any areas of interest

   b) consider whether there are any changes that they would wish to see to the format and content of the report for the future.

Elma Murray
Interim Chair
30 November 2020