

MEETING: 11 NOVEMBER 2021

REPORT BY: SECRETARY TO THE COMMISSION

SECRETARY'S UPDATE REPORT

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Commission on significant recent activity relating to local government, including issues relating to Covid-19.
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 his activity.
 - 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.

Commission business

Publications and activities

3. Audit Scotland collects media coverage on all reports published by the Accounts Commission. [Appendix 1](#) provides download and view statistics for the Commission's published reports and blogs in October and over the previous 12 months. [Appendix 2](#) provides additional information on the overall engagement that reports and other business have received on social media.
4. During October, with the promotion of a number of reports and accompanying videos, the Commission's Twitter page has seen strong levels of engagement. The blog on the Christie Commission and the update reports on auditing climate change and community empowerment were particularly popular. The Commission also experimented with targeted advertising on Facebook ahead of the live streaming of the last Commission meeting. Statistics on downloads and engagement on Twitter for the following reports are outlined in [Appendix 1](#):
 - On 4 October a [blog](#) by the Interim Chair was published, on her reflections on the Christie Commission, ten years since that report was published
 - On 7 October the Commission [published](#) its report on the impact of Covid-19 on Scottish councils' benefit services
 - On 14 October, a [blog](#) by Commission member Andrew Cowie was published, on his thoughts on the important role of report sponsor.
 - In the run up to the Commission meeting on 7 October, the Communications team ran a Facebook promotion advertising the live streaming of the meeting on social media, specifically targeting community groups in South Ayrshire Council.

- On 21 October, the Commission and Auditor General [published](#) an update report on the role of public audit in helping Scotland meet its net zero ambitions. As of 22 October (one day after publication) the post had reached 6,830 people on social media.
 - On 27 October the South Ayrshire Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) was [published](#).
 - On 28 October the Commission and Auditor General [published](#) an update report on Community Empowerment and how communities played a crucial role in the response to Covid-19.
5. On 2 November the Accounts Commission issued its four-monthly [newsletter](#) to all Scottish councillors.
 6. On 2 November, the Commission met with representatives of East Dunbartonshire Council to discuss the Best Value Assurance Report on the Council, published on 29 September. The Commission was represented by Tim McKay, Andrew Cowie and Pauline Weetman, accompanied by Paul Reilly, Commission Secretary and Fiona Mitchell-Knight, Audit Director, Audit Scotland (the appointed auditor). The Council was represented by councillors Andrew Polson, Joint Leader (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Group); Vaughn Moody, Joint Leader (Scottish Liberal Democrat Group); Gordan Low (Leader of the Scottish National Party Group); Alan Moir, Leader of the Scottish Labour Party Group; Gerry Comes, Chief Executive; and Jamie Robertson, Chief Finance Officer. The Council will consider the Commission's findings on 4 November.
 7. On 3 November, Sharon O'Connor attended the [Education, Children and Young People Committee at the Scottish Parliament](#). Alongside the Auditor General for Scotland and the audit team, Sharon gave evidence to the committee on the *Improving outcomes for young people through school education* performance audit as part of the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny.
 8. The Commission will consider an annual update on the progress of its Strategic Alliance with the Improvement Service at its March 2022 meeting. Meantime, a summary of the first six months of the initiative will be shared in coming days with members via SharePoint.

Forthcoming publications and activities

9. During November, the following activities are planned:
 - On 9 November, the Commission will issue its four-monthly newsletter to community groups and third sector organisations and make this available to the public.
 - On 24 November, Elma Murray will jointly chair a roundtable with the Improvement Service for council chief executives, as part of work on the 2022 financial local government overview report.
 - The Commission will publish a blog on its future reporting on housing benefit services (following consideration of item 6 at the meeting today).

Other Commission business

10. On 20 October, Audit Scotland [published](#) a tribute to Robert Black CBE, former Controller of Audit and Scotland's first Auditor General who sadly passed away earlier in

the month. Andrew Burns attended, on behalf of the Commission, a memorial service for Mr Black on 1 November.

11. On 1 November, as part of Audit Scotland's Insight Events programme, Pauline Weetman reflected on her career and time on the Commission. 52 Audit Scotland colleagues attended the session and they provided positive feedback. The session was [recorded](#) and is available for members to view.
12. On 1 November, the Commission, Auditor General and Audit Scotland submitted a response to the Scottish Government's consultation on a National Care Service for Scotland. A copy of the response has been saved on [the members' SharePoint site](#).
13. Member queries on the October Secretary update report have been saved on [the members' SharePoint site](#).
14. Members are asked to review the members' communications schedule 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, following discussion with the Interim Chair and Audit Scotland's work programme and communications teams. Members are asked to share their thoughts on the schedule, as well as any suggestions for further communications directly to the [schedule](#).

Auditor General for Scotland

15. On 7 October the Auditor General for Scotland and the audit team [gave evidence](#) to the Public Audit Committee on the Interim Controller of Audit's [blog](#) on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) as well as the 2018 joint performance audit on [Children and young people's mental health](#).
16. On 12 October, the Auditor General for Scotland [published](#) a section 22 report¹ on the 2020-21 audit of NHS National Services Scotland (NSS). This considered how NHS National Services Scotland used emergency procurement provisions to award PPE contracts.
17. On 13 October the Auditor General for Scotland [published](#) a section 22 report on the 2020/21 audit of the Crofting Commission. The report concluded that the body responsible for overseeing Scotland's 20,000 crofts must improve its governance and rebuild damaged relationships between its board and managers.
18. On 28 October the Auditor General and the audit team gave [evidence](#) to the Public Audit Committee on the [Covid-19 vaccination programme](#) briefing paper. At the same session the Auditor General, Interim Controller of Audit and audit team gave [evidence](#) on the [Community Justice, sustainable alternatives to custody](#) report.

Audit Scotland

19. Following the [publication](#) by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) of its assurance review report about the policing of the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26) in June 2021, the most recent liaison meetings held in July between Audit Scotland and the Police Investigations and Review Commissioner (PIRC) and in September with HMICS, covered the following aspects of the COP26 conference: operational policies and priorities and the impact on court schedules; plans for arrangements to deal with any rise in arrests; and arrangements of mutual aid offers

¹ Section 22 reports are prepared by the Auditor General if any specific concerns or issues have been raised in the annual audit of one of the public bodies for which he is responsible. This is done under Section 22(3) of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000.

between the PIRC, Police Scotland and Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

20. On 7 October, Audit Scotland hosted one of its 'Insight' events for staff with Scotland's National Clinical Director, Professor Jason Leitch on leading during a pandemic. The session was [recorded](#) and is available for members to view on MS Stream.
21. On 20 October, Audit Scotland's LGBTQ+ Network Group hosted an Insight event with a panel of guests from Stonewall Scotland and the Scottish Trans Alliance to explore key issues affecting LGBTQ+ people and communities in Scotland. The session was [recorded](#) and is available to members to view on MS Stream.
22. On 28 October, Antony Clark, Interim Controller of Audit and Interim Director of PABV hosted an Insight event on how audit work can better reflect the contribution the third sector and communities make to improving the lives of Scotland's people. Panel members included Jennifer Wallace, Head of Policy at the Carnegie Trust and Anna Fowlie, Chief Executive of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations. The session was [recorded](#) and is available for members to view on MS Stream.
23. Links to a number of Audit Scotland's Insight events taking place over the next month have been shared with members. This includes:
 - On 8 November, Audit Scotland's Green Future Team will explore Scotland's public sector response to the climate emergency with George Tarvit, Director of the Sustainable Scotland Network, based within the Edinburgh Climate Change Institute.
 - On 10 November, Director of Audit Services, Fiona Kordiak will host a keynote event, *What does the future look like for the audit profession?* with Audit Director, Gillian Woolman, Rob Whiteman CBE, Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), and Alison Ring OBE FCA, Director for Public Sector at the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW).
 - On 11 November, MND Scotland's Carla Belkevitz, Advocacy Worker and Morag McGown, Corporate Partnerships Manager, will explore the charity's experiences of the pandemic.
 - On 24 November, Tricia Meldrum, Senior Manager, will host a panel of experts from Who Cares Scotland?, The Promise, the Fostering Network and Edinburgh City Council for the Insight event How has Covid-19 impacted on Scotland's care experienced community?

Issues affecting Scottish local government

Scottish Government

24. On 29 September, the Scottish Government launched its [consultation](#) on the next Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland. It runs until 22 December 2021 and provides stakeholders the opportunity to influence the strategic direction of SFRS to keeping communities safe. The Auditor General will be responding to the consultation, but given the Commission's interest in local government collaboration with SFRS, we will maintain a watching brief on the progress of the consultation. Meantime, the Auditor General's response will be shared with the Commission.
25. On 5 October, the Scottish Government [published](#) its revised Fairer Scotland Duty guidance for public sector bodies to help them actively consider how they can reduce inequalities caused by socio-economic disadvantage. To fulfil their legal obligations

under the Duty, public bodies must actively consider how they could reduce inequalities of outcome in any strategic decision they make. Key points include:

- The Duty applied from 1 April 2018 and does not cover decisions made before this date.
- The Duty does not override other considerations – such as equality or best value.
- The Duty is a key consideration, underpinned by statute.
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) is the Regulator for the Fairer Scotland Duty and is closely involved with monitoring and the development of best practice for the Duty.

Audit Scotland's Equalities and Human Rights Steering Group will consider the implications of the revised Duty.

26. On 12 October an independent Expert Advisory Group [published](#) its report considering the drivers, impacts and support needs of migrant families. The final chapter sets out ten suggestions on how policy at UK, Scottish and local authority level could better support migrant families.
27. On 20 October the Scottish Government opened a [consultation](#) on its draft national plan to end the need for food banks. The consultation closes on 25 January 2022. As the consultation focuses on a specific policy, it is proposed that the Commission does not respond.
28. On 29 October, the Scottish Government [published](#) the refreshed Transforming Planning in Practice work programme, following the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 and other aspects of planning reform. The refresh provides an update on the programme and a new schedule for the remaining aspects of the work to reform Scotland's planning system.

Local government general

29. On 13 October, the Scottish Government [published](#) a report summarising the activities delivered by local authorities using flexible funding streams between October 2020 and March 2021. These funding streams allowed councils to provide emergency income, food, fuel and wellbeing support for those in need during the pandemic. The report highlights trends and learning to enhance future policy and practice.
30. On 14 October the Scottish Government [published](#) its 2021/22 council tax datasets including average council tax per dwelling and council tax by band.

Health and social care

31. On 30 September the Scottish Government [published](#) its autumn/winter vaccination strategy 2021 outlining its progress on Covid vaccinations and detailing plans for Covid and seasonal influenza vaccinations.
32. On 5 October, the Scottish Government [announced](#) additional investment of £300 million in hospital and community care to help tackle winter pressures within the NHS and social care system.
33. On 15 October the Scottish Government [announced](#) the launch of a new £15 million Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund to help tackle the impact of social isolation, loneliness and the mental health inequalities made worse by the pandemic. On

22 October the Scottish Government published its [Adult social care - winter preparedness plan: 2021-22](#) and accompanying [Health and Social Care Winter Overview 2021-22](#).

34. On 26 October the Scottish Government [published](#) details of additional funding allocated to NHS Boards and Integration Authorities to meet the costs of the pandemic and remobilising health services.
35. On 27 October the Scottish Government and COSLA [published](#) and updated the [Digital health and care strategy](#) 'to improve the care and wellbeing of people in Scotland by making best use of digital technologies in the design and delivery of services.'

Education

36. On 5 October the Scottish Government [published](#) its Covid Education recovery plan, with a renewed focus on excellence and equity, underpinned by four priorities:
 - Improvement in attainment.
 - Closing the attainment gap.
 - Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing.
 - Improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people.
37. On 27 October the Scottish Government [published](#) its implementation framework for the review of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and sets out how it will address the recommendations in the [Organisation for Economic co-operation and Development report](#). Actions include:
 - Re-assess the vision of CfE.
 - Agree measurement and evaluation approach.
 - Clarify roles and responsibilities.
 - Align assessment and qualifications.
 - Increase curriculum development capacity.
38. On 27 October the Education Secretary [announced](#) exams and national qualifications are to be reformed and new qualifications developed. It is expected that externally marked exams will remain part of the new assessment approach. Views on the reforms will be sought from young people and teachers.
39. On 1 November the Scottish Government and COSLA [published](#) a progress report on the Additional Support for Learning Action Plan, highlighting good progress, but recognising improvements required in a number of areas.

Welfare

40. On 29 September, the First Minister [announced](#) more than 2,000 jobs will be created with Social Security Scotland over the next 12 months, with the majority of the new roles based in Social Security Scotland's Dundee head office and Glasgow.
41. On 30 September, the Scottish Government [announced](#) its commitment of £20.4 million over the next four years to the provision of new programme of advocacy support to

disabled people looking to access Scottish social security benefits. The service will be operational in the new year and is independent of the Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland.

42. On 3 October the First Ministers of Scotland and Wales and the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland united to [demand](#) the Prime Minister reverse the decision to withdraw the £20 a week uplift to Universal Credit.
43. On 7 October the Scottish Parliament [unanimously](#) passed the Carer's Allowance Supplement Bill which means unpaid carers will receive a double payment of the Carer's Allowance supplement this winter.
44. On 21 October the Scottish Government [published](#) its second benefit take-up strategy which outlines plans to make sure no one misses out on financial support due to a lack of awareness or barriers to applying.
45. On 26 October the Scottish Government [published](#) Scottish Welfare Fund statistics to Wednesday 30 June. During April to June, local authorities received 21,705 applications for Community Care Grants, an increase of 37 per cent compared to the same quarter the year before. Awards distributed totalled £8.7million, a 150 per cent increase on April to June 2020.
46. On 29 October the Scottish Government [published](#) its outlines for the £41 million Winter Support Fund. The package includes £10m to help those struggling to pay fuel bills, £25m discretionary funding to local authorities to support wellbeing and respond to financial insecurity, and £6m for third sector partners to support low-income families.

Communities

47. On 28 September the Scottish Government [published](#) its annual report on Community Ownership in Scotland for 2020. This includes consideration of assets in community ownership by local authority area. The local authorities with the most community owned assets currently recorded are Highland (145) and Argyll and Bute (89); Falkirk is the only local authority with no community owned assets currently recorded.
48. On 4 October, Scotland's Chief Statistician [published](#) the latest reconviction rates in Scotland for the 2018-19 offender cohort.
49. On 5 October, the Scottish Government [announced](#) funding up to £50 million will be given to councils and social landlords to build housing infrastructure to help deliver new homes across the country.
50. On 7 October the Scottish Government [published](#) its 2021 annual report setting out the progress made in the last 12 months by national government, local government and third sector partners against actions in the Ending Homelessness Together action plan. Six out of 58 actions have been completed since the last annual report.
51. On 13 October the Scottish Government [announced](#) £1 million funding for eight local groups to bring land into community ownership and use.
52. On 15 October the Scottish Government [announced](#) funding for 23 projects focusing on developing sustainable economic activities on islands, through the £2 million Island Communities fund.

Economy and business

53. On 29 September, the Scottish Government [published](#) Scotland's labour market statistics from the Annual Population Survey 2020/21, presenting analysis on the labour

market, education and training. Model Based Unemployment rates have increased in all 32 of Scotland's local authorities since April 2019-March 2020

54. On 30 September the Scottish Government [published](#) its Fiscal Framework Outturn Report on reconciliation and outturn information for Scottish Income Tax, Scottish Landfill Tax, Land and Buildings Transaction Tax, devolved social security benefits and updates on borrowing and the Scotland Reserve. Breakdowns by local authority will be published later in 2021/22.
55. On the 8 October, the Scottish Government [announced](#) an additional £450,000 to the £2.75 million Scotland's Events Recovery Fund. The fund will support 275 cultural and sporting events across the country.
56. On 14 October the UK and Scottish Governments [discussed](#) and agreed in principle the scope of the independent report that will inform the subsequent review of the Scottish Government's Fiscal Framework.
57. On 14 October, the Scottish Government [published](#) Fair Start Scotland's third annual report that highlights the national employment support service. There is reference to partnership working with local authorities.
58. On 15 October the Scottish Government [published](#) its labour market monthly briefing for October 2021 – a summary of employment, unemployment and economic inactivity sourced from the Labour Force Survey and other labour market statistics from a range of official sources for Scotland and the UK. Some of the information is broken down into Scottish local authority areas. On the 13 October SPICe [published](#) an overview of the labour market for Scotland in October.
59. On 26 October the Scottish Finance Secretary [published](#) a letter she had written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer ahead of the UK Autumn Budget and comprehensive spending review, calling for additional spending to support households and businesses who are facing rising prices, reduced support and increasing shortages.
60. On 26 October the Scottish Government [published](#) a summary of local and non-local authority funds that supported businesses to help mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic.
61. On 28 October the Scottish Government [published](#) non-domestic rates relief statistics in Scotland 2021. It includes breakdowns by relief, property type and local authority area, and additional information on Small Business Bonus Scheme (SBBS) and reliefs introduced to support businesses through the pandemic.

Covid-19 measures

62. On 1 October the Scottish Government's Covid-19 vaccine certification scheme came into [force](#). There was initial [reports](#) of major problems with the app. Following an 18-day grace period, the scheme [enforcement measures](#) came into effect on 18 October the Scottish Government [published](#) guidance to help local authorities enforce the vaccine certification (or Covid passport) scheme.
63. On 5 October the Scottish Government [published](#) its *Covid Recovery Strategy: for a fairer future*, setting out their vision for recovery and actions that will be taken to address systematic inequalities made worse by Covid. It includes a section on rebuilding public services and partnership working with local government.
64. On 14 October the Scottish Government [published](#) the latest findings on modelling Covid-19 in Scotland, both in terms of the spread of the disease through the population and of the demands it will place on the system.

65. On 19 October the Scottish Government [announced](#) existing Covid-19 safety mitigations in schools are to remain, following advice from senior clinicians. Pupils will continue to be required to wear face coverings in secondary school classrooms and in communal areas.
66. On 21 October the Coronavirus (Covid-19) Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's issues [published](#) its guidance on baseline Covid-19 mitigations that should be in place within schools following the October holidays.
67. On 26 October the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government [published](#) a letter to local authorities about the continuation of special measures guidance for building standards during Covid-19. The guidance is being extended until 30 September 2022, with a review scheduled for summer.

Climate emergency

68. On 7 October the Scottish Government [published](#) its Heat in Buildings Strategy, which sets out the pathway for cutting greenhouse gas emissions from Scotland's homes and buildings – which currently account for about a fifth of Scotland's emissions and will require over a million homes and the equivalent of 50,000 non-domestic buildings to convert to zero emissions heat by 2030.
69. On 8 October the Scottish Government [announced](#) the first Green growth pathfinder projects to benefit from a programme driving investment in low carbon infrastructure. The projects come from five different local authority areas.
70. On 19 October the First Minister of Scotland [signed](#) Scotland up to a climate agreement with 260 state, regional and city governments to become net-zero in less than 30 years.
71. On 25 October the First Minister gave a [speech](#) to young people in Glasgow, setting out Scotland's priorities for COP26. She outlined the importance of the conference and urged participants to bring the same sense of urgency world leaders had when dealing with the Covid pandemic. She also set out plans for an analysis of Scotland's energy needs and [advised](#) that the Scottish Government will no longer support unlimited recovery of hydrocarbons and work will be undertaken to support a just transition for the energy sector.
72. On 27 October the Scottish Government [announced](#) the reopening of the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme (AECS) for funding in 2022. The fund is to support farmers, crofters and land managers for the conversion to and maintenance of organic land and sits alongside a suite of measures aimed at promoting low carbon farming and protecting the environment.
73. On 26 October, Transport Scotland [published](#) guidance for local authorities on the creation, modification and revocation of low emission zones in Scotland.
74. On 27 October the Scottish Government [published](#) its annual report on progress with the renewable heat target and action.
75. On 28 October the Scottish Government launched a [consultation](#) on the Scottish Government's ambition to more than double Scotland's onshore wind capacity by 2030. The consultation closes on 21 January 2022. It is proposed that the Commission does not respond.
76. On 29 October the Scottish Government [published](#) guidance for Scotland's public bodies on their leadership role in the shared national endeavour to tackle the global crises of health, climate emergency and biodiversity loss.

Other matters

77. On 16 October the Scottish Government [announced](#) a major transformation programme that will overhaul the way evidence is handled and used by the criminal justice system. A pilot of the system will launch in Spring 2022.
78. During October the Scottish Government's Director of Communications and Ministerial Support shared with public organisations their revised risk assessment, [protocol](#) and guidance for commissioning celebrities or influencers for external engagement to public organisations for their consideration. This also included a [contract template](#). The protocol requests that should any concerns about an individual's suitability to be engaged in publicly-funded engagement and communications activity arise then the Scottish Government Head of Marketing should be notified.
79. On 22 October the Scottish Government [launched](#) its consultation on the production and dissemination of Scotland's recorded crime statistics. The consultation ends on 22 December 2021. It is proposed that the Commission does not respond to this consultation (Audit Scotland is currently considering whether to respond).
80. On 27 October the Scottish Government [published](#) a progress report for 2021 on the British Sign Language (BSL) national plan. The report covers the period 2017-2023 and covers work in a variety of areas including education, public services, transport, justice, training, social security, democracy and health. It concludes that many of the actions in the plan "remain wholly or partly incomplete" but the government commits to considering what further work needs to be done as it develops Covid-19 recovery plans.
81. On 27 October Transport Scotland [published](#) a report looking at trends in transport and travel in Scotland during the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic between March 2020 and March 2021. It considers the impact of local authorities being at different restriction levels and movements between restriction levels.

Scottish Parliament

82. In October, SPICe published:
 - A [blog](#) on how Scotland is performing against the indicators in the national performance framework.
 - A [blog](#) considering how the UK and Scottish Governments are thinking differently about health and care reform.
 - A [briefing](#) on the Scottish House conditions survey 2019 annual report which includes information on council powers to address poor house conditions and sources of support for improving conditions in private housing.
 - A [briefing](#) on the impact of Covid-19 on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans (LGBT+) population in Scotland.
 - A [briefing](#) considering the impact of Covid-19 on women entrepreneurs in Scotland and the support available to them during the pandemic.
 - A [blog](#) considering how school pupils might be assessed in the future.
 - A [blog](#) considering increasing gas prices and fuel poverty.
 - A central [hub](#) for all SPICe material related to COP26 and climate change, including:

- A [blog](#) on the science behind COP26 and the Intergovernmental Panel on climate change's (IPCC) code red for Humanity report.
 - A [blog](#) on the Agenda for COP26.
 - A [blog](#) on the history of climate COP.
83. On 7 October the Scottish Government [introduced](#) the Good Food National Bill to Parliament. It will require public bodies including health boards and local authorities to prepare plans help ensure good quality, locally sourced and produced food is a practical everyday reality for everyone.

Parliamentary Committee news

Public Audit Committee

84. In October, the Committee [took evidence](#) on the Auditor General reports on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), Sustainable alternatives to custody and the Covid-19 vaccination programme.
85. Following a meeting on 7 October, the Convener [wrote](#) to the Auditor General advising of the Committee's concern about limited progress having been made in terms of Children and young people's mental health. The letter acknowledges the impact the Covid-19 pandemic has clearly had on the system and encourages the Auditor General to consider how to review his work programme accordingly.

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

86. In October, the Committee [took evidence](#) on and considered subordinate legislation, the Code of Conduct for Councillors (the Code) and pre-budget scrutiny.
87. The Committee [published](#) a letter from Shona Robison, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government to the Convener updating the Committee on revised plans for the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (Licensing of Short-term Lets) Order 2021. This includes proposed changes to local authority powers concerning short-term lets.
88. In October the Committee [published](#) a report recommending that the Code of Conduct for Councillors be approved.

Finance and Public Administration Committee

89. In October, the Committee [took evidence](#) on and considered its work programme and pre-budget scrutiny 2022-23 and the impact of Covid-19 on public finances.
90. In October the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Covid recovery [wrote](#) to the Convener about the national performance framework to provide further detail about the timing of the NPF review.

Covid-19 Recovery Committee

91. In October, the Committee [took evidence](#) on and considered the work programme and subordinate legislation.

Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee

92. On 1 November the Committee published its pre-budget scrutiny [report](#) on culture sector funding. Recommendations include an outcome-based process centred on the now

established health and social benefits of cultural engagement. The Commission submitted a response to its consultation in September 2021.

Local government news

93. On 25 October the Paisley Daily Express [published](#) a news story about an ex-councillor who lost his appeal on the decision by the Standards Commission that he be banned for 16 months.
94. On 28 Oct the City of Edinburgh Council [heard](#) a paper on the Independent Inquiry report arising out of allegations concerning the conduct of the late Sean Bell (a former senior manager in the Communities and Families directorate, who passed away in August 2020. Mr Bell was due to stand trial for sexual offences charges, but Police Scotland's criminal investigation was brought to a close following his death.)

COSLA

95. On 1 October COSLA [welcomed](#) the news that the Scottish Government is funding a £2 million initiative to roll out a ground-breaking approach to interviewing vulnerable child victims and witnesses across Scotland. The Scottish child interview model was developed by local authorities and Police Scotland.
96. On 6 October COSLA's president [expressed](#) disappointment on the Supreme Court Judgement in relation to the United National Convention on the Rights of the Child and European Charter Bills which they had supported. The Supreme court unanimously ruled there were certain provisions in each bill that were outside of the competence of the Scottish Parliament and would have imposed undue requirement on the UK Parliament.
97. On 1 and 8 October, COSLA raised [concerns](#) about the Scottish Government's proposals for a National Care Service. In particular that it put at risk vital links between essential services that vulnerable people rely on and that there is no evidence to demonstrate the need to centralise children's services.

SOLACE

98. On 29 September, SOLACE UK [stated](#) that the forthcoming Spending Review must address the issue of the local government workforce capacity and capability crisis.

Improvement Service

99. On 27 September, the Improvement Service [published](#) an Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Delivery progress report which shows 90,890 children were accessing childcare as at the end of August 2021. On 4 October COSLA [welcomed](#) the latest figures.
100. On 27 September the Improvement Service, in partnership with COSLA, the Scottish Government, NHS Education for Scotland and the Safe & Together Institute, [published](#) a companion document to support professionals working on domestic abuse.
101. On 5 October the Improvement Service [published](#) an article on Scotland's green recovery and what role local government could have.
102. On 14 October the Improvement Service [announced](#) it has agreed a net zero statement that will guide their approach to climate change and support COSLA and the Scottish Government's commitment to a just transition to net zero by 2045.
103. On 18 October the Improvement Service published a [blog](#) by its Climate Change Transformation Manager on the importance of the local government contribution to

tackling climate change and how it is working to embed climate change in everything the Improvement Service does.

Commissioner for Ethical Standards

104. On 8 October, the Commissioner [published](#) the revised Strategic Plan 2021-2024 outlining the Commissioner's key objectives and [published](#) the Biennial Business Plan 2021-2023 detailing how the Commissioner will work to achieve its strategic objectives and reflecting progress up to 30 September 2021. The Commission provided comments previously on the draft plan.
105. On 18 October, the Commissioner published the [Public Appointments Annual report](#) which covers the work carried out on public appointments during 2020/21.

Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO)

106. The SPSO's [October newsletter](#) outlines statistics on complaints and learning points from decision reports, statistics on Scottish Welfare Fund reviews and case studies and the Annual report 2020/21.
107. On 19 October the SPSO [published](#) its Annual Report and Accounts 2020/21.

Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)

108. On 12 October, the SHR [published](#) its updated guidance about how it uses its statutory intervention powers if it needs to take action to safeguard the interests of tenants and service users.

Care Inspectorate

109. In September the Care Inspectorate and Health Improvement Scotland [published](#) the Foundations of a Barnahus (Bairns' Hoose) model in Scotland – a child-centred response for children who are victims or witnesses of serious crime and abuse.model in Scotland – a child-centred response for children who are victims or witnesses of serious crime and abuse.
110. In September the Care Inspectorate [published](#) a report on its review of throughcare practice in community justice social work services across Scotland. The report found a clear commitment to reintegration, that risk management was a strength and effective partnership working was key. Challenges included gaps in mental health support, systemic barriers which hindered reintegration and improvements are needed to ensure staff had access to key training and learning opportunities.
111. On 26 October the Care Inspectorate [launched](#) a consultation on their Corporate Plan, which will cover the three-year period from 2022 – 2025. The consultation will run until 21 November.

Scottish public policy news

112. On 4 October, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation [published](#) its annual poverty in Scotland 2021 report that outlines the current state of poverty in Scotland. The summary notes that even before the Covid-19 pandemic a million people (including a quarter of a million children) were trapped in poverty, and that without further action the Scottish Government will miss the interim child poverty targets in April 2024.
113. On 6 October the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) [published](#) a workforce skills report 2021. The report considers Scotland's population and policy changes and the impact on the care workforce, the supply and demand of training provision, qualifications

and skills challenges.

114. On 6 October the Child Poverty Action Group [published](#) a report stating 22,000 children in Scotland will be pushed into poverty as a result of the cut to Universal Credit.
115. On 6 October Holyrood magazine [reported](#) concerns raised by a number of groups about the impact of the removal of the Universal Credit uplift at the end of September 2021. This included the Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland, Save the Children and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
116. On 8 October, Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) [published](#) research which identified almost 430,000 people missed a council tax payment in the last year after running out of money before pay day.
117. On 11 October, the Scottish Association of Landlords (SAL) [reported](#) there could be a shortage of properties available to rent over the winter. This is increasing pressure on local councils to provide emergency housing. SAL says its members reported reductions of 80 per cent or more in the number of properties available to let in the past two months.
118. On 12 October the Office for National Statistics (ONS) [published](#) its latest unemployment statistics including claimant count by unitary and local authority which is an experimental dataset. The unemployment rate in Scotland remained at 4.4 per cent, with more than 2,630,000 people aged 16-64 employed in Scotland between June and August. Across the UK, the unemployment rate was estimated at 4.5 per cent.
119. On 14 October the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a [briefing](#) about poverty levels for people in minority ethnic communities in Scotland which are double the national average, and rising.
120. On 19 October the Office for National Statistics (ONS) [published](#) its figures for Workless households for regions across the UK: 2020. This includes annual figures for the numbers and percentages of working, mixed and workless households within all local authorities. Glasgow City and Inverclyde featured in the top ten areas with the highest percentage of workless households.
121. On 20 October the Fraser of Allander Institute published a [report](#) on adults with learning disabilities and set out six recommendations for Scottish Government to consider to build evidence-based effective action for people with learning disabilities in Scotland.
122. On 22 October the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) [published](#) research that found Scotland spends more on education than any other devolved UK nation, with its core per-pupil figure expected to be over £800 higher than in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in the current academic year.
123. On 22 October Citizens Advice Scotland [published](#) a briefing on fuel debt, warning that increasing numbers of people are missing energy payments because they have run out of money before pay day.
124. On 25 October Charlotte Street partners and Diffley Partnership [published](#) their inaugural quarterly report Understanding Scotland which highlights the Scottish population's views on several key issues. From over 2,000 respondents, the survey found 34 per cent of individuals put tackling poverty and inequality in the top three issues facing the country, with the environment a significant concern among those aged 16-34 years old.
125. On 25 October the Royal Society of Edinburgh Post-Covid-19 Futures Commission [published](#) a report reflecting on the Commission's learnings, findings and recommended

actions to support Scotland as it emerges from the pandemic. It makes several recommendations for decision-makers, to support Scotland's Covid recovery and future resilience, including transforming the delivery of public services. [Summaries](#) of each working group were also published including one on inclusive public services, chaired by former Auditor General, Caroline Gardner.

Other UK audit bodies

126. On 30 September Audit Wales published reports on [local government](#) and the [financial sustainability](#) of local government.
127. On 7 October Audit Wales [published](#) a report on social care. The report outlines some key issues facing the sector in Wales, including financial sustainability, funding, slow progress in addressing the challenges and the impact of Covid-19.
128. On 14 October, the Auditor General for Wales [published](#) three reports that identified unlawful activity and failure to exercise minimum standards of financial management and governance in three local community councils.
129. On 21 October, the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) [published](#) a joint report with the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) on a strategic approach to the use of public sector assets – a good practice guide for local government in Northern Ireland.

UK Government

130. On 19 October the UK Government [published](#) its Net Zero Strategy, outlining how the UK will meet its net zero emissions target by 2050. It includes a commitment to setting clearer expectations for local government.
131. On 20 October the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland [announced](#) the appointment of Tom Harris as lead non-executive director for the Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Office of the Advocate General of Scotland for three-year terms.
132. During October the government [published](#) its programme of presidency events for COP26. The two-week programme of events starts with a World Leaders' Summit (1-2 November), hosted by the UK Prime Minister.
133. On 27 October the UK Government [published](#) its Autumn Budget and Spending review 2021. Key announcements included:
 - In relation to Barnett consequentials, on top of the 2021/22 block grant base rate of £36.7 billion, the Scottish Government will receive an average of £4.6 billion in additional funding per year over the Spending Review Period. However, the 2021/22 base rate does not include Barnett consequentials received as a result of spending on Covid-19, which means that overall levels of block grant funding from 2022/23 onwards will likely be lower than in 2020/21 and 2021/22.
 - In relation to direct UK Government spending in Scotland, announcements included £170 million to be allocated to eight projects in Scotland, as part of its first round of the Levelling Up Fund.
134. On 27 October the Fraser of Allander Institute [published](#) a summary of implications for the Scottish Budget for 2022/23.
135. On 27 October, SOLACE UK [published](#) its response, welcoming the extra investment in local government over three years. However, SOLACE noted that the investment will fall short of what is needed because of rapidly rising demand for vital services.

136. On 28 October, SPICe [published](#) a blog summarising key points from the budget and setting out some of the implications for Scotland.

UK Parliament

137. On 12 October, the House of Commons and Science and Technology Committee and Health and Social Care Committee [published](#) their report, Coronavirus: lessons learned to date, examining the initial UK response to the Covid pandemic. The Committee praised the UK's vaccine programme but raised concerns over a delay in establishing an adequate test and trace system.
138. On 20 October, the Public Accounts Committee [announced](#) an inquiry into the cost of the UK's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and how this interacts with the Spending Review. The deadline for submitting evidence is Wednesday 10 November.
139. On 21 October, the Public Accounts Committee [published](#) its report on the Test and Trace programme. The report finds the programme has not achieved its objective of breaking chains of Covid-19 transmission and has underspent by £8.7billion (of its £37 billion budget).
140. On 26 October the UK Parliament [published](#) a research briefing on Covid-19 and withdrawing crisis social security measures.

UK public policy news

141. On 5 October the CIPFA Chief Executive Rob Whiteman [wrote](#) an open letter to new Communities Secretary, Michael Gove in which he says local government would welcome radical change to its functions and form in return for greater funding certainty.
142. On 12 October, the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) [reported](#) that as at the target date 30 September 2021 only 9 per cent of local government bodies' 2020/21 audits have been completed. The position compares to completion of 45 per cent of 2019/20 audits and 57 per cent of 2018/19 audits by the respective target dates. The challenges posed by Covid-19 have contributed to the current position as have a number of other pressures. This story was also [reported](#) in Public Finance later in the month.
143. On 15 October Charles Randell, chair of the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and Payments Systems Regulator, [announced](#) he will step down from both organisations in Spring 2022. The Treasury has begun the recruitment process for his replacement.
144. On 21 October, the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey [published](#) its annual findings, which show 73 per cent of Scots believe the distribution of income in the UK is unequal, compared to 65 per cent in England. On the issue of Covid-19, it found individuals' outlook towards broad areas of public policy remained the same, but attitudes towards working patterns had changed in light of home working.
145. On 29 October the Financial Reporting Council [published](#) its inspection findings into the quality of major local body audits in England and found 30 per cent required improvements. This is an improvement on the prior year inspection results where 60 per cent of audits inspected required either improvements or significant improvements.

Conclusion

146. The Commission is invited to:
- a) Agree that it maintains an interest in the progress of the Scottish Government consultation on the next Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland (paragraph 24).

- b) Agree not to respond to the consultations highlighted at paragraphs 28, 75 and 79.
- c) Note this report.

Paul Reilly
Secretary to the Commission
3 November 2021

Appendix 1 - Accounts Commission activity over the past 12 months – report downloads, blog and Commission meeting views and Twitter engagement

October outputs	Date	Downloads/ views *	Twitter engagement rate (%)
Blog: Christie - it really is now or never	4 Oct	467	4.1
Blog: The impact of Covid-19 on Scottish councils' benefit services	7 Oct	176	-
October Accounts Commission meeting***	7 Oct	27 live 26 recorded	2.3
Blog: The role of sponsors in our reporting work	14 Oct	118	-
Briefing: Auditing climate change: An update	21 Oct	213	2.3
Best Value Assurance Report: South Ayrshire Council	27 Oct	145	2.4
Briefing: Community empowerment: Covid-19 update	28 Oct	503	1.8

Key:

* Figures as of 28 October

** Engagement rates over two per cent are considered strong.

*** Figures compare to 13 live and 18 recorded views of the meeting in September

Previous outputs	Date	Report downloads/ blog views**
Accounts Commission Strategy 2021-26	23 Sept 21	152
Blog: Digital exclusion	16 Sept 21	293
Blog: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	31 Aug 21	468
Best Value Assurance Report: Aberdeen City Council	24 Jun 21	664 (+111)
Accounts Commission annual report 2020/21	3 Jun 21	296 (+44)
Local government in Scotland Overview 2021	27 May 21	2,234 (+428)
Equality Outcomes 2021-25	27 Apr 21	436 (+54)
Mainstreaming equality and equality outcomes: progress report 2019-21	27 April 21	409 (+87)
Improving outcomes for young people through school education	23 Mar 21	5,845 (+724)

Previous outputs	Date	Report downloads/ blog views**
Local Government in Scotland: Financial Overview 2019/20	26 Jan 21	2,547 (+183)
Digital progress in local government	14 Jan 21	2,715 (+193)
Digital progress in local government – supplement 1 (checklist)	14 Jan 21	326 (*)
Digital progress in local government – supplement 2 (methodology)	14 Jan 21	114 (*)
Housing Benefit Performance audit: annual update 2020	8 Dec 20	337 (*)
Best Value Assurance Report: The City of Edinburgh Council	26 Nov 20	1,570(+61)
Covid-19 Strategic Scrutiny Group	5 Nov 20	851 (*)
Best Value Assurance Report: Aberdeenshire Council	22 Oct 20	1,121 (+49)

Key:

** Figures are reported as of 30 September 2021

(x) Increase in numbers since last month

* This figure is below 30

n/a Not applicable

Appendix 2: Accounts Commission social media engagement data

	Followers	Posting views	Video views	Links accessed	Retweets	Likes	Replies	No. of publications
Oct 21	778 (+13)	22,500	316	93	47	97	6	6
Sep 21	765 (+8)	13,600	584	43	35	39	0	3
Aug 21	757 (-1)	11,200	339	48	3	13	0	0
Jul 21	758 (+18)	7,700	24	5	16	26	0	0
Jun 21	740 (+14)	56,900	513	348	113	174	8	1
May 21	726 (+22)	46,300	836	122	95	148	9	1
Apr 21	704 (+3)	3,300	n/a	1	1	0	0	0
Mar 21	701 (+15)	36,100	2,100	76	66	138	10	1
Feb 21	686 (+3)	11,000	307	20	9	10	1	0
Jan 21	683 (+30)	50,000	2,400	128	94	103	9	2
Dec 20	653 (+24)	26,400	688	46	34	47	0	1
Nov 20	639 (+22)	23,400	730	106	49	53	3	2
Oct 20	617 (+12)	10,700	526	34	26	34	0	1

Figures as of 28 October 2021

Increase on previous month shown in brackets.