

MEETING: 11 NOVEMBER 2021

REPORT BY: INTERIM CHAIR OF ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

INTERIM CHAIR'S UPDATE 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 of 1 to 31 October have been as follows:

Audit Scotland Board and Committee meetings

- There were no meetings in October.

Audit Scotland engagement

- 6 October – Attended Leading in a Pandemic – what does the road to recovery look like for our health and social care services. This was a Knowledge Café organised by Audit Scotland colleagues with Professor Jason Leitch, National Clinical Director of the Scottish Government. This provided an excellent insight into the team working between civil servants and politicians working to manage the pandemic. It also provided some valuable reminders about how to take care of 'self' when things are really tough. It was extremely well hosted by Jillian Matthew, Senior Audit Manager.
- 11 October – Monthly catch up with Antony Clark, Interim Controller of Audit and Director of Performance and Best Value, to discuss key areas of work and intelligence and how we work together.
- 20 October – Pride in our Workplaces: Understanding Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) rights and issues Knowledge Café organised by Audit Scotland colleagues. I did not manage to attend this but picked up the recording afterwards. It was extremely interesting looking at how Scotland's legal framework supports our LGBTQ+, developments happening internationally, how we can all take steps to be allies and the role of audit work in amplifying inequalities.
- 28 October – Attended Recovery and Radical Thinking keynote session, which was hosted by Antony Clark and heard from Anna Fowlie, CEO of Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and Jennifer Wallace, of Carnegie. They discussed the role of audit, communities and the third sector as well as how we think about kindness, a wellbeing economy how we become more radical in our approach to reform. I was delighted that Andrew Burns and Geraldine Wooley, Commission Members, also joined this session.

External engagement

- 5 October – Attended the Scottish Leaders Forum event where Deputy First Minister John Swinney and Alison Evison, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) President jointly launched the Scottish Government's Covid Recovery Strategy. The Strategy covers many themes that the Commission has discussed and will be jointly overseen by the Scottish Government and COSLA. We discussed the role of public audit, the opportunity for greater innovation and risk-taking, as well as the need to maintain the urgency to 'get things done' that was evident during the response to the Covid pandemic.
- 12 October – Introductory meeting with Louise Halpin, Scottish Human Rights Bill Team Leader at the Scottish Government to discuss engagement with the Strategic Scrutiny Group in the bill development. There is more to do here but this provides an excellent opportunity for ongoing engagement between the Bill Team and auditors, inspectors and regulators.

Commission business, development and support

3. Commission business has been as follows:

- Regular catch ups with Paul Reilly, Secretary to the Commission, and Jillian Elgin, Executive Assistant to the Commission.
- 6 October – Account Commission pre-meeting.
- 7 October – Accounts Commission meeting.
- 12 October – Best Value Working Group meeting. Updates are shared with Commission members at each monthly Commission meeting as a standing item on our agenda.
- 13 October – Forward planning meeting with Tim McKay, Interim Deputy Chair, Paul Reilly, Lucy Carter, Policy Manager for the Commission, and Jillian Elgin to plan up and coming Commission business.

4. Other areas of work have included:

- On holiday from 15 October until 9 November when I mostly picked up and responded to emails (see below) and queries, as well as attending some of the Insight/Knowledge Café sessions organised by Audit Scotland.
- Commented on and signed off South Ayrshire Findings.
- The Local Government Overview (LGO) audit team provided a good update, to me and Tim McKay, on the progress of evidence gathering to support our Local Government Overview (LGO) – Performance and Challenges report for 2022. While good progress is being made there are some challenges for this report and the Financial LGO, associated with the timescales for concluding annual audits. In view of this, as well as ensuring that we manage the programme of formal Commission business at the start of 2022, we plan to circulate Emerging Messages to Commission members for their input in February 2022 prior to the draft report being considered by the Commission in April. We will of course review how this works afterwards.
- Commented on and signed off responses to the following:

- A National Care Service for Scotland: consultation response.
- Community Empowerment Briefing, led by Geraldine Wooley and Sophie Flemig, on behalf of the Commission. This was welcomed by Anna Fowle at the event on the 28 October – see above.
- Just prior to Conference of the Parties (COP26) signed-off a joint press release with the Auditor General for Scotland drawing attention to our Climate Change Update published the previous week.

Forthcoming activities

5. My forthcoming engagement activities include:

- Hopefully listen in to Insight events organised by Audit Scotland for the 1, 4 and 8 November.
- 9 November – Strategic Scrutiny Group pre-meeting.
- 9 November – Audit Scotland Board Strategic Discussion.
- 11 November – Accounts Commission meeting.

Conclusion

6. This month's Commission meeting will see Professor Pauline Weetman attend her final meeting as a member of the Commission after eight years. At a personal level, Pauline has provided me with a wealth of support first of all when I was Deputy Chair and then in my Interim Chair role. A Chair cannot provide leadership to the Commission without willing supporters and followers, and I am immensely grateful to Pauline for her support and encouragement over an extremely challenging period.

7. 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
31 October 2021