

MEETING: 9 DECEMBER 2021

REPORT BY: SECRETARY TO THE COMMISSION

## SECRETARY'S UPDATE REPORT

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### 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 over the last 12 months, as of 31 October 2021.
4. In relation to social media, with fewer outputs published this month, it was a relatively quieter period, although the number of video views increased following the Commission [paying tribute](#) to longstanding member Pauline Weetman at its meeting on 11 November. The Communications team also repromoted the joint [Community empowerment update](#) and the [Auditing climate change update](#) and the upcoming 2022 Local Government Overviews were trailed. [Appendix 2](#) provides additional information on the overall engagement that reports and other business have received on social media.
5. On 4 November, the Accounts Commission, Audit Scotland and Auditor General [published](#) a joint response to the Scottish Government's National Care Service consultation. This reached 9,111 social medial users, with an engagement rate of 3.9 per cent on [Twitter](#). Engagement rates over 2 per cent are considered strong.
6. On 9 November, the Accounts Commission issued its four-monthly [newsletter](#) to 113 community groups and third sector organisations that have signed up to receive updates from the Commission. The newsletter was also forwarded to 387 community council contacts, who were asked whether they would like to receive future updates from the Commission.
7. On 16 November, following giving evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee, Sharon O'Connor of the Accounts Commission and the Auditor

General jointly wrote to Mr Fergus Ewing MSP in response to points he raised about providing services in rural areas. The letter has been saved on the [members SharePoint site](#). The response identified a number of published reports which reference additional challenges and costs of providing services. The response also references the funding formulas used by the Scottish Government in relation to local government and the NHS. The inclusion of inequalities, including rural inequalities is also identified as an area of focus of audit work.

8. On 17 November, following giving evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee, Sharon O'Connor, member of the Commission and the Auditor General jointly [wrote](#) to the Convener to provide further information on the extent to which curriculum planning was happening in college regions. The letter also provided information relating to how much money is spent by local authorities on PFI contracts for the school estate.
9. On 24 November, Interim Chair Elma Murray jointly chaired a roundtable with the Improvement Service for council chief executives, as part of work on the 2022 financial local government overview report.
10. On 25 November, Commission member Andrew Cowie [blogged](#) on the Commission's future reporting on Scotland's housing benefit services. By 26 November it had reached 611 social media users, been viewed 84 times and had an engagement rate of 5.7 per cent on Twitter. Engagement rates over 2 per cent are considered strong.

### ***Forthcoming publications and activities***

11. During December, the following activities are planned:
  - On 1 December, Commission member Sheila Gunn will chair a jointly hosted online [event](#) with the Improvement Service. This is for Education Conveners and Directors of Education from Scottish local authorities to consider the findings from the Commission's joint report with the Auditor General on [Improving outcomes for young people through school education](#). The event will provide participants with the chance to engage with the Accounts Commission on the key findings of the report, while also hearing from Steven Quinn, Director of Children's Services, Renfrewshire Council, about the challenges of improving outcomes and how they have approached this in Renfrewshire.
  - On 20 December, the Commission will publish a blog by Elma Murray on the revised Statutory Performance Information Direction for councils. This is covered in item 9 on today's agenda.

### ***Other Commission business***

12. On 2 November the Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee launched its [inquiry into the Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People](#), with a deadline of 7 December for responses. Give the tight timescales, it was agreed by the Interim Chair that Audit Scotland issue a response on behalf of the Commission and the Auditor General. This will be shared with Commission members once available.
13. At its previous meeting, the Commission agreed, to respond to the Scottish Government's [consultation](#) on the next Fire and Rescue Framework for, which runs until 22 December. The response will be shared with Commission members once available.
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

15. On 28 October the Auditor General [wrote](#) to the Public Audit Committee referring it to an Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland update report [Community empowerment: Covid-19 update](#). He notes that the Committee may wish to consider this briefing as part of its work programme.
16. On 30 November the Auditor General [published](#) a section 22 report<sup>1</sup> on the 2020/21 audit of National Records of Scotland. It notes that Scotland's census has faced considerable challenges and is expected to cost £21.6 million more than originally planned.

## Audit Scotland

17. On 8 November, the Interim Controller of Audit [wrote](#) to the Strategy Review team in the Scottish Government's Community Justice Division with a response to the consultation on the National Strategy for Community Justice review. Commission members provided comments on the paper through the MS Teams channel in October. The final response has been saved on the [members SharePoint site](#).
18. On 9 November Audit Scotland [published](#) an announcement that Chief Operating Officer, Diane McGiffen will be leaving Audit Scotland after more than 20 years working in public audit to take up the post of Chief Executive of the Law Society Scotland from 5 January 2022.
19. In November, Audit Scotland held the following events as part of its insight programme:
  - On 8 November, Audit Scotland's Green Future Team took part in a session exploring 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. The session was recorded and is available for members to view on the Audit Scotland's [intranet](#).
  - On 10 November, Director of Audit Services, Fiona Kordiak hosted a keynote event, *What does the future look like for the audit profession?* With representatives from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW). The session was recorded and is available for members to view on Audit Scotland's [intranet](#).
  - On 11 November, MND Scotland explored the charity's experiences of the pandemic. The session was recorded and is available for members to view on Audit Scotland's [intranet](#).
  - On 23 November Fiona Kordiak, Director of Audit Services hosted an event with the PCS trade union to consider the desirability, feasibility and impact of a shorter working week. Autonomy and PCS consulted with over 2,500 people across the Scottish Government and published findings in this [report](#) which received considerable media attention at the time. The session was recorded and is

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

available for members to view on Audit Scotland's [intranet](#).

- On 24 November, Tricia Meldrum, hosted 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?* The session was recorded and is available for members to view on Audit Scotland's [intranet](#).
20. On 12 November Audit Scotland [published](#) its annual diversity report 2020/21 with information about the diversity of staff as at 31 March 2021.
  21. On 12 November Audit Scotland [published](#) an Equality Impact Assessment on changes in working practice: Hybrid working (office/home)
  22. On 23 November an Audit Scotland knowledge café was held with Scottish Government School of Social Science PHD student Nokwazi Makanya presenting her research and findings on the differences, challenges and opportunities faced by Scotland's regional economies. The session was recorded and the link will be shared with members once this is ready.
  23. On 24 November Audit Scotland [published](#) its strategy on international work for 2021-24.
  24. On 26 November Audit Scotland [published](#) its Environment, Sustainability and biodiversity annual report for 2020/21 outlining progress on reducing carbon emissions and managing climate change activity.
  25. Links to a number of Audit Scotland's internal Insight events taking place over the next month have been shared with members. This includes:
    - On 1 December, Elaine Boyd, Associate Director, for Audit Quality and Appointments and ambassador for the Open University to support learning and employment opportunities for people with disabilities, will host a panel of experts on how to create accessible and inclusive workplaces for people with disabilities.
    - On 8 December, Chief Operating Officer, Diane McGiffen will be joined by representatives from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) Scotland, and Heriot-Watt University to discuss how we work in a post-pandemic Scotland and the potential for technology to transform workplaces and how public services are delivered.
    - On 13 December the Data Analytics team will introduce Audit Scotland's new financial ledger analytics tool.

## **Issues affecting Scottish local government**

### ***Scottish Government***

26. On 10 November the Scottish Government [published](#) the draft Fourth National Planning Framework alongside a [consultation](#) which runs until Thursday 31 March and an accompanying [explanatory report](#) on the framework's Housing Land Requirement. Under the new proposals, planning applications will have to show how they help meet Scotland's ambitious targets to cut emissions to net zero by 2045. We will report further to the Commission in this regard following liaison with colleagues in Audit Scotland.
27. On 15 November the Scottish Government opened a [consultation](#) about changes to bail and remand and release from custody and closes on 15 February 2022. It plans on changing bail law so people who do not pose a risk of serious harm are managed safely

in the community and given the policy focus. As this is policy-focused, Audit Scotland are not issuing a response and it is proposed that the Commission does not respond either.

28. On 16 November, the Scottish Government [announced](#) that more than £1 million had been allocated under the Public Library Covid Relief Fund to support 23 projects that are re-connecting communities with their libraries.
29. On 17 November the Circular Economy Minister [announced](#) the next steps in creating a circular economy in Scotland. These included:
  - a review of the role of incineration in the waste hierarchy.
  - requiring planning authorities to notify Scottish Ministers of any applications or decision involving incineration facilities until the end of the review period.
  - announcing the first round of funding through the Scottish Government's £70 million Recycling Improvement Fund which has awarded over £7 million to seven local authorities – Aberdeenshire, East Lothian, Fife, Highland, Midlothian, North Ayrshire and South Ayrshire.
30. On 18 November the Scottish Government [announced](#) that John Paul Marks had been appointed Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government and would take up post on 5 January 2022. He joins the Scottish Government from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) where he was Director General, Work and Health Services.
31. On 19 November the Scottish Government published a [progress report](#) on actions taken to support and promote the human rights of children in Scotland from 2018-2021, an [action](#) plan 2021 to 2024 and new [guidance](#) developed in partnership with public authorities and the third sector, for those delivering public services, on how to consider the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The progress report is the second such report setting out:
  1. The measures taken to progress of the Action Plan's strategic priorities over the period 2018-2021.
  2. The measures taken to ensure the human rights of children and young people are at the heart of the Government's response to the Covid-19 crisis and recovery.
  3. The key policy initiatives and measures undertaken between 2018-2021 to give further effect to the UNCRC.
  4. An Annex to the report includes a list of policy specific initiatives currently being progressed across the Scottish Government relevant to the rights of the child, taking forward the mainstreaming of children's rights across the Scottish Government and ensuring the principles of the UNCRC accounted for in the development of legislation, policies, strategic frameworks, action plans and other key initiatives.
32. On 23 November the Scottish Government [published](#) their formal response to the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland's *Doing Politics Differently* report that had been [published](#) in January 2021. The response sets out the government's plans for the Citizens' Assembly of Scotland's identified priorities and 60 recommendations and includes references to local authorities in recommendations relating to the priority groupings of Incomes and poverty, young people and further powers.

### *Local government general*

33. During November, the Scottish Government [published](#) an independent report on the Scottish Crown Estate's net revenue by local authority. Net revenues have been distributed to coastal local authorities since 2019.

### *Health and social care*

34. On 12 November the Scottish Government [published](#) a 2021 update report, prepared by the Digital Health & Care Directorate, on the scale-up and adoption of digital health and care solutions in Scotland, in response to the Covid pandemic.
35. On 15 November the Scottish Government [announced](#) funding of £7 million to improve GP surgeries, expanding the level of care to patients across Scotland. £5 million from the Primary Care Fund in 2021/22 has been set aside for improvements to existing GP premises such as grants for contractors, work to improve ventilation and the digitalisation of paper records to increase clinical space. An additional £2 million will enable Health Boards to acquire new sites to accommodate multi-disciplinary teams and enable Integration Authorities to take over vacant high street units to expand the primary care estate where appropriate.
36. On 16 November the Scottish Government [announced](#) the launch of a new phone service that will see trained staff stay on the line while people use drugs to ensure they remain safe. Run by the charity 'We are with you' and backed by £100,000 Scottish Government funding, the service is the first of its kind in Europe and will be trialed in Glasgow, and North and South Ayrshire.

### *Education*

37. On 22 November the Scottish Public Pensions Agency announced a [consultation](#) on draft regulations to amend the Scottish Teachers' pension schemes with a deadline of 16 January 2022. The audit team has advised that no response is required. It is proposed that the Commission does not respond.
38. On 23 November the Education Secretary [announced](#) plans for the next phase of the £1bn Scottish Attainment Challenge. Recognising the impact of the pandemic and poverty on pupils across the country, a redesigned approach to the Challenge will see funding of £43 million extended to all of Scotland's local authorities to help tackle the attainment gap and support education recovery. A COSLA spokesperson for Children and Young People welcomed the recognition that councils across Scotland will be pivotal in work to tackle the attainment gap. An [article](#) in Holyrood magazine highlights the change will cut funding to the nine challenge authorities which were funded previously. The local authorities affected are Clackmannanshire, Dundee, East Ayrshire, Glasgow, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire and West Dunbartonshire.

### *Welfare*

39. On the 10 November, the Scottish Government [published](#) its annual report on the performance of the Scottish social security system. Although the period covered was significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic the Scottish social security system is delivering 11 benefits; seven of which are new and unique to Scotland and the four others replacing UK Government benefits. The report identifies a range of actions undertaken over the year including:
  - actions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic; an additional Coronavirus Carer's Allowance Supplement payment in June; working with DWP to relax some rules around Carer's Allowance eligibility; changes made to protect



access to the Young Carer Grant and legislation relating to the Coronavirus pandemic which were commenced on 1 April 2020 and relaxed timescales in relation to applications, re-determinations and appeal requests.

- updating the following benefits from April 2020; the Carer's Allowance Supplement; the Funeral Support Payment; Young Carer Grant and Carer's Allowance.
  - the introduction of a new form assistance, unavailable elsewhere in the UK; the Child Winter Heating Assistance from November 2020.
  - publishing the second benefit take-up Strategy in October 2021.
40. On 15 November, the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Act 2021 received [Royal Assent](#). The new act increases the original payment as set by the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 and gives the Scottish Government the ability to increase the amount of a carer's allowance supplement in future.
41. On 22 November the Child Disability Payment [opened](#) for new applications. This is the first of three disability benefits to be introduced by the Scottish Government, replacing the UK Government's Disability Living Allowance for children.

#### *Communities*

42. On 5 November the First Minister [announced](#) all young people under the age of 22 years will have access to free bus travel from 31 January 2022. The scheme will be delivered by the Scottish Government in partnership with the Improvement Service, National Entitlement Card Programme Office, Young Scot, local authorities and bus operators to help Scotland reach its net zero targets by 2045. The Improvement Service also [published](#) an article summarising the announcement.
43. On 5 November the Scottish Government [published](#) an overview report considering the operation of Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in Scotland and their developments from 2020 to 2021. The arrangements bring together the Police, Scottish Prison Service (SPS), Health and local authorities, in partnership as the Responsible Authorities, to assess and manage the risk posed for certain categories of offenders.
44. On 11 November the Scottish Government [published](#) guidance to assist local authorities in deploying funding to support households experiencing financial insecurity over the winter 2021-2022.

#### *Economy and Business*

45. On 19 November the Scottish Government [published](#) its labour market monthly briefing for November 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 16 November SPICe [published](#) an overview of the labour market for Scotland in November.

#### *Covid-19 measures*

46. On 1 November, the Scottish Government [published](#) details of its marketing campaign on TV and radio encouraging everyone who is eligible for either or both of the flu and Covid-19 booster vaccinations to take up the offer when invited.
47. On 1 November the Scottish Government [announced](#) that the military is to support the

national autumn/winter vaccination programme to increase capacity.

48. On 15 November the Scottish Government [launched](#) a portal to allow those aged 50 to 59, unpaid carers who are 16 and over, and over-16s who are household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals to book a booster appointment. It has subsequently been [announced](#) that from 27 November those aged 40 to 49 can also now book a booster appointment.
49. On 16 November the Scottish Government [published](#) an updated strategic Covid-19 framework ahead of anticipated winter health challenges and potential reductions in Covid-19 vaccine effectiveness.
50. On 23 November the Scottish Government [announced](#) from the 6 December people attending venues covered by Scotland's Covid certification scheme will be given the option of providing a recent negative lateral flow test, as an alternative to proof of vaccination.
51. On 26 November the Scottish Government [published](#) an update on international travel and quarantine rules for travellers arriving in Scotland from abroad starting from 30 November. It follows the recent UK Government announcement that South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe and Namibia have been added to the red list for the UK's international travel restrictions.

#### *Climate emergency*

52. On 7 November the Scottish Government [announced](#) the seven towns chosen to help tackle the impact of climate change and secure a just transition to net zero through the Climate Action Towns programme are Alness, Annan, Blackburn, Campbeltown, Holytown, Invergordon and Stevenston. The programme will be delivered by design agency Architecture and Design Scotland, with funding from the Scottish Government and collaboration between local people and agencies.
53. On 10 November the Scottish Government [signed](#) five international agreements supporting the global decarbonisation of the transport sector. The agreements signed include the 'Further, Faster, Together' Under2 Coalition Leaders Action Document – committing 100per cent of light-duty public fleet vehicles to be zero emission by 2035.
54. On 11 November the Scottish Government [announced](#) new regulations to ban single use plastic items from 1 June 2022.
55. On 11 November the First Minister [confirmed](#) the Scottish Government will increase its fund for climate justice by a further 50per cent on top of the previous commitment to double the fund as part of Scotland's response to climate change.
56. On 17 November the Scottish Government [announced](#) an additional £18 million will be available this year to help householders install energy efficient measures and reduce their heating bills.
57. On 24 November the Net Zero, Energy & Transport Committee launched a [consultation](#) looking at the role of local government and its partners in delivering net zero and closes 21 January 2022. It is proposed that the Commission responds.

#### **Scottish Parliament**

58. In November, SPICe published:
  - A [briefing](#) exploring the views of employers' representative organisations (EROs) to current structures of social dialogue in Scotland with a focus on skills



and training.

- A [blog](#) looking at the role of Scottish local authorities in resettlement of refugees.
- A [blog](#) providing an update on UK government funding of economic development in Scotland. It specifically considers three funds; the community renewal fund; the levelling up fund and community ownership fund, detailing funding values by local authority area.
- A central [hub](#) for all SPICe material related to COP26 and climate change, including:
  - A [blog](#) considering the role of Parliaments in tackling the Climate and Ecological emergencies.
  - A [blog](#) considering what COP26 has to do with the Scottish Parliament.
  - A [blogpost](#) exploring what gender equality could mean in relation to climate action in Scotland, across selected areas.
  - A [blog](#) on what the key agreements (and disagreements) have been and to summarise the outcome of the negotiations and the Glasgow Climate Pact.
  - A [blog](#) summarising the outcomes of COP26.

### ***Parliamentary Committee news***

#### *Public Audit Committee*

59. On 4 November the Auditor General and Senior Manager Graeme Greenhill gave [evidence](#) on the [Crofting Commission section 22 report](#).<sup>2</sup> Afterwards the Auditor General and audit team gave evidence on the [NHS National Services Scotland section 22 report](#) and a [briefing on personal protective equipment](#).
60. On 9 November the Auditor General [wrote](#) to the Public Audit Committee in response to the committee's [letter](#) asking that further audit work on child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) be considered in the work programme.
61. On 25 November the Auditor General [gave evidence](#) alongside representatives from community and third sector organisations on the joint Accounts Commission and Audit Scotland update report [Community empowerment: Covid-19 update](#).

#### *Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee*

62. In November, the Committee [took evidence](#) on and considered: the Local Governance Review (specifically on 'understanding barriers to local elected office'); the National Planning Framework 4; and retrofitting housing for net-zero.

#### *Finance and Public Administration Committee*

63. On 9 November the Auditor General gave [evidence](#) on public service reform and the Christie Commission.
64. In November, the Committee also [took evidence](#) on and considered: pre-budget scrutiny;

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subordinate legislation; the impact of Covid-19 and the committee works programme.

#### *Covid-19 Recovery Committee*

65. In November, the Committee [took evidence](#) on and considered: subordinate legislation; the Covid-19 recovery strategy and baseline health protection measures.
66. In November the Committee also [published](#) a call for views on the Coronavirus (Discretionary Compensation for Self-isolation) (Scotland) Bill. The two key questions are whether respondents agree with the bill and whether there are any other issues related to the bill of which the committee should be aware.

#### *Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee*

67. In November the Committee [took evidence](#) on: the work programme; the UK internal market inquiry; the Continuity Act and inquiry into the Scottish Government's international work.

#### *Social Justice and Social Security Committee*

68. In November the Committee [took evidence](#) on and considered: its session 6 priorities for homelessness and rough sleeping; the work programme; subordinate legislation; a proposed Scottish Employment Injuries Advisory Council bill; the benefit take-up strategy and proposed fuel poverty strategy.

#### **Local government news**

69. On 12 November, Councillor Shona Haslam [announced](#) she will be stepping down from her role as the leader of Scottish Borders Council. She will remain a Conservative councillor until elections in May next year, having stated ambitions to lead a new think tank focused on building stronger communities in Scotland. On the 25 November the Council [announced](#) that Councillor Mark Rowley had been appointed to replace her as the new leader of the Council.
70. On 12 November, Renfrewshire Council [announced](#) the appointment of Alan Russell as its new Chief Executive. Mr Russell is currently responsible for the council's Finance and Resources Department and will take up post at the end of November.

#### **COSLA**

71. On 12 November, COSLA [published](#) its response to the National Care Service consultation, saying positive change is needed to tackle long standing issues in the care sector, but the creation of a National Care Service is not the way to achieve it.
72. On 15 November, COSLA [published](#) details of its budget lobbying campaign called *Live Well Locally*, urging the Scottish Government to increase levels of local government funding to ensure councils have adequate resources. Additional [news](#) items throughout November highlighted the range of services provided by local government and called on the Scottish Government to provide adequate funding ahead of the budget.

#### **Improvement Service**

73. During November the Improvement Service [published](#) details of the *Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme* which is a delivery partnership between the Improvement Service and Public Health Scotland, funded and supported by the Health Foundation and Scottish Government with support from COSLA. The ambition of the programme is to improve Scotland's wellbeing and reduce inequalities through enabling partnership-based system-wide action at a local level, supporting local authorities and their partners

to deliver Scotland's Public Health Priorities. Four communities in Alloa, Ayr, Dunoon and Clydebank are being supported initially.

74. On 29 November the Improvement Service [published](#) the results of its National Instrumental Music Survey for 2021 which shows the continued popularity and resilience of these services, even during the pandemic.

### **SOLACE**

75. On 27 October, SOLACE UK [published](#) a statement in response to the Budget and Spending Review 2021.
76. On 4 November SOLACE issued its [response](#) to the Scottish Government's consultation on the National Care Service, highlighting the significance of the proposals and therefore the time required to get it right; concerns about the lack of consultation with local government; the short timescale; the presentation of only one alternative model; and significant areas of ambiguity.

### **Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO)**

77. On 17 November the SPSO [published](#) their November newsletter, outlining statistics on complaints and learning points from decision reports, statistics on Scottish Welfare Fund reviews and case studies.

### **Care Inspectorate**

78. On 8 November the Care Inspectorate [launched](#) a consultation on the review of their strategic outcomes that will shape the new Corporate Plan, which will cover the three-year period from 2022 – 2025. The consultation ran until 21 November.
79. On 16 November the Care Inspectorate [published](#) a joint inspection report of Adult Support and Protection in South Ayrshire. It found some strengths in processes but also important areas of weakness in key processes and strategic leadership and listed substantial areas for improvement.
80. On 23 November, the Care Inspectorate [published](#) a joint inspection report of Adult Support and Protection in Dumfries and Galloway. It found Dumfries and Galloway has clear strengths ensuring adults at risk of harm are safe, protected and supported and that there was a clear collaborative ethos across the partnership. The inspection also identified areas where improvements could be made including timescales of key processes being inconsistently met which resulted in poor outcomes for a small but significant number of adults; that medical examinations should be completed in line with the needs of the adults at risk; and that front-line staff should be more directly involved in self-evaluation and improvement activity.

### **Scottish public policy news**

81. On 29 October the David Hume Institute [published](#) a briefing on levelling up high speed broadband infrastructure in Scotland and calls on the UK and Scottish governments to work together with commercial partners to increase superfast broadband provision and deliver reliable high-speed connectivity across Scotland.
82. On 29 October the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland [published](#) its young people monitoring report for 2020-21. The report finds there were 86 admissions of young people under the age of 18 to non-specialist, mostly adult, hospital wards for mental health treatment in the previous year. This is a fall from 2019-20 where there were 103 admissions, but the report stresses these numbers are not directly comparable due to Covid-19 restrictions.

83. On 1 November the Fraser of Allander Institute (FAI) [published](#) an article taken from the recent [FAI economic commentary](#). It considers how Scotland is performing on its commitment to net zero emissions by 2045 by considering the following three national outcomes - Economy, Communities and Environment.
84. On 2 November Holyrood [published](#) an article outlining how Scotland Excel is helping councils make more informed and sustainable choices through its procurement contracts and sourcing strategies.
85. On 10 November Scottish Enterprise [announced](#) it has commissioned an international collaboration project, Scot2ger, which will explore future export opportunities for Scotland's green hydrogen.
86. On 23 November Public Health Scotland [published](#) figures which show those living in the most deprived areas in Scotland were around three times more likely to experience inpatient mental health care than their wealthier counterparts. There is an interactive [online tool](#) that presents data broken down by council area of residence.
87. On 24 November the Fraser of Allander Institute [published](#) details of a new research project commissioned by ClimateXchange commissioned on behalf of the Scottish Government as part of a Joint Budget Review with the Scottish Parliament, which aims to improve the transparency with which climate change is considered in the Scottish Budget. The project will explore options for assessing the carbon impacts of policies and aims to improve how greenhouse gas emissions are considered in the development of Scottish Budgets and spending decisions. The project is due to conclude by Summer 2022.
88. In November more than 100 charities, faith groups, trade unions and other organisations [wrote](#) to the Scottish Finance Secretary urging her to use the upcoming budget to double a benefit payment made to poorer families immediately.

### **Other UK audit bodies**

89. On 28 October the National Audit Office (NAO) [published](#) its good practice guide for audit committees to help scrutinise cyber and information security arrangements.
90. On 3 November the Jersey Audit Office published a [report](#) and [good practice guide](#) on annual audit reporting which found an overall improvement from the previous year, and that the Covid-19 pandemic had provided a focus for entities to more clearly describe their purpose and actions and taken during the pandemic. However, the content of most annual reports did not meet best practice
91. On 25 November the NAO [published](#) a report on the financial sustainability of schools in England outlining that overall the financial position of primary schools has been relatively stable but there were signs of financial challenges in secondary schools and that mainstream schools would need to find significant savings to counteract cost pressures.

### **UK Government**

92. On 28 October the UK Government [published](#) the greening government commitments for 2021 to 2025. These set out the actions UK Government departments and their partner organisations will take to reduce their impact on the environment. The new targets include emissions, water use, domestic flights, and new measures on biodiversity, climate adaption and food waste. The annual report for the greening government commitments from 2019-20 has also been [published](#).
93. On 29 October the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport [published](#) the autumn update for the Project Gigabit Delivery Plan. The report finds the UK is on track for 85per

cent gigabit coverage by 2025 and there has been a significant expansion in commercial plans to deliver gigabit capability. Improved internet connectivity for 570,000 rural premises has been [committed](#), including 3,600 premises in Scotland.

94. On 1 November the Environment Agency [published](#) research on using natural flood management (NFM) to help manage flood and coastal erosion risks. This approach relies on local partnership working and local authorities are identified as one of more than 85 partners in a range of successful projects.
95. On 3 November the UK Department for levelling up, housing and communities [announced](#) a boost of £200 million to help level up communities across the UK. The list of [successful applicants](#) for the first round of levelling up funding, backs projects in Aberdeen City, Highland, Fife and Glasgow City councils. In addition the first successful projects to benefit from the community ownership fund were [published](#) and include projects in Stirling, Dumfries and Galloway, Perth and Kinross and Highland council areas.
96. On 10 November, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and Department for Transport [published](#) the zero emission vehicles transition council action plan for 2022. The action plan outlines priorities across charging infrastructure, fuel efficiency standards and regulations, the pace of transition and ensuring the zero emission vehicles transition is global.
97. On 17 November the UK Government [published](#) details on the workings of the new charging reform framework following the [publication](#) of its build back better plan for adult social care reform in England. From October 2023, the government will introduce an £86,000 cap on the amount anyone in England will need to spend on their personal care over their lifetime.
98. On 23 November the Home Office [announced](#) it will temporarily mandate the National Transfer Scheme for unaccompanied children seeking asylum. It claims there is a need for all local authorities to play a role in housing asylum seekers with the view to providing improved care and reducing the use of temporary accommodation. A start date for mandatory transfers will be confirmed following an initial notice period. The Scottish Government has [expressed concerns](#) at the announcement and plans saying it would mean the end of a rota systems agreed with all 32 Scottish local authorities. COSLA is also [reported](#) to have responded by writing to the home secretary calling for urgent talks following suggestions 31 of 32 Scottish local authorities had refused to participate in the Home Office's asylum seeker dispersal scheme. It claims there is no funding in place to support those seeking asylum, with the widespread use of temporary accommodation a symptom of government policy.
99. On 29 November the Department of Health & Social Care (DHSC) [published](#) details of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) who advised the government's booster vaccination programme be extended to everyone aged 18 or older, with a second booster dose to be provided to those who are severely immunosuppressed. It has also recommended a second dose of vaccine be given to those aged 12 to 15 three months after their first, in light of efforts to tackle the risks posed by the emerging Omicron Covid variant.

## **UK Parliament**

100. On 26 October the Housing, Communities & Local Government Committee [published](#) a report on local government and the path to net zero. The report calls on the government to increase its efforts to work with local councils on climate action in housing and planning, low-carbon heating and energy efficiency and criticises a lack of a clear government commitment to increase long-term funding specifically for local authority climate action.

101. On 17 November the Public Accounts Committee [published](#) a report on fraud and error in the benefits system, which found the level almost doubled during the pandemic, with overpayments now making up 7.5 per cent of the DWP's overall benefit expenditure.
102. On 17 November Public Finance also [reported](#) in this regard that of the Public Accounts Committee's criticism of the DWP for a lack of control over fraud and overpayments of Universal Credit which rose to 14.5 per cent of spending last year, the highest level of any income support since records began.

### **UK public policy news**

103. On 28 October the New Economics Foundation [published](#) an analysis which shows the poorest fifth of people would still have been £380 a year better off if the Universal Credit uplift had been retained, despite the boost to Universal Credit outlined in the autumn budget.
104. On 5 November, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) [published](#) findings of a recent survey which suggested 75 per cent of adults in Great Britain are worried about the impact of climate change.
105. On 17 November the Joseph Rowntree Foundation [published](#) findings from its two-year project on in-work poverty. It outlines a series of recommendations, noting a need to introduce new rights to secure work to ensure individuals can plan their family life and finances, while making flexible working the default for employees.
106. On 17 the Institute for Fiscal Studies [published](#) a briefing note following the publication of the rate of consumer inflation in October. It states figures are significantly higher at 4.2 per cent when compared with September (3.1 per cent) and warns the effects when combined with upcoming tax changes will have a significant impact on living standards.
107. On 22 November Public Finance [reported](#) that HMRC is expected to recoup less than half of the forecast £5.8bn lost through fraud and error on Covid-19 support schemes.
108. During November, the EIS Salaries Committee [rejected](#) the Scottish Government's improved offer of 1.22 per cent pay award and a one-off payment to teachers. Teaching unions had tabled a salary claim of 3-5 per cent.

### **Conclusion**

109. The Commission is invited to:
  - a) Agree that it does not respond to the consultations highlighted at paragraphs 27 and 37.
  - b) Agree that it responds to the consultation highlighted at paragraph 57.
  - c) Note that responses to the consultations in paragraphs 12 and 13 will be shared with members once available.
  - d) Note that we will report further on the consultation in paragraph 26.
  - e) Note this report.

**Paul Reilly**  
**Secretary to the Commission**  
**1 December 2021**



**Appendix 1 - Accounts Commission reports/blogs in past 12 months – downloads and views**

Report / Blog	Date	Report downloads/ blog views
<a href="#">Community empowerment: Covid-19 update</a>	28 Oct 21	819
<a href="#">South Ayrshire Best Value Assurance Report</a>	27 Oct 21	165
<a href="#">Auditing climate change: An update</a>	21 Oct 21	254
<a href="#">The role of sponsors in our reporting work</a>	14 Oct 21	125
<a href="#">The impact of Covid-19 on Scottish Councils' benefit services</a>	7 Oct 21	181
<a href="#">Blog: Christie – it really is now or never</a>	4 Oct 21	479
<a href="#">East Dunbartonshire Best Value Assurance Report</a>	29 Sept 21	286 (+160)
<a href="#">Accounts Commission Strategy 2021-26</a>	23 Sept 21	241 (+89)
<a href="#">Blog: Digital exclusion</a>	16 Sept 21	470 (+168)
<a href="#">Blog: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services</a>	31 Aug 21	869 (+186)
<a href="#">Best Value Assurance Report: Aberdeen City Council</a>	24 Jun 21	732 (+68)
<a href="#">Blog: Public Services and Scotland's Voluntary Sector during Covid-19?</a>	25 Jun 21	403 (+56)
<a href="#">Accounts Commission annual report 2020/21</a>	3 Jun 21	337 (+41)
<a href="#">Social Care: social care reform questions remain</a>	3 Jun 21	1501 (+145)
<a href="#">Local government in Scotland Overview 2021</a>	27 May 21	2,472 (+238)
<a href="#">Equality Outcomes 2021-25</a>	27 Apr 21	472 (+36)
<a href="#">Mainstreaming equality and equality outcomes: progress report 2019-21</a>	27 April 21	438 (+30)
<a href="#">Improving outcomes for young people through school education</a>	23 Mar 21	6,502 (+657)
<a href="#">Local Government in Scotland: Financial Overview 2019/20</a>	26 Jan 21	2,657 (+110)
<a href="#">Digital progress in local government</a>	14 Jan 21	2,903 (+188)
<a href="#">Digital progress in local government – supplement 1 (checklist)</a>	14 Jan 21	341 (*)
<a href="#">Digital progress in local government – supplement 2 (methodology)</a>	14 Jan 21	150 (*)
<a href="#">Housing Benefit Performance audit: annual update 2020</a>	8 Dec 20	358 (*)
<a href="#">Best Value Assurance Report: The City of Edinburgh Council</a>	26 Nov 20	1,621 (+51)
<a href="#">Covid-19 Strategic Scrutiny Group</a>	5 Nov 20	869 (*)

Note: Figures are reported as of 31 October 2021

Key:

(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
<b>Nov 21</b>	788 (+10)	6,600	499	32	29	35	0	1
<b>Oct 21</b>	778 (+13)	22,500	316	93	47	97	6	6
<b>Sep 21</b>	765 (+8)	13,600	584	43	35	39	0	3
<b>Aug 21</b>	757 (-1)	11,200	339	48	3	13	0	0
<b>Jul 21</b>	758 (+18)	7,700	24	5	16	26	0	0
<b>Jun 21</b>	740 (+14)	56,900	513	348	113	174	8	1
<b>May 21</b>	726 (+22)	46,300	836	122	95	148	9	1
<b>Apr 21</b>	704 (+3)	3,300	n/a	1	1	0	0	0
<b>Mar 21</b>	701 (+15)	36,100	2,100	76	66	138	10	1
<b>Feb 21</b>	686 (+3)	11,000	307	20	9	10	1	0
<b>Jan 21</b>	683 (+30)	50,000	2,400	128	94	103	9	2
<b>Dec 20</b>	653 (+24)	26,400	688	46	34	47	0	1
<b>Nov 20</b>	639 (+22)	23,400	730	106	49	53	3	2

Figures as of 26 November 2021.

Increase on previous month shown in brackets.