

MEETING: 9 DECEMBER 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 30 November have been as follows:

Audit Scotland Board and Committee meetings

- 9 November – Board Strategic Discussion to consider our Medium-Term Financial Plan and the implications of that.
- 22 November – Audit Scotland Board – The main items of substance covered were a Covid-19 update and discussion; Strategic improvement programme update; Q2 Financial performance and corporate performance reports; a range of budget matters as well as the draft Audit Scotland International Strategy for 21-24, and the Environment, Sustainability and Biodiversity annual report. Copies of the key papers have been loaded onto the Commission's SharePoint site and brought to members attention.

Audit Scotland engagement

- 1 November – Attended the Audit reflections with Professor Pauline Weetman in conversation with Gillian Woolman. This was a Knowledge Café organised by Audit Scotland colleagues and provided an excellent perspective on Pauline's time as a Commission member. It was extremely well hosted by Gillian Woolman, Audit Director.
- 9 & 15 November – Strategic Scrutiny Group pre-meetings with Carol Calder, Audit Director, as we prepared for the meeting on the 16 November.
- 15 November – Pre-meeting with Antony Clark, Interim Controller of Audit and Director of Performance and Best Value, Carol Calder and Gemma Diamond, Audit Directors, in advance of my meeting with Richard Leonard MSP on 17 November.
- 17 November – Monthly catch up with Antony Clark to discuss key areas of work and intelligence and how we work together.
- 18 November – Monthly catch up with Diane McGiffen, Chief Operating Officer. These meetings tend to focus on operational matters and how I work with Audit Scotland Management Team.
- 25 November – New Audit Appointment Steering Group to hear how the tender process has been progressing.

External engagement

- 10 November – Preparatory meeting with Adam Lang from Nesta in advance of Adam presenting at the November Accounts Commission insight session.
- 12 November – Preparatory meeting for the Strategic Scrutiny Group with Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People's Commissioner, and Gina Wilson, Head of Strategy.
- 17 November – Introductory meeting with Richard Leonard MSP.
- 17 November – Introductory meeting with new East Ayrshire Chief Executive Eddie Fraser, Joe McLachlan, Head of Finance and ICT, and Antony Clark.
- 23 November – Meeting with Ian Bruce, Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC) and Paul Reilly, Commission Secretary to discuss the ESC plans and strategy.
- 24 November – Insight Event – this event focused on the impact of the pandemic on those who are care-experienced. This was a very powerful event and there is much to think about in relation to our future audit work.
- 29 November – Catch up with Sally Loudon, Chief Executive, COSLA, to discuss how we work together and opportunities for increased engagement.

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.
- 3 November – Preparatory meeting for November Commission meeting with Antony Clark, Paul Reilly, Tim McKay, Interim Deputy Chair, and Jillian Elgin.
- 11 November – Accounts Commission meeting.
- 11 November – Accounts Commission Insight session with Adam Lang from Nesta.
- 16 November – Strategic Scrutiny Group meeting. We heard from Bruce Adamson, The Children and Young People's Commissioner, and Gina Wilson, Head of Strategy. As well as considering how we make better use of data in relation to equalities and agreeing a programme of work including the creation of a National Scrutiny Portal. A more detailed update will be provided to members at the January Accounts Commission meeting.
- 17 November – Communications monthly catch up meeting with Paul Reilly, Lucy Carter, Policy Manager, Craig Flannigan and Joanna Mansell, Communications Team, to discuss Accounts Commission communications, engagement and public profile.
- 18 November – Monthly sponsor catch up and issues and investigations discussion with the Local Government Overview team to discuss the approach, timing, and emerging messages for the Local Government Overview due for publication in May.

- 22 November – Forward planning meeting with Tim McKay, Paul Reilly and Lucy Carter to plan up and coming Commission business.
- 24 November – Sponsor catch up with Geraldine Wooley, Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland and Accountable Officer, and the Supporting businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic team.
- 24 November – I chaired a Local Government Overview (LGO) roundtable with council chief executives which was excellent and insightful.
- 25 November – Financial Audit and Assurance Committee.
- 25 November – Performance Audit Committee.

4. Other areas of work have included:

- The annual development meetings with Commission members started on 24 November and will conclude on 7 December.
- On holiday from 15 October until 9 November when I mostly picked up and responded to emails and queries, as well as attending some of the Insight/Knowledge Café sessions organised by Audit Scotland.
- Commented on and signed off responses to the following:
 - A response to Fergus Ewing MSP to queries following the consideration of the Educational Outcomes report by the Scottish Parliament Education, Children and Young People's Committee.
 - Commented on a response to the Scottish Parliament's Health and Sport Committee.

Forthcoming activities

5. My forthcoming engagement activities include:

- 1 December – Accounts Commission preparatory meeting.
- 1 December – Monthly catch up with Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland.
- 1 December – Monthly catch up with Simon Ebbett, Communications Manager.
- 1 December – Strategic Scrutiny Group post-meeting catch up with Carol Calder, Audit Director, and Tina Yule, Chair of Operational Scrutiny Group.
- 8 December – Communications monthly catch up.
- 8 December – Accounts Commission pre-meeting.
- 9 December – Accounts Commission meeting.

Conclusion

6. The Commission is invited to:
 - a) Note this report and enquire about any areas of interest.
 - b) Consider whether there are any changes that they would wish to see to the format and content of the report for the future.

Elma Murray
Interim Chair
30 November 2021