

MEETING: 12 AUGUST 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 from 1 June to 31 July have been as follows:

Audit Scotland Board and Committee meetings

- 2 June – Audit Committee. The main items of substance discussed were the Audit Scotland Audit summary report and the draft annual report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021; along with a suite of annual assurance and governance reports.
- 2 June – Audit Scotland Board Meeting. The main items of substance discussed were our Governance arrangements; Strategic Improvement Programme update; a Covid-19 update; Q4 Financial performance report; 2020/21 Annual report on international work; 2020/21 Annual report on complaints, 2020/21 Annual report on freedom of information and environmental information; 2020/21 Annual reports from the Chairs of the Audit Committee and Remuneration Committees; Policy on the provision of non-audit services by Audit Scotland's external auditor report; Counter Fraud Policy review report and 2020/21 Governance statement and certificate of assurance report.
- Copies of the key papers from these meetings have been loaded onto the Commission's SharePoint site and brought to members attention.

Audit Scotland engagement

- 8 June – Meeting with Diane McGiffen, Chief Operating Officer and Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland to have a general discussion on how we work together.
- 14 June & 14 July – 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.
- 15 June – Work Programme meeting with Michelle Borland, Business Manager, Performance Audit and Best Value and Jillian Elgin, Executive Assistant to discuss how the new dynamic approach to updating the refreshing the Work Programme will operate in practice. This was a really good discussion.
- 16 June & 7 July – Monthly catch up with Stephen Boyle. These meetings focus on joint areas of interest and how we can work well together.

- 17 June – Monthly catch up with Diane McGiffen. These meetings tend to focus on operational matters.
- 21 June – Media catch ups and preparation for the publication of the Aberdeen City Best Value Assurance report with Joanna Mansell, Communications Adviser.
- 23 & 28 June – Catch up with David Blattman, HR & OD Manager.
- 24 June – New Audit Appointments Steering Group meeting.
- 1 July – Catch up with Elaine Boyd, Associate Director, Audit Quality and Appointments and Kathrine Sibbald, Audit Quality Project Manager about the New Audit Appointments project and the approach to the procurement and interviews.
- 1 July – NAA discussion about tender arrangements with officers and NAA Steering Group members.
- 6 July – Regular catch up with Alan Alexander, Audit Scotland Board Chair.
- 14 July – Quarterly catch up with Simon Ebbett, Communications Manager

External engagement

- 4 June – Introductory meeting with Sean Neill, new Director for Local Government & Communities at Scottish Government.
- 14 June – Strategic Alliance meeting with Antony Clark and Sarah Gadsden, Chief Executive Improvement Service to prepare for a meeting on the 22 July to discuss how we can engage with the third and voluntary sector.
- 16 June – Scottish Housing Regulator meeting with George Walker, Chair, Michael Cameron, Chief Executive and Carol Calder, Audit Director, Performance Audit and Best Value, to follow-up on issues raised at my meeting with Tenants Representative Chairs earlier this year. This meeting also explored other potential opportunities for us to work more closely.
- 5 July – Angela Scott, Chief Executive Aberdeen City Council, to receive some feedback on how the recent BVAR had progressed.
- 8 July – Introductory meeting with Robert Scott, HM Chief Fire Inspector
- 22 July – Strategic Alliance meeting with Antony Clark, Sarah Gadsden and Annie Gunner-Logan, Chief Executive, Coalition of Care and Support Providers in Scotland discussing how we can engage and work closer together. Annie pointed me to their #BigIdeas site www.ccps-big-ideas.org
- 27 July – Introductory meeting with the Convener and Depute Convener of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. This was a very rich conversation and an early date for us to brief the Committee on our most Overview reports is being arranged.
- 27 July – Online Leadership Symposium - The Art of the Possible: Making Scotland's National Care Service a Reality. A fabulous discussion supported by three position papers from Julia Unwin, Neil Crowther and Ron Culley with observations and comments from IJB Chief Officers, Council and Third/Voluntary sector Chief Executives and Carers.

- 27 July – Meeting with Scottish Government colleagues Laura Turney, David Milne and Catriona McLean to discuss Public Service Reform and the role of scrutiny bodies.
- 30 July – Initial discussion with Jimmy Paul, Director of the Wellbeing Alliance, in preparation for the discussion with the Commission in August.

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.
- 9 June & 8 July – Forward planning meetings 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.
- 10 June – Accounts Commission meetings
- 17 June & 28 July – Communications monthly catch up meetings with Paul Reilly, Lucy Carter, Craig Flannigan and Joanna Mansell, Communications Team, to discuss Accounts Commission communications, engagement, and public profile.
- 24 June – Aberdeen Digital catch up with Antony Clark and Tim McKay.
- 28 June – Catch up with Tim McKay to discuss ongoing Commission business and how we are working.
- 7 July – Action Tracker review meeting with Paul Reilly, Jillian Elgin and Lucy Carter.
- 8 July – Performance Audit Committee follow-up discussion with Christine Lester, Performance Audit Committee Chair and Tim McKay.
- 14 July – Discussion with Mark Roberts about the Commission's approach to Parliamentary Engagement.
- 15 July – Strategy Seminar preparation meeting with Andrea Quinn, external facilitator, Tim McKay, Paul Reilly and Lucy Carter. And a follow-up meeting with Tim McKay, Paul Reilly, Lucy Carter and Jillian Elgin on 28 July.
- 15 July – Monthly sponsor catch up and draft report discussion with Tim McKay and Local Government Overview team to discuss the approach, timing, and emerging messages for the Local Government Overview due for publication in May.

4. Other areas of work have included:

- Preparation, video recording and media interviews to support the publication of the Aberdeen City Council Best Value Assurance report.
- Reviewed the newsletter for the Annual Report & Work Programme.
- Signing off introductory letters to the Conveners of the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee, Finance and Public Administration Committee, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and Education, Children and Young People Committee outlining the work of the Commission and seeking an introductory meeting.

- Signing off a response to the Ethical Standards Commissioner on his Strategic Plan.
- Signing off a detailed response to the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee Convener on the wealth and depth of evidence that the Accounts Commission can bring to the Committee.
- I have been working at APSE, the Association of Public Service Excellence, for the last 18 months taking evidence and considering the future of local government. Our report, Local by Default, was published on the 22 July, which involved my first 'out-of-home' work event since March 2020. My focus has been to consider inequalities, community empowerment and ensuring the voice of young people is heard.
- On 14 June I did my first Speakers for Schools broadcast to around 400 young people covering my career and my interest in ensuring young people have the opportunity to influence and design public services.

Forthcoming activities

5. My forthcoming engagement activities include:

- 2 August – Catch-up with Kathrine Sibbald on New Audit Appointments
- 3 August – Observation of Audit Scotland Management Team meeting
- 4 August – preparatory meeting with for August Commission meeting with Antony Clark, Paul Reilly and Tim McKay and monthly catch-ups with Stephen Boyle and Diane McGiffen
- 5 August – Forward Planning meeting and Strategic Improvement Programme keynote event preparatory meeting with Stephen Boyle and Professor James Mitchell.
- 10 August – Strategic Scrutiny Group pre-meeting and New Audit Appointments Steering Group
- 11 August – Accounts Commission pre meeting.
- 11 August – Mid-Year Strategy Seminar.
- 12 August – 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
31 July 2021