

MEETING: 9 SEPTEMBER 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

3. Audit Scotland collects media coverage on all reports published by the Accounts Commission. [Appendix 1](#) provides download statistics for the Commission's published reports over the last 12 months. [Appendix 2](#) provides additional information on the overall engagement that reports and other business have received on social media.
4. August was a quieter month than normal due to the summer period and no publications to promote. The Commission promoted the [recruitment](#) of Chair of the Accounts Commission, August's monthly [vlog](#) by Sharon O'Connor (which has been viewed over 300 times so far), as well as re-promoting some of its previous work, including [its Digital progress in local government report](#). The Commission will promote the [Secretary's blog](#) on the role of Chair on social media, as well as new publications, in the next period.

Other Commission business

5. On 30 July the Scottish Government launched stage two of its review of the operation of the Public Sector Equality Duty in Scotland, to progress the areas of focus identified in its [stage one report](#) published in March 2021. As part of this process, the Scottish Government sought views from Duty holders (including the Commission and Audit Scotland). A response from the Commission and Audit Scotland was agreed with the Interim Chair and has been placed on the [members' SharePoint site](#).
6. On 5 August, Elma Murray, in her capacity as Deputy Chair of the Developing the Young Workforce board, attended the Deputy First Minister's Covid Recovery Roundtable. Slides for this event can be found on the [members' SharePoint site](#).

7. On 12 August, as part of their 'Insight' series of discussions, Commission members met with Jimmy Paul, Director of the Wellbeing Alliance Scotland. The slides for this session can be found on the [members' SharePoint site](#).
8. On 18 August, the Commission met with representatives of Aberdeen City Council to discuss the Best Value Assurance Report on the Council which was published on 24 June 2021. The Commission was represented by Elma Murray; Andrew Burns; Sharon O'Connor; Paul Reilly, Secretary to the Commission; and Michael Wilkie, Director, KPMG (the appointed auditor). The Council was represented by councillors Jenny Laing, Leader of the Council (Aberdeen Labour); Marie Boulton, Independent Alliance Group leader; Ryan Houghton, Conservative Group leader; Alex Nicoll, Scottish National Party Group leader; and Ian Yuill, Liberal Democrat Group leader; and by Angela Scott, Chief Executive. A note of the meeting has been shared with members and is available on the [members' SharePoint site](#). The Council considered the BVAR at its [meeting on 23 August](#), accepting the Commission findings and noting the actions in place to respond to the report.
9. On 19 August Elma Murray joined Stephen Boyle, Auditor General, and Professor James Mitchell, Chair of Public Policy at the University of Edinburgh for a presentation and discussion with colleagues across Audit Scotland on 'Tackling inequalities and helping public services recover – what's next for our work'. If members wish to watch a recording of the session, please get in touch with the Commission Support Team.
10. On 23 August the Scottish Government and the Commission [announced](#) that they are seeking a new Commission Chair from January 2022. Completed applications must be received on or before midnight on Monday 20 September 2021.
11. On 31 August, Elma Murray, alongside Antony Clark, Interim Controller of Audit and other representatives from Audit Scotland, attended the [Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee](#) to discuss the two most recent publications of the Commission's [Overview reports](#).
12. Member queries on the August Secretary report have been saved on the [members' SharePoint site](#). There was one query, relating to the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy's recent consultation on restoring trust in audit and corporate governance.
13. Members are asked to review the members' communications schedule on the [members' SharePoint site](#). This includes a list of planned publications and communication 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](#).
14. At its last meeting, I advised the Commission on the consultation paper [published by](#) the Acting Ethical Standards Commissioner on a revised Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland. This consultation proposes a draft Code, and is based upon the conclusion of the previous consultation in this regard, to which the Commission responded in [October 2020](#). The Commissioner's proposals largely fit with the Commission's response to this earlier consultation, and therefore it is proposed that the Interim Chair will respond to the consultation noting how this fits with the Commission's previous response. The response will be shared with Commission members for information. A similar response will be made separately by the Auditor General.

Auditor General

15. On 24 August the Auditor General responded to the Finance and Public Administration Committee's Pre-Budget [call for views](#). The response can be found on [the members SharePoint site](#).

Audit Scotland

16. On 12 August – International Youth Day – Tricia Meldrum, Senior Manager wrote about what Inform100, Audit Scotland's Youth Panel, taught colleagues about engagement. A copy is saved [here](#) on the members' SharePoint site.
17. On 31 August Antony Clark, Interim Director of Performance Audit & Best Value and Interim Controller of Audit [published](#) a blog on access to children and young people's mental health services. Serious concerns have existed for years about access to children and young people's mental health services and the pandemic's impact has made the need for change more urgent.
18. On 2 September, Audit Scotland published its latest assessment of the [strategic risks and issues affecting the Scottish public sector](#). It is currently intended to update and report this assessment every six months.
19. On 29 September at 2pm, Audit Scotland is holding a staff insight event with the Venture Trust, a charity which works with people struggling with involvement in Scotland's criminal justice system, long-term unemployment, and mental health and wellbeing. Audit Scotland has extended an invitation to Commission members: to attend, please sign up [here](#).

Issues affecting Scottish local government

Scottish Government

20. Given that Covid-19 has resulted in a significant number of matters originating from the Scottish Government, this section is divided, for ease of reference, into the following sub-sections:
 - Local government general
 - Economy
 - Health and social care
 - Education
 - Transport
 - Communities
 - Business
 - Covid-19 measures
 - Climate change
 - Other matters

Local government general

21. On 10 August the Scottish Government [published](#) management information provided by local authorities relating to support to isolate and support for people during the coronavirus pandemic.

22. On 21 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) that play parks across Scotland will be modernised and restored through £5 million of funding, following agreement between the Scottish Government and COSLA.
23. On 24 August the Scottish Government [published](#) figures on the number of Council Tax Reduction recipients and the income foregone for all local authorities from April 2013 to June 2021.
24. On 24 August the Scottish Government [published](#) a whole school approach framework to support local authorities and schools to embed support for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing across all aspects of the school environment.

Economy

25. On 2 August the Scottish Government [published](#) the monthly economic brief for July 2021.
26. On 4 August the Scottish Government [published](#) GDP Quarterly National Accounts for 2021 Quarter 1.
27. On 5 August the Scottish Government [published](#) a summary of findings from the Digital Economy Business Survey (DEBS) 2021.
28. On 17 August the Scottish Government [published](#) the latest labour market trends. The unemployment rate in the three months to June 2021 was 4.3 per cent, up 0.6 per cent from pre-pandemic levels but down 0.1 per cent over the quarter.
29. On 18 August the Scottish Government [published](#) the latest [Government Expenditure & Revenue Scotland \(GERS\) statistics](#). New figures show record public spending of £99.2 billion, an increase of 21 per cent on 2019/20, reflecting the costs of the health and economic responses to the pandemic. The [Institute for Fiscal Studies \(IFS\)](#) and the [Fraser of Allander Institute](#) commented on the publication. The Fraser of Allander Institute concluded that, in view of Covid-19 making public sector deficits that much bigger, the challenge of building a model of fiscal sustainability just got harder.
30. On 25 August the Scottish Government [published](#) monthly GDP estimates for June 2021, when Scotland's onshore GDP grew by 0.9 per cent.
31. On 25 August the Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that £14 million of funding will be invested to support North East based workers impacted by the pandemic and the Oil and Gas downturn, creating 3,000 training opportunities.

Health and social care

32. On 1 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) the launch of a scheme to provide children in eligible pre-school settings with milk and a portion of fruit or vegetables.
33. On 3 the August the Scottish Government [announced](#) that a new residential rehabilitation facility to support families affected by drug use is to be developed in North Ayrshire.
34. On 6 August the Scottish Government [published](#) lessons identified from the initial Health and Social Care Response to Covid-19 in Scotland.
35. On 9 August the Scottish Government [launched](#) a consultation on the creation of a National Care Service. The consultation closes on 18 October. It is proposed that the Commission respond to this consultation, to be considered at the Commission's October meeting.

- 36. On 9 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) an extension to the appointment of Paul Edie as Chair of the Care Inspectorate.
- 37. On 19 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) that an expert group of leading scientists and medical specialists set up to advise on preparing for the threat of future pandemics will meet for the first time.
- 38. On 20 August the Scottish Government [published](#) a Women's Health Plan, which outlines improvement and change in areas including menopause, heart health, menstrual health including endometriosis, and sexual health.
- 39. On 25 August the Scottish Government [published](#) its NHS Recovery Plan, which commits £1 billion of targeted investment for the recovery and renewal of the health service. The plan also sets out actions for the next five years to help address backlogs and increase capacity by at least 10 per cent.

Education

- 40. On 4 August the Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that up to 130,000 children will be able to benefit from 1,140 hours of free early learning and childcare each year from this month.
- 41. On 9 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) £50 million of funding to recruit 1,000 new teachers and 500 pupil support assistants.
- 42. On 10 August Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that 137,000 learners received SQA results. The poverty-related attainment gap is narrower than in 2019, although slightly wider than in 2020. The SQA also [published](#) its equalities monitoring report.
- 43. On 12 August the Scottish Government [published](#) new guidance to help schools better support transgender children and young people.
- 44. On 16 August the Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that discussions with local government are underway to provide every school pupil in Scotland with a laptop or tablet.
- 45. On 17 August the Scottish Government [published](#) an equality impact assessment on the £20 million 'Get Into Summer' programme for children and young people.
- 46. On 18 August the Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that temporary Covid-19 recovery funding of £80 million that helped to recruit 1,400 teachers and 250 support staff is to be made permanent.
- 47. On 18 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) that National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams will be held in spring 2022 if public health advice allows.
- 48. On 19 August the Scottish Government published information on the [remit](#) of Professor Ken Muir CBE, the advisor to the government on the reform of the SQA and Education Scotland. The advisor will establish a [supporting expert panel](#), for which the draft terms of reference have been published. A [practitioner and stakeholder advisory group](#) will also be set up and its draft terms of reference have been published.
- 49. On 26 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) a new package of support materials for teachers and staff, to help embed anti-racism and race equality into all aspects of school life.

Transport

50. On 30 July Transport Scotland [highlighted](#) that the Scottish Government is providing up to £5.7 million to help bus, coach and community transport operators to comply with Low Emission Zones (LEZs) through retrofitting technology.
51. On 19 August Transport Scotland Minister for Transport Graeme Dey [launched](#) the procurement process for the most northerly section of the Scottish Government's £3 billion programme to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness.

Communities

52. On 2 August Scottish Government [opened](#) a consultation on the development of its commitment to deliver an Islands Bond, offering 100 bonds of up to £50,000 to young people and families to stay in or to move to islands currently threatened by depopulation. The consultation closes on 25 October and largely focuses on local service users. It is proposed that the Commission does not respond.
53. On 9 August the Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that projects aiming to help transform towns and neighbourhoods could apply to a new £10 million multi-year fund – 'Scotland Loves Local'.
54. On 15 August the Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that organisations and community groups working to support refugees in Scotland will share £2.8 million through a new grant scheme.

Business

55. In August Scottish Enterprise:
 - [published](#) a market insights report for August. It gathers a range of commercial research on consumer trends, travel and tourism, and digital technology; and
 - [published](#) its economic commentary for August, which found optimism continued to improve as Covid-19 restrictions were lifted, but uncertainty remained in consumer-facing sectors.
56. On 5 August Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) [published](#) analysis of the findings of the Scottish Government's Digital Economy Business Survey. 78 per cent of Highlands and Islands companies are now using mobile technology, up from 70 per cent in 2017
57. On 4 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) that applications have now opened for a fund to support Scottish food and drink suppliers and producers to invest in future growth.

Covid-19 measures

58. On 1 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) that children and young people aged 12-17 with certain conditions are to be offered the Covid-19 vaccine. On 4 August, in line with the latest advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the Scottish Government [announced](#) that all young people 16 to 17 years of age will now be offered the Covid-19 vaccination in Scotland.
59. On 17 August the Scottish Government [launched](#) a consultation on legislative reform to support Scotland's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. Proposals include whether some temporary provisions made under Scottish and UK coronavirus legislation and due to expire in March 2022 should be maintained. This includes public health measures, maintaining pre-eviction protocols relating to rent arrears in the private

rented sector and remote registration of deaths. The consultation period ends on 9 November. It is proposed that the Commission does not respond.

60. On 24 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) that work is underway to set up a public inquiry to investigate the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic in Scotland. The proposed inquiry would take a person-centred, human rights-based approach with a focus on outcomes and timely reporting to identify lessons and recommendations. Particular consideration would also be given to the 'four harms' of the pandemic: direct health impacts of Covid-19, including:

- direct health impacts of Covid-19, including cases and deaths in care homes
- other non-Covid health impacts
- societal impacts, including education
- economic impacts.

The Scottish Government is [seeking](#) feedback on the draft aims and principles. The consultation closes at the end of September 2021. It is proposed that the Commission responds on the basis of drawing to the inquiry's attention the reports made by the Commission which may be of relevance.

61. On 27 August the Scottish Government issued guidance on the re-opening of Scottish Government offices. The [letter](#) from Lesley Fraser, DG Corporate and a copy of that [guidance](#) have been saved on the members' SharePoint site.

Climate change

62. On 6 August the Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that a total of £16.5 million has been awarded to the Net Zero Technology Centre. Seven projects will be developed through the centre's Net Zero Technology Transition Programme (NZTTP) to transform the North Sea energy system, with a focus on emissions reduction.
63. On 12 August Nicola Sturgeon [wrote](#) to Prime Minister Boris Johnson calling for the UK Government to reassess oil and gas licencing plans. The First Minister also proposed a UK four nations summit in the run-up to COP26 in light of the recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [report](#).
64. On 22 August the Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that scientists, climate and nature professionals have been appointed to a new group of international experts, tasked with advising the Scottish Government on environmental issues.
65. On 25 August the Scottish Government [set out](#) the next steps in reforming the agriculture sector in Scotland and supporting farmers and crofters to cut emissions and produce sustainable, high quality food.
66. On 27 August the Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that an estimated £1.2 billion of Scotland's buildings, transport infrastructure, cultural and natural heritage may be at risk of coastal erosion by 2050, according to new research. As part of the Scottish Government's Dynamic Coast project, funded by the Centre of Expertise for Waters (CREW), the University of Glasgow has developed new maps to serve as a coastal change adaptation planning tool for government, agencies, local authorities as well as communities and businesses.

Other matters

67. On 8 July the Scottish Government [published](#) recommendations for the 2021 to 2026

parliamentary session from the Equality Budget Advisory Group. This included recommendations on improving budgetary processes, communications, culture and knowledge and understanding, all on the basis of advancing equality and human rights.

68. On 3 August the Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that organisations across Scotland will share £21 million funding over three years to advance human rights, promote equality and tackle discrimination.
69. On 12 August First Minister Nicola Sturgeon [met](#) with trade union representatives to discuss issues including the furlough scheme, reversing planned cuts to the £20 uplift in Universal Credit, and the protection of workers' during the net zero transition.
70. On 17 August the Scottish Government [highlighted](#) that work has begun on a Minimum Income Guarantee. The public has been [asked](#) to share its views, with the consultation period ending on 16 September. It is proposed that the Commission does not respond.
71. On 18 August the Scottish Government [published](#) information about changes to procurement legislation since the UK's exit from the EU.
72. On 20 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) that it has agreed to work with the Scottish Green Party Parliamentary Group over the next five years. A draft shared policy programme [details](#) collaboration on the climate emergency, economic recovery, child poverty, the natural environment, energy and the constitution. The programme is expected to develop during the parliamentary session and proposals for amendments can be made by either the government or the Green Group (GG).
73. On 23 August the Scottish Government [announced](#) that Professor Linda Bauld will take up the role of interim Chief Social Policy Adviser on 27 September, replacing Professor Carol Tannahill who will retire at this time.

Scottish Parliament

74. The Scottish Parliament is in recess until 31 August 2021.
75. On 20 August the Scottish Liberal Democrats [announced](#) Alex Cole-Hamilton as its new leader. On 27 August Alex Cole-Hamilton [announced](#) his new spokespeople team. The new leader will remain as health spokesperson and former leader, Willie Rennie, will become the party's spokesperson on education, economy and communities.
76. On 20 August Shona Robison MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, [provided](#) a written answer to Mark Griffin MSP's question on what the scope and timeline is for the planned comprehensive audit of current housing and homelessness legislation. The response notes the audit work will begin later in 2021.
77. On 24 August Anas Sarwar MSP [lodged](#) a motion that Parliament welcomes the launch of "A Fair Deal for Glasgow Campaign", which calls on the city's arts, culture and leisure venues to be properly funded and supported.
78. On 30 August, the First Minister confirmed her intention to [appoint](#) Patrick Harvie MSP as Minister for Zero Carbon Buildings, Active Travel & Tenants' Rights and Lorna Slater MSP as Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy & Biodiversity.
79. In August SPICE published:
 - A [briefing](#) on August's labour market update.
 - A [briefing](#) about constitutional issues.

- A [briefing](#) on income tax in Scotland.
- A [briefing](#) on the Carer's Allowance Supplement (Scotland) Bill.
- A [briefing](#) on the three devolved benefits for carers: Carer's Allowance, Carer's Allowance Supplement and Young Carer Grant, and the plan to introduce a Scottish replacement for Carer's Allowance.
- A [subject profile](#) on Equalities and Human Rights.
- A [subject profile](#) on land use and rural policy.
- A series of briefings on Brexit Statutory Instruments (SIs).
 - The first [briefing](#) sets out the process followed by the Scottish Parliament to consider Brexit SIs including the Protocol 1 process.
 - The second [briefing](#) is to help inform the implementation of Protocol 2, and examines the implementation of Protocol 1, the impact of UK Exit SIs on the devolution settlement.
 - The third [briefing](#) highlights some of the challenges encountered in the implementation of Protocol 1 which, it is hoped, will assist the committees, their support staff and MSPs in future scrutiny exercises under Protocol 2.
- A [briefing](#) on local government finance: concepts, trends and debates.
- A [briefing](#) on the impact of the removal of the Universal Credit uplift on Scottish households (on 1 September).

Parliamentary Committee news

Public Audit Committee

80. Sharon Fairweather, director of internal audit and assurance at the Scottish Government, has [written](#) to the Public Audit Committee with a six-month update on major IT projects. See [Annexe A: Major IT Project Report July 2021](#)

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

81. The Committee published the following:
- A [letter](#) from the Scottish Government in response to the Committee Convener's request for information on priorities for the forthcoming Parliamentary session that are of interest to the committee, including the Local Governance Review and Local Democracy Bill, and the funding formula for local government, housing and planning.
 - A [letter](#) from Shona Robison, Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government concerning funding for affordable and social housing.
 - A series of [responses](#) from stakeholders on their priorities for the Parliamentary session, including from the [Accounts Commission](#).
82. On 31 August the Committee discussed its [agenda](#), including the Accounts Commission's priorities (see paragraph 9).

Finance and Public Administration Committee

83. On 30 August the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy Kate Forbes [wrote](#) to the Committee on the Process and timetable around Scottish Budget 2022-23. In her letter she stated that she would be amenable to reverting toward the timetable envisaged in the Written Agreement, and publishing Scottish Budget 2022-23 during this calendar year.
84. On 31 August the Committee discussed its [agenda](#), which included consideration of the Scottish Fiscal Commission's [economic and fiscal forecasts](#).

Covid-19 Recovery Committee

85. The Committee did not meet in August.

Other committees

86. The Constitution, Europe, External Affairs and Culture Committee [launched](#) a call for views on funding for culture in Scotland. The deadline for submissions is Wednesday 8 September. Following consultation with colleagues in Audit Scotland, the Interim Chair will issue a response on behalf of the Commission, which will be uploaded on to the members' SharePoint site on 8 September.

Local government news

87. On 19 July Open Access Government [published](#) an article entitled "Local authorities, digital transformation and the COVID rebound." The article mentions Argyll and Bute Council's use of innovative technology to deliver medical supplies to remote islands.
88. On 2 August the National [reported](#) that GMB Union has advised 2,300 local authority street cleaners and bin collectors to refuse to return to work and instead self-isolate if they have been exposed to Covid-19.
89. On 5 August Edinburgh Council [highlighted](#) that a consultation will be launched in September on whether Edinburgh should be a short term let control area, where property owners must acquire planning permission to run a short-term let.
90. On 6 August the UK Government [highlighted](#) the construction of a Greenock cruise ship visitor centre as part of a £19.2 million development. The development, led by Inverclyde Council as part of the £1 billion Glasgow City Region Deal, is expected to increase visitor numbers to 150,000 per year and provide a £26 million boost to the economy.
91. On 7 August, the Herald [reported](#) that Glasgow City Council's (GCC) previous Solicitor and Director of Governance (until April 2021 when she took voluntary redundancy) had become a consultant for a firm GCC had previously awarded an IT contract to. This matter has been considered by the Commission's Financial Audit and Assurance Committee.
92. On 8 August Glasgow City Council leader Susan Aitken [spoke](#) about her vision for the future of Glasgow in an interview with the Herald. She said her goal was to revive the areas of the city along the Clyde and create a "bustling waterway which creates jobs", rivalling the Seine in Paris or the South Bank of the Thames in London.
93. On 17 August Edinburgh Evening News [reported](#) that more than 200 witnesses have now come forward to the independent inquiry into the organisational culture at Edinburgh City Council.

94. On 18 August Public Finance [reported](#) that Shetland Island Council's reliance on reserves is 'unsustainable', according to a [report](#) discussed at a full council meeting.
95. On 18 August Holyrood [reported](#) that the Scottish Trade Unions Congress (STUC) has [called for](#) local authorities to establish publicly owned bus services.
96. On 20 August Public Finance [reported](#) that West Lothian Council [agreed](#) to guarantee West Lothian Leisure's cash flow for the remainder of this year to assist its auditors Azure, in signing-off the 2020-21 accounts.
97. On 25 August Unison [confirmed](#) that it has informed employers that it is to conduct a formal ballot of its members over a pay dispute with local authorities.
98. On 27 August STV [reported](#) that plans to close five council-run care homes in Edinburgh have been delayed after an angry response from staff and families. Edinburgh Integration Joint Board [confirmed](#) that a consultation will now take place on the proposals.

Public policy news

99. In August the Fraser of Allander Institute [announced](#) a new project, funded by the Standard Life Foundation, in which it will work with parents with lived experience of poverty to design and simulate policies aimed at reducing child poverty.
100. On 9 August Common Weal [published](#) a report setting out 21 actions for Scotland to take to tackle climate change.
101. On 11 August the David Hume Institute [published](#) a briefing paper advocating for multi-year budgetary planning for the Scottish Government. The briefing mentions Audit Scotland, including its conclusion that: "we would like to see the Scottish Parliament, Scottish Government and Audit Scotland work together to make multi-year budgeting the established norm in Scotland."
102. On 17 August the Green Alliance [published](#) a report on developing a greener tax system. The report investigated public attitudes towards tax reform which could benefit the environment.
103. On 18 August the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration [published](#) an explainer on Equality & Human Rights Impact Assessments.
104. On 20 August the Social Housing Resilience Group with Housemark Scotland and Scotland's Housing Network [published](#) a joint report - The Impact of COVID-19 on the social housing sector in Scotland and comparisons with the whole of the UK.
105. On 23 August IPPR Scotland [published](#) its report *Delivering a fair work recovery in Scotland: Securing a living income for all*. The authors of the report found women and minorities had been hit hardest by labour market changes due to the pandemic.
106. In August The David Hume Institute [published](#) its response to the Finance & Public Administration Committee's consultation on [Scotland's public finances 2022-23](#). The think tank argues more should be done to outline where trade-offs exist between the coming financial year and planned investments in subsequent years, as it reinforces its calls for multi-year budgeting.
107. On 25 August Includem [published](#) the interim report for the National Childhood Bereavement Project, setting out its participation and engagement strategy, detailing its reach across Scotland, and outlining its initial findings.

108. In August Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) [published](#) its latest monthly summary of data on advice sought from people in Scotland. CAS also [published](#) its annual housing data briefing.
109. On 26 August the Scottish Fiscal Commission [published](#) its report on Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts August 2021, setting out its five-year forecasts of the Scottish economy, tax receipts, social security expenditure and an assessment of whether the Scottish Government's projections of borrowing are reasonable.
110. On 26 August Our Scottish Future [published](#) a paper calling on the UK Government to hold at least four meetings each year with the leaders of devolved administrations.

COSLA

111. On 3 August COSLA launched its *Why You?* [campaign](#) aimed at encouraging people to consider standing for office ahead of 2022 local government elections.
112. On 9 Aug COSLA [responded](#) to the launch by the Scottish Government on its [consultation](#) on the creation of a National Care Service, stating "It is deeply concerning that the consultation is (also) a considerable departure from the recommendations of the independent review set up to look at Adult Social Care' (see paragraph 35).
113. On 9 August COSLA [welcomed](#) the [announcement](#) of £50 million of funding to recruit 1,000 new teachers and 500 support assistants in the next academic year.
114. On 13 August COSLA, SOLACE and CIPFA Directors of Finance [provided](#) a joint response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee's Pre-Budget [call for views](#). COSLA's Spokesperson for Resources, Councillor Gail Macgregor, said: "Our response emphasises the need for Local Government to be funded fairly in the Scottish Government's Budget, in order that Councils can deliver the critical services needed in communities - for recovery from the COVID pandemic; to tackle poverty and inequality; and to enable a move to net zero emissions."

Improvement Service

115. On 16 August, the Improvement Service and Public Health Scotland as members of the Spatial Planning, Health and Wellbeing Collaborative [published](#) a briefing – *Place and wellbeing: integrating land use planning*.
116. On 24 August, the Improvement Service [announced](#) it is coordinating a short-term research project on *Understanding the mental health needs of women and girls experiencing gender-based violence*.
117. On 24 August, the Improvement Service [reported](#) that Climate Emergency UK is developing a Council Climate League by scoring council's Climate Action Plans and creating a database. The deadline for councils to publish a Climate Action Plan and it being scored is 20 September 2021.
118. On 24 August, the Improvement Service [announced](#) that jointly with COSLA and in the run up to the COP26 UN Climate summit they are planning a social media campaign to highlight the work of Scottish councils across service areas in tackling climate change. The Improvement Service is looking for examples of innovative practice to share as case studies.

Commissioner for Ethical Standards

119. Nothing to report in August.

Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO)

120. On 18 August the SPSO's [August newsletter](#) outlines statistics on complaints and learning points from decision reports, statistics on Scottish Welfare Fund reviews and case studies.

Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)

121. On 10 August the SHR published the first [quarterly dashboard report for 2021-22](#), which showed that arrears levels had remained stable since quarter four of 2020/21. This report is designed to help the Scottish Government and social landlords to understand the continuing impact of the pandemic and to support the work of the Social Housing Resilience Group. The dashboard for quarter four of 2020-21 showed that rent arrears had fallen to their lowest level since the regulator started collecting monthly returns from social landlords in April 2020.

Care Inspectorate

122. During August, the Care Inspectorate published the following reports:
- Joint inspection reports of adult support and protection measures in [East Ayrshire Partnership](#) and [Fife Partnership](#).
 - A progress review of services for children and young people in need of care and protection in [Orkney](#).

Other UK audit bodies

123. On 4 August the National Audit Office (NAO) posted a [blog](#) – *Six reasons why digital transformation is still a problem for government*.
124. On 5 August the NAO published a [good practice guide](#) for Audit and Risk Assurance Committees on Climate change risk.

UK Government

125. On 4 August the UK Government [published](#) guidance for policy and decision makers to help them consider the value of a natural capital approach. It explains what natural capital is and how to find evidence of it.
126. On 11 August the UK Government [highlighted](#) the establishment of the UK Resilience Forum, which provides a forum for national, regional and local government; private and voluntary sectors and other interested parties to consider risk; provide challenge and insight and help align emergency preparedness activities.
127. On 17 August the UK Government [published](#) the UK Hydrogen Strategy, which sets out the approach to developing a low carbon hydrogen sector in the UK to meet the ambition for 5GW of low carbon hydrogen production capacity by 2030.
128. On 19 August the UK Government [highlighted](#) that it has agreed the first state-backed green transition loan to help businesses reduce emissions. Wood Group, an Aberdeen engineering company, has been given a £430 million loan from UK Export Finance, the government's credit agency.
129. On 20 August the UK Government [highlighted](#) that councils in England, Scotland and Wales will have access to a share of £5 million to help them provide the necessary housing and support for those arriving from Afghanistan.

130. On 22 August the UK Government [launched](#) a UK-wide Covid-19 antibody surveillance programme, with home antibody tests to be made available for up to 8,000 people a day across the UK.
131. On 26 August the UK Government [announced](#) that John Edwards, who is currently New Zealand's Privacy Commissioner, is its preferred candidate for the UK's Information Commissioner.
132. In August the Office for National Statistics published:
- [data](#) on economic activity and social changes in the UK
 - [data](#) on public sector finances in the UK
 - a [time series](#) for public sector finances.

Other UK news

133. On 2 August the National Institute of Economic & Social Research (NIESR) [published](#) its economic outlook for summer. It forecasts the UK economy to grow by 6.8 per cent in 2021, up 1.1 per cent from its spring outlook, and 5.3 per cent in 2022.
134. On 5 August the Institute for Government (IfG) [published](#) a report on productivity and recovery from Covid-19. IfG suggests that a narrow focus on high-value sectors will not address the UK's £300 billion growth gap.
135. On 11 August the Institute for Government (IfG) [published](#) a paper exploring alternative types of examination in 2022 and beyond. The IfG considers that improved contingency planning, alongside wider reform to secondary assessment including some essay-based tests replacing in-person exams, would create a fairer and more reliable system for England's schools.
136. On 11 August CIPFA [launched](#) a new value-for-money toolkit in partnership with the Government Outcomes Lab (GO Lab) based within the University of Oxford's Blavatnik School of Government. The tool is available [here](#) on CIPFA's website.
137. On 20 August the Electoral Reform Society [published](#) a blog comparing the results of Westminster Elections to those of devolved institutions.
138. On 20 August Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) [published](#) its 2020/21 audited statement of accounts, noting that the organisation's financial position enables it to distribute a further £5.6 million of surplus funds to opted-in eligible bodies.
139. On 23 August Public Finance [reported](#) that councils in England will be required to provide more information on reserve levels to the government, in a bid to improve Whitehall's understanding of financial risks.

Conclusion

140. The Commission is invited to:
- a) Agree the proposed approach to responding to the consultation by the Acting Ethical Standards Commissioner on a revised Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland (paragraph 14)
 - b) Agree that the Commission responds to the consultation on the National Care Service (paragraph 35)

- c) Agree the proposed approach to responding to the Scottish Government's consultation on the terms of the Covid-19 inquiry (paragraph 60).
- d) Agree that the Commission does not respond to the consultations highlighted at paragraphs 52, 59 and 70.

Paul Reilly
Secretary to the Commission
1 September 2021

Appendix 1 - Accounts Commission reports in past 12 months – downloads

Report	Date	Report downloads
Best Value Assurance Report: Aberdeen City Council	24 Jun 21	461 (+179)
Accounts Commission annual report 2020/21	3 Jun 21	238 (+37)
Local government in Scotland Overview 2021	27 May 21	1,533 (+222)
Equality Outcomes 2021-25	27 Apr 21	330 (+69)
Mainstreaming equality and equality outcomes: progress report 2019-21	27 April 21	274 (+51)
Improving outcomes for young people through school education	23 Mar 21	4,729 (+249)
Local Government in Scotland: Financial Overview 2019/20	26 Jan 21	2,233 (+175)
Digital progress in local government	14 Jan 21	2,376 (+164)
Digital progress in local government – supplement 1 (checklist)	14 Jan 21	279 (*)
Digital progress in local government – supplement 2 (methodology)	14 Jan 21	115 (*)
Housing Benefit Performance audit: annual update 2020	8 Dec 20	300 (*)
Best Value Assurance Report: The City of Edinburgh Council	26 Nov 20	1,443 (+61)
Covid-19 Strategic Scrutiny Group	5 Nov 20	818 (*)
Best Value Assurance Report: Aberdeenshire Council	22 Oct 20	1,032 (+47)
Best Value Assurance Report: Dundee City Council	29 Sept 20	1,212 (+39)

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 public'ns
Sep 20	605 (+15)	9,700	607	82	35	46	2	1
Oct 20	617 (+12)	10,700	526	34	26	34	0	1
Nov 20	639 (+22)	23,400	730	106	49	53	3	2
Jan 21	683 (+30)	50,000	2,400	128	94	103	9	2
Feb 21	686 (+3)	11,000	307	20	9	10	1	0
Mar 21	701 (+15)	36,100	2,100	76	66	138	10	1
Apr 21	704 (+3)	3,300	n/a	1	1	0	0	0
May 21	726 (+22)	46,300	836	122	95	148	9	1
Jun 21	740 (+14)	56,900	513	348	113	174	8	1
Jul 21	758 (+18)	7,700	24	5	16	229	0	0
Aug 21	757 (-1)	11,200	339	48	3	13	0	0

Increase on previous month shown in brackets