

MEETING: 8 DECEMBER 2022

REPORT BY: POLICY MANAGER, ACCOUNTS 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.
2. The Commission receives regular information to complement this report, which is available through the [members' SharePoint site](#). This includes:
 - The Interim 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 2022. [Appendix 2](#) provides additional information on the overall engagement that reports, and other business received on social media, as of 29 November 2022.
4. November was a relatively quiet month for social media, with the publication of the Chair's [blog](#) on the future of Best Value and the publication of the regular newsletters, to councillors and to other stakeholders. The social media statistics related to the blog were positive with one post about it reaching over 1,300 impressions (the number of people that see the content on social media) and was the strongest post this month. Throughout November, promotion of the appearance of Andrew Burns at the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee on 8 November and information about the four new Commission members resulted in relatively high levels of engagement.
5. On 4 November the Commission [published](#) details of its four new members as [announced](#) by Ben Macpherson MSP, Minister for Social Security and Local Government. The four new commission members were appointed from 1 November for an initial period of four years and bring a range of experience and knowledge to the Commission. Their profiles were shared on [twitter](#) a few days later.
6. On 8 November Commission member Andrew Burns and Carol Calder, Interim Audit Director, PABV attended the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee to give [evidence](#) on the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill.
7. On 10 November Bill Moyes, Chair of the Commission published a [blog](#) marking the

new approach to auditing Best Value and highlighting the importance of best value in the current climate. The blog also identifies the need to ensure a focus on improvement, change and delivery of services that improve outcomes for local people.

8. On 23 November commission member Christine Lester attended a Best Value event for Integrated Joint Boards (IJBs) Chairs and Vice Chairs.
9. On 24 November the Commission sent out its regular [Councillor newsletter](#) to 1,349 Councillors and [stakeholder newsletter](#) to the third sector.
10. On 25 November the Chair, Bill Moyes attended a virtual roundtable event with members of SOLACE concerning Best Value. He was accompanied by Adam Bullough and Blyth Deans, PABV and members of the Local Government Overview team.

Other Commission business

11. 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 Audit Scotland's communications team.

Auditor General

12. On 17 November the Auditor General [published](#) a briefing on the challenges and risks of Scotland's public finances calling for faster reform of the public sector.
13. On 29 November the Auditor General [published](#) a Section 22 report on the running of Scotland's 2022 census by National Records of Scotland (NRS). The report advises lessons must be learned after a lower than expected return rate saw the census extended by a month which is anticipated to cost NRS an additional £6 million in 2022/23.

Audit Scotland

14. During November the following Insight and keynote sessions and events were held;
 - Martin Walker, Director of Corporate Support chaired an event on how Audit Scotland has been developing hybrid working (7 November)
 - Researchers from the University of Edinburgh presented their research and some initial findings on supporting healthy ageing at work (10 November)
 - Kenny Oliver, Director of Innovation and Quality held a keynote session on meeting the challenges of the audit profession and outlining progress with establishing the new I&Q business group. He shared a reflection piece with his after the session. A copy can be found on the [members' SharePoint site](#). (12 November)
15. On 1 November Audit Scotland published a [blog](#) by Gemma Diamond, Audit Director, PABV on the action needed to for Scotland's public sector to make better use of existing data, improve data quality and to make better use it to deliver better outcomes.
16. On 16 November Antony Clark, Executive Director of PABV and interim Controller of Audit shared a Perspective piece on the internal news site. It considered the delivery of Best Value assurance reporting over the last six years and outlined planned changes to the approach going forward. A copy can be found on the [members' SharePoint site](#).

17. During December the following Insight and Keynote sessions and events are due to take place:
- An opportunity to meet members of the Public Audit Committee in the Edinburgh offices at West Port (05 December).
 - An Insight event, Building cyber resilience, with guest speakers from the Scottish Business Resilience Centre (07 December).
 - A Keynote session from Executive Director of Audit Services, John Cornett looking at our priorities and ambitions in financial audit (08 December).
 - A Keynote session from Executive Director of Public Audit and Best Value, Antony Clark on why public engagement and data can build trust and quality in audit (12 December).

Issues affecting Scottish local government

Scottish Government

18. During October the Scottish Government [published](#) its report on the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey 2021/22. This includes attitudes to the Scottish Government and local government and political engagement. In terms of local government, key findings included:
- 48% of people in Scotland were more likely to trust the Scottish Government to make fair decisions compared with 31% for local councils and 15% for the UK Government.
 - 58% of people thought the Scottish Government was good at listening to people before it made decisions, compared with 41% for local councils and 18% for the UK Government.
 - 98% of people thought it important to vote in Scottish Parliament elections compared with 95% in local council elections and 92% in UK Government elections.
19. On 2 November the Scottish Government [published](#) details that the First Minister had asked Elena Whitham MSP to join the Scottish Government as Minister for Community Safety. The First Minister said the position “has cross-cutting responsibilities across Scotland’s fire service, our justice system, and the prevention of violence against women and girls.”
20. On 8 November the Scottish Government [published](#) the revised draft National Planning Framework 4. The document sets out the Government’s spatial principles, regional priorities, national developments and national planning policy to 2045. The document identifies regional spatial priorities for five regions across Scotland which will inform the preparation of regional spatial strategies and local development plans by planning authorities.
21. On 21 November the Scottish Government [published](#) its position statement on the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The statement sets out the action Scotland has taken to embed human rights in all areas of policy with the aim to create a social security system based on dignity, fairness and respect. This includes reference to the work of local authorities in relation to a range of policy areas including; Human trafficking and exploitation, childcare, food insecurity, child poverty, Housing for disabled people, Gypsy Traveller

sites, Homelessness, Mental Health and Education.

Health, Social Care and Covid Response

22. On 8 November the Scottish Government published the 2021 Scottish Health Survey which provides information on the health and factors related to health of adults and children living in Scotland. In addition to a [summary report](#), dashboard summarising key indicators from 2008-2021 and information by local authority and NHS health board areas is available [online](#).
23. On 8 November the Scottish Government and COSLA [published](#) a joint national delivery plan for 2022-23 on 'Care in the Digital Age'. The strategy describes activities to support health boards, health and social care partnerships, local authorities, primary care, social care, social work, and care providers to offer new or improved services through improved systems and infrastructure or access to digital services.
24. On 22 November the Scottish Government [published](#) details of the First Minister's visit to open Harper House in Saltcoats, a new facility for parents with problematic drug or alcohol use. The residential rehabilitation centre is being run by the Phoenix Futures charity which was awarded over £8m in Scottish Government grant funding last year to establish a family rehabilitation service and will accept referrals from across Scotland. The facility can support up to 20 families for placements between three and six months long, resulting in up to 80 families being supported annually. The service is designed to allow parents to access treatment and care for their family while in recovery with the help of the centre's staff who support child development, parenting skills and the overall health and wellbeing of all family members.
25. On 28 November the Scottish Government [published](#) information that the Residential Rehabilitation Rapid Capacity Programme Fund (RRRCP) had been reopened. Organisations who support people with problem drug use are being invited to apply for funding to expand their residential rehabilitation provision.

Education and Location Government pay dispute

26. Throughout November the EIS union published a number of articles regarding the ongoing campaign for fair pay for teachers and teaching staff. This included calling members out on [strike action](#) on Thursday 24 November and on a further two days in the [new year](#) on 10 and 11 January 2023.
27. On 22 November the Scottish Government [published](#) details of a new pay offer made to unions which saw a salary increase of between 6.85% for those on the lowest pay grade to 5% for teachers at the higher main pay scale. COSLA also published an article on the [new pay offer](#) made, describing it as fair, affordable and recognising the cost-of-living-crisis was a priority. Following this new offer, two teaching unions, the [EIS](#) and [Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association](#) (SSTA) both published articles condemning the revised pay offer. The SSTA [published](#) details of planned strike action for 7 and 8 December.

Social Security and Communities

28. On 1 November the Scottish Government [published](#) the Ministerial statement given to Parliament by MSP Neil Gray, Minister with Special Responsibility for Refugees from Ukraine. Neil Gray advised that over 21,000 people had been assisted which was significantly above the original commitment of 3,000 people. He also advised the super sponsor scheme had been reviewed and results and interventions identified to improve the scheme and support were now [reported](#). The review also outlines the next steps for a warm Scottish welcome. The Minister also spoke about the provision of longer-term accommodation and about the provision of a £50 million Ukraine Long Term

Resettlement Fund. Through this fund, £486,000 grant funding has been provided to North Ayrshire Council and Aberdeen City Council was being awarded over £6 million to bring around 500 void properties back into use. Guidance for [local authorities](#) and [hosts](#) on the scheme was also published during November.

29. On 1 November the Scottish Government [published](#) an updated Scottish Social Housing Charter. The revised charter was subject to consultation with social landlords, social housing tenants, homeless people and other stakeholders. It applies to all social landlords and has seven sections, and 16 outcomes and standards that should be achieved.
30. On 14 November the Scottish Government [published](#) details of the expansion of the Scottish Child payment benefit to more than 400,000 children and an increase to £25. The benefit was first launched in February 2021 at £10 per week per child for children under the age of six and has been extended to include eligible children up to age 16. The website for people to apply for the new extended benefit crashed within hours of being set up.
31. On 20 November the Scottish Government [published](#) details that the £6 million Self-Build Loan Fund reopens from 21 November for applications for Self-builders who are unable to access standard bank lending. Applicants can apply for up to £175,000 towards development costs and aims to support the delivery of good quality and energy efficient housing.
32. On 28 November the Scottish Government [published](#) an article about the suspension of the power of local authorities to require homeless applicants to demonstrate a local connection to the area they present as homeless. The legislation comes into effect from 30 November and suspends that power to require someone to demonstrate a local connection. This change should give people more choice in where they would prefer to settle.

Economy and business

33. On 15 November the Scottish Government published its labour market trends for [November](#). This summarises employment and economic inactivity from the Labour Force Survey and other labour market statistics from a range of official sources. Some of the information is broken down into Scottish local authority areas. SPICe has published an overview of the labour market for Scotland in [November](#).
34. On 22 November the Scottish Government [published](#) a wellbeing Economy toolkit that is aimed at helping local authorities identify and measure local wellbeing metrics including health, child poverty, levels of greenhouse gas emissions and fair work, and prioritise investments and policies to improve them

Scottish Parliament

35. During November, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) published:
 - A [blog](#) on Scotland's performance
 - A [briefing](#) on the allocation of social rented housing
 - A [hub](#) for the National Care Service (NCS)
 - A [blog](#) on funding climate change
 - A [blog](#) on the UK Autumn Statement

- A [blog](#) on the 22/23 Emergency Budget Review
- A [blog](#) on the impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market
- A [blog](#) on earnings in Scotland 2022
- A [blog](#) on learning from the covid response in supporting migrant and minority populations.

Parliamentary committee news

36. On 9 November the Scottish Parliament agreed to the following changes to Committee membership;
- the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee - Ash Regan be appointed to replace Natalie Don.
 - the Social Justice and Social Security Committee - James Dornan be appointed to replace Elena Whitham.
37. On 24 November members of the Criminal Justice; Health, Social Care and Sport; and Social Justice and Social Security Committees held a joint [evidence session](#) to consider the matter of reducing drug deaths in Scotland and tackling problem drug use.

Public Audit Committee

38. During November the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): tackling child poverty, the New vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides and the arrangements to deliver vessels 801 and 802 and its work programme.
39. On 4 November the Auditor General, and, Audit Scotland Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value Antony Clark gave [evidence](#) on [the New vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides](#) report.
40. On 10 November the Auditor General attended the [roundtable](#) discussion on tackling child poverty following the publication of the joint [briefing](#) in September.

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

41. During November the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill (UK Parliament), Understanding barriers to local elected office, Community Empowerment Act, the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Bill, Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2023/24, the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill, National Planning framework 4, the Local Governance Review and subordinate legislation.
42. On 9 November the Committee launched its [inquiry](#) into the impact of Part 2 of the Community Empowerment Act (2015) on community planning and how Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) can respond to significant events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the current cost-of-living crisis. The inquiry's call for views is aimed at members of CPPs and operational practice and therefore it is proposed the Commission does not respond. It closes on 30 December 2022.

Finance and Public Administration Committee

43. During November the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill - Financial Memorandum, Proposed contingent liability, Scotland's public finances in 2023-24: the impact of the cost of living and public service reform and its work programme.

44. On 1 November Audit Scotland Audit Director Mark Taylor, gave [evidence](#) regarding the financial memorandum to the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill.
45. On 3 November the Committee published a [report](#) on public finances in 2023/24 and the impact of the cost of living and public service reform as part of its pre-budget scrutiny. A [published](#) article quoted the Committee convener, Kenneth Gibson as saying “An open and honest debate with the public about how services and priorities are funded is now needed, including on the role of taxation in funding wider policy benefits for society.”

Other Committee news during October

- The Covid-19 Recovery Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the inquiry into the impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market and its work programme.
- The Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): Environmental common frameworks; Environmental Standards Scotland's Strategic Plan; Scottish Water's Annual Reports and Accounts 2021/22; the role of local government and its cross-sectoral partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland; a modern and sustainable ferry service for Scotland; pre-budget scrutiny 2023-24; public petitions; subordinate legislation and its work programme.
- The Education, Children and Young People Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): National Care Service (Scotland) Bill; Colleges Regionalisation Inquiry; Universities; pre-budget scrutiny 2023-24; UK subordinate legislation; subordinate legislation and its work programme.
- The Social Justice and Social Security Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): Scottish Benefits Independent Advocacy; National Care Service (Scotland) Bill; the Child Poverty and Parental Employment inquiry; Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2023-24; subordinate legislation and its work programme.
- On 29 November, the Economy and Fair Work Committee [published](#) a report following its inquiry into the new realities of retail, the impact on town centres and the policy responses needed to create living and resilient town centres in Scotland. The inquiry concluded Scotland's planning system needs to be strengthened to ensure no new developments unfairly compete with town centre provision. Alongside this, the report's conclusions and recommendations highlight a number of opportunities where local authorities funding, actions and powers can support town centre and act as a catalyst for regeneration.
- During November the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the National Care Service (Scotland) Bill and subordinate legislation.

Local government news

46. On 2 November Orkney Islands Council [published](#) details of the appointment of Oliver Reid as the new Chief Executive. He will join the Council from Renfrewshire Council where he has most recently been Head of Communities and Public Protection.

COSLA

47. On 2 November COSLA [published](#) comments from Councillor Paul Kelly, COSLA's Health and Social Care spokesperson advising that with no new action or investment

being made available to councils ahead of winter and during the cost of living crisis council leaders have expressed real concern at the pressure within the system and the impact on people and communities. He stressed the need for an urgent national plan that is properly resourced and coordinated to be developed with local government and partners across social care.

48. On 3 November COSLA [published](#) its comments on the latest figures on early learning and childcare savings that show a year-on-year increase in the number of children accessing funded early learning and childcare.
49. On 4 November COSLA [published](#) a statement advising that the Chief Executive Sally Loudon, had given notice of her intention to step down from her position in the spring of 2023 after seven years in post.
50. On 8 November COSLA [published](#) an initial response to the new National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). Environment and Economy spokesperson Councillor Gail Macgregor said that further analysis and scrutiny will be necessary in order to comment on the content of NPF4 due to the detail and complexity of the framework. COSLA welcomes the moves in the framework to achieve the aims of the Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy and place making to improve wellbeing but without resources and flexibility of cost recovery the framework on its own will not achieve these aims.
51. On 21 November COSLA [published](#) an article by Health and Social Care Spokesperson, Councillor Paul Kelly about the independent review [report](#) of adult social care chaired by Derek Feeley. Councillor Kelly considers the response to the review and reflects on progress with the commitments outlined in the [joint statement](#) of intent made by the Scottish Government and COSLA in 2021.

Improvement Service

52. On 11 November the Improvement Service [published](#) an article about Hanna McCulloch, Local Child Poverty Action reports (LCPARs) national co-ordinator giving evidence to the Parliament's Public Audit Committee as part of its inquiry into tackling child poverty. Evidence from the Improvement Service focused on the importance of taking a strategic preventative approach to tackling child poverty and that recent LCPARs have seen a wider range of policy levers engaged in tackling child poverty, including housing, transport, childcare and employability, but that there are still challenges including barriers to sharing data between organisations.

SOLACE

53. On 15 November SOLACE [published](#) its statement ahead of the Autumn Statement, warning the Government against real-term cuts to local government funding. SOLACE president Joanne Roney said local government has disproportionately borne the brunt of austerity over the last decade with a real terms reduction to core government funding and advises that the current spending settlement for local government is 'no longer sufficient to meet demand' and that 'there is no meaningful 'fat' to trim from public service budgets.
54. On 22 November SOLACE [published](#) an article on the results of a survey which found that 87% of council chief executives and senior managers believe the Autumn Statement will have a negative or extremely negative impact on their residents. The survey also identified that environmental services (e.g., bin collections, street cleaning, parks); libraries, leisure and tourism; and regeneration were the most likely to be cut.

Other scrutiny bodies

Standards Commission

55. On 9 November the Standards Commission published three [advice notes](#) for councillors on using social media, the role of a monitoring officer and bullying and harassment.
56. On 14 November the Standards Commission [published](#) an article on freedom of expression considering what it means, why is it important and does it have limits? It reminds Councillors of the code of conduct and the requirement for councillors and members to treat others with respect and refrain from bullying and harassment but that this is not to restrict their ability to express themselves or limit scrutiny and debate.
57. On 15 November the Standards Commission [published](#) details of a recruitment drive for two part-time Members of the Commission. The closing date for applications is 5 December.

Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO)

58. During November, the SPSO [published](#) their monthly newsletter, outlining statistics on complaints, findings and learning points from an investigation report relating to Highland NHS Board. It also includes statistics on Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) reviews, decisions, contacts made via their support and intervention policy and case studies. Links are also provided to the SPSO's [Annual report for 2021-22](#) which was published during October and to the Independent National Whistleblowing Officer's [e-bulletins](#).

Care Inspectorate

59. On 8 November the Care Inspectorate published a joint inspection [report](#) of adult services, focusing on the outcomes and experiences of adults with physical disabilities and complex needs in the Fife Health and Social Care Partnership. It found clear strengths in how integrated health and social care services are positively supporting people's health and wellbeing outcomes and that the senior and extended leadership team had developed a strong collaborative culture. Other key strengths included that most people had positive experiences and people and carers said they were listened to and treated with dignity, respect and kindness. Inspectors also identified areas which could further improve. These included the partnership should continue to drive efforts to improve outcomes for people and carers, improve its processes for anticipatory care planning and how it responds, balance responding to local needs and ensuring a consistent response by monitoring performance and evaluate the effectiveness of organisational development.

Scottish Housing Regulator

60. On 14 November the Scottish Housing Regulator [published](#) an article describing the scale of the challenges facing social landlords as unprecedented and highlighting that most landlords will incur significant new costs at the same time that tenants are under real financial pressure. The Director of Regulation encouraged landlords to continue to have meaningful and effective dialogue with tenants about what is important to them, what they want and can afford to pay.

Scottish public policy news

61. On 3 November the Fraser of Allander Institute (FAI) [published](#) an article following the latest results from the Scottish Business monitor report which had surveyed 450 firms in October across the economy. It showed that 70% of businesses are expecting

growth in the Scottish economy to be weak or very weak over the coming year and that energy bills and staff remuneration are expected to be the biggest cost drivers for the next two quarters.

62. On 7 November Education Scotland [published](#) the Scottish Attainment Challenge Recovery and progress report for 2021-22. The report analyses progress over the last 12 months, outlining how educators and stakeholders are working to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty. It reports attainment advisors found that the majority of local authorities had improved their;
 - management of the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF)
 - use and analysis of data to inform the poverty-related attainment gap
 - support for Care Experienced Children and Young People
 - provision in Career Long Professional Learning to support the equity agenda
63. On 8 November the Child Poverty Action Group [published](#) The Cost of a Child in 2022 report. The report presents the latest evidence of what families need as a minimum to raise a child, and how this compares to the actual incomes of low-income families. It finds the cost of raising a child to age 18 is nearly £160,000 for a couple and over £200,000 for a lone parent. Cuts to the value of social security between April 2021 and April 2022 have meant families have experienced the biggest deterioration in living standards in the past decade. Childcare is also highlighted as a key driver of increased costs for in-work families.
64. On 15 November the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) [published](#) a letter from Chief Executive, Anna Fowlie to the Deputy First Minister John Swinney, following the Emergency Budget Response outlined at Holyrood. The letter expressed disappointment at the lack of recognition of the challenges faced by voluntary organisations, staff, and volunteers and the positive contribution the voluntary sector makes and challenges the Scottish Government to include six commitments concerning funding and data reporting to facilitate the sector.
65. On 11 November Public Finance [published](#) an article about Glasgow City Council reaching an agreement with unions GMB, Unite, Unison and campaign group Action 4 Equality Scotland and is to pay an additional £265 million. The new settlement will cover the 'gap period' from 2018 until an agreed new pay structure and will cover around 18,000 current and former employees. The deal will be paid for through the sale and leaseback of a number of operational properties over 30 years.
66. On 16 November the FAI published a [report](#) on the impact of COVID on household income, which found most households had a slight increase in incomes.
67. On 16 November the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) [published](#) a report which explores the fiscal, distributional and poverty impacts of different options for social security. The report makes the case for additional household support, combined with revenue raising matters and sets out options to reform the social security system that could be considered and their potential impacts.
68. On 16 November the Bank of Scotland [published](#) research that suggests three out of ten homeowners across the UK have already considered changing their living arrangements to help meet rising costs.
69. On 16 November the abrdn Financial Fairness Trust [published](#) a joint report with the Poverty Alliance and Scottish women's Budget Group exploring women's' experiences

of the cost-of-living Crisis in Scotland. The report found evidence that women are suffering increased hardship, destitution and food insecurity due to a lack of support. Fifteen recommendations are made aimed at the UK and Scottish Governments, Local Government, the Department for Work and Pensions, Social Security Scotland and the NHS.

70. On 18 November the BBC [published](#) an article about a pilot project operating in 30 homes run by West of Scotland and Southside housing associations using Smart technology to detect damp conditions in social housing. The scheme involves sensors that monitor temperature, moisture and vapour pressure in homes and will alert social landlords and the Council about 'critical' conditions in a property. The Council's housing convenor councillor Kenny McLean advised they hope to roll-out the technology across the pilot is successful.
71. On 22 November the East Lothian Courier [published](#) an article about an emergency meeting of East Lothian Council where the Executive Director of Finance, Sarah Fortune presented a financial report and advised councillors that the financial risk level to the council was at a 'critical' level and the highest risk ever reported. The report outlined a range of additional measure to try and mitigate the extra funding gap of £5 million, including a recruitment freeze and review of all capital projects.
72. On 23 November the Herald [published](#) an article about a lack of rehabilitation and treatment facilities being linked to the number of Homeless Deaths. It refers to a report by the National Records for Scotland showing 222 people died while experiencing homelessness in 2021. The figures show the numbers have nearly doubled since 2017 when records began, with Midlothian, Glasgow City, and the City of Edinburgh experiencing the highest rates of homeless deaths.
73. During November Aberlour [published](#) a report which revealed 55% of low-income families in Scotland receiving Universal Credit face deductions due to debts to public bodies.

Other UK audit bodies

74. On 1 November Audit Wales published a [report](#) reviewing poverty in Wales aimed at helping councils make better use of resources to support people in poverty. The report's overall conclusion was that the scale of the challenge and weaknesses in current work make it difficult for Welsh and local government to deliver the systemic change required to tackle and alleviate poverty. In addition to 8 recommendations for the Welsh National and local government in the report, Audit Wales also published a [blog](#) about the report highlighting the need for better data and referencing the accompanying [online data tool](#) with interactive data relating to poverty and its impact.
75. On 11 November the National Audit Office [published](#) a report reviewing the support for vulnerable adolescents in England. Although it does not consider locally delivered services the report concludes that identifying and supporting vulnerable adolescents to reduce the risk of adverse outcomes is complex, but done successfully, can provide potential savings in damage to lives and costs to other public services. It also identifies gaps in the government's understanding of risk factors and adverse outcomes and of an overall strategic approach. It also identified that at a local level more could be done to improve the effectiveness of arrangements aimed at joining up the work of local bodies and that it can be difficult for local bodies to navigate the range of different government programmes.

UK Government

76. On 31 October the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee [published](#) their report on the governance arrangements for England. The report found current arrangements were not fit for purpose and are in need of comprehensive reform, advising that the current system has led to geographical inequality with people feeling they cannot influence political or social change. The Committee calls for the UK Government and opposition to set up a Parliament sponsored cross-party commission to decide on a long-term solution.

UK public policy news

77. On 10 November the BBC [published](#) an article about a group of economists from the centre-left Progressive Economy Forum questioning the UK Government's assertions that a "black hole" in the public finances will need to be filled with austerity measures and tax rises.
78. On 14 November the Resolution Foundation [published](#) its intergenerational audit for the UK in 2022 which analyses economic living standards across generations in Britain. Although the focus is on longer term changes and differences, the 2022 audit included an analysis of how the cost of living crisis has been experienced by different age groups to date.
79. On 16 November the Fraser of Allander Institute (FAI) [published](#) a summary of key findings from a report on understanding the impact of Covid-19 on household income, labour market changes and policy solutions. The report examines trends in the labour market during the pandemic and estimates household incomes at the start of the financial year 2022-23. It further models the effects of any changes in estimated income on income distribution, poverty, and inequality in Scotland, and examines the effects of some tax and benefit policies.
80. On 17 November the Local Government Association (LGA) [published](#) an article responding to the Autumn Statement advising that while the financial outlook for councils was better than feared, it will be residents and businesses who will be asked to pay more. The Chairman of the LGA also said "We have been clear that council tax has never been the solution to meeting the long-term pressures facing services - particularly high-demand services like adult social care, child protection and homelessness prevention." He also identified 'financial turbulence' as damaging to local government and said Councils want to work with central government to develop a long-term strategy to deliver critical local services as well as work to have wider devolution and greater freedom for local leaders from central government.
81. On 22 November Ofgem [published](#) findings from its investigation into how energy suppliers are helping vulnerable customers. It considered information from 17 of the biggest domestic energy suppliers and found energy firms have been failing vulnerable customers. Some of the failings revealed in the report included firms setting debt repayments so high customers could not top-up their pre-payment meters, as well as suppliers failing to read the meters of customers who could not do so themselves.
82. On 25 November the Institute for Government [published](#) a report on public spending in the UK, forecasting that Jeremy Hunt's approach to spending cuts will leave UK public services in a worse condition than before the pandemic by 2025, with performance levels already far lower than in 2010. The report warns of annual spending growth being limited to only 1% from 2025-26 across day-to-day public service spending, with reductions of 0.7% in unprotected areas.

Conclusion

83. The Commission is invited to:

- a) Agree to note but not to respond to the call for views highlighted in paragraph 42.
- b) Note this report and consider any implications for its work programme.

Martin McLauchlan
Policy Manager
1 December 2022

Appendix 1 Commission reports/blogs in past 12 months: Downloads and views

Report / blog	Date	Downloads/ blog views
Best Value Assurance Report: Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	29 Sept 22	330 (+154)
Tackling child poverty briefing	22 Sept 22	1,465 (+640)
Scotland's councils' approach to addressing climate change briefing	8 Sept 22	828 (+240)
Best Value Assurance Report: Shetland Islands Council	25 Aug 22	369 (+44)
Best Value Assurance Report: Angus Council	5 July 22	606 (+59)
Integration Joint Boards: Financial analysis 2020/21	30 June 22	773 (+93)
Accounts Commission annual report 2021/22	29 June 22	279 (*)
Blog: Inequalities in Scotland	23 June 22	642 (+65)
Scotland's financial response to Covid-19	16 June 22	1,801 (+242)
Blog: Local Government in Scotland 2022	1 June 22	723 (+42)
Local government in Scotland Overview 2022	25 May 22	2,442 (+249)
Blog: Children and young people who need additional support for learning	17 May 22	1,052 (+183)
Blog: Working together to increase collaboration and accelerate improvement	16 May 22	259 (*)
The 2020/21 audit of Orkney and Shetland Valuation Joint Board	22 Mar 22	436 (*)
Blog: Councils face complex and urgent challenges	21 Mar 22	889 (+173)
Scotland's economy: Supporting businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic	17 Mar 22	1,229 (+73)
Local government in Scotland: financial overview 2020/21	10 Mar 22	1,783 (+103)
Drug and alcohol services update	8 Mar 22	2,005 (+215)
Best Value Assurance Report progress report: Moray Council	3 Mar 22	653 (+45)
Blog: The value of independence & scrutiny across local gov't	24 Feb 22	467 (*)
Social care briefing	27 Jan 22	4,385 (+292)
Best Value Assurance Report: Falkirk Council	13 Jan 22	1,378 (+88)
Blog: Public performance reporting – why it matters	21 Dec 21	402 (*)

Note: Figures are reported as at 31 Oct 2022.

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
Nov 22	930	4,508	60	105	18	15	0	3
Oct 22	930 (+12)	8,687	314	90	26	34	3	0
Sep 22	918 (+27)	13,138	1,020	36	64	40	18	3
Aug 22	891 (+1)	6,800	794	71	25	15	4	1
July 22	890 (+7)	18,200	740	124	42	53	2	2
June 22	883 (+30)	20,600	679	245	90	47	10	4
May 22	853 (+12)	17,200	843	140	78	65	8	3
Apr 22	841 (+10)	2,009	0	16	3	2	0	0
Mar 22	831 (+23)	33,100	2,800	118	77	61	12	5
Feb 22	807 (+2)	8,000	1,100	60	34	32	1	1
Jan 22	805 (+13)	12,600	839	103	27	38	6	2
Dec 21	792 (+4)	6,500	108	48	20	25	2	0
Nov 21	788 (+10)	6,600	499	32	29	35	0	1
Oct 21	778 (+13)	22,500	316	93	47	97	6	6

Figures as of 29 November 2022.

Change on previous month shown in brackets.