

MEETING: 10 MARCH 2022

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.
2. The Commission receives regular information to complement this report, which is available through the [members' SharePoint site](#). This includes:
 - The Controller of Audit report to the Commission, updating the Commission on his activity.
 - An update on issues relating to local government which is considered by the Commission's Financial Audit and Assurance Committee.
 - A weekly news coverage briefing provided to the Commission by Audit Scotland's Communication Team.

Commission business

Publications and activities

3. Audit Scotland collects media coverage on all reports published by the Accounts Commission. [Appendix 1](#) provides download and view statistics for the Commission's published reports and blogs over the last 12 months, as of 29 January 2022. [Appendix 2](#) provides additional information on the overall engagement that reports, and other business received on social media.
4. On 10 February the Commission held and livestreamed its first hybrid meeting, where, amongst other items, it discussed a follow up report to the Commission's 2020 Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) on Moray Council. The link to the livestream was promoted on Facebook, with targeted advertising for community groups in Moray, reaching 2,891 people. The livestream of the Commission's February meeting was viewed 84 times, and the recorded version has been viewed 61 times. This compares to 27, 6 and 57 views of the Commission's livestreamed meeting in the previous three months. Live views of meetings are typically higher when a BVAR is being discussed. Deputy Chair Tim McKay posted a [vlog](#) of the February meeting which has been viewed 18 times.
5. Throughout February, previous work was re-promoted on Twitter, including the 2018 [Children and young people's mental health](#) report, to [coincide](#) with Children's Mental Health Week.
6. During February the Accounts Commission and Auditor General for Scotland submitted joint responses to:
 - the Scottish Government's consultation on the review of the Public Sector Equality Duty in Scotland. This will be placed on the members' SharePoint site.

- the Scottish Parliament's Education, Children and Young People Committee's consultation on the Scottish Attainment challenge. This can be found on the [members SharePoint site](#).
 - the Scottish Government and COSLA's consultation on proposals for new prevention of homelessness duties. This can be found on the [members SharePoint site](#).
7. On 24 February, the Commission Chair of the Commission published a [blog](#), on the value of independence and scrutiny across local government and setting out his priorities as Chair including recruiting further members to reach its full complement of 12 and to include those with lived experience. He also highlighted the importance of reporting on inequalities, which have been amplified as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. He expects councils to now focus on doing things differently and approach new ways of working including tackling climate change and supporting communities.
 8. On 25 February the Commission sent out its [newsletter](#) for all 1227 councillors across Scotland, including an embedded [video](#) from the Chair. Alongside a review of the Commission's activities since November 2021, the Chair's blog was linked in the newsletter. Statistics relating to these activities, as of 2 March, are as follows:
 - Promotion of the newsletter on Twitter reached 243 people and the engagement rate was 3.3% (1% is considered good).
 - The Chair's blog reached 1,440 people on Twitter, with an engagement rate of 3.3%. The blog had been viewed 119 times.

Forthcoming publications and activities

9. During March, the following activities are planned:
 - Publication of:
 - Audit Scotland's climate change baseline review on 1 March. The Commission's Performance Audit Committee at its recent meeting considered proposals for future work in this area. The Commission's sponsors for climate change have had sight of this report which includes a summary of national recommendations made to public bodies highlighting the areas where improvement is most needed. The review will cover all public bodies and help to inform future audit work.
 - A follow up report to Moray Council's Best Value Assurance Report on 3 March
 - A blog (joint with the Auditor General) on drug and alcohol services on 10 March
 - A joint briefing Supporting businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic & planning Scotland's economic recovery on 17 March
 - Distribution of the Commission's newsletter for community groups and the third sector on 18 March.
 - The Commission's Spring Strategy Seminar on 29 and 30 March.
10. Between 24 March and 5 May 2022, the Commission will not release any publications as a result of the moratorium for local government elections.

Other Commission business

11. During February the Scottish Government advised that Commission members will receive an uplift in their daily fees in line with the Scottish Public Sector Pay Policy, thus an uplift of 1 % for [2021/22](#) and £500 for [2022/23](#).
12. 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. Members are asked to share their thoughts on the schedule, as well as any suggestions for further communications directly to the [schedule](#).

Auditor General

13. On 1 February the Auditor General [published](#) a Section 22¹ report on the 2020/21 audit of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency considering the financial impact of a cyber-attack on the agency which is still not clear. It focuses on the handling and impact of the cyberattack in December 2020, saying it was highly sophisticated and is still affecting SEPA operations today. The report finds SEPA had good cyber security arrangements in place and responded quickly, with business continuity arrangements allowing it to continue to deliver critical services.
14. On 8 February the Auditor General [published](#) a Section 22 report on the 2020/21 audit of Scottish Canals. The report found flaws in the way the public body recorded and valued its assets. The organisation changed from a public corporation to a non-departmental public body in 2020/21 which meant a requirement to adopt the HM Treasury's accounting rules. Auditors found the organisation did not have valuations for around £51 million of specialist assets. Auditors could not give an opinion on the accounts.
15. On 24 February the Auditor General [published](#) a report on the NHS in Scotland 2021. It recommends that the Scottish Government must focus on transforming health and social care services to address the growing cost of the NHS and its recovery from Covid-19. The health service is on an emergency footing and under severe pressure with a backlog of patients awaiting treatment due to the pandemic and remains financially unsustainable. In addition, the NHS's ability to plan remains hindered by a lack of robust and reliable data, including workforce, primary care, community, social care, and health inequalities data.

Audit Scotland

16. During February Audit Scotland saw a return to Phase 3 of the programme for accessing workplaces where staff can book desks in the offices and move into hybrid working. Audit Scotland is moving into Phase 4 from 7 March, with social distancing requirements reducing from 2m to 1m.
17. During February Audit Scotland launched its recruitment [campaign](#) for two Executive roles: Chief Operating Officer and Executive Director of Audit Services. Applications close on 11 March.
18. On 15 February the Interim Director of Performance Audit and Best Value submitted a response on behalf of Audit Scotland to the [consultation](#) by the UK Cabinet Office on

¹ Section 22 reports are prepared by the Auditor General if any specific concerns or issues have been raised in the annual audit of one of the public bodies for which he is responsible. This is done under Section 22(3) of the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000.

the draft Digital Government (Disclosure of Information) Regulations 2022 which opened on 10 January 2022 and ended on 7 March 2022. The response can be found on the [members' SharePoint site](#)

19. On 28 February Audit Scotland launched its annual Best Companies survey for all staff. It will close on 11 March.

Issues affecting Scottish local government

Scottish Government

20. On 7 February the Scottish Government emailed stakeholders about changes to the [revised protocol](#) on the application of terms and conditions of employment during the Coronavirus outbreak. The key changes related to removing the requirement for employers to support employees to work from home and adding in text on hybrid working.
21. On 10 February the Scottish Government [published](#) election guidance for civil servants, agencies and national devolved public bodies during the run up to the 5 May council elections. The pre-election period for local authorities is expected to start around Monday 14 March.
22. On 14 February the Scottish and UK governments [published](#) details of a partnership agreement to establish two Green Freeports in Scotland. The two governments have agreed to establish a joint prospectus and joint assessment process with both Governments having an equal say on all bids and reflecting the Scottish Government's distinctive net zero aspirations.
23. On 28 February the Scottish Government's Director-General of Communities Paul Johnston wrote to all chief executives of public bodies in Scotland sharing a [published](#) report and response that reviewed the Scottish Government's relationship with public bodies and outlined 11 recommendations. All public bodies are encouraged to engage with their lead Director on the recommendations and implementation plan going forward. The Commission Secretary is engaging with the Scottish Government's Local Government Division to this end. The letter can be found on the [members SharePoint site](#).

Local government general

24. On 22 February the Scottish Government [published](#) council tax reduction tables and charts for April 2013 to December 2021 broken down by local authority area.
25. On 23 February the Scottish Government [published](#) its updated Serious Organised Crime Strategy. The strategy seeks better collaboration across sectors, including local government, with Police Scotland and the National Crime agency, to help tackle and respond to the threat of organised crime. Elected members, local authorities and other public bodies are asked to protect themselves from cyber threats, to use the [checklist](#) and ensure robust processes are in place.

Health and social care

26. On 2 February the Scottish Government [published](#) details of a new £1 million fund established to support projects which look after the wellbeing of staff working in social care.
27. On 10 February the Scottish Government [published](#) its analysis of stakeholders' responses to the consultation on proposals for a National Care Service in Scotland. The consultation process is the first phase of engagement. More than three-quarters

(77%) of people who responded thought the main benefit of the proposed change would be more consistent outcomes for people accessing care and support across Scotland. Meanwhile more than two-thirds (72%) of those responding agreed that the Scottish Government should be accountable for the delivery of social care through a National Care Service.

28. On 21 February the Scottish Government [published](#) its report on improving care for people with complex needs and learning disabilities, with measures to reduce delayed discharge and provide care closer to home. The actions to be taken forward include setting up a new national register to improve monitoring those at risk of hospital admission and establishing a national support panel and peer support network.
29. On 25 February the Scottish Government [published](#) details of an additional £6 million for the £15 million Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund that was launched in October 2021. The fund is managed in partnership with local integrated health authorities and other partners including Community Planning Partnerships and local authority mental health leads. It has funded 730 community organisations to date.
30. On 28 February the Scottish Government [launched](#) its consultation on proposals for Scottish Carer's Assistance, a new Scottish benefit which will replace the Carer's Allowance, to be delivered by Social Security Scotland. The consultation is open until 23 May 2022. Due to the detailed operational nature of the consultation, it is proposed that the Commission does not respond.

Education

31. On 1 February the Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA) [published](#) details of a package of support services that will be available for learners who are taking National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher courses in 2022.
32. On 3 February the Scottish Government [published](#) details of a further £2 million to help support outdoor education centres facing financial challenges as a result of the pandemic.
33. On 22 February the Scottish Government [published](#) statistics on the on the initial destinations and attainment of 2020-21 school leavers from Scotland's publicly funded mainstream schools. The results also show that 95.5% of 2020-21 school leavers were in a positive destination three months after leaving school. This was higher than in 2019-20 (93.3%) and the highest since consistent records began in 2009-10.

Social Security

34. On 9 February the Scottish Government [published](#) details of the new Adult Disability Payment that will open for applications in three pilot areas from 21 March 2022. The pilot areas are Dundee City, Perth and Kinross and the Eilean Siar council areas with further council areas being introduced in phases until the benefit is rolled out nationwide on 29 August.
35. On 24 February the Scottish Government [published](#) the fourth annual report from the Social Security Experience Panels programme, covering the key activities and outputs from 2021 which included research with Seldom Heard Groups. Three reports were published in December 2021 focusing on [vulnerable groups](#) (people experiencing homelessness, military veterans and people living with HIV or Hepatitis C), [carers and care experienced people](#), and those at the [end of life](#). Common barriers across all three groups included a lack of knowledge and awareness of the benefit system, difficulty finding information, complex application forms, and stressful interactions with staff. The three groups recommended a variety of channels for communication and clear and streamlined information. The positive role of third sector organisations in helping

people navigate the benefit system, and knowledgeable and empathetic benefit staff were also noted.

Communities

36. On 5 February the Scottish Government [published](#) details of an additional £3 million for families with children who are on the edges of care or have experience of care. Individual local authorities have been allocated funding based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.
37. On 17 February the Scottish Government published a monitoring report on Housing First tenancies that started in Scotland between 1 October and 31 December 2021.

Economy and business

38. On 18 February the Scottish Government published its labour market monthly briefing for [February 2022](#). 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. On the 16 February SPICe [published](#) overviews of the labour market for Scotland.
39. On 21 February the Scottish Government [published](#) details of an £80 million Covid Economic Recovery Fund. Councils have the flexibility to target support either using existing schemes like Scotland Loves Local, Business Improvement Districts or place-based investment programmes, and can use the funding to support low-income households. A further £3 million has been allocated to the City Centre Recovery Fund.

Covid-19 measures

40. Throughout February, as the Scottish Government reviewed the latest evidence regarding Covid-19 and restrictions, a number of changes were announced and guidance updated, including publishing an [updated Strategic Framework](#). Announcements included:
 - Updated [guidance](#) for office working including hybrid working.
 - From 28 February [high school pupils](#) and staff will not be required to wear face coverings in classrooms although they will still be required in communal areas.
 - Providing [second booster jabs](#) to those aged 75 years and over, residents in care homes for older adults, and individuals aged 12 years and over who are immunosuppressed.
 - Providing [vaccination appointments](#) for children aged five to 11 years, from 19 March.
 - Removing the legal requirement for vaccine certification from 28 February and the use of face coverings and collection of customer details from 21 March.
 - Continuing with free access to lateral flow and PCR tests ahead of a published detailed transition plan for Scotland's test and protect programme.
 - Continuing to ask people who test positive for Covid-19 to self-isolate.

Climate emergency

41. On 21 February the Scottish Government [announced](#) the establishment of a new £300 million fund to support the development and roll out of zero emission heat networks. The fund is open to public and private sector applications and will support projects

where the heat for individual properties is supplied from a communal source and should help accelerate the development of heat networks across Scotland.

Scottish Parliament

42. In February, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) published:
- A [briefing](#) and comparison of international citizens' assemblies.
 - A [briefing](#) on the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill.
 - A [briefing](#) on incineration and energy from waste
 - A [briefing](#) on the public procurement framework
 - A [briefing](#) on the Coronavirus (recovery and reform) (Scotland) Bill covering public health, education and the delivery of public services.
 - A [blog](#) on the next steps for the National Care Service
 - A [blog](#) on current performance against the 81 National Indicators
 - A [blog](#) on the relationships between Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework and other strategic land uses.
 - A [post](#) on Coronavirus deaths a local authority level in Scotland
43. On 9 February the Transport Minister Jenny Gilruth the [confirmed](#) in Parliament that ScotRail will be taken into public ownership on April 1 2022.
44. On 10 February the Scottish Parliament [passed](#) the 2022-23 Scottish Budget Bill. During the Stage 3 debate in the Scottish Parliament, Finance Secretary Kate Forbes announced a further £290 million in financial support to help address the rising cost of living. This includes £280 million to provide £150 council tax rebates for households receiving council tax reduction and £10 million to continue the Fuel Insecurity Fund. On 15 February the Fraser of Allander Institute (FAI) [published](#) an article considering the Government's response to the cost of living crisis.

Parliamentary Committee news

Public Audit Committee

45. During February the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the 2020/21 audit of Scottish Government Consolidated Accounts, the 2020/21 audit of Scottish Canals, Planning for skills, the Section 22 Report: The 2020/21 audit of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, and the Administration of Scottish income tax 2020/21 report.
46. On 3 February the Auditor General, Audit Scotland Audit Director Mark Taylor, Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office and Audit Director Darren Stewart, National Audit Office gave [evidence](#) on the [Administration of Scottish income tax 2020/21](#).
47. On 10 February the Auditor General, Audit Scotland Audit Director Gordon Smail, Senior Manager Rebeca Seidel and Audit Manager Douglas Black gave [evidence](#) on the [Planning for skills](#) report. Afterwards Senior Manager Morag Campsie gave evidence on the [2020/21 audit of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency](#).

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

48. During February the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the National Planning Framework 4, Understanding Barriers to Local Elected Office, Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill, New standards of fire alarms in all homes in Scotland, and the Building Safety Bill (UK Parliament legislation).
49. During February Willie Coffey was appointed Deputy Convener of the Committee.

Finance and Public Administration Committee

50. During February the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): its work programme, Replacing EU structural funds in Scotland and on 1 March the Resource Spending Review Framework.

Covid-19 Recovery Committee

51. During February the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): its work programme, Ministerial Statements, Subordinate Legislation, the Excess Deaths Inquiry, and Coronavirus Acts Reports.
52. On 3 February the Committee launched a [call for views](#) on the Coronavirus (recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill, which the Scottish Government has introduced to make some of the temporary, emergency powers to respond to Covid-19, permanent and to extend others. The closing date for submissions was 25 February and it considered evidence on 3 March.

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

53. During February, the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): reducing drug deaths in Scotland and tackling problem drug use (at a joint meeting with Criminal Justice Committee and Health, Social Care and Sport Committee), Refugees and Asylum Seekers, Nationality and Borders Bill (UK Parliament legislation), Kinship care and on 3 March, Domestic Violence and Violence against women and girls.
54. On 15 February the Committee launched an [inquiry](#) into challenges faced by individuals on low incomes and debt problems. It will seek to engage with organisations supporting those in need. In November, the Committee held an informal roundtable with money advisers and affected individuals. It found concerns around digital exclusion, stigma and accessing free money advice. Concerns over mental health and formal debt solutions were also raised. A call for views will close on 31 March. Given its operational focus it is proposed that the Commission does not respond.

Other Committee news

55. On 1 February the Economy & Fair Work Committee launched a [call for views](#) to inform its inquiry on town centres and high streets. The inquiry has three areas of focus: keeping town centres alive, new realities for Scottish retail, and e-commerce activity in Scotland. The call for views closes on Wednesday 16 March. As there is no substantive relevant audit work to draw on, it is proposed that the Commission does not respond.
56. On 11 February the Education, Children & Young People Committee [published](#) a report on the impact of Covid-19 on children and young people, particularly those who have additional support needs, are care experienced or are from deprived backgrounds. The report concludes the impact has been most significant on those already disadvantaged. The Committee launched a [consultation](#) seeking views on the impact of Covid from those with direct experience.

Local government news

57. The Commission's Financial Audit and Assurance Committee, at its meeting on 24 February, considered a summary of matters reported by appointed auditors across all local government bodies.
58. On 3 February the BBC [reported](#) that disabled people felt forgotten over day-care services that had not re-opened to pre-pandemic levels and that no local authority in Scotland confirmed their day-care services had returned to normal levels.
59. On 23 February the City of Edinburgh Council's Planning Committee [approved](#) the proposal to ask the Scottish Government to designate the City of Edinburgh Council area as a short term let (STL) control area. If the government agrees, residential property owners wholly letting a property as an STL, which is not their principal home, would need to apply for planning permission for a 'change of use'.
60. During February Perth and Kinross Council's Head of Education and Learning [commissioned](#) an investigation into the culture, policies and processes at Crieff High school, following allegations of bullying and discriminatory behaviour at the school.
61. During February the Aberdeen and Grampian Chamber of Commerce [published](#) its annual investment tracker report for the Aberdeen City Region. It has forecast investments worth more than £12 billion will flow into the north-east of Scotland in the coming decade, while £3.2 billion in projects have been completed since 2017.

COSLA

62. On 17 February the Daily Record [published](#) an article by Cllr Stephen McCabe, COSLA's children and young people spokesperson, explaining why children's services should not be included in the Scottish Government's proposed National Care Service. He argues radical change for supporting children and families is already underway and must not be compromised by national restructure.
63. On 22 February COSLA and the local government workforce trade unions [published](#) a joint statement on the proposed National Care Service stating it should be locally delivered, democratically accountable and free at the point of need. It also says the Scottish Government should not consider breaking up the local government workforce.
64. Over 24 and 25 February COSLA and the Improvement Service held their Annual Conference online with the winners of the COSLA excellence awards for 2022 being [announced](#), as follows:

Award	Winner
Service Innovation and Improvement	Angus Council (Environmental Services) Four Day Working Week for Waste Services
Achieving Better Outcomes in Partnership	Renfrewshire Council (Housing Support Services – Sheltered Housing and Health and Wellbeing Teams) We're Safe and Well
Tackling Inequalities and Improving Health	Fife Council (Fife Justice Services) TURN Men's Group
Stronger Communities, Especially in Light of Covid	Dumfries and Galloway Council (Community Planning and Engagement Services) Community Resilience Strengthened Through Covid

Award	Winner
Just Transition to a Net Zero Economy	West Dunbartonshire Council Partnership (Regulatory & Regeneration) Queens Quay Water Source Heat Pump (WSHP) District Heating Network (DHN)
Scottish Government – Delivering Excellence Award	South Lanarkshire Council (Early Years) Together We Can and We Will
COSLA Chairperson's Award	North Lanarkshire Council (People and Organisational Development) ROOTS: Opportunities for Growth
SOLACE Best Team Award	Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership (Dundee Alcohol and Drug Partnership) Dundee Non-Fatal Overdose Rapid Response Team
Excellent People, Excellent Outcomes Award	South Lanarkshire Council (Housing and Technical Services) Delivering Gypsy/Traveller Services During a Pandemic

65. The conference and convention day on 25 February included a [speech](#) by the First Minister highlighting the essential role local government played in supporting businesses and communities and the recovery work as Covid-19 restrictions are eased and in the recovery work ahead. The UK Minister for intergovernmental relations, Michael Gove also gave a [speech](#) in which he claimed the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund should be allocated directly to local authorities to support the delivery of services on the ground.

Improvement Service

66. On 14 February the Improvement Service (IS) published a [blog](#) about the new young persons' free bus travel scheme that launched on 31 January 2022, for young people between the ages of 5 and 22 years..
67. On 22 February the IS [published](#) its joint statement with local government workforce Trade Unions on the proposed National Care Service, suggesting the current proposals would have a negative and damaging impact on the cohesion and effectiveness of the current workforce and that local councils remain the most suitable bodies for delivering social care and professional social work services.
68. On 23 February the IS [published](#) its annual local economic development report for 2020/21 showing what councils in Scotland are delivering as local economic development organisations. It also shows that all councils economic development teams have experienced significant pressure over the last two years as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis.

SOLACE

69. On 2 February SOLACE UK [published](#) a statement on the UK government's levelling up white paper stating whilst they supported the concept and ambition, Ministers would need to look beyond the proposals to deliver transformational change which was needed. They also highlight the important and irreplaceable role of local councils and argue that cuts to council budgets have hampered the delivery of long-term regeneration.

Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO)

70. On 16 February the SPSO published their [February](#) newsletter, outlining statistics on complaints and learning points from decision reports, statistics on Scottish Welfare Fund reviews, case studies and listing training courses available.

Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR)

71. On 11 February the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) [published](#) its quarterly dashboard report covering the period 1 October to 31 December 2021 considering the continuing impact of the pandemic on social landlords. It shows that rent arrears have risen to 6.53% of rent due, that fewer lets were made compared to previous quarters, and the number of homeless applications made fell while the number of empty homes at 31 December had increased.
72. On 16 February the SHR [published](#) an updated engagement plan for Falkirk Council looking at services for people who are homeless. It considered stock quality, after reviewing the information from Covid-19 monthly returns and noting concerns raised by residents.

Care Inspectorate

73. On 8 February the Care Inspectorate [published](#) its joint inspection of adult support and protection measures in Falkirk. It found clear strengths but also identified areas that could further improve, including clearer recording of the support and protection process. It also suggested that all members of the partnership explore opportunities to make their contributions to the arrangements more effective.
74. On 15 February the Care Inspectorate [published](#) a single quality framework for care homes for adults and older people, following a review of previous frameworks for each service type.
75. On 23 February the Care Inspectorate [published](#) its joint inspection report of adult support and protection measures in the Clackmannanshire Partnership. It found clear strengths in ensuring adults at risk of harm are safe, protected and supported but also identified several important areas for improvement. These included the partnership should remove the 'police only' investigations procedure from its adult support and protection work to ensure investigations have an active social work involvement.

Scottish public policy news

76. On 3 February, Health and Care Scotland, (Scotland's Health and Care news channel) [reported](#) that the Children & Young People's Commissioner for Scotland had criticised the Scottish Government's National Care Service plans for not taking account of the human rights of children. He said he had not seen evidence for the government's decision to extend the proposed service to include children's services and criticised a lack of detail or time for the participation of children in the government's consultation.
77. On 3 February the National Records of Scotland [published](#) figures which show the number of years people in Scotland can expect to live in good health has fallen. The [Healthy Life Expectancy in Scotland 2018-20](#) report shows average expectancy decreased in each of the last four years for females and for the last three years for males. Tables are available for healthy life expectancy by local authority area.
78. On 10 February the Royal Bank of Scotland [reported](#) that Scottish firms are reporting greater confidence in Scotland's economic recovery, with recruiters recording a 13th successive monthly uplift in permanent placements in January.

79. On 10 February the Resolution Foundation [published](#) a paper about the likely spending pressures on the state in the coming decade. It notes that significant increases in the cost of state pensions are unlikely to be abated by raising the pensionable age.
80. On 11 February Children in Scotland [published](#) research from the Scottish Parliament's Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Children and Young People which found 90% of services for young people and families are facing delivery barriers. The report found 86% of respondents reported negative impacts of the pandemic on mental health, with 74% of organisations facing staffing pressures and 35% struggling with digital inclusion.
81. On 21 February the Scottish National Union of Students (NUS Scotland) [published](#) findings which suggest around two-thirds of students have experienced mental ill health as a result of financial pressures and a third have considered dropping out of their course. The survey found one in three students had experienced homelessness and 15% of those with caring responsibilities relied on food banks.
82. On 22 February Public Health Scotland [published](#) an annual update on how health service operating costs were spent in the financial year 2020/21. It covers hospital, community and primary care provided to patients.
83. During February Timewise [published](#) its annual index of the proportion of Scottish jobs advertised with flexible working option for 2021, which found only 27% jobs in Scotland offer flexible working. It recommends an extension to flexible working to new hires by welcoming applications from flexible workers throughout the recruitment process.
84. During February Understanding Scotland, a survey tool, [published](#) a quarterly report on environmental attitudes and expectations in Scotland. It reported a clear public consensus that climate change constitutes a global emergency, that they believe governments are primarily responsible for tackling climate change and that tackling climate change would not damage the economy.

Other UK audit bodies

85. On 13 January Audit Wales [published](#) a public interest report relating to a county council's decision to give a former chief executive an exit payment that was found to have failed to follow internal policies and procedures and had not followed the council's decision-making process and did not comply with legislative requirements.
86. On 2 February the National Audit office (NAO) [published](#) a report on supporting local economic growth. It found the government's policies to stimulate local economic growth are not consistently based on evidence of what interventions are likely to be most effective, increasing the risk that billions of pounds awarded to local bodies will not deliver the intended benefits.
87. On 3 February Audit Wales [published](#) a new financial sustainability data tool which will enable users to compare financial data for each council, national park and fire and rescue authority in Wales from 2015-16 onwards.
88. On 10 February the National Audit Office (NAO) [published](#) a report that identified public bodies in England owed an estimate of £260 million in tax after they had been given insufficient time to adopt changes to employment regulations. [Public Finance](#) also reported on this.
89. On 25 February the NAO [published](#) a report on the rollout of the Covid-19 vaccination programme in England, covering the period from the start of vaccinations to the end of October 2021. The report found the vaccine programme operated at an unprecedented pace, scale and complexity and that there was evidence the programme saved lives and reduced the incidence of serious illness and hospitalisation. It was assessed to

have provided value for money to date but that the programme needed to identify a clear sustainable model for the future.

UK Government and Parliament

90. On 2 February the UK Government [published](#) its policy paper *Levelling up the United Kingdom* that aims to close regional inequalities in the UK. It includes targeting £100 million of investment in three new regional innovation centres in Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and Glasgow City-region.
91. On 2 February the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee [published](#) its report on the local government finance system. The report warns there is a “real risk” of the 2021 Spending Review only providing enough funding for local government to maintain its current position and not address any of the significant pressures which have been compounded over the last decade, as a result of a 50 % fall in real terms funding.
92. On 2 February the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee [published](#) its update on the Covid-19 cost tracker. The report finds the government risked and lost unacceptable billions of taxpayer’s money in its Covid response, and whilst the total amount lost is not yet fully known, it is clear the taxpayer has been exposed to substantial long-term risks amounting to at least £15 billion.

UK public policy news

93. On 3 February the Resolution foundation [published](#) a briefing note considering intergenerational wealth transfers and the effect this has on UK families. It notes the total value of inheritances is expected to double in the coming two decades, with the lowest 20 % of households half as likely to receive a transfer of wealth as the highest earning 20 %.
94. On 9 February, Bright Blue [published](#) a report comparing the experience of people in receipt of a number of legacy benefits and Universal Credit claimants with the rest of the population. The analysis suggests the latter are more likely to report struggling with housing and council tax payments and raises particular concerns around the cost of living for disabled people.
95. On 16 February the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) [published](#) a report on the transition to net zero and its impact on communities. The report highlights the risk of top-down policymaking in widening inequalities between people and places and calls for the community-led design of net zero places through sustainability and engagement.

Conclusion

96. The Commission is invited to:
 - a) Agree that it does not respond to the consultations highlighted at paragraphs 30, 54 and 55.
 - b) Note the responses to the consultations highlighted in paragraph 6.
 - c) Note this report.

Paul Reilly
Secretary to the Commission
2 March 2022

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

Report / Blog	Date	Report downloads/ blog views
Social care briefing	27 Jan 22	1,076
Falkirk Council Best Value Assurance Report	13 Jan 22	545
Blog: Public performance reporting – why it matters	21 Dec 21	191 (+129)
Blog: Assurance and scrutiny on Scotland's housing benefit services	25 Nov 21	201 (*)
Community empowerment: Covid-19 update	28 Oct 21	2,187 (+241)
South Ayrshire Best Value Assurance Report	27 Oct 21	568 (+65)
Auditing climate change: An update	21 Oct 21	586 (+92)
The role of sponsors in our reporting work	14 Oct 21	188 (*)
The impact of Covid-19 on Scottish Councils' benefit services	7 Oct 21	319 (+32)
Blog: Christie – it really is now or never	4 Oct 21	647 (+41)
East Dunbartonshire Best Value Assurance Report	29 Sept 21	454 (+42)
Accounts Commission Strategy 2021-26	23 Sept 21	613 (+128)
Blog: Digital exclusion	16 Sept 21	872 (+85)
Blog: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	31 Aug 21	1,161 (+117)
Blog: Public Services and Scotland's Voluntary Sector during Covid-19?	25 Jun 21	527 (+50)
Best Value Assurance Report: Aberdeen City Council	24 Jun 21	943 (+63)
Social Care: social care reform questions remain	3 Jun 21	1,873 (+174)
Accounts Commission annual report 2020/21	3 Jun 21	412 (*)
Local government in Scotland Overview 2021	27 May 21	3,281 (+289)
Equality Outcomes 2021-25	27 Apr 21	644 (+81)
Mainstreaming equality and equality outcomes: progress report 2019-21	27 April 21	518 (*)
Improving outcomes for young people through school education	23 Mar 21	8,015 (+537)

Note: Figures are reported as at the end of January 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
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
Sep 21	765 (+8)	13,600	584	43	35	39	0	3
Aug 21	757 (-1)	11,200	339	48	3	13	0	0
Jul 21	758 (+18)	7,700	24	5	16	26	0	0
Jun 21	740 (+14)	56,900	513	348	113	174	8	1
May 21	726 (+22)	46,300	836	122	95	148	9	1
Apr 21	704 (+3)	3,300	n/a	1	1	0	0	0
Mar 21	701 (+15)	36,100	2,100	76	66	138	10	1
Feb 21	686 (+3)	11,000	307	20	9	10	1	0

Figures as of 2 March 2022.

Change on previous month shown in brackets.