

MEETING: 7 APRIL 2022

REPORT BY: SECRETARY TO THE COMMISSION

**STRATEGIC ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE ACCOUNTS COMMISSION AND THE
IMPROVEMENT SERVICE: ANNUAL REVIEW**

Purpose

1. This report reviews the Strategic Alliance between the Commission and the Improvement Service (IS) and proposes joint priorities for the next 12 months.

Background

2. At its March 2021 meeting, the Commission approved a Joint Statement of Intent for a Strategic Alliance between the Commission and agreed joint priorities for the following 12 months. The Joint Statement was also approved by the IS Board at its meeting on 5 March 2021.
3. It was also agreed that the Commission and the IS jointly review progress in delivering the Strategic Alliance at the end of the first 12 months of its operation. This paper reports the conclusion of that review.
4. Members may recall that a six-month update was shared with them in December 2021.

Progress

5. A summary of progress against the priorities that form the basis of the Alliance is set out in **Appendix 1**.
6. When it agreed the Alliance last year, the Commission noted that it would be important for both organisations to reflect on whether the Joint of Statement of Intent is working and delivering the ambition set out. The progress shown in Appendix 1 suggests that this ambition is being met.
7. Specifically, when it considered the matter in March 2021, the Commission agreed, in response to a point made by Geraldine Wooley, that further thought be given to prioritising work with integration joint boards (IJBs). As Appendix 1 notes, Audit Scotland and IS have been working closely as part of the development of the Commission's new approach to auditing Best Value including IJBs, and it would be anticipated that IS will be able to provide an offer of self-assessment support to IJBs as part of any approach.
8. Further, IS is currently delivering self-assessment and improvement planning support to IJBs and health and social care partnerships. IS has also played a key role in setting up a joint account management approach for health and social care partnership chief officers, working with partners in the national Integration Huddle (Care Inspectorate, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Public Health Scotland, NHS National Services Scotland, NHS Education Scotland and Scottish Social Services Council) to raise awareness of the improvement support available and to discuss their improvement needs, and how the bodies might collectively be able to respond.
9. Sarah Gadsden, Chief Executive of the IS, is present at today's meeting to participate in discussion.

Next steps

10. It is proposed therefore that the Commission restate and underline its commitment to the Alliance and that as a basis for its further development, these priorities be retained.
11. There will be a new IS Board in place following the local government elections. It is recognised, therefore, that the new Board will be asked to continue their commitment to the Alliance. We will therefore report back to the Commission after this is considered by the new IS Board. This approach can be informed by a clear commitment made by the Commission to continue the Alliance.
12. With this in mind, in **Appendix 2** we have mapped some themes between the Commission's work programme and the current IS business plan and set out how we intend to take forward our collaborative working. Given the flexible and dynamic nature of the work programme, further opportunities for collaborative working will be a core feature of ongoing dialogue between the Commission, IS and Audit Scotland.
13. Further thought is also to be given to collaboration on matters such as public performance reporting (reflecting the Commission's newly published 2021 Statutory Performance Information Direction) and on learning and development around Best Value (reflecting the new approach to Best Value auditing from 2023).
14. Most immediately, the Commission (and Alliance) will feature in IS induction material for a new intake of elected members following the local government elections. For its part, the Commission will refer to the Alliance in its next four-monthly newsletter to all elected members in Scotland (thus including this new intake) to be published in mid-July 2022.
15. The Commission is therefore asked to endorse this commitment and accompanying proposals.
16. We will further review progress in 12 months' time.

Promotion

17. With a new IS Board in place following the election, we will continue to collaborate on promoting the Alliance and the benefits for councils and integration joint boards.

Conclusion

18. The Commission is invited to.
 - a) note the progress of the Strategic Alliance between the Commission and the IS.
 - b) restate and underline its commitment to the Alliance and articulate accordingly to a new IS Board in place following the local government elections.
 - c) agree to retain and further develop the joint priorities agreed as a basis for the Alliance.
 - d) note that I will report back on the new IS Board's review of the Alliance.
 - e) note a further review in 12 months' time.

Paul Reilly
Secretary to the Commission
23 March 2022

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS

Priority	Progress
The Accounts Commission (AC) and Improvement Service (IS) will consult with each other on their annual work programmes/ Business Plans to identify opportunities for collaborative working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IS submitted a response to the AC's consultation on its work programme 2021/22 and 2022/23. • The IS will commence work shortly on the development of its Business Plan 2022/23 and will seek views from the Commission on IS priorities and deliverables. • The IS has mapped its business plan deliverables to the AC's work programme, to ensure relevant IS and Audit Scotland teams are connected.
The IS will participate in Advisory Groups established to oversee the development of the annual Local Government Overview reports on finance and challenges and performance and other relevant audit work which directly links to IS programmes, and will contribute relevant data, intelligence and case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IS actively participates in advisory groups on the Local Government in Scotland Overview and Local Government in Scotland Financial Overview reports. Audit Scotland refers to IS reports, data analysis and case studies in these reports, where relevant and helpful. • The IS is a member of Audit Scotland's (AS's) Community Empowerment Advisory Group and has contributed to the Community Empowerment Covid-19 update published on 28 October. • The IS participated in an interview with AS colleagues on the joint AC/Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) performance audit on Scotland's financial response to Covid-19. • The IS Climate Change Manager has met with the Audit Manager in AS with responsibility for developing the joint AC/AGS programme of climate change-related audit work. Both are exploring opportunities to work together, following the publication of the AC/AGS report on 'Auditing Climate Change: An Update'. • IS and AS colleagues are meeting in November to explore opportunities to work together on child poverty. • IS and AS colleagues are liaising over their shared interest in the Scottish Government's Fair Work agenda. • The AC will be participating in the IS research project into future models of local government service delivery. • The IS is collaborating with AS in the planning of the AC's 'end-of-term' report (currently proposed to be published in Summer 2023) which will summarise the findings of the current programme of Best Value Assurance reporting on Scottish councils. The AC will draw on and highlight good practice identified by the IS in this report and will use the report to highlight key areas where IS improvement support may be of value to local authorities moving forward.

Priority	Progress
<p>The AC will signpost councils to the support available from the IS following Best Value audit work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In meeting councils to discuss their published Best Value Assurance Reports (BVARs), the AC actively signposts councils to relevant improvement support available from the IS. This has resulted in the IS, for example, providing support to councils on self-assessment and improvement planning, and another on member/officer roles and relationships. • One of the recommendations in South Ayrshire Council's BVAR was that 'the council should assure itself that it has the capacity and skills required to increase its pace of improvement in key aspects of Best Value. Where appropriate, external support should be sought from other councils, or the IS, to help with focusing its areas of improvement'. On the back of this recommendation, the IS has been in touch with the Council to offer support.
<p>The AC will involve the IS in its approach to developing a Best Value audit approach for Integration Joint Boards (IJBs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AS colleagues have been working closely with IS colleagues as part of the development of the AC's new approach to auditing Best Value in IJBs, with a particular focus on exploring how best to embed self-evaluation at the heart of this approach. It is anticipated that the IS will be able to provide an offer of self-assessment support to IJBs pre and post their Best Value audit.
<p>The IS will provide briefings to the AC on outcome areas that it is delivering improvement support in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IS delivered a presentation to the AC on the Local Government Covid-19 Data Dashboard. This was helpful in the context of the Commission considering the Statutory Performance Information (SPI) direction for the next three years and how it makes use of the work Local Government is doing to measure and improve performance, including sharing good practice. • The IS has shared a report with the AC on Collaborative Working, following research the IS undertook on shared services/ wider collaborative working in place in councils prior to the pandemic. • The AC Secretary signposts relevant IS work in his monthly update report on significant recent activity relating to Local Government. These updates are taken from the IS Newsletter and IS Leaders' Newsletter.
<p>The AC will provide periodic briefings to the IS Board on the key themes arising from its Local Government audit work, to help inform future Local Government improvement planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new AC Chair had an introductory meeting with the current IS Chair and Chief Executive on 1 February 2022. He will meet the new IS Chair following the local government election.

Priority	Progress
<p>The AC and IS will co-host two events in areas of mutual interest</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colleagues from both organisations worked together to deliver an online event on 1 December 2021 focused on the conclusions of the AC performance audit on 'Improving outcomes for young people through school education'. The event was chaired by Sheila Gunn and attended by Education Conveners and Directors of Education, with facilitation support from the IS. • A second online event for elected members, on the AC's Local Government in Scotland Overview report 2021 was planned for December 2021 but was cancelled following the resignation of the previous Commission Chair in December. • Such events are intended to be highly participative with a focus on learning, but also providing the IS and AC with an opportunity to engage with members and senior officers on the findings of the reports and to identify areas where further improvement support would be helpful.
<p>The AC and IS will consider opportunities for co-produced elected member briefings and/or elected member webinars in areas of mutual interest</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The IS is working with all councils to co-design elected member induction materials which will be in place following next year's local government elections. As part of this, colleagues from both organisations are considering how best we can signpost new elected members to the work of the AC and of external audit. • Colleagues from both organisations are also considering how we can work together and with councils on elected member development, to address some of the issues commonly picked up in BVARs on elected member development.

MAPPING OF AC WORK PROGRAMME 22/23 & IS BUSINESS PLAN 22/23

Theme	Accounts Commission	Improvement Service
Best Value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best Value Assurance Reports • Thematic summary of Best Value best practice examples – Autumn 2022 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will continue to offer support to councils in advance of their BVAR and where relevant, we will offer support to assist them with their BVAR recommendations. • We will continue to embed and develop dedicated knowledge sharing platforms, including the Knowledge Hub and the case study section of the IS website.
Social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A series of themed audit and reporting work will follow on from the publication of the social care briefing published in January 2022. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will support Local Government's response to the outcome of the National Care Service consultation. • We will work with six organisations through the National Organisations Integration Huddle to deliver a Joint Account Management Approach to Health and Social Care Chief Officers. • We will work with national improvement bodies to deliver collaborative improvement support to integration authorities. • We will provide self-assessment support to Integration Joint Boards and Health and Social Care Partnerships to support improvement.
Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AS are developing a front-facing accessible data tool to improve transparency and scrutiny of progress on climate change. • Alongside these products we are developing our longer-term approach and priorities for auditing climate change to be discussed later in the year. 	<p>We will work with Solace, COSLA and others to provide practical support to councils in relation to the improvement agenda around climate change. This will include helping connect councils better with good practice, supporting elected members' knowledge and scrutiny on this issue, supporting links to shared ambitions in promoting public health and helping embed the climate change agenda across the full range of service areas and professional groups that have a role to play. We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with all IS programmes to embed climate change where relevant, building connections between networks, priorities and projects. • Work in partnership with Solace, Scottish Cities Alliance, Sustainable Scotland Network (SSN) and COSLA to drive transformation. • Deliver webinars and briefing notes tailored for elected members. • Undertake research with SSN, COSLA and Solace to understand the needs and priorities of Scottish local authorities in delivering on their climate change commitments. • Explore funding opportunities with Scottish Government to support our priorities on climate change, with a particular focus on work

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		<p>with Scottish and Local Government to consider and evidence the implications of net zero interventions on tackling poverty and inequality, helping to join up significant policy agendas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with the Scottish Cities Alliance and Edinburgh Climate Change Institute to explore how we can support their Carbon Scenario Tool Pathfinder Project, particularly in relation to baselining data for area-wide emissions and developing a climate data repository for Scotland. <p>Our work in planning will also make a significant contribution to our climate change work. We will continue to deliver a Planning Skills programme that leads the behavioural change required for those working within the planning system to deliver: The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, National Planning Framework 4, Scottish Planning Policy, and the Digital Planning Strategy. Key priorities will be the delivery of the Place Principle and the contribution of planning to climate change, public health and Covid-19 recovery priorities.</p>
Early Learning and Childcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Next performance audit in the series will look at whether the expansion in funded ELC was delivered as planned and how much it cost. Report in Q4 2022/23. 	<p>We will provide a range of business analysis, communications and workforce planning support to councils as they continue to evolve and deliver their Early Learning and Childcare services. Support will be tailored to individual local authorities' needs, whilst reporting on progress to Scottish Government and COSLA. High level deliverables include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertaking periodic data collections to evidence the progress being made by local authorities in delivering the expansion of funded ELC to 1140 hours. • Supporting local authorities in developing and improving recruitment strategies while strengthening capacity for effective long-term workforce planning by sharing learning and good practice. • Supporting the standardising of processes for calculation of sustainable rates in ELC, including through the organisation and facilitation of a series of learning events. • Supporting local authorities in addressing the thematic challenge of 2-year-old uptake.

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Child poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Child Poverty blog due to be published in September 2022 will highlight the Commission interest in this topic, connected to their focus on inequalities. • In 2023/24, we plan to report on progress made in achieving interim targets within the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. This will include looking at any additional plans and action the Scottish Government is putting in place with local government and their partners to mitigate the new risks in this area created by Covid-19. 	<p>We will work with local and national partners to support the development and delivery of effective local child poverty action reports and associated activity. We will continue to support networks to identify and share good practice in relation to tackling child poverty. We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review all Local Child Poverty Action Reports (LCPAR) and provide feedback to lead officers, focused on improvement. • Further roll out the self-evaluation process. • Co-ordinate and host the Child Poverty Peer Support Network. • Share practice from LCPARs across Scotland and provide improvement support in areas where there are gaps. • Support leads to ensure that tackling Child Poverty is at the heart of recovery from Covid-19. • Deliver briefing notes and webinars for elected members. • Chair the National Partners Co-ordination Group. • Work with National Partners to develop a joint work plan • Work with National Partners to develop a joint work plan and identify how to support local areas on key thematic issues. <p>We will also provide support for the implementation of the UNCRC across Local Government,</p>
Elected member development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All AC reports, performance audits, briefings and blogs are targeted at elected members and council officials. 	<p>We will facilitate the development of elected members to provide effective Political Leadership for Scottish Local Government. We will do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supporting councils to put in place effective elected member development support • providing national development resources, such as briefings, guidance and workshops • providing bespoke support on roles, responsibilities and working relationships to individual councils • facilitating and influencing partner organisations to provide support and develop resources for elected members • signposting councils to other sources of support from partner organisations

<p>Covid-19 Recovery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Local Government Overview reports include a focus on Covid-19 recovery. • There will be two significant outputs on the Covid-19 pandemic: a briefing on <i>Supporting businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic and planning Scotland's economic recovery</i> (17 March 2022) and a performance audit <i>Reviewing Scotland's financial response to the Covid-19 pandemic</i> (9 June 2022). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will support the work of the national Covid Recovery Strategy Programme across each of the workstreams identified as part of the programme – evidence, change and assure.
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