

MEETING: 12 MAY 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 31 March 2022. [Appendix 2](#) provides additional information on the overall engagement that reports, and other business received on social media, as of 29 April 2022.
4. Due to the moratorium period between 24 March and 5 May 2022, the Commission restricted its social media activity except for a Tweet promoting its monthly meeting. As a result, April was a quiet month in terms of social media activity resulting in low numbers of impressions (the number of browsers exposed to the Commission's social media content) compared to previous months with only 2,009 impressions compared to 33,100 in March and 8,000 in February. As expected, clicks, retweets, likes and video views were also low compared to previous months.

Forthcoming publications and activities

5. Between 24 March and 5 May 2022, the Commission is not releasing any publications in respect of the moratorium for local government elections.
6. During May the following activities are planned:
 - Publication of:
 - A blog on the Commission's January briefing on Social Care, to be published by the Improvement Service and repromoted on the Commission's Twitter account (date to be confirmed).

- A blog by William Moyes about the Improvement Service Strategic alliance (date to be confirmed)
- A blog by Stephen Moore about Children with Additional Support Needs (17 May).
- A vlog/video by Andy Cowie about the May Commission meeting (20 May).
- The publication of the updated joint work programme with the Auditor General of Scotland (25 May)
- The publication of the Local government overview 2021 report on (27 May).
- The Commission Chair will be writing a letter welcoming new councillors after the local elections, accompanied by social media promoting this.

Other Commission business

7. On 13 April, the Commission met with representatives of Orkney and Shetland Joint Valuation Board to discuss the [statutory report](#) on the Board which the Commission published on 22 March. The Commission was represented by William Moyes (Chair) and Paul Reilly (Secretary to the Commission). The Board was represented by Councillor Andrew Drever (Convener) and Karen Greaves (Clerk). At the meeting, the Board confirmed that following the local government election, a newly appointed Board will consider the Commission's findings and agree an appropriate response
8. On 9 May, the Commission advertised for applications for the Controller of Audit role. The advert is open for four weeks.
9. In June, the Scottish Government will advertise for applications for four new members of the Commission, to be appointed for an initial period of four years from early October 2022. The Commission will also be undertaking its own promotional campaign around these appointments, including outreach events for individuals who may be interested in becoming a member of the Commission.
10. 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

11. On 21 April the Auditor General [published](#) a report on the 2020/21 audit of South Lanarkshire College. The independent audit was unable to conclude that governance at the college had been satisfactory in the last year and found a number of areas where the college did not fully comply with the Code of Good Governance for Scotland's Colleges.

Audit Scotland

12. During March Audit Scotland [retained](#) its Silver Healthy Working Lives award after the Healthy Working Lives team submitted a portfolio of evidence and met with the assessor. The team are now working on their action plan for 2022 and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the next three years.

13. On 30 March Audit Scotland [published](#) its gender pay gap report for 2021 as at 31 March 2021 and giving an overview of the steps being taken to continue to reduce the gap.
14. On 7 April Audit Scotland Management Team and Leadership Group shared a [summary](#) of the most recent Best Companies Survey in which Audit Scotland retained One Star accreditation. The Commission will meet the Auditor General following its June meeting.
15. On 18 April, following the latest change relating to the requirement to wear face coverings in public places, Audit Scotland advised staff that in line with the latest Scottish Government [guidance](#), and following discussions with office landlords, staff are being requested to continue to wear face coverings when moving around Audit Scotland offices and in common areas.
16. Over 20-21 April Audit Scotland held three hybrid sessions with colleagues interested in choosing active travel and hear views on facilities at Audit Scotland offices.
17. On 27 April Audit Scotland published an interim progress report on mainstreaming equality and equality outcomes. This is an agenda item for today's Commission meeting.
18. On 14 July Audit Scotland will publish its annual fraud and irregularity report 2020/21. Audit Scotland plays an important role in deterring and detecting fraud in public bodies, and in helping organisations prevent the loss of public money through mistakes. Part of its counter-fraud work involves sharing examples of where fraud has been identified in public bodies. Audit Scotland shares this information anonymously through quarterly technical bulletins and a summary report after the year end. The purpose is to share information about cases where internal control weaknesses have led to fraud and irregularities. This will allow audited bodies to review their arrangements to help prevent similar circumstances happening again. The report will be shared with Commission members.

Issues affecting Scottish local government

Scottish Government

19. On the 4 April the Scottish Government published [guidance](#) for public bodies on procurement implications and options that may be taken in relation to discouraging activity that may support the Russian government's action on Ukraine.
20. On the 13 April the Scottish Government [published](#) details of its consultation of the key aspects of the revised National Strategy for Community Justice. Due to the specific nature of this consultation, it is not proposed that the commission would respond.
21. On 19 April the Scottish Government [published](#) statutory guidance to support appointing persons and public authorities to carry out functions under the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018.

Local government general

22. On 1 April Unison [announced](#) plans to consult local government members on taking industrial action over pay after an initial offer from COSLA of a 2% increase across the board and an increase in the Living Wage hourly rate to £9.98 was rejected.
23. On 1 April the Scottish Government [published](#) guidance for local authorities on the Scottish Government's Super Sponsorship Scheme and Scotland's responsibilities under the UK Government's Homes for Ukraine scheme.

24. On 22 April the Scottish Government [published](#) its updated finance circular 2/2022 providing guidance for local authorities in the delivery of the cost of living award.

Health and social care

25. On 31 March the Scottish Government [published](#) details of new Standards for Health and Social Care in adult care homes. The two new Standards set out the expectation that people living in care homes should have the right to see someone who is dear to them, even during a Covid-19 outbreak, and be able to name a person or persons who can directly participate in meeting their care needs. The Care Inspectorate will consider whether they are being met when registering, inspecting and supporting homes.
26. On 3 April the Scottish Government [published](#) details £25 million funding for drugs services. A total of 77 initiatives working with people affected by drug use are to receive awards totalling more than £25m over the next five years. Grants of more than £6m in total have been allocated to 16 organisations providing residential rehabilitation and pre- and post-rehabilitation support to enable further enhancement of services. A further 38 awards totalling more than £10m have been made to organisations that support people through recovery and 23 projects working with children and families have received funding of almost £9.5m.
27. On 11 April the Scottish Government published a range of information relating to the Tayside Mental Health Inquiry and Tayside Mental Health Service Oversight Group. This included the oversight group's first [quarterly report](#) and four themed [work plans](#).

Education

28. On 12 April the General Teaching Council for Scotland [announced](#) the appointment of Ms Khadija Mohammed as convener of the GTCS council. She is its first black, Asian and / or minority ethnic (BAME) convener. Ms Mohammed previously worked as a Primary teacher and is a university lecturer.

Social Security

29. On 3 April the Scottish Government [published](#) details about employability services helping those at greatest risk of long-term unemployment are to receive up to £113 million of funding. This includes £60 million for the No one Left Behind and the Young Person's Guarantee in the 2022/23 budget plus additional investment in the Parental Employability Support Fund and Tackling Child Poverty.
30. On 12 April the Scottish Government [published](#) a report analysing the impacts of UK Government reform on households with children in Scotland. The report estimates that 70,000 people in Scotland, including 30,000 children would be lifted out of poverty by 2024 if the UK Government welfare reforms introduced since 2015 were reversed. The report estimates that the cost of reversing the changes, including the removal of the £20 per week Universal Credit uplift and two children benefit cap, would be around £780 million a year.

Communities

31. On 12 April, the Scottish Government [published](#) details of an increase in funding for the Outdoor Community Play Fund to £550,000 for the year 2022-23. The fund will also support four pilot projects providing outdoor play opportunities for children with additional support needs.
32. On 26 April the Scottish Government [published](#) plans to automatically pay the Best Start Grant Early Learning and School Age Payments to parents and carers who already receive Scottish Child Payment when their children become eligible.

Economy and business

33. On 13 April the Scottish Government published new measures to revitalise town centres and regenerate local economies in a [joint response](#) with COSLA to the Town Centre Action Plan [review](#) which was launched in June 2020 and published in February 2021. A spokesperson from COSLA [welcomed](#) the response and that the framework will help towns to contribute to national targets as well as open up opportunities for towns. The response outlines actions to better embed a 'Town Centre First' approach to meet the needs of communities and tackle climate change. Actions include:
- ensure town centre regeneration contributes to climate action by reducing emissions, investing in low carbon transport and creating more green spaces
 - make town centre services as accessible as possible to help reduce unnecessary car journeys and prevent climate change
 - incentivise entrepreneurship by delivering the ambitions set out in the National Strategy for Economic Transformation
 - support businesses with town centre premises by exploring a new online sales tax that helps traditional businesses compete with those operating online
 - use the planning system to limit out of town development and ensure the non-domestic rates system continues to support our net zero ambitions
 - require developers to install and optimise digital connectivity in new town centre housing developments and support community organisations delivering digital skills training
34. On 14 April the Scottish Government published its labour market monthly briefing for [April 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 12 April SPICe [published](#) overviews of the labour market for Scotland.

Covid-19 measures

35. Throughout April, as the Scottish Government reviewed the latest evidence regarding Covid-19 and restrictions, and guidance for [workplaces and public settings](#) and coronavirus [testing](#) was updated. Updates and announcements included;
- From 4 April, the legal face covering requirement was removed for those attending places of worship, marriage ceremonies, civil partnerships, funeral services, and commemorative events.
 - From 18 April the legal requirement to wear [face coverings](#) in most public spaces and on public transport became guidance.
 - From 31 May the [Highest Risk List](#), formerly known as the Shielding list will formally end as a result of the successful vaccination programme and new treatments for Covid-19. Revised [advice](#) for people on the Highest Risk List was also published.
 - From 1 May public health advice for people who have [symptoms of Covid-19](#) will change from self-isolation to 'stay at home'.
36. On 8 April the Scottish Government [wrote](#) to all chief executives of public sector bodies following the removal of all legal restrictions relating to Covid-19 from 18 April, setting

out the Scottish Government's mitigation measures in place in Scottish Government buildings until further notice. Measures include encouraging the continued wearing of face coverings in communal areas and when moving around buildings, keeping a social distance while working and ensuring good ventilation.

Scottish Parliament

37. During April, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) published:
- A [blog](#) exploring the energy price crisis
 - A [blog](#) looking at how Scotland is performing against the 81 National Indicators
 - A [central hub](#) for all SPICe material on Covid-19

Parliamentary committee news

38. The Scottish Parliament was in recess from 2 to 17 April 2022, and as a result no meetings in the chamber or committee meetings were scheduled to take place at this time.
39. On 19 April, the Parliament debated the [National Planning Framework 4](#), tabled by the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. On 19 April, the Parliament debated the [National Planning Framework 4](#), tabled by the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. On 19 April, the Parliament debated the [National Planning Framework 4](#), tabled by the Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee. The Parliament agreed that the Committee's report and associated documents form the basis of the Parliament's response to the Scottish Government.

Public Audit Committee

40. During April the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the Commission and Auditor General update on [Drug and Alcohol services](#), Major ICT projects accountability and governance arrangements, the performance audit on the new vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides, the Commission and Auditor General's Social Care Briefing, the Section 22 Report: The 2020/21 audit of NHS Highland; and the Auditor General's work programme.¹
41. On 31 March the Auditor General, Audit Scotland Interim Director of Performance Audit and Best Value (PABV), Antony Clark and Senior Manager Jillian Matthew gave [evidence](#) on [update on Drug and alcohol services](#). This was followed by the Auditor General and Senior Manager Morag Campsie giving evidence on Major ICT projects accountability and governance arrangements relating back to previous reports considered: the Audit Scotland 2017 report [Principles for a Digital Future: Lessons learned from public sector IT projects](#) and the Public Audit and Post-legislative Scrutiny Committee's March 2021 report [Key audit themes: Managing public sector ICT projects](#).
42. On 21 April the Auditor General, Audit Scotland Interim Director of PABV, Antony Clark, Audit Director Angela Canning and Audit Manager Gill Miller gave [evidence](#) on the performance audit [New vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides](#). This was followed by the Auditor General and Senior Manager Mark MacPherson giving evidence on the [Social care briefing](#).

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.

43. On 28 April the Auditor General, Audit Scotland Interim Director of PABV, Antony Clark and Audit Director Angela Canning gave [evidence](#) on the report [New vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides](#). This was followed by the Auditor General and Senior Manager Leigh Johnston and Partner of Grant Thornton UK LLP Joanne Brown giving evidence on the Section 22 report [the 2020/21 audit of NHS Highland](#).

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

44. During April the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): An Allotments inquiry, Non-domestic rates (Coronavirus) (Scotland) Bill, the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill, the Annual Report of the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman, the National Planning Framework 4, subordinate legislation and the work programme.

Finance and Public Administration Committee

45. During April the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the Scottish Government's continuous improvement programme, Skills Development Scotland: the trends behind the income tax forecasts and its work programme.

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

46. During April the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): The NHS in Scotland 2021, Health and Care Bill (UK Parliament Legislation), health inequalities, health and wellbeing of Children and Young People and subordinate legislation.

Covid-19 Recovery Committee

47. During April the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the Excess Deaths in Scotland since the start of the pandemic, the Covid-19 update, the Coronavirus acts: two -monthly reports and subordinate legislation, communication of public health information and the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill.

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

48. During April, the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the inquiry into low income and debt problems, the Scottish Government's Child poverty delivery plan 2022-26, the Case Transfer, Kinship Care, and the work programme.
49. On 25 April the Committee [wrote](#) to Lady Poole, chair of the independent Covid inquiry, and John Swinney to set out the evidence provided to it about the impact of the pandemic regarding violence against women and girls, including disabled women and girls and those from black and ethnic minority backgrounds.

Net Zero Energy & Transport Committee.

50. On 6 April the Committee [launched](#) a snapshot inquiry into rising energy prices. The inquiry will focus on short- and medium-term solutions to high energy prices as well as longer-term structural solutions. The Committee will hold evidence sessions during April and May, hearing from a wide range of stakeholders including academics, consumer representatives, energy companies and government officials.
51. On 7 April the Improvement Service [published](#) its response to the Committee's inquiry into the role of local government and its partners in financing and delivering a Net Zero Scotland. The Commission has liaised with the Committee on the inquiry.

Education, Children and Young People Committee

52. During April the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the Scottish Attainment

Challenge Inquiry, British Sign Language Bill, subordinate legislation and the work programme.

53. On the 30 March, the Minister for children and young people, Clare Haughey [wrote](#) to the Education, Children and Young People and Criminal Justice Committees to notify them of the Scottish Government's [consultation](#) on the policy proposals and potential legislative reforms to promote and advance the rights of children in the care and justice systems. Due to the practical aspect of the consultation in the delivery of the legislative reforms, it is proposed the commission will not respond.
54. On 1 April, the Committee [wrote](#) to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills Shirley-Anne Somerville, to request information on the timescales for education reform. The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills [responded](#) setting out timetables for education reform. She also confirmed operating models for new education bodies will be developed by winter 2022, with a period of shadow operation before they become operational later in 2024.

Local government news

55. On 31 March the Scottish Government [published](#) the City Centre Recovery Task Force's report co-produced with the Scottish Cities Alliance. This report sets out the specific impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on city centres and identifies the immediate priorities to support city centre recovery.
56. On 10 April the Scotsman [published](#) details of analysis showing real-terms cumulative cuts to library services over the last 10 years. Using figures from the local government benchmarking framework, Scottish Labour highlighted there had been real-terms cumulative cuts of more than £18.6 million since the last local government election in 2017, and annual spending in 2020/21 equated to 36 per cent lower than it was in 2010/11. Scottish Labour's local government spokesperson said, "Year after year of brutal cuts have left a black hole in libraries funding – and this is the case for so many local services."

COSLA

57. On 4 April COSLA [published](#) its response to the Scottish Government's spending review framework. One of the key messages made was the need to focus on prevention and drive investment upstream to reduce demand on health and social care services. In addition, the submission stated that local government has borne the brunt of funding pressures for more than a decade and the gap cannot continue to be met through further efficiencies. In addition, there are clear signs health inequalities are worsening and need to be addressed and local government funding needs to be sustainable.
58. On 11 April COSLA [published](#) an annual report setting out how local government have worked to keep The Promise and highlighting some of the work undertaken by councils alongside care experienced communities. The report highlights examples of coproduction work with care experienced communities, ways in which families have been supported to stay together, nurturing love and overcoming difficulties, making houses homes, and youth work approaches.

Improvement Service

59. On 31 March the Improvement Service [published](#) an interactive collection of local government climate change case studies showing how councils are tackling climate change. Case studies from across Scotland are given under the following nine themes; Energy and Heat, Planning and Build Environment, Nature, Nature, Climate Adaptation and Biodiversity, Waste, Recycling and Circular Economy, Transport, Children and

Youth, Community Engagement, Economy, Business and Employability and Just Transition to Net Zero.

60. On 12 April the Improvement Service [published](#) an article about how working patterns are changing and considers the opportunities and challenges hybrid working creates for those working in local government.
61. On 27 April the Improvement Service published plans about the following projects/programmes.
 - A new project to coordinate a [Safe & Together Implementation Forum](#). This will bring together and support local authorities that are using the Safe & Together Framework to develop domestic-abuse informed systems, services and workforces.
 - a new project to support the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the [Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). The project's aim is to support public bodies to prepare for the incorporation of the UNCRC and to understand their duties and how best to meet these.
 - An IS Recovery and Delivery programme to support the ongoing early learning and childcare expansion work and the new Covid Recovery Strategy workstream.
 - Following the publication of the [Delivery Progress Report](#). Part of the role of the Improvement Service is to learn about and analyse the ELC workforce landscape in Scotland to provide an understanding of the challenges and priorities for service delivery and also feed into benchmarking and individual council workforce planning and development.
 - Following the publication of the Scottish Government's [Covid Recovery Strategy](#), the Improvement Service is to work with the Scottish Government's team to support the delivery of all workstreams; Evidence, Change and Assure (further details are available on the dedicated Covid Recovery Strategy [webpage](#)).

Other scrutiny bodies

Standards Commission

62. On 1 April the Standards Commission published a [blog](#) about avoiding the pitfalls of social media, following an increase in complaints about the conduct of councillors on social media. The blog also provides links to existing [advice notes](#) available.

Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO)

63. On 20 April the SPSO published their [April](#) newsletter, outlining statistics on complaints and the publication of two cases that highlight the importance of carrying out full clinical assessments. It also includes statistics on Scottish Welfare Fund reviews, case studies and that there is a backlog in allocating complaints due to the organisation recovering from the pandemic. There is also information about updated online whistleblowing training programmes.

Scottish Housing Regulator

64. On 20 April the Scottish Housing Regulator published three updated factsheets for tenants and social landlords about complaints and significant performance failures;
 - [Complaints about a regulated body](#)

- [Significant performance failures: information for tenants of social landlords](#)
- [Significant performance failures: information for social landlords](#)

Care Inspectorate

65. On 14 April the Care Inspectorate [published](#) details of its national inquiry into unpaid carers experiences of social work and social care. The Care Inspectorate is looking to understand carers' experiences of adult social work and social care services and is open until 3 June 2022.

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary Scotland

66. On 12 April, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary Scotland [published](#) their first three-year Scrutiny Plan for 2022-25 following consultation with partners and stakeholders. The plan includes scrutiny and review work relating to domestic abuse, online fraud, missing persons, legitimacy and organisational culture, as well as probationer training, strategic workforce planning, healthcare in custody and forensic services.

HM Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland

67. On 14 April the HM Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland [published](#) the Chief Inspector's plan for 2022-2025, following consultation with key stakeholders. The plan sets out a new inspections process considering performance across the three service delivery areas and across each Local Senior officer within the SDA against four themes; Prevention, Response, People and Partnership. In addition thematic inspections will take place and during 2022-23 will cover the operational focus of Health, Safety and Welfare in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, firefighting in high rise buildings, mental health and well-being and the operational impact of climate change. Potential future thematic activity includes planning and preparation for a terrorist act, the provision of specialist resources, organisational learning, national resilience assets, fire cover, HR/Workforce planning, operations control and the Retained or volunteer duty system.

Scottish public policy news

68. On 1 April the Fraser of Allander Institute [published](#) a report on trends in economic activity. Increased levels of economic inactivity were seen during the pandemic, partly due to the number of people in full-time education and early retirement among degree educated professionals. Over 20,000 more people are economically inactive due to long-term sickness.
69. On 2 April, Reform Scotland [published](#) a briefing on Scotland's education statistics urging the Scottish Government to establish an independent body, similar to the Office for National Statistics, to oversee the collection and analysis of education data in Scotland. The think tank's Commission on School Reform suggested a review of assessment and certification at secondary level will only be effective if data collection and analysis is undertaken.
70. On 8 April the Royal Bank of Scotland [published](#) findings which show there has been an increase in permanent placements and temporary billings in Scotland. Survey data from March indicates a growing imbalance between demand for staff and supply of labour resulting in a marked increase in starting salaries.
71. On 25 April the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland [published](#) a statement expressing concern about a lack of urgency on the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into law.

Other UK audit bodies

72. During March Audit Wales [published](#) a follow-up review report considering the shared resource service (SRS) collaboration between four councils and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent and Chief Constable of Gwent Police. The SRS is a collaboration of technology provision to deliver shared Information Technology services between five partners. The review found that SRS partners consider collaboration has delivered effectively during the pandemic and would benefit from improved communication, more effective sharing of digital aspirations and learning, addressing workforce challenges and be able to demonstrate value for money.
73. On 6 April Audit Wales [published](#) a report on Direct Payments for Adult Social Care. The report found Direct Payments were highly valued but that managing and supporting people to use them varies widely, meaning service users and carers receive different standards of service. Ten recommendations to the Welsh Government and local authorities are made in the report.

UK Government

74. On 30 March the UK Parliament's Joint Human Rights Committee published a [report](#) on UK Government proposals to reform the Human Rights Act. It warns proposals to replace the act with a "British" Bill of Rights would cause confusion and result in more cases being sent to the European Court of Human Rights, cautioning attempts to strengthen freedom of speech could undermine other rights.
75. On 13 April the UK Government [published](#) details of £2.6 billion of funding to be allocated across the UK from the Shared Prosperity Fund between 2022-25. £1.58bn is being made available to communities in England, with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to receive £212m, £585m, and £127m respectively. It is claimed the fund will be more flexible, locally led and will be the same in real terms to the EU structural funds it replaces. The Scottish Government [argued](#) funding allocated to Scotland for 2022-23 falls £151m short of the £183m it estimates to be an appropriate replacement for EU funds.
76. On 25 April the UK Government [published](#) its plans to resume moving benefit claimants to Universal Credit by the end of 2024 from 9 May. The initial transition was paused due to the pandemic and subsequent influx of new claimants.

UK public policy news

77. On 29 March, the Equality and Human Rights Commission [published](#) its strategic plan for 2022-25, setting out six priority areas to improve equality and human rights as the country emerges from the pandemic. It is centred on the changing workplace, experience of children and young people, health and social care provision, digital services, strengthening legal frameworks and promoting respect between groups.
78. On 1 April the Resolution Foundation [published](#) a briefing warning of increased fuel stress among poorer households, and arguing the UK Government's planned 'British Energy Security Strategy' should focus on reducing demand-side pressures in light of poorly insulated homes and growing regional inequalities.
79. On 5 April the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) [published](#) findings which suggest work coach discretion for Universal Credit claimants are insufficient with a need for the DWP to explore how best to limit conditionality in a post-pandemic environment. A number of recommendations are made including extending flexibility and offering an advance where claimants hold no savings.
80. On 13 April the Office for National Statistics (ONS) [published](#) figures showing

consumer inflation rose by 7% in the 12 months to March 2022, up from 6.2% in February. This has largely been driven by increases in average diesel and petrol prices.

81. On 21 April the ONS [published](#) figures which show in early April over a quarter of businesses reported their production and/or suppliers had been affected by rising energy prices, up from 25% in the previous month.
82. On 25 April the ONS [published](#) figures showing around nine in 10 adults reported an increase in their cost of living during March, compared with six in 10 in November 2021. Nearly a quarter of adults reported difficulty paying their usual household bills in the period, with 30% reporting it was very or somewhat difficult to afford housing costs.
83. On 25 April the ONS [published](#) figures showing the disability pay gap decreased slightly from 14.1% in 2019 to 13.8% in 2021 in the UK. However, Scotland had the widest disability pay gap at 18.5%.
84. During April Deloitte [published](#) its State of the State report for 2021-22 recording public attitudes across the four nations through the pandemic and beyond. In Scotland, it has observed a growing divergence to Westminster on matters such as social mobility alongside Wales and Northern Ireland. The report also highlights the Scottish public's support for a higher tax and spend environment but that the growing cost of living has shifted perceptions broadly in line with the rest of the UK. Trust in the Scottish and Welsh governments is more buoyant than for the UK Government.
85. On 25 April the Institute for Fiscal Studies [published](#) a briefing note suggesting Covid has not fundamentally reshaped the labour market, with change in the occupational mix of vacancies no greater than would have been expected over a "normal two-year period". It has observed a shift towards vacancies in lower-paid occupations, with higher vacancies in some occupations not appearing to have pushed up wages.
86. On 28 April the Financial Times [published](#) an article about the UK Government dropping of a draft bill on the reform of audit and corporate governance from the Queen's speech which will outline the UK government's legislative programme for 2022-23. Reform had been identified as a priority following a number of corporate scandals including BHS in 2016, Carillion in 2018 and Patisserie Valerie in 2019. A number of accounting and investor groups have expressed concern at the prospect of no draft bill being included in the legislative programme.

Conclusion

87. The Commission is invited to:
 - a) Agree that it does not respond to the consultations highlighted at paragraphs 20, 53.
 - b) Note this report.

Paul Reilly
Secretary to the Commission
4 May 2022

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

Report / blog	Date	Downloads/ blog views
The 2020/21 audit of Orkney and Shetland Valuation Joint Board	22 Mar 22	268
Blog: Councils face complex and urgent challenges	21 Mar 22	202
Scotland's economy: Supporting businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic	17 Mar 22	545
Local government in Scotland: financial overview 2020/21	10 Mar 22	770
Drug and alcohol services update	8 Mar 22	855
Best Value Assurance Report progress report: Moray Council	3 Mar 22	304
Blog: The value of independence & scrutiny across local gov't	24 Feb 22	301 (+265)
Social care briefing	27 Jan 22	2,278 (+424)
Best Value Assurance Report: Falkirk Council	13 Jan 22	911 (+140)
Blog: Public performance reporting – why it matters	21 Dec 21	304 (+37)
Blog: Assurance & scrutiny on Scotland's housing benefit services	25 Nov 21	249 (*)
Community empowerment: Covid-19 update	28 Oct 21	2,517 (+154)
Best Value Assurance Report: South Ayrshire Council	27 Oct 21	673 (+52)
Auditing climate change: An update	21 Oct 21	756 (+104)
The role of sponsors in our reporting work	14 Oct 21	204 (*)
The impact of Covid-19 on Scottish Councils' benefit services	7 Oct 21	379 (*)
Blog: Christie – it really is now or never	4 Oct 21	708 (*)
Best Value Assurance Report: East Dunbartonshire Council	29 Sept 21	590 (+86)
Accounts Commission Strategy 2021-26	23 Sept 21	722 (+44)
Blog: Digital exclusion	16 Sept 21	1,104 (+131)
Blog: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	31 Aug 21	1,280 (+72)
Blog: Public Services & Scotland's Vol Sector during Covid-19	25 Jun 21	588 (+39)
Best Value Assurance Report: Aberdeen City Council	24 Jun 21	1,106 (+100)
Social Care: social care reform questions remain	3 Jun 21	1,955 (+64)
Accounts Commission annual report 2020/21	3 Jun 21	471 (*)
Local government in Scotland Overview 2021	27 May 21	3,749 (+240)

Note: Figures are reported as at the end of March 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
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
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

Figures as of 29 April 2022.

Change on previous month shown in brackets.