

MEETING: 9 JUNE 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 30 April 2022. [Appendix 2](#) provides additional information on the overall engagement that reports, and other business received on social media, as of 27 May 2022.
4. May saw a return to greater levels of engagement on social media following the moratorium period with 17,200 impressions (the number of browsers exposed to the Commission's social media content) which is more comparable to number of impressions in January at 12,600 although not as high compared to 33,100 impressions in March. Clicks, retweets, likes and video views also increased and were closer to the levels experienced in March. Much of this activity has been as a result of this [tweet](#) about Stephen Moore's [blog](#) on additional support services and this [tweet](#) on the [annual Local Government Overview](#) report (paragraphs 6 and 9), as well as other blogs published in May as covered below.
5. On 16 May a joint [blog](#) between Chair William Moyes and Sarah Gadsden, Chief Executive of the Improvement Service, was published about our Strategic Alliance and collaborative work that has been carried out over the last 12 months and which is planned for the future to help accelerate improvement and the pace of change across local government services. The blog had been viewed 41 times by the end of 17 May.
6. On 17 May a [blog](#) by member Stephen Moore was published on additional support for learning and the gap between ambition and reality of the support that is provided. The blog had been viewed 225 times by the end of 17 May.

7. On 24 May the Commission and Auditor General for Scotland [published](#) details of the appointment of the auditors to Scotland's public bodies for the next five years from October 2022. The audits of local government on behalf of the Commission and of health, central government, and further education bodies on behalf of the Auditor General, will be carried out by a mix of in-house Audit Scotland teams and external firms. The full list of auditors to each public body is available on the [Audit Scotland website](#).
8. On 25 May the Commission [published](#) its Overview of local government in Scotland 2022. It reports Scotland's councils have a pivotal role in supporting and working with communities as they responded to the impacts of Covid-19. In terms of recovery work councils should lead recovery work with and alongside local communities, focusing on getting the services people need in place as pressures and stresses escalate and impact the day to day lives of individuals and communities. The report was downloaded 393 times in the first 24 hours after publication. A [vlog](#) by the Commission Chair William Moyes was also published and viewed 779 times in Twitter by the 27 May. COSLA [responded](#) to the report with COSLA's Resources Spokesperson welcoming it and appreciating the recognition it gave to the extremely challenging context that councils are operating in and that the Commission highlighted the continuing need for more funding certainty and stability.
9. Following the May Commission meeting members had the following questions in relation to agenda item 10, the interim progress report on mainstreaming equality and equality outcomes.
 - *How are refugees and care-experienced young people feature in Audit Scotland's outcome 2 - 'We will increase the diversity of people into Audit Scotland and their progression through every level of our organisation'?* The Audit Scotland Human Resources team have advised that recruitment campaigns for all roles within Audit Scotland aim to attract a wide range of talent by advertising through targeted agencies and job boards. We aim to include additional support to underrepresented groups through application mentoring.
 - *How does Audit Scotland can use benchmarking against other organisations in relation to outcomes 2 (as above) and outcome 3, namely 'We will broaden our culture of diversity and inclusion, so all employees feel valued, engaged and contribute', and how this would be reported?* The Audit Scotland Human Resources team have advised that benchmarking will be completed through work with our partner, procured as part of our Diversity and Inclusion Action plan. Additional data capture will also assist with this measurement.

Forthcoming publications and activities

10. During June the following activities are planned:
 - Publication of:
 - An email from the Commission Chair to all 1227 newly elected councillors to welcome them to their new role (week commencing 6 June)
 - A vlog/video by Stephen Moore about the June Commission meeting (17 June)
 - The Commission's annual report (23 June)
 - The financial overview report of IJBs with an accompanying vlog by William Moyes (30 June)

- A media campaign to accompany the campaign to recruit four new Commission members from October (applications open from 10 June and close on 22 July).

Other Commission business

11. On 19 May the Commission submitted a joint response with the Auditor General for Scotland on the revision consultation in relation to the National Strategy for Community Justice. This can be found on the [members SharePoint site](#).
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.

Auditor General

13. On 19 May the Auditor General [published](#) a report on the progress of the implementation of new devolved social security benefits. It found significant progress has been made in the delivery of complex devolved social security benefits under challenging circumstances during the pandemic. The report suggests there will need to be an expansion of the Social Security Scotland workforce to meet expected demand.

Audit Scotland

14. On 5 May Audit Scotland launched its mentoring partnership with Audit Wales in addition to the Audit Scotland internal mentoring programme.
15. On 20 May the Best Companies results for 2022 were announced in a virtual ceremony recognising the best in workplace engagement with Audit Scotland reaching 21st place across Scotland in the Best Companies list and named the UK's 8th best accountancy workplace. A copy of the article is available on [the Commission member's SharePoint site](#). In addition, a best companies [profile](#) of Audit Scotland is also publicly available.
16. During May Audit Scotland published details of the following appointments to its Executive Team:
 - [Vicki Bibby](#) as Chief Operating Officer
 - [Antony Clark](#) as Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value
 - [John Cornett](#) as Executive Director of Audit Services
 - [Kenneth Oliver](#) as Executive Director of Innovation and Quality.
17. During May, Audit Scotland concluded a 10-year review of the Institute of Chartered Accounts of Scotland (ICAS) training scheme, the conclusions of which are now being considered by its Management Team.

Issues affecting Scottish local government

Scottish Government

18. On the 4 May the Scottish Government contacted public bodies with a [further update](#) on Scottish Government's work on sanctions against Russia and related issues including a ban on exports of luxury goods to Russia, strengthened trade sanctions and to advise that the UK Government had unilaterally liberalised all tariffs with Ukraine. [Guidance](#) regarding IT products and cyber security was also provided.
19. On 9 May the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service launched a [consultation](#) on their draft

Strategic Plan 2022-25 which sets out the SFRS's seven outcomes that will be the focus of the SFRS over the next three years. These outcomes include community safety and wellbeing will improve due to both preventative activities and partnership working and that communities will be safer and more resilient following the application of lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic and as the SFRS responds effectively to changing risks. It is proposed the Commission will provide a joint response with the Auditor General, to be agreed by the Secretary in conjunction with the Chair. The consultation runs until 10 July.

20. On the 12 May the Scottish Government launched a [consultation](#) on improving victims' experiences of the justice system, with a particular focus on sexual offences. Views are being sought on the establishment of a Victims' Commissioner for Scotland and whether to take a trauma-informed and person-centred approach, to consider special measures to assist vulnerable parties and new statutory underpinning for anonymity for complainers in sexual offence cases as well as the establishment of a new specialist criminal court for serious sexual offences. The consultation will close on 5 August 2022. It is proposed that the Commission does not respond (in common with the Auditor General) given a lack of audit evidence available at this time.
21. On 24 May the Scottish Government launched a [consultation](#) on recommendations that will or are likely to require legislation following the [independent review](#) and related recommendations regarding police complaints handling, investigations and misconduct issues. The consultation will close on 16 August. It proposed that the Commission does not respond (in common with the Auditor General).
22. During May a dedicated [website](#) for the Scottish Covid-19 inquiry was launched to publish research and provide updates on its work. The Commission has agreed previously to provide a submission to the inquiry.
23. On 31 May, the Scottish Government [published its Resource Spending Review \(RSR\)](#), alongside an updated [Medium Term Financial Strategy \(MTFS\)](#). This is the first multi-year spending plan since 2011, and is informed by updated fiscal and social security forecasts by the [Scottish Fiscal Commission](#). Resource spending relates to the day-to-day spending of government, such as spending on public sector pay and services. This is different to capital spending, such as infrastructure spending, for which a separate [Capital Spending Review](#) was published last year.
24. Expected budgets, funded mostly through Barnett consequentials, are expected to be lower in the medium term than during the pandemic but higher than pre-pandemic levels. It is clear that there are substantial pressures on the Scottish budget in the medium term. This is caused by a combination of factors, including recovering from a pandemic, external factors such as inflation and cost of living pressures, and policy choices, such as increasing social security payments. The RSR and MTFS outline the Scottish Government's intended response to these pressures. In particular, this includes:
 - Prioritising spending in addressing child poverty, climate change, the economy and public services (such as the national care service)
 - Improving efficiency to reduce costs, such as through digitisation, reform of the public sector estate and improving public procurement
25. Audit Scotland is currently working through the reports to determine what this means for portfolios and public spending, including the implications for local government. The team will provide further information to the Accounts Commission at its meeting in August.

Local government general

26. On 19 May the Scottish Government [published](#) Local Government finance circular 6/2022 containing accounting guidance for the extension to accounts approval and publication dates for 2021-22. This sets out the agreed extension of the statutory dates for approving and publishing the 2021/22 annual accounts to 15 December 2022.

Health and social care

27. On 7 May the Scottish Government [published](#) details of an additional £15 million to support the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for adults for a second year. This fund was launched in October 2021 to tackle social isolation, loneliness and mental health inequalities made worse by the pandemic.
28. On 10 May Public Health Scotland [published](#) the results and related online dashboards of the Scottish Health and Care Experience Survey 2021/22. This biennial national survey asks about people's experiences of accessing and using their GP practice and other local healthcare services; receiving care, support and help with everyday living; and caring responsibilities. Individual reports for each Health and Social Care Partnership, GP practice, GP cluster and NHS Board are available from the online dashboards.
29. On 16 May the Scottish Government published details of its [consultation](#) on its first Data Strategy for health and social care. The consultation covers how the data should be used and managed and runs until 12 August. I am consulting with Audit Scotland colleagues to agree whether the Commission should respond to this consultation. I will advise the Commission accordingly at today's meeting.

Education and Young People

30. On 9 May the Scottish Government published details of a [consultation](#) seeking views on improving the collection of education data to assess progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap. It is proposed the Commission provide a joint response with the Auditor General, to be agreed by the Secretary in consultation with the Chair. The consultation runs until 18 July.

Social Security

31. On 11 May the Scottish Government [published](#) its plans to support an additional 30,000 people by removing income thresholds from Best Starts Foods eligibility by 2023/24 as part of the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan.

Restorative Justice

32. On 30 May the Scottish Government [published](#) details of its new restorative justice services, putting victims at the heart of the justice system with the launch of two hubs. The National Hub, within Community Justice Scotland which will have a strategic oversight role and will also manage the delivery of an initial test project in Edinburgh, Lothian, and the Borders. It will seek to establish best working practices ahead of a wider rollout to other regions. A Thriving Survivors hub is also being set up to offer a trauma informed service to support cases involving sexual harm. To date, £725,000 in government funding has been allocated for the rollout of restorative justice services.

Climate Change / Energy Efficiency

33. On 10 May the Scottish Government [published](#) details of grants awarded from the low carbon Vacant and Derelict Land Investment Programme that aims to drive regeneration and innovation while tackling climate change. Successful projects include

regenerating derelict land in East Greenock, decontaminating and redeveloping former industrial land for social housing in East Dunbartonshire, installing heat pump technology for proposed commercial developments in South Lanarkshire and redeveloping challenging building plots for net zero and affordable homes through the Edinburgh Home Demonstrator programme.

34. On 10 May the Scottish Government [published](#) a report following an independent review of the role of incineration in the hierarchy of waste disposal in Scotland. The report makes 12 recommendations and two provisional recommendations for the Scottish Government, local authorities, and the wider waste industry, including:
- Industry, local authorities, and the Scottish Government should do more to make data around waste in general and around incineration more transparent and accessible (Recommendation 3).
 - The Scottish Government should ensure no further planning permission should be granted to incineration infrastructure, unless balanced by an equal or greater closure of capacity (Recommendation 4).
 - Local authorities should specifically address the risks of lock-in when negotiating waste management contracts (Recommendation 6).
 - As part of the strategic approach referred to in Recommendation 11, Scottish Government and Local Authorities should ensure that adequate time and resource is dedicated to local and community engagement (Recommendation 8).
 - Communities deserve more authentic and committed engagement from local authorities and industry than is currently sometimes the case (see Recommendation 8 and Recommendation 9).
 - Scottish Government and local authorities should work with industry to develop a strategic approach to planning and deploying waste collection, reprocessing and management facilities by end of 2023 that takes account of the key issues. (Recommendation 11).

The Scottish Government will set out its initial response to the review in June.

35. On 13 May the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport wrote to public sector leaders with information regarding the enhanced Public Bodies Climate Change Duties reporting requirements. A copy of the letter is available on the members SharePoint site [here](#). Audit Scotland currently publish an annual report on [Environment, Sustainability and biodiversity](#) and also provide [data](#) to Sustainable Scotland Network Scotland who collate all public sector data and report to the Scottish Government. All recommendations will be integrated into Audit Scotland reporting requirements and this year's reports will be published by the 30 November 2022.
36. On 17 May the Sustainable Scotland Network [published](#) a summary analysis and report on the climate change reporting requirement duties on Scotland's public bodies for 2020/21. It reported local authorities demonstrated a step change in emissions with a reduction of 11.4% on 2019/20 but they still represented the largest share of total emissions at 44%. Good practice examples were highlighted and included the following councils: City of Edinburgh, East Ayrshire, Highland, Dundee City and Argyll and Bute, West Dunbartonshire and Inverclyde, Midlothian, and South Lanarkshire.
37. From 21 May the Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies (Scotland) Order 2022 ([Scottish Statutory Instruments 2022 No 171](#)) came into effect. The order requires local authorities to prepare a Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy and Delivery Plan

by 31 December 2023 and subsequently on a five yearly cycle. As set out in the Scottish Government's [Heat in Buildings Strategy](#), Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategies (LHEES) will provide an area-based 'blueprint' for decarbonised heat and energy efficiency planning and delivery.

38. On 26 May the Scottish Government published [its third progress report on Scotland's Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019 to 2024](#) (the SCCAP2 programme) and the [second annual monitoring report](#). It also published its [response](#) to the publication of the Climate Change Committee's [annual report on progress in reducing emissions in Scotland](#), in December 2021.
39. On 30 May the Scottish Government [published](#) details of new measures to help cut waste and preserve resources to help tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis. Key proposals include banning the destruction of unsold goods to ensure that products never end up landfilled or incinerated when they could be used or recycled, improving household recycling and reuse services and consulting on separate kerbside collection of textiles by 2025, introducing new reporting to show where recycling goes once it has been collected and powers to set local recycling targets.

Communities

40. On 10 May the Scottish Government published an [annual housing statistics](#) summary up to 31 March 2021 on new housing supply across all sectors and information on various elements of local authority housing stock. Detailed excel tables that include information on individual local authorities are also available. Additional detailed published information about individual local authorities housing stock was also [published online](#).
41. On 16 May the Scottish Government [published](#) details about its consultation on the creation of a new National Park in Scotland before the end of the Parliamentary Session in 2026. The public [consultation](#) is asking what people a number of questions including what Parks should deliver, how they can help protect and restore nature, tackle climate change and propose sustainable land use. The consultation will close on 3 June, and after which, there will be a longer period during which communities, local government and organisations will be encouraged and supported to develop proposals for new Parks. It is proposed that the Commission does not respond to this consultation.
42. On 17 May the Scottish Government [published](#) details of six Scottish islands that are to be included in the Carbon Neutral Island project to support island communities to become carbon neutral by 2040. They have been identified by the Scottish Government in collaboration with local authorities and island representatives and include Hoy, Islay, Great Cumbrae, Raasay, Barra and Yell.

Economy and business

43. On 9 May the Scottish Government [published](#) details about its plans to establish a new centre of Expertise in Equality and Human Rights, putting human rights and equality at the heart of economic policy development. [The report of the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery](#) (June 2020) concluded that tackling inequalities is key to economic recovery.
44. On 9 May the Scottish Government [published](#) details of an additional £4 million funding to the Young Person's Guarantee to help remove barriers to employment. Three programmes will share the funding which will connect people with employers, training, and volunteering opportunities. The three programmes are Inspiring Scotland, the Young People's Consortium and Volunteering Matters.

45. On 20 May the Scottish Government published its labour market monthly briefing for [May 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 17 May SPICe [published](#) overviews of the labour market for Scotland.

Scottish Parliament

46. During May, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) published:
- A [blog](#) on Scotland's Performance
 - A [blog](#) on the local government elections
 - A [blog](#) on the Queen's speech
 - A [blog](#) on Social Work and the National Care Service
 - A [blog](#) on the Social Work Workforce
 - A [Common Frameworks hub](#)
 - A [National Care Service hub](#)
 - A guest [blog](#) from ICAS and guide to public finance accountability
 - A [briefing](#) on Children and Young People's mental health
 - A [briefing](#) on Social Work
 - A [briefing](#) on Scotland's GDP for Q4 of 2021
47. On 9 May the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee launched an [inquiry](#) into the role of public participation in the Scottish Parliament. It is seeking views from organisations and people not traditionally engaged with the Parliament's work to help identify any barriers that may exist and to get their view of how the parliament can meet the needs of all the communities it serves. This includes groups such as those who are disabled, from a minority ethnic background or those who are living on a low income. The consultation runs until 30 June. It is proposed that the Accounts Commission provide a response joint response with the Auditor General.

Parliamentary committee news

Public Audit Committee

48. During May the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the Auditor General's performance audit on the new vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides; the Section 22 Report: The 2020/21 audit of South Lanarkshire College¹; the administration of Scottish income tax 2020/2; accountability and governance arrangements of major capital projects; a draft committee annual report; and its work programme.
49. On 12 May the Auditor General, Audit Scotland Senior Manager Rebecca Seidel and Mazars LLP Director Lucy Nutley gave [evidence](#) on the Section 22 report: [the 2020/21 audit of South Lanarkshire College](#). This was followed by the Auditor General and Audit Scotland Senior Manager Richard Robinson giving evidence on the [Administration of](#)

¹Section 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.

Scottish income tax 2020/21.

50. On 19 May the Auditor General and Audit Scotland Senior Manager Morag Campsie gave [evidence](#) on the management of [Major Capital Projects: Accountability and governance arrangements](#). (This report is a committee report rather than the Auditor General.)
51. On 26 May the Auditor General, Audit Scotland Director Angela Canning and Audit Manager Gill Miller gave [evidence](#) on the performance audit [New Vessels for the Clyde and Hebrides](#).

Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee

52. During May the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): an evidence session on its allotments inquiry; the Non-domestic Rates (Coronavirus) (Scotland) Bill; the Coronavirus (Recovery and Reform) (Scotland) Bill; affordable housing; subordinate legislation; a draft committee annual report; and its work programme.

Finance and Public Administration Committee

53. During May the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the National Performance Framework: Skills Development Scotland; the trends behind the income tax forecasts; the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body Budget; the Scottish Parliament's website; appointments to the Scottish Fiscal Commission; public administration in the Scottish Government; a draft committee annual report; and its work programme.

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

54. During May the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): tackling alcohol harms in Scotland; the Auditor General's report [the NHS in Scotland 2021](#); its inquiry on health inequalities; an update on the [briefing on Social Care](#); provisional common frameworks; its annual report; and subordinate legislation.
55. On 13 May the Committee [published](#) its inquiry report on the Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People in Scotland. The report includes 99 recommendations covering 29 different areas or aspects including physical, sexual and mental, stigma, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services & workforce, the impact of poverty and inequality on health and wellbeing, disadvantaged groups and health, tackling poverty, young carers, adverse childhood experiences, care experienced children and young people, the transition to adult services, the role of schools and youth services in supporting health and wellbeing, the co-production of services, long-term strategies and data gaps.
56. On 25 May the Committee [published](#) its annual report for 2021-22. The Committee held 33 meetings, four inquiries, scrutinised one bill and published eight reports during the parliamentary year.

Covid-19 Recovery Committee

57. During May the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): an evidence session on its inquiry into communication of public health information in relation to the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic; and its annual report.
58. On 13 May the Committee [published](#) its annual report for 2021-22. The Committee held 30 meetings, three inquiries, scrutinised two bills and published 18 reports during the

parliamentary year.

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

59. During May, the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the inquiry into low income and debt problems; the Scottish Commission on Social Security; a draft committee annual report; and its work programme.

Net Zero Energy & Transport Committee.

60. During May, the Committee took [evidence](#) on and considered: the role of local government and its partners in financing and delivering a net-zero Scotland; ferry services; the UK Internal Market Act 2020; the High Speed Rail (Crewe-Manchester) Bill; Energy Price rises; and a draft Committee annual report.

Education, Children and Young People Committee

61. During May the Committee took evidence on and [considered](#): the Scottish Attainment Challenge Inquiry; public petitions; and the implementation of the expansion of early learning and childcare hours.

Local government general

62. On 22 April Unison wrote a joint open [letter](#), with Unite and GMB, to the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) about the matter of pay for local government workers after results of members consultation established 89.8% of members had voted yes to taking some form of action up to and including strike action in pursuit of an acceptable pay offer. It was subsequently [reported](#) on 30 May that the GMB union will be sending a statutory notice to COSLA informing them that there will be an industrial action ballot of members in schools and early years, waste and cleansing services from 6 June.
63. Following the 2022 local government elections, councils have been continuing to form administrations with all 32 administrations now agreed. Details of the administrations and councillors voted in for each party is in **Appendix 3**. Following the election results, Shetland Islands Council had one vacant seat and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CNES) had two vacant seats. By-elections will be held on 30 June in the two CNES wards. A by-election date for the Shetland Islands Council vacancy is still to be agreed.
64. On 19 May the EIS [published](#) details that it had rejected a pay offer of 2% for Scotland's teachers and called for the Employers' Side to come back quickly with a significantly improved offer. for rapid & vastly improved settlement.
65. On 23 May The Promise Scotland Oversight Board published its first report on progress Scotland is making to keep the pledge, [The Promise](#), by 2030. The report found that although progress has been made, the pace and scale of change needs to increase. It identified that although there was clear commitment, there were issues of inconsistent accountability and incomplete data being available to help understand children's lives. Other areas lacking progress included being clear on what the financial investment is achieving, a lack of mental health provision, lack of urgency in removing 16 and 17-year-olds from Young Offenders Institute provision and that outcomes for care experienced children are not good enough.

Improvement Service

66. On 17 May the Improvement Service [published](#) details of its new project to support the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRO). The project will support public bodies to prepare for the incorporation of the UNCRC,

helping them to understand the duties that the legislation brings on them and how they are best placed to meet these.

67. On 17 May the Improvement Service [published](#) details about carbon literacy training that has been received by fifty senior leaders from Scotland's seven cities in the last three months due to a partnership between the Scottish Cities Alliance and the Improvement Service.
68. On 24 May the Improvement Service [published](#) details that two new project towns of Rutherglen and Fraserburgh are to be included in their Shaping Places for Wellbeing Programme.

SOLACE

69. On 10 May SOLACE UK [published](#) a response to the Queen's speech and the SOLACE President highlighted that local government has a vital role to play in getting the country back on track but advised that significant new powers and funding, particularly in social infrastructure was required to do so.

Other scrutiny bodies

Standards Commission

70. On 2 May the Standards Commission published an [article](#) about the representation of women in politics, highlighting that despite a century having passed since women had the right to stand for election, they remain underrepresented at both national and local levels. It referenced recent studies and stories from social media and said it was concerning if this will lead to fewer women standing for election or remaining in politics. The article calls for all councillors to adhere to the requirement to treat everyone with courtesy and respect as required by the Councillor's Code of Conduct.

Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman (SPSO)

71. On 18 May the SPSO published their [May](#) 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 with delays of up to 11 months. There is also information about their Independent National Whistleblowing Officer [May e-bulletin](#).
72. On 24 May the SPSO [published](#) their Annual Statistics 2021-22 detailing the number of enquiries and complaints received and determined in the past year. In summary, the SPSO received 3,665 complaints which was a 17% increase on the previous year and determined 3,492 complaints, a 10% increase compared to the previous year. Of the 284 complaints investigated, 73% were about the health sector and 63% of investigated complaints were upheld and 511 recommendations made.

Scottish Housing Regulator

73. On 20 May the Scottish Housing Regulator [published](#) details that it had recently appointed 12 independent, volunteer Tenant Advisors to help keep tenants' views at the heart of its work. The Tenant Advisors will provide feedback from a tenant perspective to add to other regulatory evidence it gathers.

Care Inspectorate

74. On 9 May the Care Inspectorate [published](#) its finalised Corporate Plan 2022-25 outlining the vision and the strategic outcomes and key priorities the inspectorate will

focus on. One of the seven key priorities is to scrutinise and support local authorities and partnerships to ensure that those accessing services can do so when and where they need to, and their support meets their individual needs.

75. On 24 May the Care Inspectorate [published](#) an interim report into support services for children and young people at risk of harm in West Dunbartonshire. The report recognised significant challenges faced by the partnership in terms of managing the ongoing impact of the pandemic and the resources needed to do so. Inspectors noted the partnership responded effectively when concerns about children and young people were first identified, and that the quality of later processes was inconsistent with issues around the quality of assessments, planning and reviews.

Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland

76. On 16 May Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland [published](#) the Chief Inspector's plan for 2022 to 2025 outlining the annual inspection plan of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) for 2022-2023.

Education Scotland

77. On 24 May Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education [published](#) a national report examining a range of approaches taken to support improvement and recovery in establishments nominated by local authorities across Scotland in response to the pandemic. A number of case studies were referenced from across Scotland and findings include:
- resilient staff across schools and settings who have shown great resolve in managing the challenges of the pandemic while also implementing improvement to support children's and young people's learning
 - greater emphasis on support to improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of children, young people, and their families
 - staff building on existing practices to support children and young people to make progress
 - strengthened approaches to parental engagement
 - recognition that the pandemic has impacted on skills and attributes of children and young people
 - increased need to support senior leaders with their own wellbeing
 - the impact of continued absence to supporting continuity of learning

Environmental Standards Scotland

78. On 29 April Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) [published](#) details of the appointment of its permanent Chief Executive officer, Mark Roberts who is joining from Audit Scotland where he is currently an Audit Director.

Scottish public policy news

79. On 1 May the Institute of Economic Affairs [published](#) a discussion paper that estimates the introduction of minimum unit pricing in Scotland since 2018 has not seen the reduction in the health and social alcohol-related harms intended. It claims data suggests most indicators have stayed the same or worsened since the policy's introduction.

80. On 4 May the Fraser of Allander Institute [published](#) the findings of its quarterly Scottish Business Monitor in partnership with Addleshaw Goddard. Drawing from the experience of 500 firms in April, it observed more than one in three expected to reduce their operations due to higher energy prices, though this is thought to be small or moderate.
81. On 11 May the National Institute of Economic and Social Research published data in their spring outlook that predicts over 150,000 Scottish households will have their disposable incomes wiped out by food and fuel bills over the next year.
82. On 17 May the Office for National Statistics [published](#) data from that suggests the rate of unemployment fell 0.9 percentage points in Scotland, in the first quarter of the year, down to 3.2%. Figures match levels last seen in March 2019. The estimated employment rate was at 75.6% of the working age population.
83. On 19 May Reform Scotland [published](#) a briefing setting out a series of recommendations for local government reform. The briefing calls for directly elected mayors and full devolution of local taxes to drive local engagement, with a quarterly public meeting between the First Minister and Scotland's council leaders.
84. During May the Diffley Partnership [published](#) the findings of its quarterly survey measuring public perceptions in Scotland. It has observed the cost-of-living top's people's concerns, with 47% of all respondents ranking this among their top priorities. This figure has doubled over the past eight months.

Other UK audit bodies

85. On 6 May the Jersey Audit office [published](#) a report on governance and decision making during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Comptroller and Auditor General found that although the Government of Jersey recognised existing emergency legislation did not provide the best route for managing the pandemic, there was a non-statutory Competent Authorities Ministers Group established but there were some ambiguities in the roles and responsibilities of different political groups.

UK Government

86. On 10 May the UK Government [published](#) a transcript of the Queen's speech which was delivered by Prince Charles outlining the UK Government's agenda for the coming session of parliament. The plans include efforts to 'level up' opportunity across the UK, ease the cost-of-living crisis and grow the economy.
87. On 12 May the chair of the UK Covid inquiry, Baroness Hallett, [wrote](#) to the Prime Minister Boris Johnson outlining proposed changes to the inquiry's terms of reference. She judged devolved matters should feature in the inquiry, following the findings of a public consultation in which concerns over the appropriateness and variation in guidance were raised.
88. On 26 May the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak [published](#) details of a £15.3bn package of support for UK households amid rising energy prices and spiralling inflation. It includes a one-off £650 cost of living payment for low-income households and the doubling of the energy bills discount scheme to £400. Measures will be part funded by a 25% Energy Profits Levy on oil and gas companies, which is expected to raise £5bn. The bulk of support will apply UK-wide, except the £500m Household Support Scheme, for which the Scottish Government will receive £41m in Barnett consequential. Early [analysis](#) by the Resolution Foundation suggests measures will on average benefit the poorest fifth of households by £823, in contrast with £500 and £296 for the middle and richest fifth, respectively. The Scottish Finance Secretary, Kate Forbes [published](#) a response, welcoming plans but urging greater support for households and businesses

in the coming months.

UK public policy news

89. On 9 May the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) [published](#) an observation note on the rollout of Universal Credit as the moving of the 2.6m people still claiming legacy benefits to the new system resumes today. The UK Government's planned "managed migration" of claimants was paused due to the pandemic, with the government now targeting a completion date at the end of 2024, about a decade after Universal Credit's first introduction.
90. On 10 May, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) [published](#) an article raising concerns about proposed audit reform by the ICAEW Chief Executive following the government's agenda as set out in the Queen's speech. The Chief Executive identified two aspects that were disappointing. Firstly, that the proposed scope of change "...constitutes a missed opportunity to address wider issues in corporate governance." Secondly that the draft Bill, which would include the establishment of a new statutory regulator, the Audit, Reporting and Governance Authority (ARGA) amongst other elements, may be put forward this session, but with 38 bills and draft bills to content with, there was little chance the Bill would pass in the forthcoming or subsequent parliamentary sessions.
91. On 12 May the Joseph Rowntree Foundation [published](#) findings from a study exploring the experience of low-income families during the second half of the pandemic. It highlighted the impact of disrupted education and the constraints of working from home for those with limited means to do so.
92. On 18 May the Office for National Statistics (ONS) [published](#) figures showing the headline rate of inflation rose to 9% in the 12 months to April, up from 7% in March. It has attributed three quarters of the increase to higher electricity and gas bills following Ofgem's decision to increase the energy price cap last month.
93. On 19 May the Institute for Government [published](#) a report highlighting decisions made by the UK Government which undermine net zero objectives. It also points out why a "net zero test", which could be used to judge ministerial decisions based on climate objectives, would be insufficient to stop ministers rationalising decisions which undermine net zero ambitions.
94. On 23 May the ONS [published](#) an article about the permanence of hybrid working, with the proportion of those working partly from home rising from 13% in early February 2022 to 24% in May 2022.
95. On 23 May Public Finance [published](#) an article about the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) [report](#) on the role of internal audit in supporting and improving public organisations in the UK. The report, based on survey responses from more than 800 internal auditors and public finance managers from across the UK, found that cultural issues are also affecting staff retention, and that services proved by internal audit were not always fully appreciated. Cyber security, digitisation and climate change were also identified as the key areas internal audit should focus on in the next three years, to stay relevant and provide the greatest impact.
96. On 25 May the Institute for Government [published](#) a paper warning the government should not seek to prop-up demand or introduce broad-based tax cuts in response to increasing inflation. It notes the current economic situation stems from the supply side, with a need to use fiscal policy in a limited fashion to support low-income households.
97. On 25 May the Resolution Foundation has [published](#) its annual report exploring the current state of low pay, minimum wage and the UK labour market.

98. On 30 May the ONS [published](#) findings which show there has been a steady increase in the percentage of young people (16-24) from the highest socio-economic background between 2014 and 2021. It notes those who had lived in a workless household were less likely to be in employment and more likely to be economically inactive, with findings generally consistent across time.

Conclusion

99. The Commission is invited to:
- a) Agree that it respond to the consultations highlighted at paragraphs 19, 30 and 47.
 - b) Agree that it does not respond to the consultations highlighted at paragraphs 20, 21 and 41.
 - c) Note that I will advise at today's meeting about whether the Commission responds to the consultation highlighted in paragraph 29.
 - d) Note this report.

Paul Reilly
Secretary to the Commission
1 June 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	335 (+67)
Blog: Councils face complex and urgent challenges	21 Mar 22	348 (+146)
Scotland's economy: Supporting businesses through the Covid-19 pandemic	17 Mar 22	718 (+137)
Local government in Scotland: financial overview 2020/21	10 Mar 22	1001 (+231)
Drug and alcohol services update	8 Mar 22	1035 (+180)
Best Value Assurance Report progress report: Moray Council	3 Mar 22	366 (+62)
Blog: The value of independence & scrutiny across local gov't	24 Feb 22	338 (+37)
Social care briefing	27 Jan 22	2,735 (+457)
Best Value Assurance Report: Falkirk Council	13 Jan 22	1011 (+100)
Blog: Public performance reporting – why it matters	21 Dec 21	319 (*)
Blog: Assurance & scrutiny on Scotland's housing benefit services	25 Nov 21	262 (*)
Community empowerment: Covid-19 update	28 Oct 21	2,597 (+80)
Best Value Assurance Report: South Ayrshire Council	27 Oct 21	737 (+64)
Auditing climate change: An update	21 Oct 21	806 (+50)
The role of sponsors in our reporting work	14 Oct 21	214 (*)
The impact of Covid-19 on Scottish Councils' benefit services	7 Oct 21	412 (+33)
Blog: Christie – it really is now or never	4 Oct 21	736 (*)
Best Value Assurance Report: East Dunbartonshire Council	29 Sept 21	629 (+39)
Accounts Commission Strategy 2021-26	23 Sept 21	775 (+53)
Blog: Digital exclusion	16 Sept 21	1,190 (+86)
Blog: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	31 Aug 21	1,358 (+78)
Blog: Public Services & Scotland's Vol Sector during Covid-19	25 Jun 21	616 (*)
Best Value Assurance Report: Aberdeen City Council	24 Jun 21	1,164 (+58)
Social Care: social care reform questions remain	3 Jun 21	2,011 (+56)
Accounts Commission annual report 2020/21	3 Jun 21	495 (*)
Local government in Scotland Overview 2021	27 May 21	4,080 (+331)

Note: Figures are reported as at the end of April 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
May 22	853 (+12)	17,200	843	140	78	65	8	3
Apr 22	841 (+10)	2,009	0	16	3	2	0	0
Mar 22	831 (+23)	33,100	2,800	118	77	61	12	5
Feb 22	807 (+2)	8,000	1,100	60	34	32	1	1
Jan 22	805 (+13)	12,600	839	103	27	38	6	2
Dec 21	792 (+4)	6,500	108	48	20	25	2	0
Nov 21	788 (+10)	6,600	499	32	29	35	0	1
Oct 21	778 (+13)	22,500	316	93	47	97	6	6
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

Figures as of 27 May 2022.

Change on previous month shown in brackets.

Appendix 3: Council administrations (27 May 2022)

Council	Control	SNP	Con	Lab	LD	Grn	Ind	vacancy	Total
Aberdeen City	SNP & LD coalition	20	8	11	4	0	2	0	45
Aberdeenshire	Con, Ind & LD coalition.	21	26	0	14	0	9	0	70
Angus	SNP & Ind coalition	13	7	1	0	0	7	0	28
Argyll and Bute	Con, Ind & LD coalition	12	10	1	5	1	7	0	36
City of Edinburgh	Lab minority	19	9	13	12	10	0	0	63
Clackmannanshire	SNP minority	9	3	5	0	1	0	0	18
Comhairle n Eiln Siar	Ind majority	6	1	0	0	0	20	2	29
Dumfries & Galloway	SNP, Lab, LD & Ind coalition	11	16	9	1	0	6	0	43
Dundee City	SNP majority	15	1	9	4	0	0	0	29
East Ayrshire	SNP minority	14	4	10	0	0	4	0	32
East Dunbartonshire	SNP minority	8	3	4	6	0	1	0	22
East Lothian	Labour minority	7	4	10	0	1	0	0	22
East Renfrewshire	Labour & Ind coalition.	6	5	5	0	0	2	0	18
Falkirk	SNP minority	12	5	9	0	0	4	0	30
Fife	Lab minority	34	8	20	13	0	0	0	75
Glasgow City	SNP minority	37	2	36	0	10	0	0	85
Highland	SNP & Ind coalition.	22	10	2	15	4	21	0	74
Inverclyde	Lab minority	8	2	9	0	0	3	0	22
Midlothian	SNP minority	8	3	7	0	0	0	0	18
Moray	Con minority	8	11	3	1	1	2	0	26
North Ayrshire	SNP minority	12	10	9	0	0	2	0	33
North Lanarkshire	SNP minority	36	5	32	0	1	3	0	77
Orkney Islands	Ind majority	0	0	0	0	2	19	0	21
Perth and Kinross	SNP minority	16	14	2	4	0	4	0	40
Renfrewshire	SNP minority	21	5	15	1	0	1	0	43
Scottish Borders	Con & Ind coalition	9	14	0	3	1	7	0	34
Shetland Islands	Ind majority	1	0	1	0	1	19	1	23
South Ayrshire	Con minority	9	10	5	0	0	4	0	28
South Lanarkshire	Lab, LD & Ind administration	27	7	24	3	1	2	0	64
Stirling	Lab, LD & Ind minority coalition.	8	7	6	0	1	1	0	23
West Dunbartonshire	Lab majority	9	0	12	0	0	1	0	22
West Lothian	Lab minority	15	4	12	1	0	1	0	33
Total		453	214	282	87	35	152	3	1226

Source: BBC News [bbc.co.uk/news list of all council administrations 26 May 22](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/list-of-all-council-administrations-26-May-22)