

**MEETING: 10 NOVEMBER 2022**

**REPORT BY: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PERFORMANCE AUDIT AND BEST VALUE  
SERVICE USER ENGAGEMENT INCLUDING YOUTH PANEL**

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## **Purpose**

1. The Accounts Commission has noted its interest in how we are developing our approaches to involving service users in audit work. The attached slides set out Audit Scotland's work to date, our short-term plans and proposals to develop a service user engagement strategy.
2. At its meeting on 8 September, the Commission asked for further detail on our previous work engaging with young people. This further detail is included in the slides.
3. We plan to develop a service user engagement strategy over the next few months and discuss it with the Accounts Commission in spring 2023. We would welcome the Commission's thoughts at this stage, as we embark on that work.

## **Background**

### ***Service user engagement***

4. We have a long history of engaging with service users when we carry out audit work, as summarised in the attached slides. In addition, we have had a lot of engagement with organisations that work directly with service users, for example through their involvement in audit advisory groups. Understanding the views and experience of service users is an important part of our audit evidence and adds to the value and impact of our reports.
5. Doing this properly and in a meaningful way needs skills, experience and time. It is not appropriate for all audits. It is also important that the service users that we engage with benefit in some way from their participation. We plan to develop a strategy that will set out our approach to engaging with service users. This will reflect and consider the range of issues detailed in the slides.
6. We will continue to engage with service users as part of audits as we develop the strategy. In particular, as we carry out audits on adult mental health and digital exclusion. We will also continue to progress wider developments including establishing a new youth panel.

### ***Engagement with young people***

7. During 2018-2020, we adopted a different approach to engaging with young people, recognising their different needs. The overall aim of our engagement was to better understand and reflect the views and experiences of young people in our work. The approach was different to our previous service user engagement in that it was longer term, to develop a relationship of trust and understanding, had a wider focus and was not limited to a particular audit topic. We worked with Youth Scotland, a third sector youth organisation, who established and supported the youth panel over the two years it was in existence.

8. Overall, the work with the youth panel was successful and it mostly achieved its objectives. The slides summarise the learning highlighted by Youth Scotland, the young advisers and ourselves at the end of the panel. Our proposed approach to engaging with young people in future builds on our previous experience and learning.
9. The future work programme includes a number of potential audits that are particularly relevant to young people. This includes audit work on child poverty, outcomes for children and young people with additional support needs, outcomes for care-experienced children and young people and further audit work on school education. We would anticipate working with young people affected by the issues on each of these areas of work.
10. One of the key themes from the [Independent Care Review](#) is that children should be listened to and actively involved in decision-making, and about the importance of lived experience as evidence. While it is not yet a legal requirement, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) places an expectation on all public bodies to make sure they respect, protect and fulfil children's rights in everything they do. This emphasises the importance of Audit Scotland engaging well with young people. Given these factors, a tailored approach to engaging with young people is preferred as part of our wider approach to user engagement.
11. We are planning to tender for a third sector partner to work with us to set up a new advisory group of young people who can provide input on specific pieces of work. These could be specific audits or more corporate projects such as communication and branding. This is a move away from our previous approach of expecting all members of the panel to be interested in everything we wanted to engage with them about.
12. We also plan to work with the new advisory group to tap into existing forums in a more structured way, for example the Scottish Youth Parliament and councils' own youth panels, as well as Audit Scotland's Equalities and Human Rights Advisory Group (EHRAG). This will add a richness to our engagement, and we anticipate that the members of the new advisory group themselves will lead on these links, supported by the third sector partner and Audit Scotland.
13. We would welcome the Commission's reflections on the learning from the last youth panel and any further feedback it has to help shape our approach going forward.

### **Developing a service user engagement strategy**

14. Over the next few months we will be developing a service user engagement strategy. This will include identifying where this will add most value; the implications for audit planning and timescales; and planning to ensure we have, and continue to develop, the rights skills in the team. It will also consider when it would be more appropriate to work with an external partner or commission the work externally.
15. The strategy will consider the wide range of ethical and legal issues, such as ethical incentives for service users who engage with us and ensuring that participation is of benefit to the service users as well as to the audit. It will set out our approach to being inclusive of all service users.
16. In developing the strategy, we will consider the links with our broader citizen engagement work to ensure the approaches are aligned and complementary. The strategy will also link with our work strengthening our consideration of equalities and human rights.
17. We would welcome the Commission's reflections on other issues to consider as we develop the service user engagement strategy.

## **Conclusion**

18. The Accounts Commission is asked to:

- a) Consider the report
- b) Comment on the next steps proposed:
  - Developing a service user engagement strategy
  - Commissioning an external partner to work with us to establish a youth advisory group
- c) Share any reflections on other issues to consider as we develop the service user engagement strategy
- d) Share any reflections on learning from the last youth panel and any feedback it has to help shape our approach going forward
- e) Note that we will be discussing the proposed strategy for user engagement with the Commission in spring 2023.

**Antony Clark**

**Executive Director of Performance Audit and Best Value**

**27 October 2022**