

# Annual action plan

**Progress report:**

**1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013**

## Key to progress:

**Complete and continuing** means that while an action has been completed, it continues as part of further activity, usually as part of an ongoing cyclical process.

**Continuing** means that the action has been started but will require further input from the Commission.

Aims and objectives	2012-13 actions (ie, to April 2013)	Progress at 31 March 2013
<b>Ensure that our audit activity holds local authorities to account and helps them improve</b>		
Oversee the annual audit process in holding local authorities to account and helping them improve	Monitor issues arising from the annual audit process	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p>The Commission's annual overview report was published on 28 March 2013.</p>
	Ensure proper accounting practices are observed in published accounts, including obligations in relation to transparency and accessibility of accounts	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p>All local authority accounts for the year to 31 March 2012 received clear audit certificates.</p>
Report, in conjunction with the Controller of Audit, on local authorities' implementation of their Best Value duties	Agree and maintain a programme of reports linked with the shared risk assessment process	<p><b>Complete and continuing</b></p> <p>At its 14 June 2012 meeting, the Commission noted the planned proposed Best Value audit activity arising from the 2012 shared risk assessment (SRA) refresh process. It also noted the outcomes of targeted Best Value audit work at Dumfries &amp; Galloway Council, Fife Council, The Moray Council and North Ayrshire Council which arose from the previous year's SRA process.</p> <p>The following Best Value reports were published by the Commission during the year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Midlothian Council (7 June 2012)</li> <li>• Dumfries &amp; Galloway Constabulary (28 June 2012)</li> <li>• Central Scotland Police (5 July 2012)</li> <li>• Overview of fire and rescue services (19 July 2012)</li> <li>• Fife Constabulary (13 September 2012)</li> <li>• Strathclyde Police Authority – progress report (18 September 2012)</li> <li>• Overview of police (20 November 2012)</li> <li>• Comhairle nan Eilean Siar – follow-up (18 December 2012)</li> </ul>
	Develop an approach to monitoring council improvement programmes arising from Best Value audit work	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>Analysis of council improvement programmes is a core activity in both the SRA process and in the annual audit. This will be considered further in the annual strategy seminar 2013.</p>

Aims and objectives	2012-13 actions (ie, to April 2013)	Progress at 31 March 2013
	Review how to better reflect 'pace of improvement' in our audit work	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>Analysis of 'pace of improvement' is an important consideration in both the SRA process and in the annual audit.</p> <p>This will be considered further in the annual strategy seminar 2013.</p>
Encourage improvement through our series of 'How councils work' reports	Agree and maintain a programme of reports	<p><b>Complete and continuing</b></p> <p>The following reports in the HCW series were published during the year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HCW3: <i>Using cost information to improve performance: are you getting it right?</i> (10 May 2012)</li> <li>• HCW4: <i>Managing performance: are you getting it right?</i> (4 October 2012)</li> <li>• HCW5: <i>Major capital investment in councils – good practice guide</i> (14 March 2013)</li> </ul> <p>At its 14 March 2013 meeting, the Commission agreed that the next reports in the series would be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HCW6: Options appraisal</li> <li>• HCW7: Charging for services.</li> </ul>
Report on an overview of issues arising from the annual audit	Overview report to be published by March 2013	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p><i>Responding to challenges and change: an overview of local government in Scotland 2013</i> was published on 28 March 2013.</p>
	Develop a complementary approach to the overview report, to provide a summary of issues arising from the annual audit	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>Report to be submitted to Commission in June 2013.</p>
Consider other statutory reports from the Controller of Audit on specific issues	Reports considered as appropriate	<p><b>Complete and continuing</b></p> <p>The following statutory reports were published during the year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aberdeenshire Council benefits service (21 September 2012)</li> <li>• Strathclyde Fire and Rescue Joint Board: retirement and re-employment of Chief Officer (26 September 2012)</li> <li>• Shetland Islands Council – follow-up report (10 January 2013)</li> </ul> <p>The Commission also considered and noted, on 13 December 2012, a statutory report by the Controller of Audit on audit issues in The City of Edinburgh Council.</p>

Aims and objectives	2012-13 actions (ie, to April 2013)	Progress at 31 March 2013
Report, in conjunction with the Auditor General for Scotland as appropriate, on issues at a national level through a programme of relevant national performance audits	Agree and maintain a programme of reports	<p><b>Complete and continuing</b></p> <p>The following national performance audits were published during the year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Reducing reoffending in Scotland</i> (7 November 2012)</li> <li>• <i>Health inequalities in Scotland</i> (13 December 2012)</li> <li>• <i>Protecting consumers</i> (31 January 2013)</li> <li>• <i>Major capital investment in councils</i> (14 March 2013)</li> </ul>
Robustly promote recommendations and actions from each of our audits	Audit Scotland to formulate proposals by the end of 2012	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p>The Commission, at its meeting on 14 February 2013, considered a report by the Director of Performance Audit on improving engagement and reinforcing messages in Accounts Commission reports. The Commission approved a package of proposals as set out in the report, on the basis of priority being given to activities around advocacy, reinforcing messages and engaging with key local government stakeholders.</p>
<b>Develop the audit in line with public sector reform</b>		
Develop, in conjunction with our strategic scrutiny partners, an audit of Community Planning Partnerships and outcomes, based on risk and proportionality	Proposals agreed with Audit Scotland and the Auditor General for Scotland (and submitted to Scottish Government for discussion) by the end of June 2012	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p>The Commission, at its meeting on 14 June 2012, endorsed a proposed approach to the audit of Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) and outcomes.</p>
	Carry out three early audits by the end of 2012	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p>The Commission, at its meeting on 14 February 2013, approved the reports, in conjunction with the Auditor General for Scotland, of the CPPs in Aberdeen, North Ayrshire and Scottish Borders. The reports were published on 20 March 2013.</p>
	Review lessons from early audits and agree next stages of audit by early 2013	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>The Commission, at its meeting on 14 June 2012, endorsed an independent evaluation as part of the approach to the CPP audit. At its meeting on 17 January 2013, it noted progress with the evaluation exercise.</p>
Ensure the prevention agenda features appropriately in our audit work	Audit Scotland to formulate proposals by early 2013	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>The prevention agenda was a key element of the Commission's report <i>Improving community planning in Scotland</i>, published on 20 March 2013. Further consideration will be given as to how this might feature in future CPP audit work. Such consideration will be based upon the conclusion of the ongoing evaluation of our early CPP audits.</p> <p>The seminar for Commission members and the Auditor General on the performance audit rolling programme on 28 May 2013 will consider how the prevention agenda features in performance audit work.</p>

Aims and objectives	2012-13 actions (ie, to April 2013)	Progress at 31 March 2013
<b>Ensure performance information that helps citizens and communities to assess the performance of their local authorities</b>		
Direct local authorities on the performance information upon which they should report	Issue Direction in December 2012	<b>Complete</b> The Commission, at its meeting on 13 December 2012, approved the 2013 Direction.
Encourage local authorities to develop and maintain comparative performance information	Monitor ongoing Society of Local Authority Chief Executives Scotland benchmarking project, and review data in time for input into Direction	<b>Complete and continuing</b> The Commission, at its meeting on 17 November 2012, hosted SOLACE and the Improvement Service, and discussed the ongoing benchmark project. The Commission endorsed the project, subject to SOLACE providing assurance that the resourcing of the project would allow it to sustain benchmark indicators in the future. The first set of outputs from the project were published on 7 March 2013. Monitoring of the project will continue in advance of the Commission considering its 2104 Direction at the end of the year.
<b>Continue to improve scrutiny with our scrutiny partners</b>		
Build on our progress with our scrutiny partners in providing an even more efficient and effective approach to scrutiny	Publish and monitor the annual National Scrutiny Plan	<b>Complete and continuing</b> The Controller of Audit, in his monthly updates to the Commission, reports on progress with the drafting of the National Scrutiny Plan. At the meeting of the Commission on 11 April, he reported that the Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group was to consider the plan on 18 April. It is anticipated that the plan will be published before the end of April.
Continue to coordinate scrutiny, in conjunction with our scrutiny partners, through a SRA process	Undertake annual evaluation of the SRA process	<b>Complete and continuing</b> The Controller of Audit, in his monthly updates to the Commission, reports on progress with the SRA process. At the meeting of the Commission on 15 November 2012, he reported that the Strategic Scrutiny Group at its meeting on 12 June 2012, had endorsed the outputs from an annual evaluation of the SRA process.
	Agree, in conjunction with scrutiny partners, an approach to the strategic development of the SRA process  Review, in conjunction with our scrutiny partners, the role of the Strategic Scrutiny Group	<b>Complete and continuing</b> The Controller of Audit, in his monthly updates to the Commission, reports on progress with the SRA process. At the meeting of the Commission on 11 April, he reported that the Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group had identified four work-streams to continue to improve scrutiny in Scotland, having previously, on 6 December 2012, restated its commitment to the SRA process.

Aims and objectives	2012-13 actions (ie, to April 2013)	Progress at 31 March 2013
<b>Improve our engagement with local government and with our stakeholders</b>		
Develop our close relationship with our principal partners, namely the Auditor General for Scotland and Audit Scotland	Review, in conjunction with the Auditor General for Scotland and Audit Scotland, our branding	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>This is to be the subject of discussion by the Commission at its annual strategy seminar on 22 and 23 April 2013.</p>
Ensure effective engagement and communications with local government and with our wider stakeholders, particularly the parliament, government, scrutiny partners and citizens	Agree an annual report for the Commission and an annual update of its strategy	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p>The Commission published its three-year strategy and annual action plan on 31 October 2012.</p> <p>A proposed revised strategy and updated action plan will be considered by the Commission at its meeting on 9 May 2013.</p>
	Agree and implement a programme of visits to council chief executives	<p><b>Revised</b></p> <p>The chair agreed that this be deferred, pending a report by the Director of Performance Audit on improving engagement and reinforcing messages in Accounts Commission reports. The Commission considered this report at its meeting on 14 March 2012.</p> <p>There will be further discussed at the Commission's annual strategy seminar on 22 and 23 April 2013.</p>
	Review, in conjunction with Audit Scotland, the use of new social media in marketing and engagement	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>The Commission, at its meeting on 14 February 2013, considered a report by the Director of Performance Audit on improving engagement and reinforcing messages in Accounts Commission reports. The Commission agreed that the Director further consider how to better exploit new social media in promoting reports.</p>
<b>Improve the way we work</b>		
Continue to reduce the cost and improve the quality of audit	Reduce the cost of audit by 20 per cent in the four years from 2011/12	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>This is on course. In its September 2012 submission to the Scottish Commission for Public Audit, Audit Scotland reported that it is on track to reduce average audit charges by around 25 per cent in real terms over this period. As a result of initiatives already put into effect since 2010 and based on plans for 2013/14, audit charges for the 2012/13 audit year reduced by an average of 4.3 per cent (6.8 per cent in real terms) building on the average total 11.25 per cent (15.75 per cent in real terms) reduction over 2010/11 and 2011/12.</p>
Develop the capacity of the Commission – both individual members and collectively – to deliver its strategy		
	Maintain a guest speaker programme	<p><b>Complete and continuing</b></p> <p>The Commission has agreed a programme. The first speaker, on 28 February 2013, was the Auditor General for Scotland, Caroline Gardner.</p>

Aims and objectives	2012-13 actions (ie, to April 2013)	Progress at 31 March 2013
	Develop and maintain an extranet site to facilitate information provision for members	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>Due to technical difficulties, Audit Scotland's development of extranet facilities was delayed, but an alternative, based upon Audit Scotland's intranet and providing the same functionality, has been developed for the Commission. This is to be the subject of discussion by the Commission at its annual strategy seminar on 22 and 23 April 2013.</p>
	Develop training and development opportunities for members	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>As part of the annual appraisal process, Commission members were asked if there are development needs – either individually or collectively – worthy of addressing. This is to be the subject of discussion by the Commission at its annual strategy seminar on 22 and 23 April 2013.</p>
Improve how we manage our expanding volume of business	Develop and maintain a corporate risk register	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>The strategic risks of the Commission are addressed in Audit Scotland's corporate risk register. There is, however, potential for a distinct Commission register.</p>
	Review our meeting arrangements, including meeting in public	<p><b>Continuing</b></p> <p>The Commission, at its meeting on 18 October 2012, considered a report on how the Commission may improve how it manages its business. The Commission agreed a range of measures, including frequency and timing of meetings, and clarifying the remits of the Commission's committees.</p> <p>As part of the annual appraisal process, Commission members were asked for their views on how to improve the way that the Commission does its business. This is to be the subject of discussion by the Commission at its annual strategy seminar on 22 and 23 April 2013.</p>

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1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013**



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