

Work programme update – February 2024

Executive Director of Performance Audit
and Best Value

Item 6

Meeting date: 8 February 2024

Purpose

1. This paper introduces the joint Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) and Accounts Commission work programme update.

Recommendations

2. The Commission is invited to:
 - note the progress delivering the work programme from September 2023 to January 2024 (slides 5 and 6 of Appendix one)
 - note the planned products up to May 2024 (slide 7 of Appendix one)
 - agree the additions proposed to the programme (slides 8-9 of Appendix one)
 - feedback on confirmed and pipeline audit work (slides 10-14 of Appendix one), noting that this is flexible and can be revisited as part of future work programme updates.

Background

3. In April 2021 the AGS and the Commission agreed a joint dynamic work programme. We published this on the Audit Scotland website on 24 May 2021, updating for changes since then. Updates were previously presented to the AGS and the Commission on a quarterly basis. This update is the first of the newly revised triannual updates, with the next update anticipated in June 2024.
4. This update summarises recent products as well as proposed changes to the programme, including the resource impact of those proposed additions.
5. In December 2023 the Commission considered how the products within the dynamic work programme align with the Accounts Commission's revised strategic priorities, including a high-level overview of how resources are currently being targeted towards each priority area. The Commission may wish to reflect on this when considering and agreeing any changes to the programme.

Considerations

6. Appendix one presents the work programme update. It aims to provide one report that meets the needs of the AGS and Commission, with clarity on who is producing which products and when. It includes:
 - **What we've delivered:** From September 2023 to January 2024.

- **What’s coming up:** Planned audit products from February 2024 to May 2024, and all other agreed and pipeline audit products.
 - **Decisions required:** Proposed changes to the programme.
7. In this update we have proposed adding five new Commission products to the programme. This includes four LG 24 products in line with a new strategic approach to future local government reporting endorsed by the Commission in October 2023:
- New - Council performance commentary blog
 - Refocused – Local Government in Scotland: Challenges, risks and opportunities
 - New – Council budget analysis
 - New – Service spotlight on homelessness services
8. It also includes one joint briefing paper with the AGS on Care Experienced Children and Young People. The estimated costs of these products are summarised in the table below.

Proposal	Estimated cost 2023/24 £000	Estimated cost 2024/25 £000	Estimated cost 2025/26 £000	Total estimated cost £000
Add: LG24 council performance blog	18	-		18
Add: LG24 CRO overview report	162	20		182
Add: LG24 Council budget analysis -		18		18
Add: LG24 Service spotlight - homelessness	-	79		79
Add: Care experiences children and-young people briefing		50	75	125
Total	180	167	75	422

Note: Where a product is published jointly with the AGS the 50% of the estimated costs are assigned to the Accounts Commission and are shown above.

9. The annual capacity available for the Commission’s work programme is £2,000k. Agreeing to these proposals would commit a further £180k in 2023/24, £167k in 2024/25 and £75k in 2025/26. This would bring total estimated commitments to £1,969k in 2023/24, £1,680k in 2024/25 and £991k in 2025/26. This means that available capacity for potential products would be £31k in 2023/24, £320k in 2024/25 and £1,009k in 2025/26. These amounts reflect the estimated costs of all products previously approved.
10. In line with existing practice, the approval of proposals for the addition of joint products to the work programme is subject to agreement with the AGS.

Resourcing the work programme

11. We continue to improve and refine our budget and cost data for performance Audit and Best Value work and provided a full update of the resourcing position for 2023/24 and 2024/25 to the Commission for the first time in December 2023. We have updated this summary of the

resourcing position as attached at appendix 2, reflecting the latest assessment of resource requirements. The overall position in relation to confirmed and proposed audits is as set out in paragraph 9 above.

- 12.** If all products currently in the pipeline were to be approved at future Commission meetings this would mean a small overcommitment of £66k in 2024/25. We consider that this is manageable within existing resources. The confirmed position for 2024/25 will depend on future choices made by the Commission in relation to the audits currently included in the pipeline, alongside any other emerging proposals. In December 2023 the Commission agreed that the planned Strategy Seminar in March 2024 is a good time to consider in detail the pipeline products and how to ensure the best balance across its five priorities.