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Richard Leonard MSP
Convenor
Public Audit Committee

23 December 2024

Dear Convenor,

Thank you for your letter of 14 November seeking clarification on matters discussed at the Public Audit Committee meeting on 31 October.

At the outset, I would like to be clear that the Scottish Government welcomes the Audit Scotland report on Digital Exclusion, and we are carefully considering its findings and recommendations.

On 23 August, officials provided the Minister for Business with a submission outlining proposed next steps in response to the Audit Scotland report. Due to the nature of the recommendations in the report, which will require a collaborative effort across the public sector, the Scottish Government will work with COSLA to address the recommendations within the report. This approach has received ministerial sign-off.

The Digital Strategy for Scotland "[A changing nation: how Scotland will thrive in a digital world](#)" is the primary vehicle for promoting collaboration between the Scottish Government and Local Government in matters relating to digital public services.

The Joint Digital Strategy Leadership Board ("the Board") has oversight for the strategy. It is co-chaired by Councillor Katie Hagmann, COSLA resources spokesperson, and Ivan McKee MSP, Minister for Public Finance, with members comprised of senior leaders from the Scottish Government and Local Government.

Since it was first convened in March 2022, the Board has met nine times.

An initial key focus of the Board (June 2022 – November 2022) was to identify the "priority strategy actions which have tangible, real-world impacts, with the most value in setting shared priorities with, and enhancing collaboration". These priority actions are: improve connectivity, boost public sector digital capability, reduce digital exclusion and develop common digital platforms for the public sector.

Out of this grew work (November 2022 – December 2023) to review all strategy actions in light of changes to the strategic landscape such as ongoing fiscal and resource pressures. This review was focused on determining which actions have been delivered since publication of the strategy in 2021; which actions were still in progress; and which actions needed to be delivered differently (possibly as the result of changes to policy, resourcing, or other factors).

This review resulted in a published progress update (May 2024) and the Board endorsed new work to refresh and improve this joint strategic planning. The Board also continues to receive regular reporting on the priority strategy actions.

At the most recent meeting (13 November 2024), the Board had an initial discussion on the Audit Scotland report on tackling digital exclusion – considered together with a transcript of the Public Audit Committee meeting of 31 October 2024. The Board noted that it should consider a reply to the Audit Scotland report and senior leaders are now discussing this with a view to bringing a reply to the April 2025 Board meeting for consideration.

Dates of Board meetings for 2025 are currently being finalised. These will align to the quarterly meetings of the Local Government Digital Partnership Board – the principle forum for overseeing the collective response of all 32 local authorities to the Local Government actions in the digital strategy.

I hope that the Committee finds this response helpful.

Yours Sincerely,
Lesley Fraser