

Public Audit Committee
Wednesday 8 October 2025
27th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

Audit Scotland: Our impact monitoring and evaluation report 2025

Introduction

1. At its meeting today, the Public Audit Committee will take evidence from the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) on Audit Scotland's [Our impact: Monitoring and evaluation report 2025](#) which was published on 10 September 2025.
2. On 11 September 2025, [the AGS referred Audit Scotland's Our impact: Monitoring and evaluation report 2025](#) under section 6.7.1(c) of the Parliament's Standing Orders. The referral letter states that the report is part of Audit Scotland's impact monitoring and reporting framework and draws on:
 - Monitoring data from audit products published between February 2024 to December 2024.
 - Evaluation data from performance audit reports published between July 2022 and February 2024.
 - Evaluation data from annual audits of the financial year ending 31 March 2024.
3. A copy of the report can be found at **Annexe A**.
4. The Committee will decide any further action it wishes to take following the evidence session today.

Clerks to the Committee
October 2025

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Our impact

Monitoring and evaluation report 2025



 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Prepared by Audit Scotland
May 2025

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Accessibility

You can find out more and read this report using assistive technology on our website www.audit.scot/accessibility.

Key messages

- 1** Evidence shows that our work has impact, with public bodies accepting most of the recommendations we followed-up (93 per cent). They are also implementing our recommended actions. Our performance audit reports have supported parliamentary scrutiny and contributed to national and local developments in key areas such as financial sustainability and workforce planning. We provided assurance that arrangements for financial management and financial sustainability within most public bodies are effective, but we continue to recommend improvements in key areas such as internal and budgetary controls and medium- and long-term financial planning to demonstrate sustainability.
- 2** Evidence is starting to show that the pace of change in some areas is slow. Our performance audit teams assessed over half (60 per cent) of recommendations in scope for this report as work in progress or partially implemented and only four recommendations (six per cent) as implemented. For recommendations in scope in 2023 and 2024, we assessed more than 20 per cent of recommendations as implemented. Recommendations about financial sustainability and the use of resources to improve outcomes have the lowest rates of implementation, and our annual overview reports highlight the lack of progress on key recommendations.
- 3** Progress with annual audit recommendations is quicker, where the focus tends to be on the annual reports and accounts – 33 per cent – and the use of resources to improve outcomes – 24 per cent. Within annual audits, more than half (56 per cent) of the 2022/23 audit recommendations were implemented and a further 33 per cent were in progress.
- 4** Through the annual audit we have added value to audited bodies through our engagement and recommendations in a range of ways, including providing technical support, building relationships, and improving financial planning and management, vision, leadership and governance.
- 5** Our audit work and reports continue to have a strong reach to our audiences. There were over 1,000 items of media coverage of the reports we published over the past year. Our social media engagement continues to perform well.

We achieved an average engagement rate of 5.4 per cent, against industry benchmarks of about two per cent and at a time when all platforms have seen reducing engagement.

Introduction

1. [Public audit in Scotland](#) has a vision that public money is well spent to meet the needs of Scotland's people. We aim for our work to drive change across [four outcomes](#), and thus in the lives and experiences of communities and individuals across Scotland.
2. To achieve this, our work must have impact. We consider this in several ways, from the reach of and engagement with our work through to whether our recommendations are influencing change and ultimately to what changes and outcomes occur as a result.
3. We take a proportionate, robust and flexible approach to evaluating our impact. We recognise recommendations follow up is not as in depth as audit work itself, so our focus is less about reporting on each recommendation, and more on the nature of the recommendations we make across our audit work and developing a holistic understanding of what is changing in public services due to our audit work. Ultimately public bodies are responsible for implementing audit recommendations and we cannot compel them to do so.
4. Monitoring and evaluating our impact are important. It helps us understand whether we are making a difference and where we should focus our work and recommendations. Through this, we can ultimately achieve the outcomes and vision of public audit.

1. Our monitoring and evaluation framework

How we assess our impact

5. The Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission agreed an impact monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework (outlined in [Exhibit 1](#)) in June 2022. The framework is designed to be holistic and cover all the audit work Audit Scotland undertakes on behalf of the AGS and Commission, including stakeholder perceptions and awareness of the parties involved in public audit in Scotland.

Exhibit 1

Impact monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework

When	What	How	Who ¹
Monitoring early impact (0–6 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have our recommendations been accepted? What traction are our products getting? What do stakeholders' think of the effectiveness of our work? 	Product by product reach and engagement: Media Social media Web Conferences Committees	Audit Teams Comms
Evaluating early impact (0–18 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What's happening with our recommendations? How is our work influencing change? What do stakeholders think of us? 	Product impact and recommendations tracking: Progress Effectiveness Reflections Stakeholder feedback	Audit teams AQA Comms
Evaluating long term impact (18 months+)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What difference have we made through public audit? 	Package of products: Track impact of our products on public audit outcome measures	Audit teams External perspective

Note 1. Responsibility for collecting, analysing and reporting impact data.

6. To monitor early impact, we gather reach and engagement data during the first six months after publication. We look at whether our recommendations have been accepted, what traction our products are getting and who we are reaching.

7. To evaluate early impact, we reflect on the impact of our audit engagement and recommendations and follow up on progress with audit recommendations with audited bodies, including how our work is influencing change and what stakeholders think of it.

8. This report draws on:

- monitoring data from audit products published between February 2024 to December 2024
- evaluation data from performance audit reports published between July 2022 and February 2024
- evaluation data from annual audits of the financial year ending 31 March 2024.

9. We will draw on the data we have collected through our impact framework during 2023–24 and 2024–25 to evaluate the impact we are having on the outcomes in Public audit in Scotland. Our first evaluation report is due to publish later this year.

2. Monitoring early impact

Reach and engagement with our work

Scope of early impact monitoring

10. We consider our early impact through the reach our work has with stakeholders, and their engagement with it. To do this, we look at the following measures:

- Amount of media coverage.
- Amount of social media engagement.
- Amount of parliamentary engagement.

11. During 2024/25, we started running more security scans on our website. This and the use of bots by AI platforms and search engines has significantly increased the number of downloads for our reports and made it difficult to report meaningful trend data on website engagement. As a result, we have removed the web downloads data from this report. We will keep this under review and aim to identify a more meaningful way to report on website engagement in future.

12. This section highlights the top performing reports for the Auditor General for Scotland (AGS) and Accounts Commission for each measure. More data and a list of the reports published between February 2024 and December 2024, are in [Appendix 1](#).

Overall reach and engagement

13. [Exhibit 2](#) summarises our overall reach and engagement. This includes all reach and engagement and is not just related to the audit products in scope for this impact report.

14. Social media engagement looks at the number of actions the audience has taken with our posts and the percentage of the audience that interacted with it in some way (sharing or commenting for example). Engagement rates for the UK public sector vary by platform, with Facebook and Twitter/X at two per cent and LinkedIn at 3.6 per cent. A good rate is between one and five per cent.

15. Parliamentary engagement covers staff committee appearances, mentions of our work in chamber debates, mentions of our work across committees, and parliamentary questions and answers that mention our audit work.

16. The high volume of parliamentary engagement in 2023/24 mostly relates to interest in the Auditor General's s22 report on Ferguson Marine Port Glasgow (Holdings) Limited, which generated 24 items of parliamentary engagement. It published in March 2023 and noted uncertainty over the final costs and completion dates of the two delayed lifeline ferries and raised questions about bonuses paid to senior managers.

Exhibit 2

Overall reach and engagement summary

Type	April 2023 to March 2024	April 2024 to March 2025
Media coverage	966	1,212
Total social media engagement	39,087	37,032
Average social media engagement rate	4.2%	5.1%
Parliamentary engagement	278	223

Media coverage

17. [Exhibit 3](#) sets out the top reports for media coverage by author. Media coverage includes mentions in national, local and specialist publications, online titles and radio and TV coverage.

18. Health is consistently ranked as a key concern for voters and that public interest is reflected in our media coverage. Four of the top six reports for media coverage are related to the performance of health and social care services. The Auditor General's NHS overview continues to stand apart from other reporting in terms of the very high levels of media and political interest and debate it generates.

19. Best Value reports are increasingly generating not just local, but national, media coverage. This may reflect the increasing pressures on local government, which could allow an individual council story to be framed as indicative of the rising challenges affecting all local authorities.

Exhibit 3

Top reports for media coverage by author

Report	Report author	Total media coverage
NHS in Scotland 2024	Auditor General	117
NHS in Scotland 2023	Auditor General	113
Fiscal sustainability and reform in Scotland	Auditor General	58
Best Value report: Clackmannanshire Council	Accounts Commission	24
Integration Joint Boards: Finance and performance 2024	Accounts Commission	23
Alcohol and drug services	Joint – Auditor General and Accounts Commission	22

Social media engagement

20. [Exhibit 4](#) sets out the top reports for social media engagement by author. The engagement rates achieved by each channel and specific reports remain high. Our two core channels (Twitter/X and LinkedIn) remain well above public sector averages, suggesting audiences that remain engaged.

21. We also saw growth in the reach of the Audit Scotland and Accounts Commission YouTube channels. Impressions show the number of times a post is seen by an account. Between July and December 2024, our YouTube channels achieved a combined 282,636 impressions, compared with 62,407 between August 2023 and February 2024.

22. We saw a drop in reach for Twitter/X posts about subjects other than new reports (eg, corporate updates, recruitment). This reflects a general reduction in activity and reengagement on the platform in the past year. We have recently adjusted our social media strategy accordingly.

Exhibit 4**Top reports for social media engagement**

Report	Author	Impressions	Engagement rate	Engagement
Transformation in councils	Accounts Commission	2,887	9.00	307
Benchmarking and good public performance reporting matter: Blog	Accounts Commission	1,656	7.50	123
NHS in Scotland 2024	Auditor General	85,728	6.46	3,620
Best Value report: City of Edinburgh Council	Accounts Commission	7,356	6.23	194
Fiscal sustainability and reform in Scotland	Auditor General	55,922	5.88	2,218
Shrewd approach needed for public sector success: Blog	Auditor General	15,158	5.63	1,088

Parliamentary engagement

23. [Exhibit 5](#) sets out parliamentary mentions for each report in scope, where there were mentions. Parliamentary mentions can range from parliamentary committee work and evidence sessions, parliamentary questions and answers, chamber debates and First Minister's Questions. Where reports have more parliamentary mentions, they have tended to generate higher impact parliamentary activity, like parliamentary questions and chamber debates.

Exhibit 5**Top parliamentary mentions, by report author**

Report	Report author	Parliamentary mentions
Decarbonising heat in homes	Auditor General	11
NHS in Scotland 2024	Auditor General	10
Alcohol and drug services	Joint – Auditor General and Accounts Commission	8
Integration Joint Boards: Finance and performance 2024	Accounts Commission	3
Transformation in councils	Accounts Commission	3

3. Evaluating early impact

Our recommendations and the action public bodies take on them

Scope of early impact evaluation

24. [Exhibit 6](#) sets out the number of reports considered in this review, and the number of recommendations made in those reports. A full list of the performance audits considered is in [Appendix 1](#), and information about the annual audits we undertake [is available on our website](#).

Exhibit 6
Recommendations from audits in scope for this review

Type of audit	Audits in scope	Recommendations in scope
Performance	11	63

Type of audit	Annual Audit Reports in scope 2022/23	Recommendations in scope 2022/23	Annual Audit Reports in scope 2023/24	Recommendations in scope 2023/24
Annual audit	115	490	118	459

25. Our performance audit evaluation approach considers the following:
- Nature of our key messages and recommendations
 - Recommendations acceptance
 - Recommendations implementation
 - Reflections on effectiveness of recommendations
 - Changes influenced by our work
 - Plans and strategies that reference our work.
26. Our annual audit evaluation approach considers the following:
- Recommendations acceptance

- Recommendations implementation
- Reflections on effectiveness of recommendations
- Impact of our engagement
- Quality of financial planning and management in audited bodies.

Nature of our key messages and recommendations

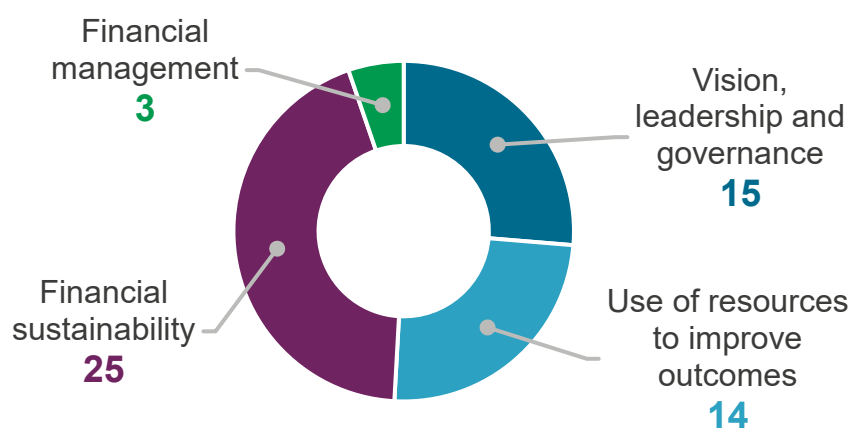
27. For both performance audit and annual audit, we categorise recommendations in line with the wider scope audit dimensions set out in the Code of Audit Practice 2021. For annual audit recommendations, there is an additional category for recommendations related to the annual report and accounts. Our recommendations categories are described in more detail in [Appendix 2](#).

Performance audit key messages and recommendations

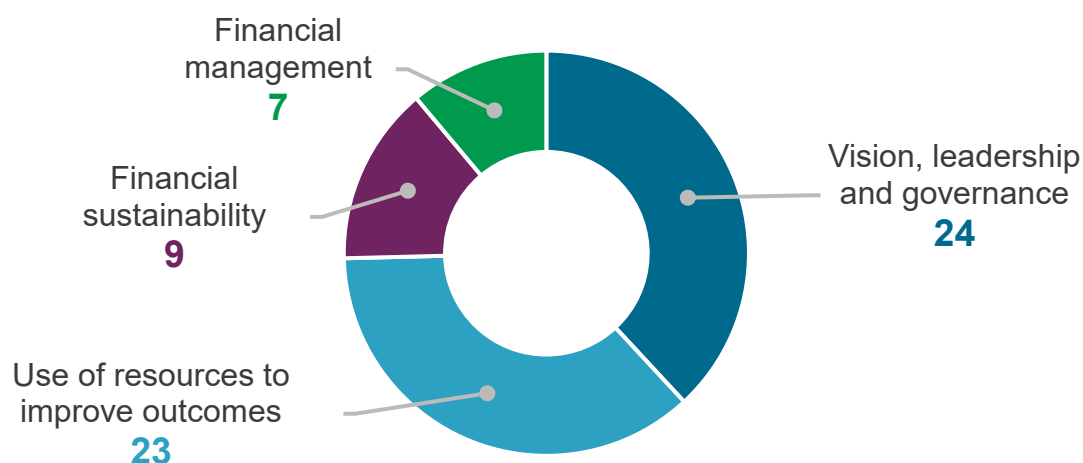
28. The performance audit products in scope for this report included 57 key messages and 63 recommendations. [Exhibit 7](#) shows the number of key messages by category.

Exhibit 7

Number of performance audit key messages by category



29. [Exhibit 8](#) shows that most of our performance audit recommendations related to either vision, leadership and governance or use of resources to improve outcomes, and we made fewer about financial management and sustainability. Within these broader categories we most often made recommendations about improving partnership working and effective planning.

Exhibit 8**Number of performance audit recommendations by category**

Annual audit recommendations

30. [Exhibit 9](#) breaks down the 459 recommendations in the 2023/24 annual audit reports in scope for this review. A third were about the annual report and financial statements, and a quarter about the use of resources to improve outcomes, with relatively few about financial sustainability.

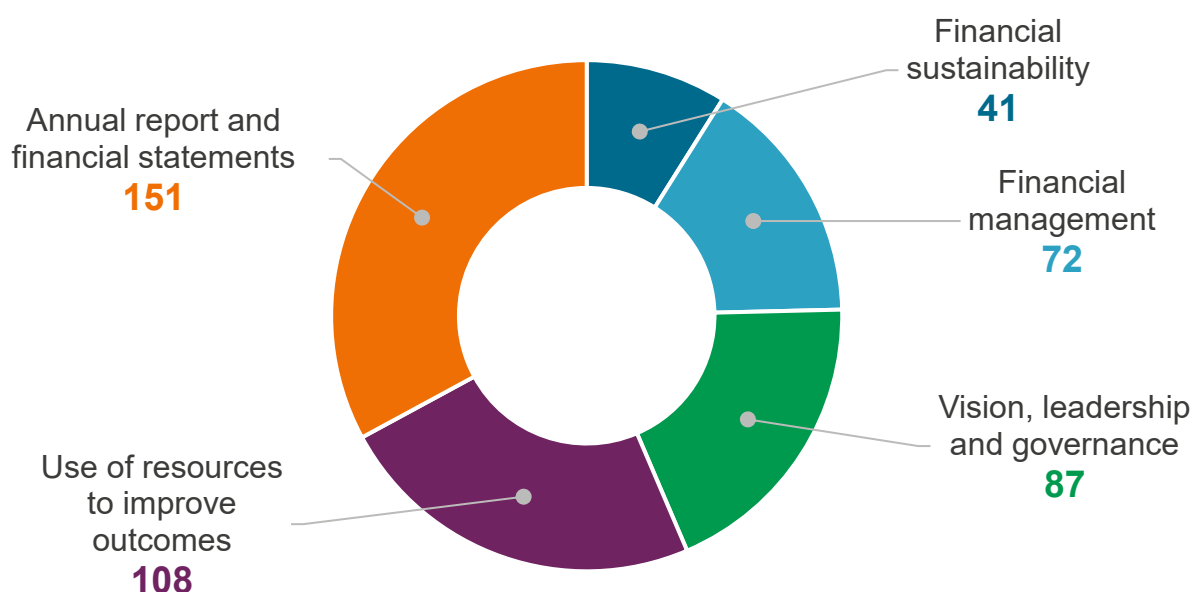
31. Within these broader categories, we most frequently made recommendations about the completeness and accuracy of disclosures and asset valuations in the financial statements, workforce planning and internal controls.

32. When comparing to recommendations in the 2022/23 annual audit, we can see a significant increase in recommendations related to the use of resources to improve outcomes (from 13 per cent to 24 per cent). Although the data on 2022/23 was based on a sample of audits (19), the number of recommendations related to workforce planning in 2023/24 is likely to be a factor in this increase.

33. Reflections on the impact of our Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023 report also note that our increased scrutiny around workforce planning has motivated wider investigation and reporting about progress councils are making with workforce planning. This has been further enhanced by our Best Value thematic focus on workforce innovation in the 2023/24 audit year.

Exhibit 9

Annual audit recommendations by category



Recommendations acceptance

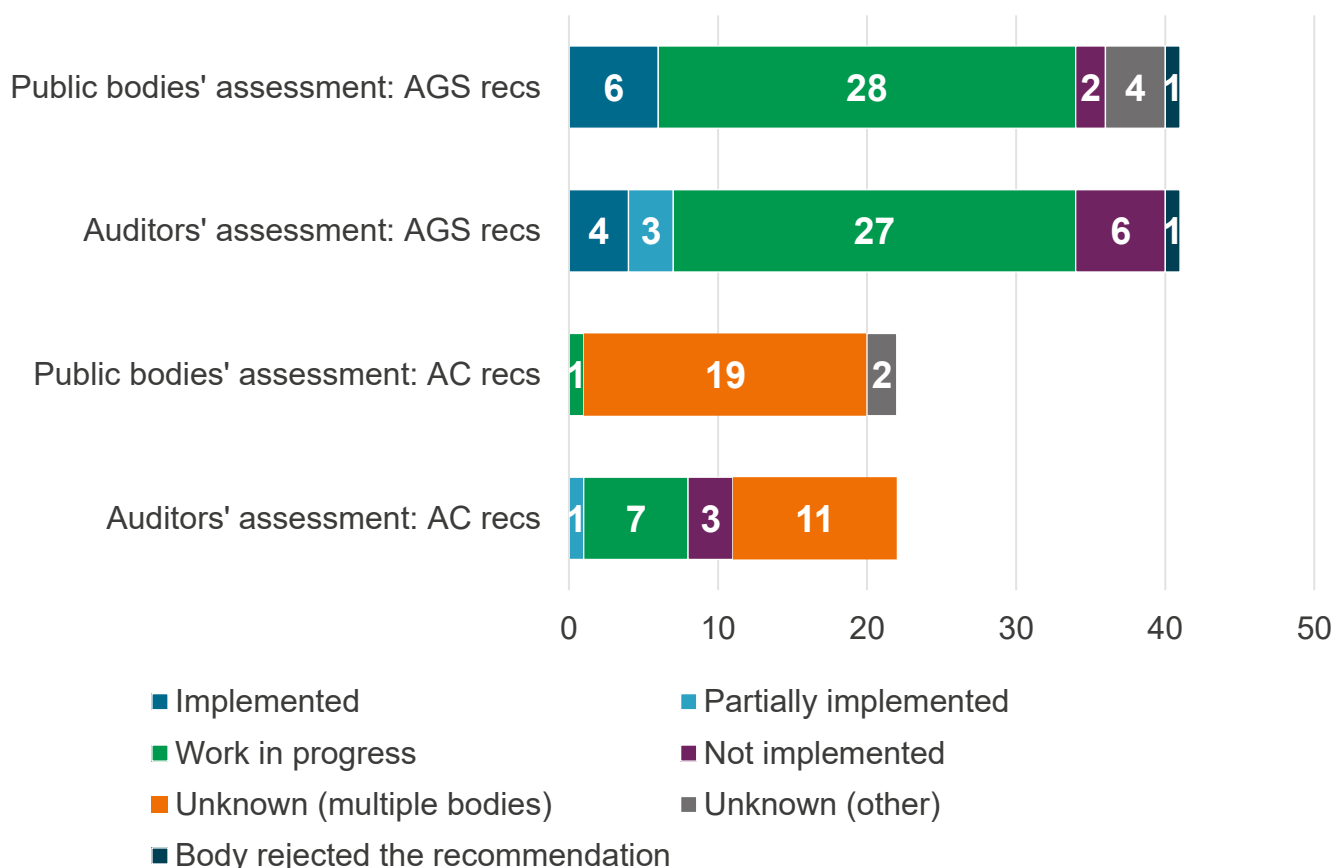
34. Most of our audit recommendations across performance and annual audit were accepted by audited bodies, some 93 per cent. This was higher for performance audit – 96 per cent (45 out of the 47 recommendations we assessed) – than for financial audit – 92 per cent (424 out of 459 recommendations).

35. The status of 16 further performance audit recommendations was unknown: this means we were unable to assess whether the recommendation was accepted. This is usually because the recommendation is sector-wide or for multiple bodies. [Paragraph 37](#) discusses trends in the acceptance of performance audit recommendations in further detail.

Recommendations implementation

Performance audit

36. [Exhibit 10](#) shows the rate of implementation of performance audit recommendations, as assessed by our audit teams and by stakeholders in public bodies who have responsibility for implementing recommendations. We do not currently have systems in place to follow-up recommendations made in national reports to all local authorities or multiple bodies. These systems are being developed and will allow us to report on implementation in future years.

Exhibit 10**Implementation of performance audit recommendations**

37. Only four recommendations were assessed by auditors as fully implemented. In line with recommendations from the Criminal courts backlog output, the Scottish Government published a delivery plan for its Vision for Justice in Scotland and consulted with partners on the ongoing transformation of the criminal courts system. Both recommendations were implemented within the timescales set out by auditors.

38. In addition, as recommended in the NHS in Scotland 2023 report, Scottish Government ensured that new financial engagement arrangements were understood by stakeholders and rolled out a new approach to governance self-assessments.

39. Nine recommendations were assessed as not implemented. These comprised:

- four from the NHS in Scotland 2022 and 2023 reports
- three from the Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023
- two from the Investing in Scotland's infrastructure output, one of which was only partially accepted.

40. The complex nature of the issues addressed by these recommendations, which included transparency over progress with NHS reform and the need for council leaders to think radically about future operating models, may have hindered progress with implementation.

41. We compared the progress of recommendations across different categories and found a similar picture once unknown implementation statuses are excluded. At least half of recommendations in all four categories (and 100 per cent of financial sustainability recommendations) were assessed as work in progress. The category with the highest proportion of recommendations assessed as implemented was financial management (17 per cent), followed by vision, leadership and governance (14 per cent). Auditors did not assess any recommendations relating to financial sustainability or use of resources to improve outcomes as implemented.

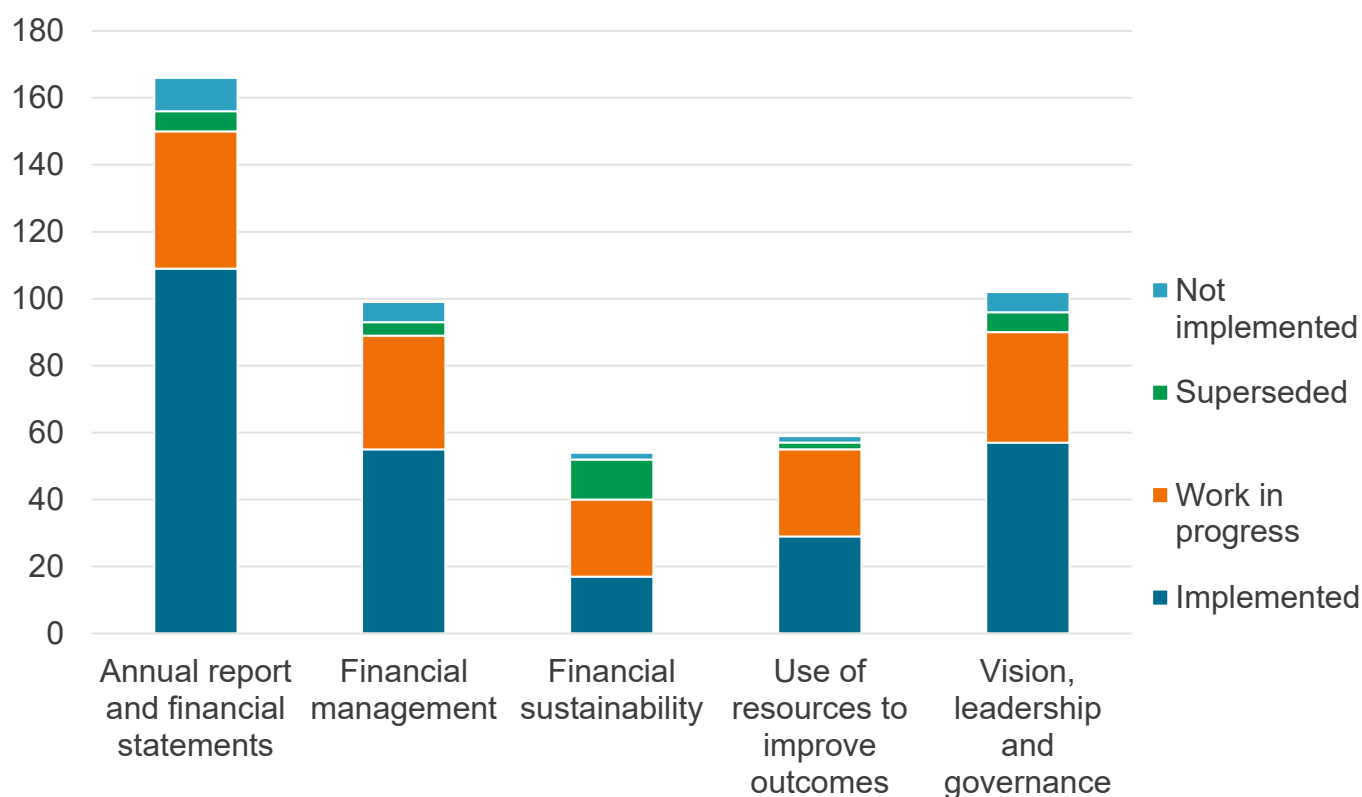
42. 14 recommendations (all AGS) included timescales for completion within the published audit report, of which 13 were due to be completed by May 2025. Of these, auditors assessed three as implemented, one as partially implemented and nine as work in progress.

43. Guidance issued to auditors in November 2023 requires teams to develop a follow-up plan with audited bodies after publication to set out expected timescales for recommendations implementation. No audits with follow-up plans are in scope for evaluating early impact in this report. The only in-scope outputs published after November 2023 were the Local government in Scotland: Financial bulletin 2022/23 and NHS in Scotland 2023 outputs. These were followed up through subsequent years' outputs rather than through a follow-up plan. Going forward, follow-up plans should allow wider analysis of the pace of implementation.

44. [Appendix 3](#) sets out specific examples of the impact of our performance audit work, including the overall impact of reports, where recommendations have been particularly effective and where progress has been more challenging.

Annual audit

45. [Exhibit 11](#) shows progress of recommendations implementation from the 115 annual audit reports in scope for this report (490 recommendations in total, with the status of ten recommendations unknown).

Exhibit 11**Recommendations by implementation status by category, 2022/23****Providing assurance through the annual audit**

46. A key part of our impact is providing assurance to stakeholders on public spending, through providing an opinion on the annual accounts of public bodies and assessing the effectiveness of arrangements for financial management and financial sustainability through our wider scope work.

47. We analysed our conclusions on financial management and financial sustainability across 89 annual audits, with less complex bodies removed. [Exhibit 13](#) shows that overall arrangements for financial management and financial sustainability within audited bodies are effective. We have summarised our main conclusions and the focus of our recommendations in these areas in [Exhibit 12](#).

Exhibit 12

Conclusions and focus of recommendations on the arrangements for financial management and financial sustainability

Wider scope area	Summary of our conclusions	Focus of our recommendations
Financial management	<p>We consistently described arrangements for financial management as appropriate and effective, with well-established budget monitoring and reporting processes. There is scope for improvement in internal controls or financial systems.</p> <p>Most bodies operated within budget or had underspends. Overspends were often covered by use of reserves, additional funding, or brokerage arrangements. Some bodies had planned deficits or small surpluses.</p> <p>We reported frequent use of reserves to cover overspends or planned deficits and raised some concerns about unplanned use of reserves or use of non-recurring savings to cover deficits.</p> <p>We reported that key controls are generally operating effectively, though some reports mention inconsistencies, inefficiencies, or gaps, including around assurance for shared services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving the financial control environment, including internal controls and budgetary controls
Financial sustainability	<p>We consistently reported concerns about sustainability risks. Although financial planning is often in place, we expressed concerns about future funding constraints, the need for ongoing updates to plans, depletion of reserves and challenges with implementation.</p> <p>We reported on workforce challenges, including reliance on agency staff, high absence rates and staffing pressures, with sustainable workforce plans being difficult to achieve.</p> <p>We highlighted funding gaps and, in some cases, pointed to the need for transformation or savings plans to address these.</p> <p>We emphasised the need for increased pace on transformation, challenging the quality of some transformation plans for falling short or not being fully costed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving medium- and long-term financial planning to demonstrate sustainability Addressing revenue funding gaps Reducing reliance on reserves Implementing capital funding plans

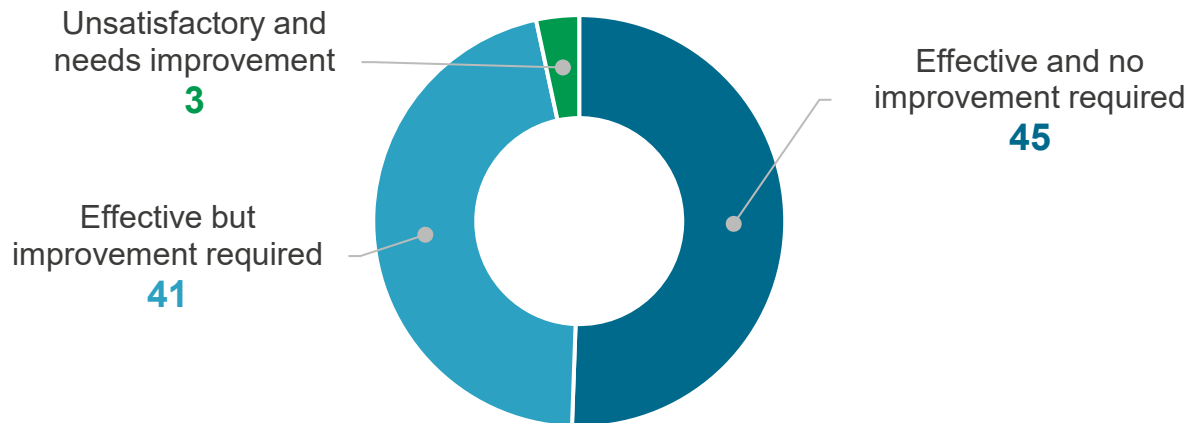
48. When looking at our assessments broken down by sector, we can see that the challenges with having effective arrangements in place for

financial sustainability are primarily concentrated within IJBs and NHS bodies, which we have consistently noted in our national reporting.

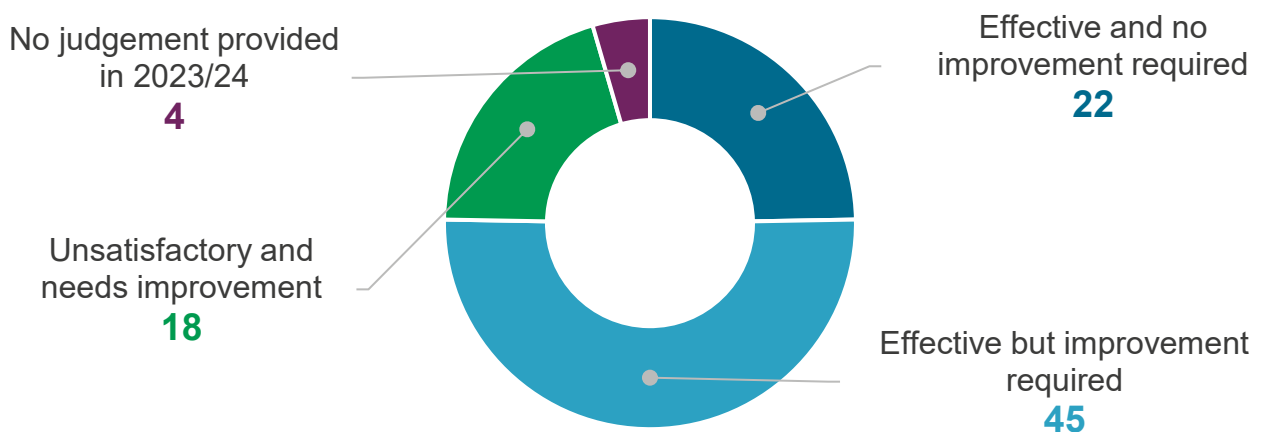
Exhibit 13

Effectiveness of financial management and financial sustainability arrangements

Conclusion on financial management across 89 annual audits



Conclusion on financial sustainability across 89 annual audits



Impact of our engagement and recommendations through the annual audit

49. We gathered data about the impact of engagement and recommendations through the annual audit through a survey and workshops with audit teams. This covered 53 audits, across all four sectors. [Exhibit 14](#) sets out the key themes emerging and the frequency of these themes. Overall, we found 89 examples of impact and highlights from these are included in [Appendix 3](#).

Exhibit 14

Key themes emerging about the impact of our engagement and recommendations

Theme	Description of impact
Providing technical support (25 examples)	<p>Audit teams add value through early engagement around technical accounting issues. This improves coherence in reporting across the public sector through adherence to technical accounting guidance, such as the Financial Reporting Manual (FReM).</p> <p>The most common areas where we made recommendations last year were accounting for leases and PFI/PPP, the completeness and accuracy of disclosures and accounting for non-current assets, asset valuation and disclosures.</p>
Building relationships (14 examples)	<p>Our audit teams achieve impact through building strong relationships with finance teams and those charged with the governance of public bodies, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early and onsite engagement: Providing insight and building understanding leads to early identification of risks and issues and more efficient, effective and timely audit delivery. • Discussion and debate: Supporting improved participation, discussion, debate and challenge around the accounts at different levels of the audited body. • Quality of recommendations: Better relationships improve our ability to develop relevant and achievable recommendations that are in the public interest and are effective in driving the change and improvement. • Lessons learned: Delivering sessions with clients to explore what worked well about previous audits and what can be improved.
Improving financial planning and management (13 examples)	<p>We have impact by making recommendations for improving the effectiveness of financial planning and management across Scotland's public services.</p> <p>This includes improving internal and budgetary controls and improving medium- and long-term financial planning within audited bodies.</p>

Theme	Description of impact
Improving vision, leadership and governance (12 examples)	<p>We have impact by challenging audited bodies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve their clarity of vision and strategy, including setting priorities for improvement within strategy, working with partners to improve outcomes and foster a culture of innovation, and communicating progress and impacts of digital transformation • ensure clarity of planning to implement vision, strategy and priorities, including aligning workforce and digital strategies to wider corporate objectives to deliver good value for money • ensure effective governance and assurance arrangements for delivery, including around digital security and business continuity.
Supporting Best Value (11 examples)	<p>We have impact by supporting audited bodies to deliver Best Value across public services, both through our integrated Best Value work in the local government sector, and by promoting Best Value principles and practice more widely across all sectors.</p>
Ensuring clear, compliant and transparent reporting (8 examples)	<p>We had impact by working with audited bodies to secure improvements in the presentation, layout, structure and accessibility of annual reports and accounts.</p> <p>Each sector has different requirements for reporting and our teams have supported clients to ensure they produce annual reports that are compliant with the relevant sector guidance.</p> <p>We also ensured reporting provides comprehensive coverage of the types of performance metrics stakeholders may be interested in – from financial health, to staffing, to the effectiveness of operations, to stakeholder feedback and satisfaction. We challenged audited bodies to elevate these aspects of their accounts.</p>
Sharing insights across public services (4 examples)	<p>Our audit teams have a wide range of knowledge and experience and identify opportunities to share insights and good practice with audited bodies from across public audit is a key area of impact.</p>
Improving timescales and building capacity (2 examples)	<p>Supporting audited bodies with audit delivery timescales and building capacity is a key area of impact for Audit Scotland. We strike an important balance between supporting audited bodies when they lack capacity within their finance teams and protecting our auditor independence. We negotiate with clients on delivery timelines and allocate our resources in line with these to ensure timely audit delivery.</p> <p>Where appropriate we make recommendations to increase local finance team capacity to ensure so we can focus our audit work on areas where we are uniquely positioned to add value.</p>

Reflections on positive and challenging progress

50. When reflecting on where they have seen positive progress within audited bodies, audit teams identified mainly internal factors:

- **Practical and specific recommendations:** Progress is better when audit teams make tailored, relevant, and actionable recommendations.
- **Balance in recommendations:** Limiting the number of recommendations helps maintain focus and increases the likelihood of implementation.
- **Proactive engagement:** Teams are increasingly engaging early with bodies to address issues before they escalate.

51. When reflecting on where progress has been more challenging for audited bodies, audit teams identified mainly external factors:

- **Resource and capacity constraints:** Bodies can struggle to implement audit recommendations due to limited staffing and financial resources or due to structural or funding constraints.
- **Workforce planning:** Workforce issues are prevalent, particularly in remote areas and strategic workforce plans are often insufficient or delayed.
- **Financial sustainability and management:** Bodies face ongoing financial difficulties with some requiring loans or government support. The lack of multi-year financial strategies is a recurring issue.
- **Transformation:** There are risks around the delivery of ambitious transformation programmes. We have reported on slow progress and a lack of clarity around transformational change within councils, including agreeing future operating models, policy and performance priorities and delivery methods. Barriers to progress include lack of capacity, public resistance, and financial limitations.
- **Assurance gaps:** In our annual audit work, we have noted that system changes and shared IT systems introduced through digital transformation have created assurance gaps.
- **Engagement and governance:** In some cases, audit committees need additional support to engage effectively with audit findings.
- **Openness and transparency:** In some cases, bodies did not make good progress on recommendations related to openness and transparency. For example, lack of detail in management commentaries within council accounts on areas such as performance trends and savings plans, lack of clarity of progress

with NHS recovery plan commitments, and lack of detailed financial information on council funding allocations from the Scottish Government.

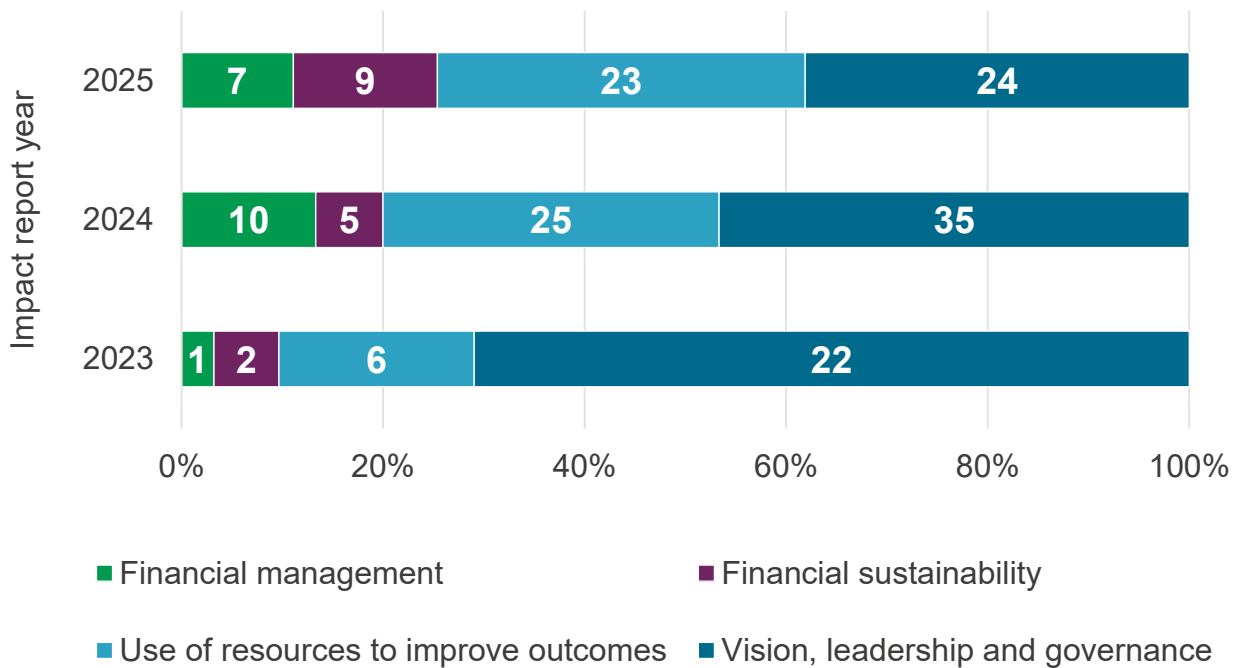
- **Rate of recommendations implementation:** Where progress on recommendations is slow or incomplete, this can be because they are too high-level or vague, making them hard to implement or assess. We could be more consistent in using SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) criteria.

Trends in our performance audit impact evaluation data

52. We have looked at the data from all the impact reports we have published since 2023/24 to explore trends. Including this report, these have covered 20 performance audit outputs and 169 performance audit recommendations. The outputs in scope were published between June 2021 and February 2024. This section explains some of the trends we are seeing in this data.

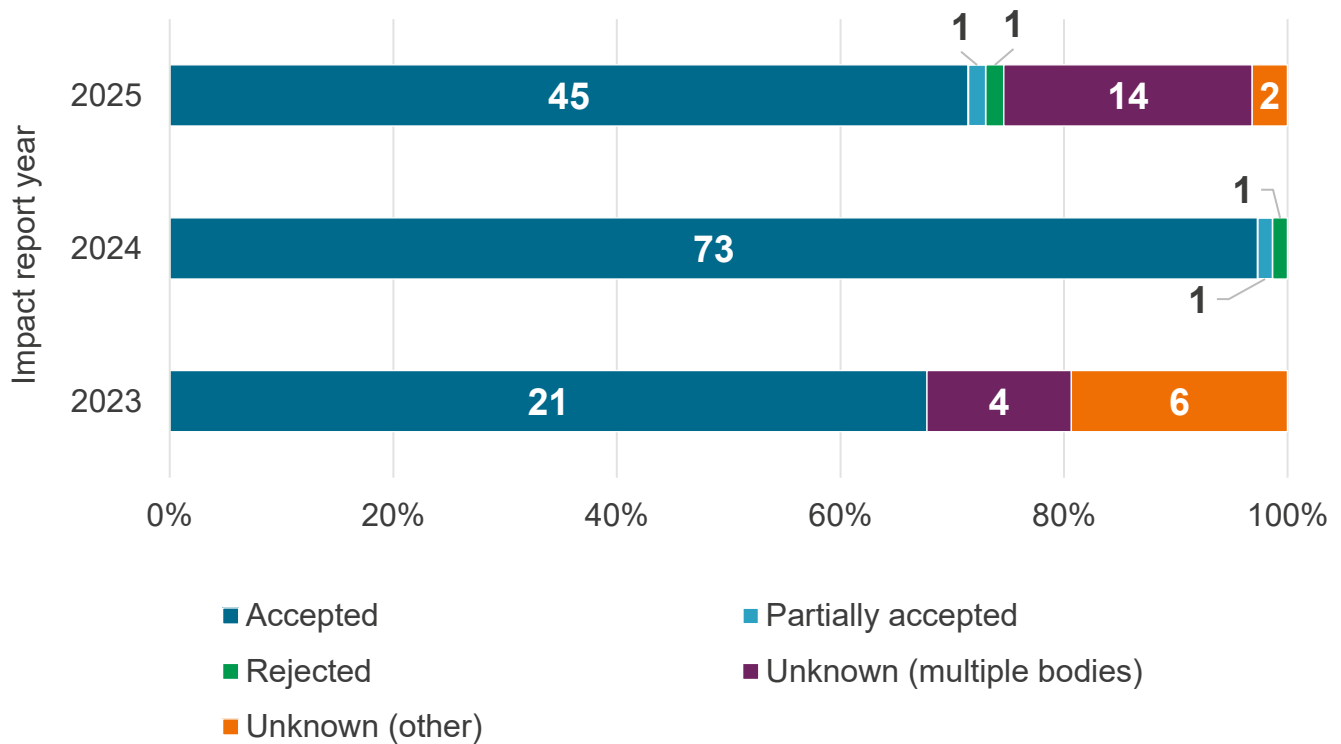
Trends in nature of recommendations

53. [Exhibit 15](#) shows that we most often make recommendations relating to vision, leadership and governance. However, this category has made up a smaller proportion of recommendations over time. Meanwhile, there has been an increase in the proportion of recommendations relating to each of the other three categories.

Exhibit 15**Nature of performance audit recommendations by category over time****Trends in recommendations acceptance**

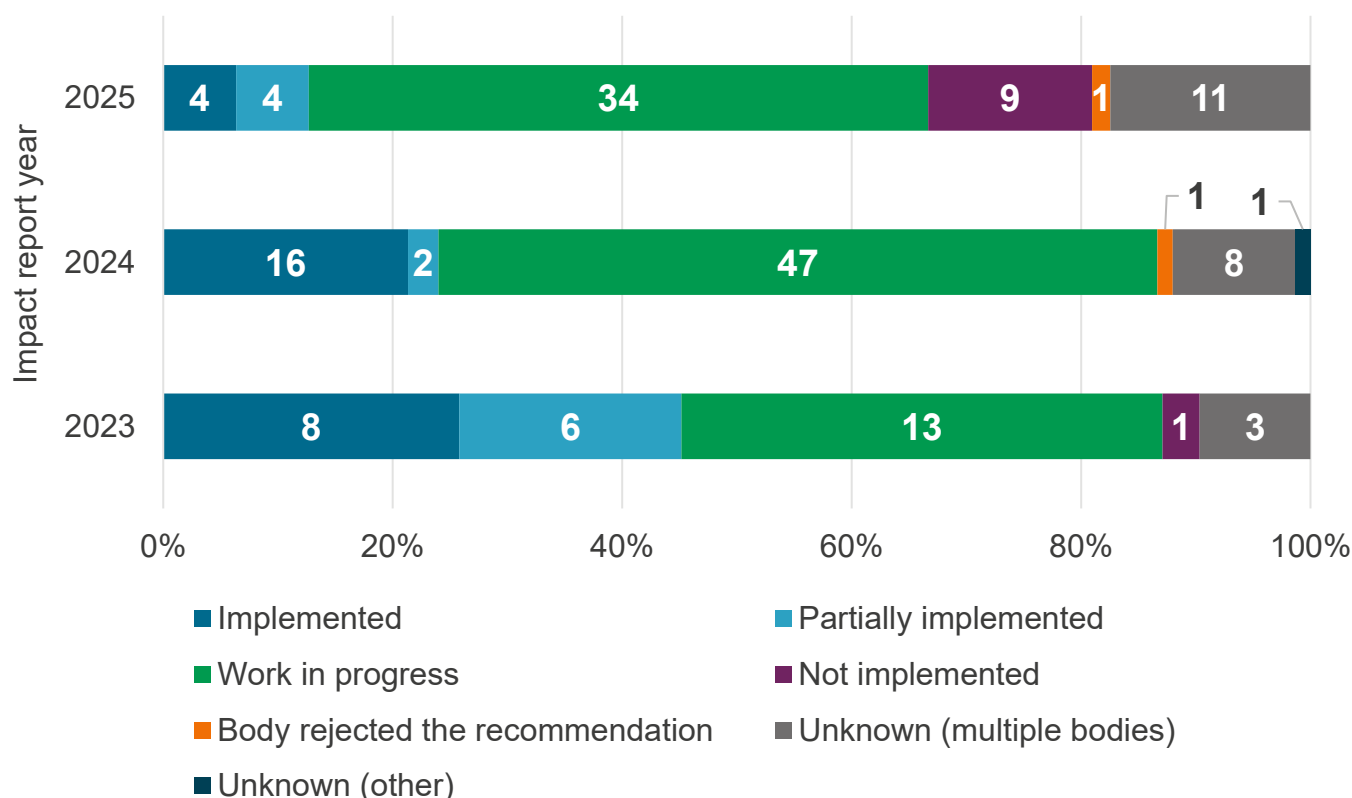
54. [Exhibit 16](#) shows that the proportion of rejected and partially accepted recommendations has been consistently low.

55. There are 26 recommendations with unknown acceptance statuses. The majority of these relate to local government overview recommendations that apply across all Scottish councils ([see paragraph 37](#)).

Exhibit 16**Acceptance status over time****Trends in recommendations implementation**

56. [Exhibit 17](#) shows that auditors most often assess recommendations as work in progress. The proportion of recommendations assessed as implemented has reduced from 26 per cent in 2023 to six per cent in 2025. Meanwhile, we have seen an increase in recommendations assessed as not implemented to 14 per cent in 2025. As set out in paragraph 39, these recommendations relate to the NHS in Scotland 2023, Local government in Scotland: Overview 2023 and Investing in Scotland's infrastructure outputs.

57. All recommendations categorised as 'Unknown (multiple bodies)' relate to sector-wide outputs on local government.

Exhibit 17**Implementation status over time (auditors' view)****Relationship between immediate impact and rate of progress against recommendations**

58. There are 15 outputs that have been in scope for both early monitoring and evaluation. Of these 15, 11 included recommendations. At this stage, it is difficult to see a clear link between levels of early engagement and subsequent progress made by audited bodies. Other factors appear to be more significant.

59. For example, the NHS in Scotland 2023 overview had high levels of media coverage (113) and parliamentary mentions (7). However, only two of the 11 recommendations were implemented as of 14 months after publication. Three were not implemented, one was partially implemented, and five were work in progress.

60. Meanwhile, the report with the highest proportion (100 per cent) of recommendations implemented (How the Scottish Government is set up to deliver climate change goals) received less media coverage (34) and parliamentary mentions (1), but all five recommendations were implemented. The recommendations in this report mostly related to governance, were specific, and included clear actions for the audited body – all factors we have previously highlighted as increasing the likelihood of implementation.

Next steps

61. Continuous improvement is a critical part of our impact framework. Below is a summary of the key areas of development we have identified through this report:

- Further embedding guidance on developing, monitoring, evaluating and following up on performance audit recommendations, to ensure we include realistic recommendations and timescales in our reports.
- Plan our impact reporting to cover recommendations that are due for implementation during a set period rather than covering recommendations made during a set period.
- Build on progress we've made sharing insights and good practice, for example the good practice case studies we have identified through our Best Value thematic work, ensuring we share insights gained through our audit work widely across the public sector.
- Develop a system for following up on recommendations made in national reports to multiple bodies.
- Work with our digital audit team to identify ways to use Artificial Intelligence to automate our impact data collection and analysis, where appropriate.
- Improve consistency of reporting recommendations acceptance and implementation status within Annual Audit Reports
- Review our approach to reflective practice across our audit work to ensure more consistency and improve our understanding of our impact.

Our impact

Monitoring and evaluation report 2025



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