

News release on behalf of the Accounts Commission

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Pressures and stresses tighten across Scotland's 32 councils

Scotland's councils have had a pivotal role in supporting and working with communities as they responded to the impacts of Covid-19. Now councils must lead recovery work with and alongside their local communities, focusing on getting the services people need in place as pressures and stresses escalate and impact the day to day lives of individuals and communities.

In its 2022 Local Government Overview report, the Accounts Commission, who report to the public on the performance of local government, are clear that recovery and renewal across councils isn't about a return to pre-pandemic service delivery. It must be about much more, changing and challenging how services are delivered.

The position for councils, is however, challenging and complex:

- dealing with increasing demand and service backlogs
- long-standing pressures, including rising poverty and inequalities
- high absence levels and acute skills shortages amongst some key front-line workers
- a lack of certainty and flexibility over long-term funding
- national priorities, including climate change and public sector reform.

William Moyes, Chair of the Accounts Commission said:

“Councils are operating in a complex and increasingly volatile, unprecedented and unpredictable environment. Strong leadership from councils is needed now more than ever, with new and returning councillors being able and willing to make difficult decisions about where and how to spend highly pressurised resources.

Pressures on councils and their communities have intensified from spiralling inflation and significant increases to the cost of living. This has direct and unintended consequences on councils at a time when they sought a period of stability to tackle the impacts of the pandemic. Councillors and senior officers must use learning from the past two years, working with their partners and communities in the recovery, renewal and difficult decision making about the future of services.

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Notes to Editor:

1. All reports by the Accounts Commission and Auditor General published since 2000 are available on the Audit Scotland website

- The Accounts Commission is the public spending watchdog for local government. It holds councils and various joint boards and committees in Scotland to account and help them improve. It operates impartially and independently of councils and of the Scottish Government, and meets and reports in public.
- Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission for Scotland.

2. The work for this audit was done during the current Covid-19 emergency. The Commission recognises the significant pressures under which local government finds itself in this current situation. Equally the Commission is of the firm view that the principles of sound financial management, good governance, public accountability and transparency remain vital.