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News release

Embargoed until 00:01 hours, Thursday 18 December 2014

Progress made by South Ayrshire Council but efforts need to be maintained

South Ayrshire Council has responded quickly to criticism earlier this year, but it must keep the positive momentum going to ensure improvement is sustained.

A follow-up report published today by the Accounts Commission examines work done since February 2014 when it voiced serious concerns about significant weaknesses in the management of the council.

Today's report says there is clear evidence that the council has taken prompt action to address the weaknesses identified. In March, it approved a plan to drive forward improvement across the organisation and agreed actions in response to each of the Commission's concerns. It has also revised its scrutiny arrangements and restructured senior management posts.

The report recognises that a number of the improvements, especially the new system for scrutinising council performance, have still to be fully implemented. This means it is too early to assess the effectiveness of the changes. The report also stresses the importance of councillors and senior officers having a clear and shared understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities.

Accounts Commission chair Douglas Sinclair said: "At the heart of this is the need to build and embed a culture of delivering Best Value for the public and achieving continuous improvement in the council's services. This is a statutory duty on all councils.

"South Ayrshire Council is addressing substantial and deep-rooted problems. It will take time to achieve the major shift in culture required. So far, the signs are encouraging but it is too early at this stage to judge the longer term impact."

The Commission has asked for a further report within the next 18 months.

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Notes to editors

1. This report has been prepared by the Controller of Audit for the Accounts Commission for Scotland. It follows up a report in February this year.

2. 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

3. 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.