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News release

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“Serious concerns” about South Ayrshire Council

The Accounts Commission said today it was seriously concerned about South Ayrshire Council's lack of progress in addressing long term weaknesses.

Its findings are in response to a report from the Controller of Audit which found significant failings in strategic direction, leadership, performance management and scrutiny at the council.

It has not fulfilled agreed recommendations from previous reports in 2009 and 2010. The Commission said it was seriously concerned about the council's inability over a number of years to fulfil and sustain its statutory Best Value responsibilities for continuous improvement in these areas.

The council has also lacked a corporate plan for the last 18 months. This is only likely to be resolved with a new plan to be agreed next month. The Commission said: “Without a plan, there is no clear statement of the council's priorities for services and improvement. Nor is there clear information about how it will address significant national issues, such as health and social care integration, in the context of other priorities and challenges”

The audit report said that overall scrutiny at South Ayrshire was ineffective. Scrutiny panel meetings were often cancelled due to lack of business. A performance management system had been introduced but lacked consistent implementation across the council. Senior managers frequently did not attend meetings of the corporate management team or did not engage effectively with its procedures.

There were recent signs that the council was aware of the issues and was beginning to address them. The Commission said despite these signs, improvement should have been established much earlier.

The Commission recognised that there were currently no significant concerns about the performance of council services, but Commission chair Douglas Sinclair said: “We require progress to be made as a matter of urgency. Otherwise, the weaknesses identified by the targeted audit of Best Value will increasingly have a negative impact on the services that the council provides for people and communities in South Ayrshire and on the public's confidence in the council.

“The challenges the council faces in establishing and sustaining effective leadership and improvement are substantial and deep rooted and we urge the council to seek external assistance in this through, for example, peer support.”

The Commission has ordered a follow- up report by December this year to measure progress against its recommendations.

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Notes to editors

1. The report with the Accounts Commission's findings is available here.
2. Links here to the [2009](#) and [2010](#) Best Value reports for South Ayrshire Council.
3. The Accounts Commission for Scotland checks how well Scotland's councils perform. It operates independently of local and central government.
4. Audit Scotland provides services to the Accounts Commission for Scotland and carries out work as directed by the Accounts Commission.

