

News release

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Argyll and Bute Council must build on strong base as it seeks to change services

Argyll and Bute Council needs to build on its good financial management and relationship with residents as it looks to change the way it delivers services.

A report by the Accounts Commission, Scotland's local authority watchdog, says the council plans and manages its budget well and has good community engagement. As it looks to the longer term, it must build on these so it can manage greater financial pressures and work with local communities to significantly redesign and improve services. Over the past five years the council has also significantly improved its culture, with better relationships between councillors and with staff.

Whilst the audit work was carried out prior to the onset of the current Covid-19 emergency, the Accounts Commission believes that key themes of this report, including financial management and good governance, are more vital than ever. The Commission does, however, recognise the significant pressures under which local government currently finds itself.

The Commission report there is limited evidence the council is using performance information as insight to make improvements and in reporting clearly to the public about how it is performing. It needs to be clearer about how it will address areas where there is mixed performance, including economic development, environmental services and education and children's services.

Elma Murray, Deputy Chair of the Accounts Commission said: "This report gives Argyll and Bute Council a framework to shift and improve the way it delivers services. But the pace and depth of improvement must now move much more quickly, working with communities to empower them and rethink how services are delivered.

"Now, more than ever, councils across Scotland need to work with their communities to challenge and change the way services are delivered. The issues we have raised in this report – good financial management, acting on performance information, and community engagement - are increasingly vital as councils prepare for the longer-term consequences of Covid-19."

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Notes to editors

1. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Accounts Commission. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

- 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 prior to the onset of 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.

3. Best Value Assurance reports, prepared for the Accounts Commission, offer a rounded and comprehensive analysis of a council's performance. These reports cover how effectively councils are managing changes in services; involving the public in decisions; ensuring enough skills and time to deliver clear priorities; and providing clear information so the public can gauge improvement.