

News release

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A decade of improvements at North Ayrshire Council

North Ayrshire Council has demonstrated a culture of continuous improvement since a previous report by the Accounts Commission in 2011.

The council continues to improve and, alongside its partners, has determination and commitment to make better the lives of local people. This is particularly important given the high levels of deprivation.

In a Best Value report published today, the Accounts Commission says the council has effective leadership, and works collaboratively and has strong links with its partners. The council enables and works well with local communities. Staff are empowered to make changes that improve service delivery. This creates a council that is committed to delivering services differently and addressing future challenges.

Overall, services have improved over the last five years. Now the Commission says the council should continue to focus on areas of poorer performance, most notably a recent decline in education. The council also needs to develop detailed plans to support its aims of further transforming services and saving up to £19 million over the next two years.

The Commission has noted the lack of external competition in the recruitment of the new Chief Executive in late 2018. This underlines the Commission's view that in councils, the recruitment of chief officers should be subject to external competition. This ensures the public have confidence in the process of appointing a council's most senior officers.

Whilst the audit work for this report was carried out prior to the Covid-19 emergency, the Commission believes that key themes, such as financial management and good governance, are more vital than ever. The Commission also recognises the significant pressures that councils are working under during the pandemic.

Graham Sharp, Chair of the Accounts Commission said: "The commitment and vision of the council is impressive. North Ayrshire is rightly recognised as an award-winning council, that looks to innovate. It continually strives to improve, working alongside its partners and local communities to make the lives of local people better, focusing on creating a thriving local economy.

"But there are challenges, including the urgent need to make savings of up to £19 million over the next two years, a need to continue looking forwards to transforming the delivery of council services, whilst ensuring the lives of local people improve."

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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.