

Audit scope

# Digital progress in local government



ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

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## Background

Digital technology can fundamentally change how council services are delivered. It has the potential to improve experiences and outcomes for service users, improve how councils interact with citizens and to make councils more efficient. There is also an expectation from the public that councils keep up to date with digital technology and offer services online.

Digital transformation is part of the wider transformation and public sector reform agenda that councils are undertaking. This audit takes place at a time when councils are operating in an increasingly complex and changing environment. As we reported in our [Local government in Scotland: Challenges and performance 2019](#), revenue funding to councils has reduced while councils are facing increasing demand and are central to delivering many public sector reforms.

To address the gap between demand, expectations and resources, fundamental change to service provision is needed. In late 2015, councils joined forces to drive forward digital transformation and established The Digital Office for Scottish Local Government. The Digital Office has set up a programme of support to councils in their vision to be digital businesses by 2020.

Digital transformation, as with any major change, presents risks to councils. It requires moving away from established ways of delivering services and this can bring considerable challenges. We know from our previous digital work that the key enablers of good leadership, planning, governance, skills, and collaboration need to be in place. This audit will look at what a digital council looks like and the progress that councils are making in putting in place the key building blocks needed to be a digital council. The audit will also look at the arrangements councils are putting in place to ensure that improved outcomes for citizens are at the very heart of being a digital council.

This is our first performance audit looking at digital progress in local government. It follows on from other work looking at digital progress across the public sector. This includes the [Enabling digital Government](#) report, published in June 2019, and focusing on the strategic role of the Scottish Government in enabling digital government. In May 2017, we published [Principles for a digital future](#), a set of digital principles for organisations to consider when planning and implementing digital programmes. These were based on findings from previous audit work on public sector ICT projects and that of other audit agencies. All our reports focusing on digital can be found on our [digital e-hub](#).

## What will the audit look at?

The overall aim of the audit is to answer the question: What progress are councils making in becoming digital councils that improve services and deliver better outcomes for citizens? We will seek to answer the following questions:

- How well do councils understand what it means to be a digital council?
- How effectively are councils putting in place the building blocks to become a digital council?

- How well are councils progressing towards being digital councils and what are the barriers they are facing?

## How will we carry out the audit?

We will answer the audit questions by carrying out detailed case studies in a sample of councils. This will include interviews and focus groups within councils, reviewing relevant documents and data analysis. Alongside this we will review key documents and carry out a wide range of interviews with key stakeholders across local government.

## What impact will the audit have?

The audit will allow us to support improvement in councils becoming digital councils. It will provide more clarity on what a digital council is and support councils in understanding where they are on the journey and planning what they need to do next. It will also support improvement through sharing practice both in Scotland and elsewhere on how councils are putting in place the building blocks needed. This will also provide some assurance on the progress councils are making and the barriers they need to address.

## Timetable and contact

We plan to publish a report in autumn 2020. Audit Scotland is carrying out the work on behalf of the Accounts Commission. If you have any questions, please get in touch with Bernadette Milligan, audit manager, on 0131 625 1850 or at [bmilligan@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:bmilligan@audit-scotland.gov.uk).



Audit Scotland, 4th Floor, 102 West Port, Edinburgh EH3 9DN  
 T: 0131 625 1500 E: [info@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:info@audit-scotland.gov.uk)  
[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)

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