

News release

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Covid-19 has accelerated the use of digital technology in councils

Responding to Covid-19 has increased the pace at which Scotland's 32 councils are delivering services through digital technology. Greater collaboration, use of shared expertise, citizen engagement and strategic planning are needed, however, to fully realise the potential of digital technology.

A report from the Accounts Commission says councils are at different stages of digital transformation. The long-term focus should now be on how digital technology can provide better opportunities and services for people across Scotland, with citizens placed at the heart of this process.

Councils have responded to Covid-19 by using technology to ensure many essential council services continue and supported thousands of council staff to work from home. But further progress may be restricted due to a lack of staff with the right skills and insufficient workforce planning. Careful planning is needed to ensure the expansion of digital services does not widen existing inequalities.

The Commission is clear that the current work of the Scottish Government and COSLA to refresh the national digital strategy provides an opportunity to drive digital transformation across all Scotland's 32 councils. Strong leadership and co-ordination at a national level is essential, to provide a consistent vision and clear direction.

Andrew Cowie, member of the Accounts Commission said: "Now is the time for clear and decisive strategic planning with the refresh of Scotland's national digital strategy. It is an opportunity that has to be seized to ensure there is a vision for digital transformation across all councils, with shared priorities, skills and knowledge.

"Councils have worked hard to increase the pace at which digital technology has been introduced due to Covid-19, enabling many vital services to continue. Now all councils must focus on putting all citizens at the heart of digital service design, empowering communities to thrive, not just survive."

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. In 2015, the Scottish Local Government Digital Partnership (Digital Partnership) was established by SOLACE and the Local Government Transformation Board to drive the ambition for all councils to be digital businesses by 2020. It is a collaboration between all local government organisations involved in digital transformation, including all 32 councils in Scotland.
 3. In October 2016 the Digital Partnership established the Digital Office for Scottish Local Government (Digital Office). It supports councils to become digital businesses through delivery of a work programme focused on Digital Leadership, Digital Foundations and Digital Services. It has a small core team that provides support and digital expertise