

News release

EMBARGOED until 00:01 hours, Thursday 27 May 2021

Councils and communities worked well together, but impacts of Covid-19 are unequal

Scotland's councils reacted quickly, working alongside communities and partners, to address the unprecedented challenges created by Covid-19. Many challenges remain significant, made more urgent by the multiple impacts of Covid-19 on communities and services.

Councils have a critical role in providing vital services which communities depend on. In its Local Government Overview 2021 report, the Accounts Commission, who report to the public on the performance of local government, make clear that councils, alongside their partners, quickly provided innovative and sustained support to vulnerable people. This included supporting those who were shielding or self-isolating, switching to delivering services digitally and managing significant funding to support local businesses.

With many council services disrupted, stopped or reduced, in particular education, social care and culture and leisure, the impact on some service users was severe and unequal. This included carers who lacked access to respite care, people with learning disabilities who were unable to access critical services and support, those receiving care at home and school children whose education was disrupted.

Covid-19 has also exacerbated and laid bare fundamental issues that need to be addressed to ensure services are maintained and that councils can tackle the multiple challenges ahead. To help achieve this, longer-term financial certainty for councils will be vital. Whilst the Scottish Government has provided significant financial support to councils to assist in managing the net cost of Covid-19 in 2020/21, considerable amounts of funding took the form of one-off payments. Furthermore, funding for councils beyond 2021/22 remains uncertain. Addressing this issue is vital.

Elma Murray, Interim Chair of the Accounts Commission says, "Councils, communities and their partners have worked incredibly hard to continue to deliver vital services to local people. The stark reality is that some council services won't restart, and some services will have to be delivered differently.

Underpinning this is the increasingly urgent need to address inequalities throughout Scotland's communities. And for councils this is made more challenging because they continue to operate in a climate of significant financial uncertainty, which must now be addressed."

For further information contact Joanna Mansell: 0131 625 1652 jmansell@audit-scotland.gov.uk

Notes to editors

1. The Accounts Commission is appointed by Ministers and 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.
2. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Accounts Commission for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

-
-
3. 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.