

News release on behalf of the Accounts Commission

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Scottish Borders Council delivering on reform

Scottish Borders Council has been highly praised. It is continuously improving, taking innovative approaches to making savings and tackling recruitment challenges. With increased demand and less money to spend, this focus on reform is vital for all councils in Scotland.

In a new report, the Accounts Commission says the council has a clear vision for the future, reforming how it works to respond to many of the challenges it faces, including its geography and ageing population.

With an impressive approach to managing its money, the council has a strong track record of planning and delivering on savings. Now, this approach needs to shift to focus on recurring, rather than one-off savings, helping ensure greater financial stability.

Recognising that significant savings still need to be made, the council is taking a refreshed approach to transforming how services will be delivered - the SBC Way. This is supported by a new 'self-replenishing' fund which will see savings made invested in other projects to reform services. Now this programme needs to deliver on the required payback and ongoing savings, at the pace required to meet the council's budget shortfall. The council must improve reporting on timescales and expected benefits, whilst ensuring local communities are involved in the changes ahead.

Jo Armstrong, Chair of the Accounts Commission said:

"Scottish Borders Council is tackling the challenges it faces with innovation, drive and focus. The council is looking externally, with a willingness to work collaboratively with other councils and organisations. It is making impressive strides to deliver differently. Other councils can learn from the approach taken to tackle workforce and recruitment challenges, as well as its strong approach to managing its finances.

"Like all councils in Scotland, the council must continue to prioritise reform to meet growing demand and ongoing financial pressures. It's very early days for its new transformation programme and we will watch how it develops with interest. Now it's vital that local people have a stronger voice in the changes ahead."

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Notes to Editor:

1. This report reflects the Accounts Commission's new approach to Best Value. It is fully integrated into annual audit work, reported in Annual Audit Reports, and includes detailed work each year on a national theme. For 2023-24 the national theme is workforce innovation.

2. The Controller of Audit will report to the Accounts Commission on each council's performance on their duty of Best Value at least once over the five-year audit appointment. The Commission will then choose how it wishes to respond.
3. The Accounts Commission last reported on [Scottish Borders Council in 2019](#).
4. The Accounts Commission holds councils and local government bodies in Scotland to account and helps them improve. It operates impartially and independently of councils and of the Scottish Government, and meets and reports in public.
5. 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.
6. All reports by the Accounts Commission and Auditor Scotland published since 2000 are available on the [Audit Scotland website](#).