

News release on behalf of the Accounts Commission

Embargoed until 00:01 hours, 7 August 2025

Strain clear across Scotland's local government workforce

Scotland's councils urgently need to make progress with workforce plans if they are to protect services and financial sustainability.

Staff are councils' most important resource and are vital in delivering services and meeting Scotland's changing and increasing needs. The numbers of staff employed by councils has risen, but this has not kept pace with ever-rising demand.

Multiple challenges are affecting Scotland's 260,000 council workers. As well as increasing demand for services, councils are facing challenges in recruiting and retaining staff, and sickness absence rates are at a record high.

Many councils have initiatives in place to address challenges with recruitment and retaining staff, but urgent progress is needed to have robust workforce plans in place at every council. This needs to: help financial sustainability; address wellbeing; link to future skill needs and drive many more shared services and roles across the public sector.

Jennifer Henderson, member of the Accounts Commission, said:

'We all benefit from a skilled and motivated local government workforce; staff are the most important resource that councils have. Councils must fundamentally reform how they deliver services, and Scotland's 260,000 council workers are crucial to this.'

'Councils need to align their existing workforce plans with their priorities so they can ensure their workforces are the right size and shape, and their staff have the skills they will need. In particular, they need to ensure workers have the digital skills necessary for the scale of changes ahead. We have seen many councils already responding to this challenge, and there are valuable opportunities for local bodies to learn from each other.'

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Notes to Editor:

1. As part of the audit of Best Value, auditors are asked to report on a specific thematic issue chosen each year by the Accounts Commission. [Auditors previously reported on the effectiveness of leadership](#), with reporting in 2023/24 focused on workforce innovation – how councils are responding to workforce challenges.

2. All reports by the Accounts Commission and Auditor General published since 2000 are available at www.audit.scot

- 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.

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